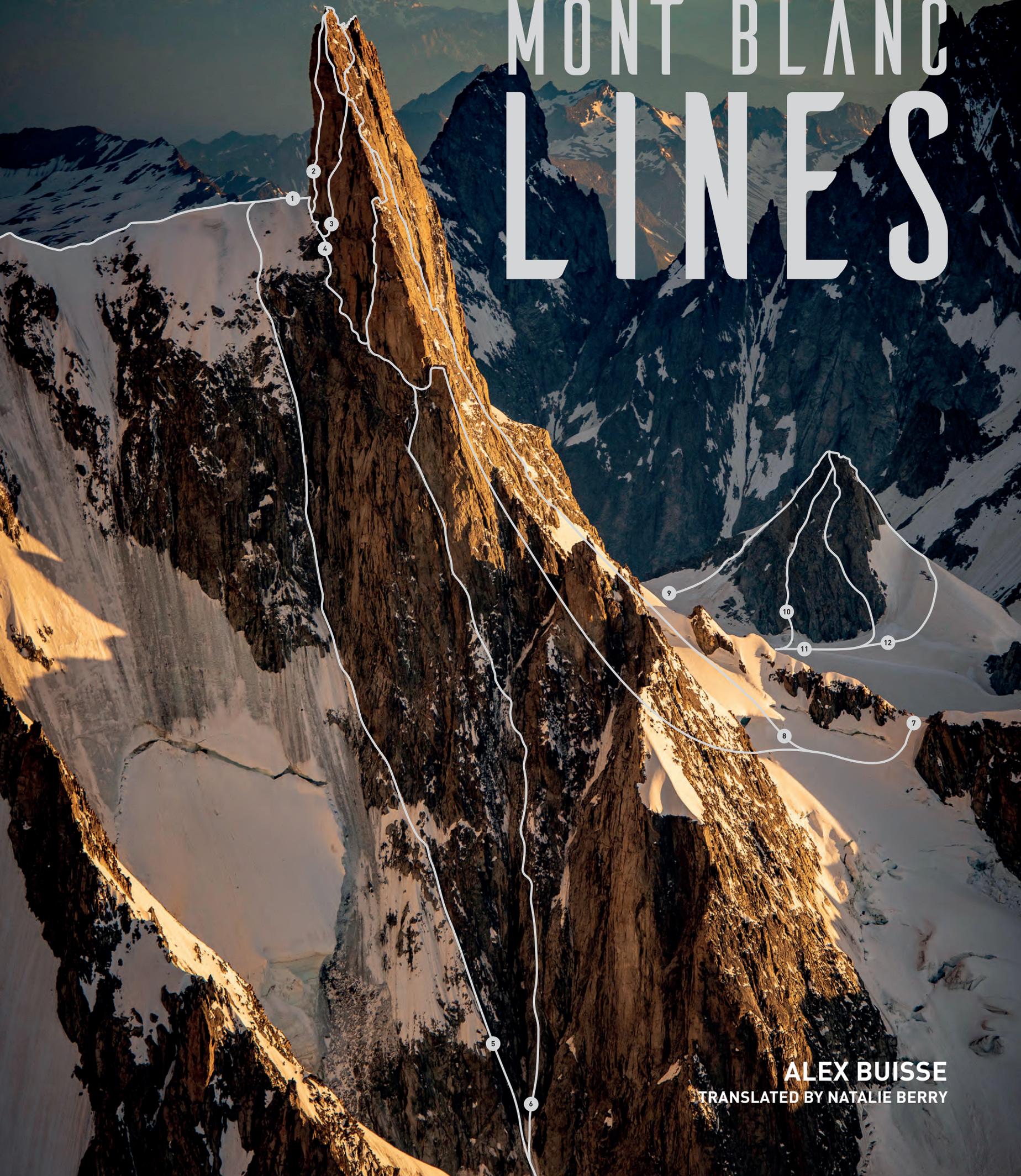


MONT BLANC LINES



ALEX BUISSE
TRANSLATED BY NATALIE BERRY

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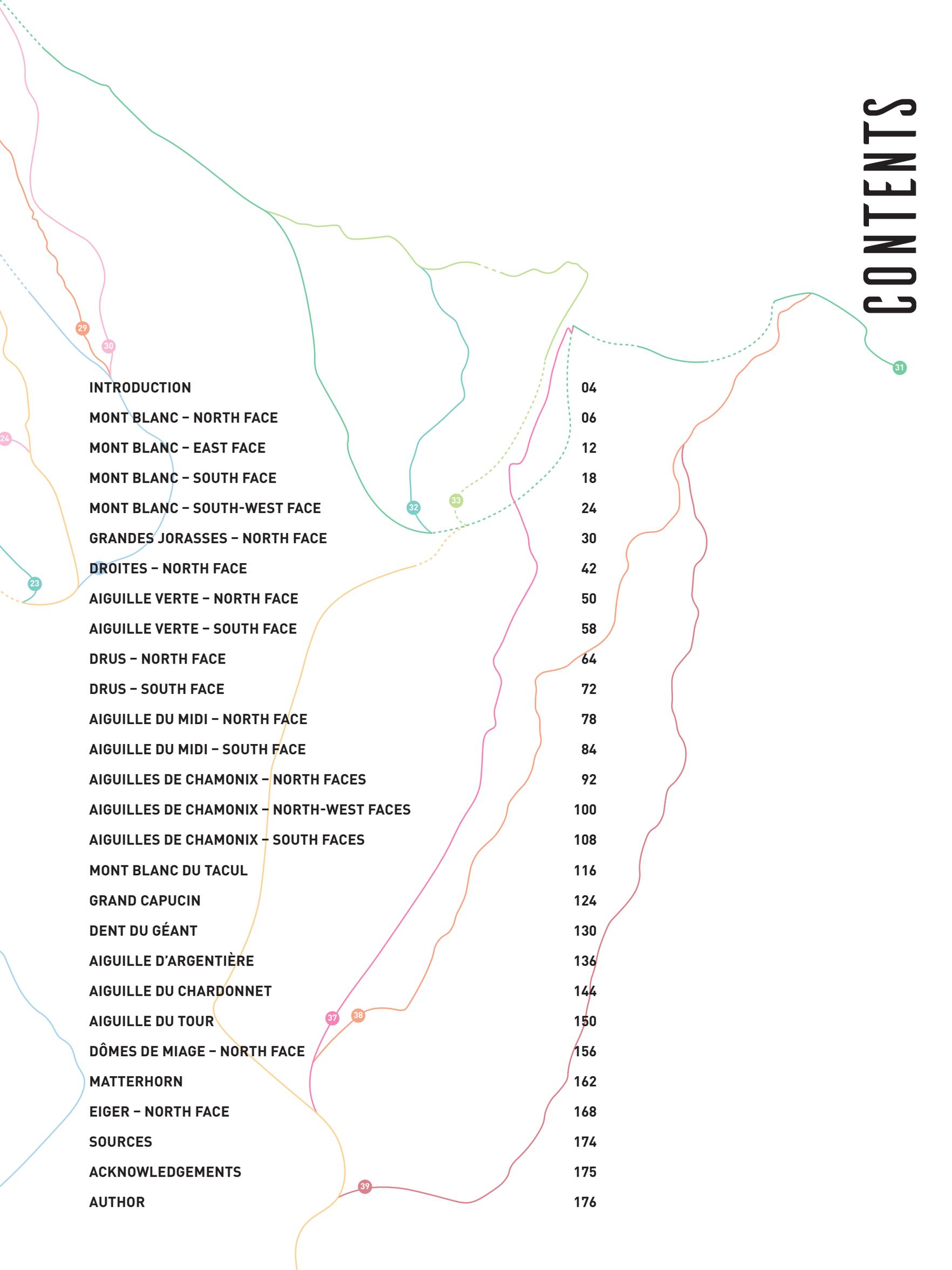
Front cover image: The east and north faces of Dent du Géant.

1. Traverse of the Rochefort Arêtes
2. South-East Spur
3. East Face
4. North Arête
5. North Gully
6. Ducornau–Mizrahi Route
7. North Arête Direct
8. Cœur de Géants
9. Grand Flambeau, West Face
10. Monia Mena
11. Cuori di Ghiaccio
12. Grand Flambeau, North Ridge

Back cover image: Aiguilles Dorées and most of the Mont Blanc massif seen from the north.

1. La Voie des Amis
2. Gabarrou–Jouve Route
3. Messner Route
4. Herman HobNob meets Dorothy the Dinosaur
5. Ligne Perdue
6. Bettembourg Route
7. North Face Direct
8. North Face Classic from Cabane de Saleina
9. North Face Classic from Cabane de Trient and Fenêtre de Saleina
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11. Aiguilles Dorées Traverse
12. Cretton Route
13. Arlettaz–Carron Route
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15. Trident Direct
16. Copt Couloir
17. Full Dry for Love
18. Troillet–Genoud Route
19. Vaucher Route
20. Misanthropie i-conique
21. Muller–Strickler Route
22. North-West Side of Tête Biselx
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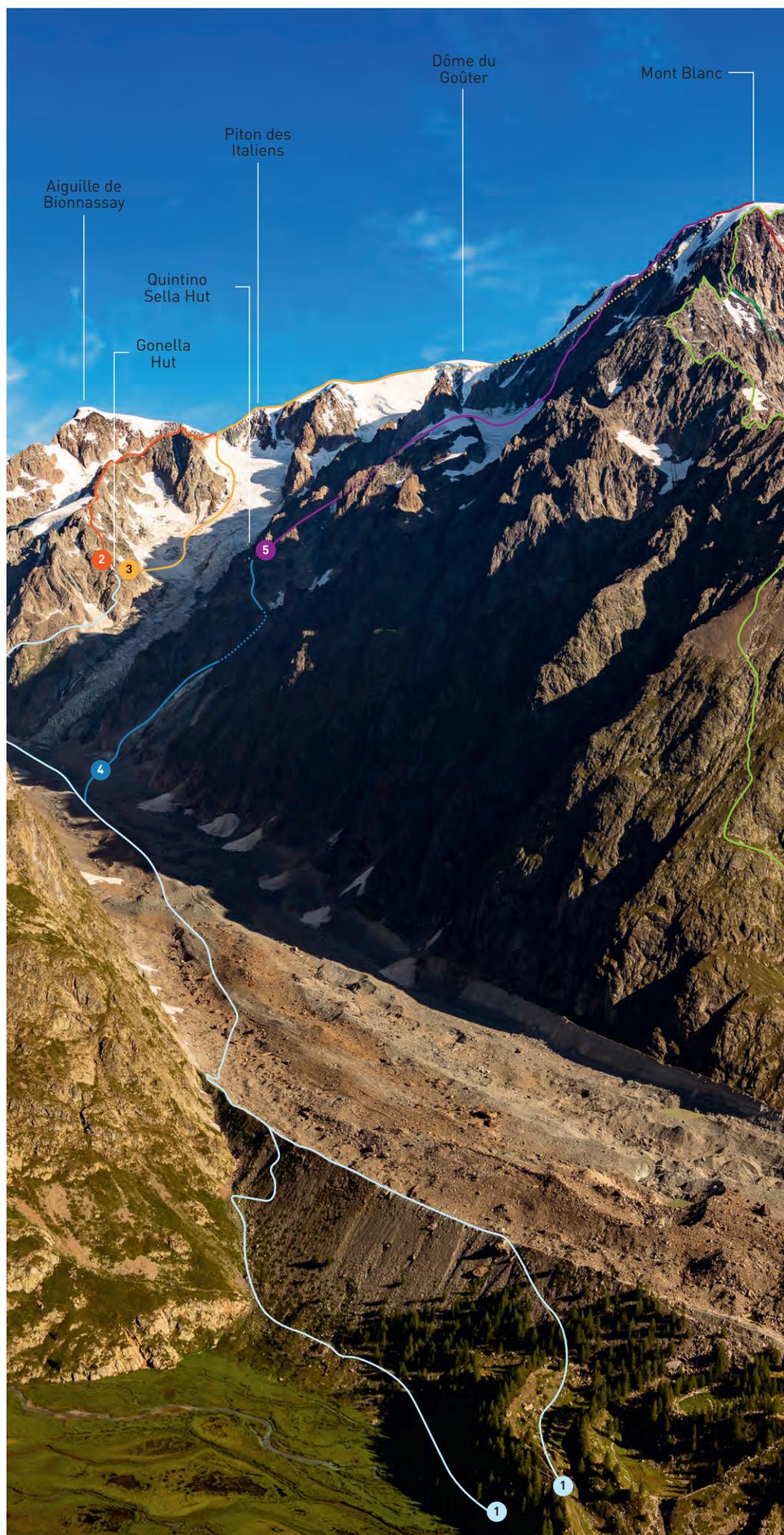
INTRODUCTION

To a mountaineer or skier, drawing lines is a way of combining their personal vision with the natural form of the mountain, of forever leaving their mark on a summit without touching it other than with a crampon or ski edge, erased by the next storm. The most aesthetic of these lines follow a logical path and immediately become all too obvious. Others, too far from the valley or too forced, are soon forgotten. Together, all these lines sketch the contours of each mountain, almost allowing them to be recomposed on a blank page.

This *Mont Blanc Lines* project is at the crossroads between guidebook and landscape photography. The images are taken from a distance, often from the air, and I have always favoured beautiful evening and morning light. A big part of my approach was to be as exhaustive as possible, in particular by dusting off old routes forgotten by modern topos, too often focused on the same selection of a few great classics. The exception was when adding all of the routes would make the picture completely unreadable, for example on the Grand Capucin.

It quickly became clear that despite two centuries of climbing in the Mont Blanc massif, there are still many magnificent lines to be drawn. May this book provide inspiration for them.

- 1 Ascent to the Gonella Hut
- 2 Arête des Aiguilles Grises
- 3 Aiguilles Grises/Voie du Pape
- 4 Ascent to the Quintino Sella Hut
- 5 Tournette Spur
- 6 Brouillard Ridge Integral
- 7 Brouillard Ridge
- 8 Bonatti-Oggioni Route on the Red Pillar of Brouillard
- 9 Innominata Ridge
- 10 Eccles bivouac by the Brouillard Glacier
- 11 Pic Eccles, South-East Ridge
- 12 Ascent to the Monzino Hut
- 13 Ascent to the Borelli Hut
- 14 Peuterey Ridge Integral





Mont Blanc de Courmayeur

Grand Pilier d'Angle

Dames Anglaises

Aiguille Noire de Peuterey

Aiguille Blanche de Peuterey

Pointe Gugliermi

Craveri Biviouac

Monzino Hut

Dent du Géant

Borelli Hut

Grandes Jorasses

Eccles Biviouac

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13

MONT BLANC - NORTH FACE



- 1 **Peuterey Integral**, D 4c, *Hechtel, Kittelman, 1953*
- 2 **Gervasutti Couloir**, D- X/5.3 E3, *Chabod, Gervasutti, 1934/Saudan, 1968*
- 3 **Mont Blanc du Tacul Normal Route**, PD, *Hudson, Kennedy et al., 1855*
- 4 **Contamine-Négri**, AD+ WI2 X, *Labrunie, Martin, Négri, Contamine, 1962*

- 5 **Contamine-Grisolle**, AD WI2, *Gren, Grisolle, Poulain, Ziegler, Contamine, 1968*
- 6 **Contamine-Mazeaud**, AD+ WI2, *Contamine, Mazeaud, 1963*
- 7 **Chéré Couloir**, D WI4, *Chéré, Tranchant, 1973*
- 8 **Les Trois Monts**, PD+, *Head, Grange, Orset, Perrod, 1863*

- 9 **Frendo Spur**, D 5c, *Frendo, Rionda, 1944*
- 10 **Les Grands Mulets**, PD- X, *Balmat, Paccard, 8 August 1786, 6.23 p.m.*
- 11 **North Arête of Dôme du Goûter**, PD+, *Millot, Millot, Payot, Payot, Charlet, 1872*
- 12 **Bosses Ridge/Goûter Route**, PD-, *Anderegg, Bennen, Perren, Stephen, Fox Tucket, 1861*



Vallot Hut

Dôme du Goûter

Aiguille du Midi

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MONT BLANC - NORTH FACE

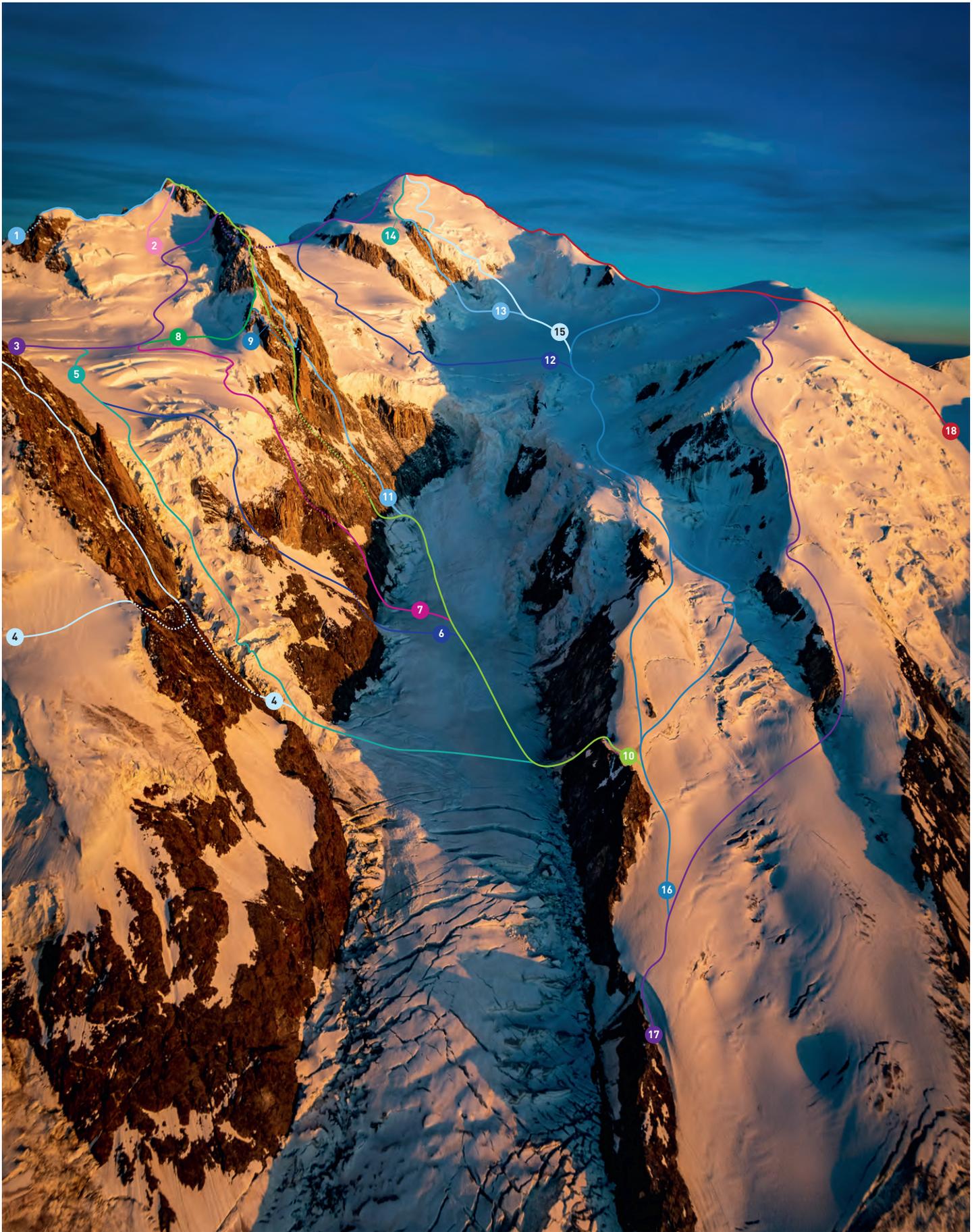
FROM THE CHAMONIX VALLEY, AND FROM A LARGE PART OF THE FRENCH ALPS – EVEN FROM LYON ON A CLEAR DAY, IT IS THE NORTH FACE OF MONT BLANC, A GIGANTIC MERINGUE OF SNOW AND ICE, THAT STANDS OUT. IT IS FRAMED BY THE TWO NORMAL ROUTES, CHOSEN BY THE VAST MAJORITY OF CANDIDATES FOR THE ASCENT: TO THE EAST, THE TROIS MONTS, VIA THE TWO SATELLITES OF MONT BLANC DU TACUL AND MONT MAUDIT, AND TO THE WEST, THE BOSSES RIDGE VIA THE AIGUILLE AND DÔME DU GOÛTER. UNLIKE THE ITALIAN SIDES, THE SLOPES ARE RELATIVELY SHALLOW AND OFFER A GREAT PLAYGROUND TO HIGH-ALTITUDE SKIERS. THE MAIN DIFFICULTIES COME FROM THE NUMEROUS OBJECTIVE DANGERS, ALL TOO OFTEN DEADLY: SÉRACS ON TACUL, MONT MAUDIT AND GRANDS MULETS, ROCKFALL ON AIGUILLE DU GOÛTER.

A SHORT HISTORY

The story of the first ascent of Mont Blanc is also the story of the birth of mountaineering. Until the middle of the eighteenth century, no one had thought of going to the top of a mountain for no particular reason (with the possible exception of Mont Aiguille, reached in 1492 on the orders of King Charles VIII), and only crystal and chamois hunters ventured into the high mountains. This all changed in 1760, when a wealthy twenty-year-old scientist from Geneva, Horace-Bénédict de Saussure, visited Chamonix and became obsessed with reaching the summit of the highest peak in Western Europe. He offered a reward to the first person who would make it to the top and made several attempts himself. Finally, the village doctor, Michel-Gabriel Paccard, and a farmer, Jacques Balmat, reached the summit on 8 August 1786. The day before, they had climbed the rocky spur that separates the Bossons and Tacconnaz glaciers, and had bivouacked just before the Jonction glacier passage, under the large rock that has since been renamed Gîte à Balmat. The next day, they climbed up the Grands Mulets to reach the Grand Plateau. The Bosses Ridge was considered impossible at the time, so they found a passage above the Rochers Rouges, then finished on easy slopes. On their arrival at the summit at 6.23 p.m., they were observed through a telescope from Chamonix. For a long time, Paccard, a humble and discreet character who left his share of the reward to Balmat, was thought to be a hapless client bordering on incompetence, and the heroic Balmat, having reached the summit first and alone, was believed to have gone back down to drag him to the top. This version is supported by the absence of Paccard's writings and the press interviews given by Saussure, Marc-Théodore Bourrit and Balmat himself, in particular to Alexandre Dumas

Hulya Vassail under Pointe Bravais at sunrise.





- 1 North-East Ridge of Mont Maudit
- 2 North Slope of Mont Maudit
- 3 Les Trois Monts
- 4 Bodin-Afanassieff Gully
- 5 Delahaie Descent

- 6 Migot-Savard Route
- 7 Brown Route
- 8 Pas si maudit que ça
- 9 Pointe Durier Normal Route
- 10 Dilleman-Charlet-Ravanel Route

- 11 West Face of Pointe Mieulet
- 12 Corridor Route
- 13 Bicentenary Route
- 14 1786 Historic Route
- 15 North Face of Mont Blanc

- 16 Les Grands Mulets
- 17 North Ridge of Dôme du Goûter
- 18 Bosses Ridge/Goûter Route



- | | | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| 1 North-North-West Ridge Direct | 6 Bosses Ridge/Goûter Route | 11 Central Route (left) | 15 North Face of Aiguille de Bionnassay |
| 2 Median Route | 7 Couloir de la Mort | 12 Central Route | 16 North Face of Aiguille de Tricot |
| 3 North-North-West Ridge | 8 West Couloir of Aiguille du Goûter | 13 Central Route (right) | 17 Tricot Ridge Integral |
| 4 Couloir de la Griaz | 9 West Face of Dôme du Goûter | 14 Diagonale du Goofy | 18 Traverse of Aiguille de Bionnassay |
| 5 Arête Payot | 10 North Face of Col de Bionnassay | | |

(of *Three Musketeers* fame) during an alpine trip. Historians now generally agree that it was Paccard who found the route, and that the two climbers reached the summit together, without helping one another. Even if the historic route was quickly abandoned in favour of the Corridor and then the Bosses Ridge after an ascent via the Grands Mulets, the two normal routes were not opened until the 1850s. The ascent through Aiguille du Goûter, although a little more technical, avoids the glacial chaos of the Junction and the threatening séracs of the Petit Plateau. The Trois Monts route, which is clearly longer, was mainly used for the ascent from the Italian side, via the Col du Géant, the only option before the discovery of the Tournette Spur and Aiguilles Grises routes. The Grands Mulets are now used almost exclusively for ski ascents in late spring, usually via the north ridge of Dome du Goûter, which is slightly more technical but without the objective dangers of the Petit and Grand Plateaux ascent.

A few climbers have since sought out new routes here and there, especially on the rockier west faces of Mont Blanc du Tacul and Mont Maudit, in particular with the magnificent Bodin–Afanassieff gully on the Tacul. But long approaches, moderate difficulty and numerous objective dangers probably explain why the vast majority of climbers flock to the same handful of routes. As always, the emergence of new practices refreshes the alpinists' playground. It is now common to come across paragliders taking off from the summit (except in July and August, when priority is given to rescue operations and free flight is forbidden in the massif); BASE jumpers have appropriated the small Pointe Durier, detached from Mont Maudit, and speed record attempts, on foot, skis, paraglider and even mountain bike, are ongoing. Since 2013, Kilian Jornet has held the best time for a round-trip ascent of Mont Blanc from the church in Chamonix, with 4 hours and 57 minutes!

A CLIMBER'S STORY: MARC-THÉODORE BOURRIT

*It is reported from Geneva to the editor that some peasants, being guides of the valley of Chamouni in Faucigny, have finally succeeded in climbing the highest summit of Mont Blanc, estimated by the most reliable observations to be 2,426 toises [4,728 metres] above the level of the Mediterranean.**

These intrepid mountaineers followed a different route in their journey to those that had been tried in vain until now. It is impossible to give foreigners, inhabitants of the plains or second-class mountains an idea of the obstacles and dangers of this attempt; they frighten the imagination. The time required to climb this mountain, which dominates the whole central chain of the Alps, is sufficient to judge.

On the first day, the travellers were obliged to sleep at the highest rocks preceding the great snows: they left at 2 o'clock in the morning and arrived at the highest peak at 5 o'clock in the evening; they set off again to descend without losing time, and half by day, half by moonlight, they returned to the place where they had slept the day before. On this terrible journey

they experienced an alternation of excessive heat and cold, great difficulty in breathing, and several times they found themselves enveloped in clouds.

Lake Geneva, distant 18 lieues from the base of Mont Blanc, seemed to them, according to what they report, a river flowing under them, and almost at the foot of the mountain. From Chamouni, they were seen, with a telescope, on the summit which appeared to be the highest. No one before these guides, whose strength, patience and courage would seem to make them beings of reason compared to all the degraded individuals who populate the great cities, had ever risen to such a height. In two glances they must have seen Italy and the Mediterranean, Switzerland, France, part of Germany, and beneath them the immense chains of the highest rocks in Europe.*

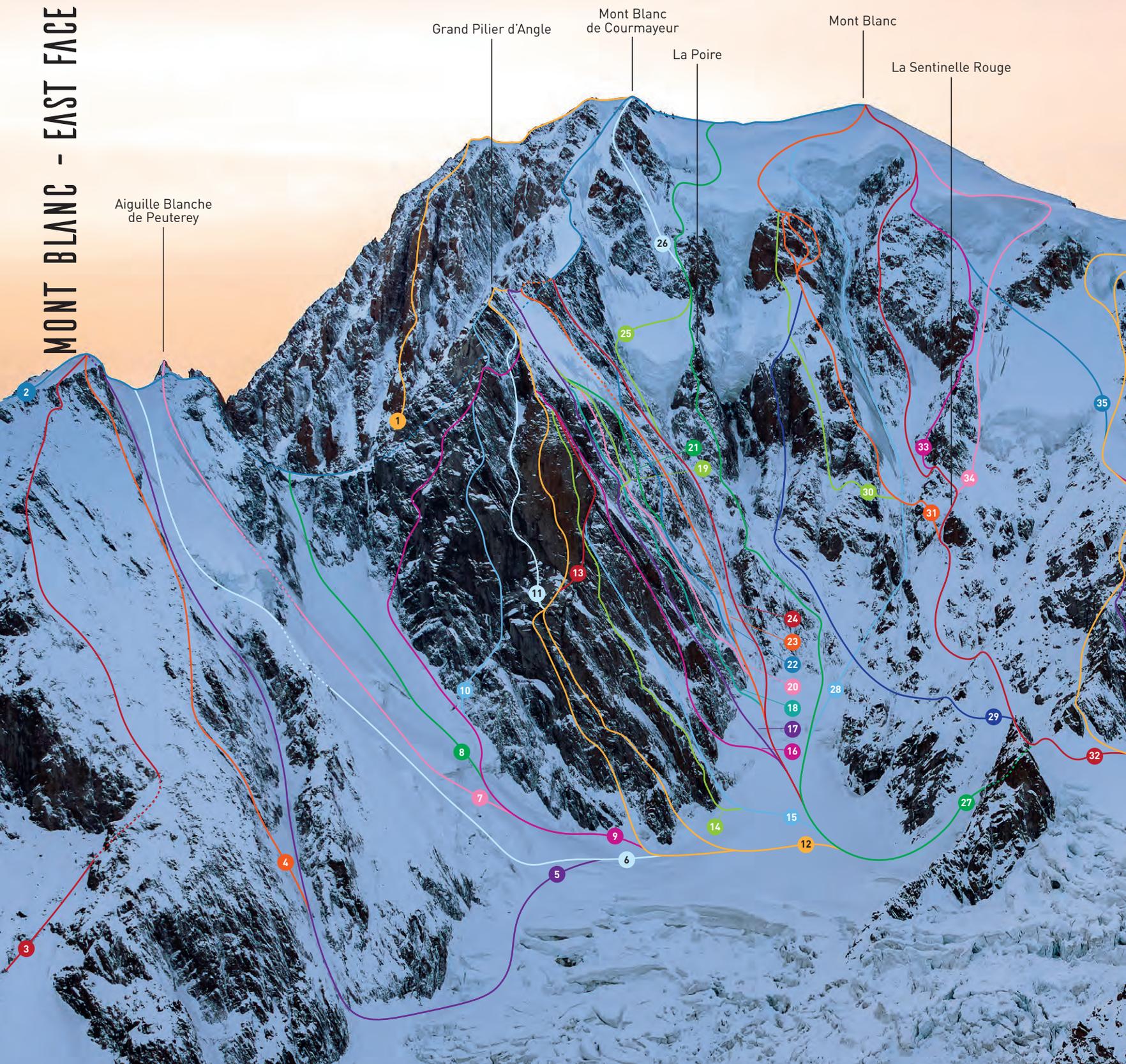
**Correspondence from Brussels,
27 August 1786; *Mercure de France*,
September 1786. Anonymous, but generally
attributed to Marc-Théodore Bourrit.**

* Ed: A *toise* is an old French unit of measurement, roughly equivalent to six feet; a *lieue* – league – is also an old French measurement, roughly equivalent to four kilometres.

Skiers at La Jonction under a celestial halo.



MONT BLANC - EAST FACE



- 1 **Central Pillar of Fréney**, TD+ 7a, Bonington, Clough, Dlugosz, Whillans, 1961
- 2 **Peuterey Integral**, TD+ 5, Hechtel, Kittelmann, 1953
- 3 **Güssfeldt Route**, D, Güssfeldt, Klucker, Ollier, Rey, 1893
- 4 **North-East Ridge**, D, Bron, Müller, Müller, 1925
- 5 **North-East Couloir**, D/5.4 E4, Gabarrou, Suzuki, 1975/Benedetti, 1980
- 6 **North Face, Left Route**, D, Chabod, Grivel, 1933
- 7 **North Face, Right Route**, D/5.3 E3, Bastien, Coutin, Gaudin, Julien, 1952/Baud, Vallencant, 1977
- 8 **North-East Face of Col de Peuterey**, AD, Herzog, Herzog, Rébuffat, Terray, 1944/Boivin, Gabarrou, 1977
- 9 **Bonatti-Zappelli Route**, ED-, Bonatti, Zappelli, 1963
- 10 **Polish Route**, ED A3, Chrobak, Laukajtys, Mroz, 1969
- 11 **Faux pas**, ED- A1, Fijackowski, Kozackiewicz, 1983

- 12 **Divine Providence**, ED+ 7c/7a obl., Gabarrou, Marsigny, 1984
- 13 **Bonatti-Gobbi Route**, ED- A1, Bonatti, Gobbi, 1957
- 14 **Un autre monde**, ED+ 6c A4, Lafaille, 1991
- 15 **Slovak Route**, ED WI3 5c A2, Chrenka, Launer, Mizicko, Piacek, Svec, Tarabek, 1976
- 16 **Belgian Route**, TD+ 6a, Caise, Grandmont, Munting, 1977
- 17 **Cecchinel-Nominé Route**, TD+ WI5 5c A1, Cecchinel, Nominé, 1971
- 18 **Directissime Gabarrou-Long**, ED- WI5 5c, Gabarrou, Long, 1983
- 19 **Boivin-Vallencant Route**, TD+ WI5, Boivin, Vallencant, 1975
- 20 **Bouchard Route**, TD+ WI4+ 5c, Bouchard, 1975
- 21 **Dufour-Fréhel Route**, TD+ WI4 5c A1, Dufour, Fréhel, 1973

- 22 **Baumont-Becker Route**, TD+ WI4, Baumont, Becker, 1976
- 23 **Bonatti-Zappelli Route**, TD WI4, Bonatti, Zappelli, 1962
- 24 **Japanese Route**, D WI2 X, Inoue, Matsumi, 1974
- 25 **Le Sérac de la Poire**, D+ WI3 X, Comino, Grassi, 1979
- 26 **Contamine-Merle Route**, D+ X, Contamine, Merle, 1951
- 27 **La Poire**, D+ 4c X, Aufdenblatten, Graham Brown, Graven, 1933
- 28 **Grand Couloir de la Brenva**, D XX, Shigi, Shigi, 1979/Valeruz, 1978
- 29 **Cascata Major**, ED WI5, Civra Dano, Vidoni, 2021
- 30 **Mazeaud-Sorgato Route**, TD- 5c X, Mazeaud, Sorgato, 1971
- 31 **Major Route**, D WI2 4b X/5.4 E4, Graham Brown, Smythe, 1928/Benedetti, 1979
- 32 **La Sentinelle Rouge**, D X/5.4 E3, Graham Brown, Smythe, 1927/Bessat, 1977



- 33 Mummery Spur, D X, Gréloz, Roch, 1936.
- 34 Couloir right of the Mummery Spur, D X, Dubois, Flouret, Laut, 1976
- 35 Diagonal Route, D X/5.4, Azéma, Charlet, 1937/Benedetti
- 36 Brenva Spur, D X/5.2 E3, Anderegg, Anderegg, Matthews, Moore, Walker, Walker, 1865/Holzer, 1973
- 37 Jardin suspendu, AD+, Chovin, Merlin, Page, Pouey, Perroux, 1990
- 38 Vendredi 13, D, Fayard, Gerbaud, Perroux, 1995
- 39 Güssfeldt Variant, AD, Croux, Güssfeldt, Rey, Savoye, 1892/Holzer, 1973
- 40 Brenvitudes, 5.3, Sainte Marie, Tardivel, 2009
- 41 Caribou Route, 5.3, Bonnet, Tardivel, 2010
- 42 Gruber Route, Gruber, Rey, Von Bergen, 1881
- 43 Tardivel Descent, 5.3 E3, Tardivel, 1988
- 44 Bicentenary Couloir, D+ WI5, Fava, Grassi, 1986

- 45 Domenech-Hanoteau Route, D, Domenech, Hanoteau, 1974
- 46 Ghersen-Twight Gully, D WI4 5a, Ghersen, Twight, 1989
- 47 South-East Gully, D WI5, Grassi, Marchisio, 1985
- 48 Nata di Pietra, TD- WI5, Grassi, Rossi, 1989
- 49 Tableau d'honneur, D WI4, Chovin, Merlin, Page, Pouey, Perroux, 1990
- 50 Country Couloir, TD- WI5, Belinger, Fantini, 1979
- 51 Bonnet d'Anne, TD- WI5, Gabarrou, Marsigny, 1988
- 52 Griffin-Torrans Route, D+ WI1 5a, Griffin, Torrans, 1975
- 53 Overcouloir, TD- WI5, Grassi, Margaira, Siri, 1986
- 54 Diagonal Route, D/5.4 E4, Baumont, Decorps, 1977/Benedetti, 1983
- 55 Giannina Route, TD, Bonatti, Ferrario, Oggioni, 1959
- 56 East Couloir, D, Bonnenfant, Simonet, 1961/Boivin, 1982

- 57 Neige, glace et mixte, D WI4, Artru, Damilano, Guérin, Heinz, Maurus, Perroux, Pilou, 1996
- 58 Swiss Variant, Aubert, Dittert, Marullaz, 1937
- 59 Dom, TD+ WI6, Gabarrou, Marsigny, 1987
- 60 Crétier Route, D+ 5c, Binel, Chabod, Crétier, 1929
- 61 Bougerol-Mroz Route, TD 5c, Bougerol, Mroz, 1971
- 62 Bonatti Route, TD 5c, Bonatti, Gallieni, Oggioni, 1959
- 63 Slovak Direct, TD+ 5c A1, Chrenka, Launer, Piacek, Tarabek, 1975
- 64 Carroz d'as, TD- WI5, Broisin, Gabarrou, 1987
- 65 Kagami-Perren Route, D+ WI3, Kagami, Perren, 1929
- 66 Polish Direct, TD- WI3 6a, Sodus, Zawadzki, 1963
- 67 Rencontre au sommet, TD- WI4+, Grassi, Marchisio, Marsigny, Rossi, 1985
- 68 South-East Couloir, TD- WI4+, Gabarrou, Steiner, 1981
- 69 Küffner Arête, D, Burgener, Furrer, Küffner, 1887

THE CIRQUE DE LA BRENVA, ORGANISED AROUND THE GLACIER OF THE SAME NAME, IS WITHOUT EQUAL IN THE MASSIF. THE BREADTH AND VERTICALITY OF ITS WALLS, WITH NO MAJOR LINE OF WEAKNESS, AS WELL AS THE ALMOST UNINTERRUPTED LINE OF SÉRACS IN ITS UPPER PART, INTIMIDATE MOST CLIMBERS TODAY, EVEN THOUGH THE BRENVA SPUR, MAJOR, SENTINELLE ROUGE AND POIRE ROUTES WERE VERY POPULAR AND FREQUENTLY CLIMBED AS RECENTLY AS TWENTY YEARS AGO. UNLIKE THE HIDDEN MIAGE GLACIER, THE GLACIAL BASIN IS EASILY VISIBLE, IN ALIGNMENT WITH THE AOSTA VALLEY AND A STONE'S THROW FROM THE CABLE CAR ON THE ITALIAN SIDE. BRAVE CLIMBERS AND SKIERS WILL FIND LONG, WILD SNOW AND ICE ROUTES AT AN ALTITUDE OF OVER 4,000 METRES. THIS IS ALSO THE LOCATION OF THE MOST DIFFICULT WAY TO REACH THE SUMMIT OF MONT BLANC, *DIVINE PROVIDENCE*.

A SHORT HISTORY

From the beginning of the nineteenth century, ascents of Mont Blanc via the Balmat and Paccard route and its variants multiplied, democratising access to the roof of Western Europe. More than a century before the drilling of the tunnel, the Courmayeur valley, so close as the crow flies, was in fact a very long way from Chamonix. It quickly became important for Italian guides to find an alternative route to the Grands Mulets. Many options were explored and several attempts were made from the Miage glacier and Mont Blanc du Tacul, but one fact remained constant: the walls of the Brenva basin were so high, so steep and so dangerous that it would be pointless to even explore the glacier. It was a dead end.

In 1864, however, a young Englishman, Adolphus Warburton Moore, leaned over the face on his way down from the summit of Mont Blanc. To his great surprise, it was not a bottomless abyss that answered him, but an almost gentle slope. It seemed to Moore that he could almost slide down it. His decision was quickly made, and a year later, accompanied by two guides and three other Englishmen, he climbed the main line of weakness on the face: the Brenva Spur. The route, although very aesthetic, is also long, difficult and requires good snow and ice conditions. It was only rarely repeated in the decades that followed, and no other lines were opened in the basin, with the exception of a variant on the spur in 1892, the now-classic Güssfeldt Couloir.

Everything changed in 1927 with the arrival of a Scotsman whose interest in the Brenva dated back to before his first visit to the Alps, after reading a brief passage in an adventure book. Within a few years, T. Graham Brown opened the three most iconic routes of the face: *La Sentinelle Rouge* in 1927, the Major route in 1928 and *La Poire* in 1933. Each of these routes follows a more or less prominent spur and mostly avoids the omnipresent séracs at the top of the face. They are quite logical, and highly prized trophies for any mountaineer. The exploration of the basin continued after the war, and the next step was, quite obviously, the rocky and glacial bastion of the Grand Pilier d'Angle, which closes the glacier to the west and whose summit forms the upper part of the Peuterey Ridge. Here too, one man left his mark: Walter Bonatti opened two rocky routes on the apparently impregnable face, with Toni Gobbi in 1957 and Cosimo Zappelli in 1963, two routes of a scale and difficulty comparable to the Walker Spur of the Grandes Jorasses. And above all, in 1962, also with Zappelli, Bonatti established the first route on the north face. Glacial, of extreme difficulty, and exposed to séracs, it is a mental, technical and physical feat. Bonatti considered it to be his toughest route in the massif.

The last major line of the basin is the work of two aficionados of the massif. In 1984, Patrick Gabarrou and François



- | | | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 Griffin-Torrans | 9 Crétier Route | 17 Küffner Arête | 25 Pibaro-ci, Pibaro-là |
| 2 Diagonal Route | 10 Bougerol-Mroz | 18 Choucas blancs | 26 Directissime Baxter-Jones |
| 3 Country Couloir | 11 Bonatti Route | 19 Surprise | 27 À l'Est, rien de nouveau |
| 4 Giannina Route | 12 Slovak Direct | 20 Couloir de la consolation | 28 Anderson Route |
| 5 East Couloir | 13 Carroz d'as | 21 Mixed Emotion | 29 Filo di Arianna |
| 6 Neige, glace et mixte | 14 Kagami-Perren | 22 Grand Couloir of the Androsace | 30 Fantasia per a Ghacciatore |
| 7 Swiss Variant | 15 Polish Direct | 23 Fille ou garçon | 31 Lacrima degli Angeli |
| 8 Dom | 16 South-East Couloir | 24 Blaireaux Route | |

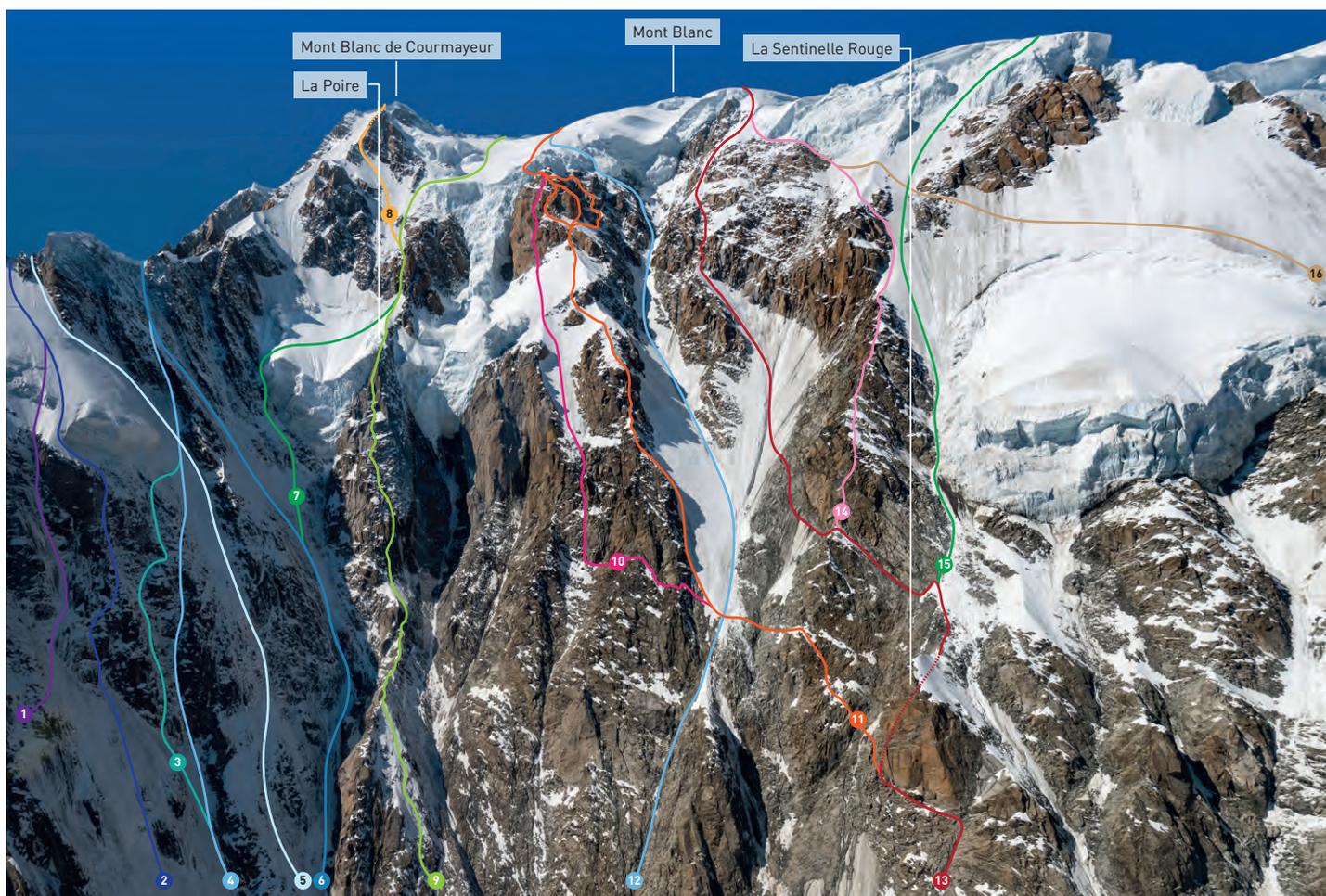
Marsigny climbed a direct line through the steepest rocky shield of the Grand Pilier d'Angle, *Divine Providence*. With four pitches of artificial climbing in A3/A4, the route was almost completely freed (except for three points of aid) in 1990 by repeat offenders Alain Ghersen and Thierry Renault, with several pitches between 7b and 7c. Unique because of its wild and committed character, its altitude and the 1,500 metres of climbing left after the summit of the Pilier (not to mention the descent from Mont Blanc!), it is a route that attracts as much as it intimidates strong climbers, and several parties come test themselves each summer.

A CLIMBER'S STORY: SÉBASTIEN DE SAINTE MARIE

The end of spring 2009 had delivered beautiful conditions for high-mountain skiing. Continuous thunderstorms had covered the faces with sticky snow, and made it possible to descend routes that were rarely in condition. Pierre Tardivel invited me on his new project: a magnificent ephemeral line between the Güssfeldt Couloir and the Brenva Spur. An ephemeral line, because its descent requires an alignment of circumstances: snow is needed, as well as peaceful collaboration from the séracs in the upper part.



A rope party on the summit slopes of the Tour Ronde, with the Brenva basin in the background.



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|---------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1 Boivin–Vallençant | 5 Bonatti–Zappelli | 9 La Poire | 13 La Sentinelle Rouge |
| 2 Dufour–Fréhel | 6 Japanese Route | 10 Mazeaud–Sorgato | 14 Mummery Spur |
| 3 Tamagnini Variant | 7 Le Sérac de la Poire | 11 Major Route | 15 Couloir right of the Mummery Spur |
| 4 Baumont–Becker | 8 Contamine–Merle | 12 Grand Couloir de la Brenva | 16 Diagonal Route |

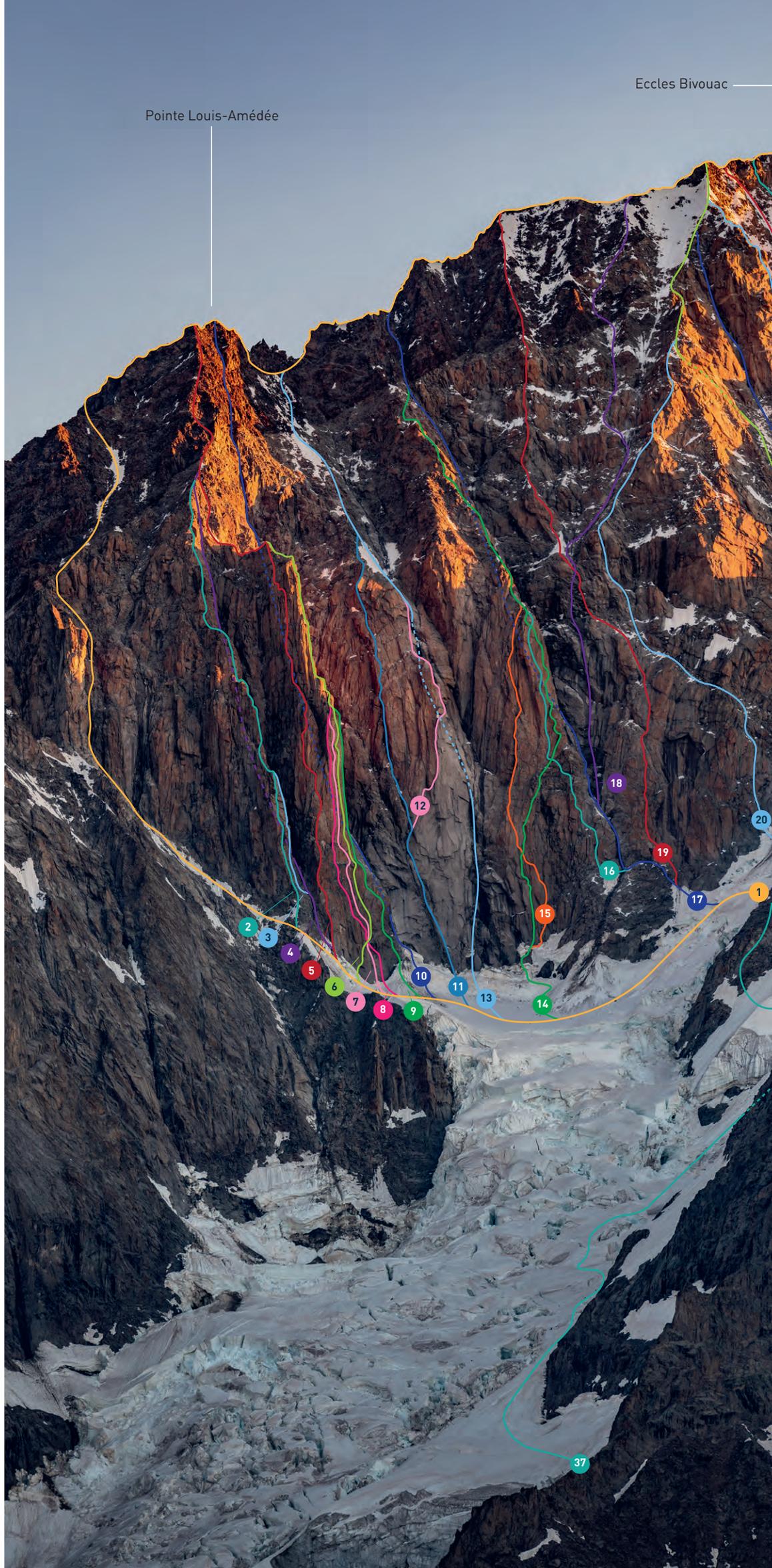
On 31 May, we meet at the Cosmiques hut from where we will leave the next day to reach the summit of Mont Blanc via the Trois Monts route. While this adds the risk of an on-sight descent, neither of us is keen to climb under the summit séracs. So, surrounded by a good dozen other roped parties, we attack Mont Blanc du Tacul with skins, then Mont Maudit before the steep shoulder that requires us to switch our skis for crampons. After the Mur de la Côte, Pierre continues to the summit of Mont Blanc while my limited fitness leads me directly to the start of our line, at 4,500 metres. After Pierre's success on the summit, we set off on our first descent, at first easily weaving through séracs and crevasses in wide curves before reaching the first slope. Beautiful, smooth, it allows us a quick descent on the right. Somewhat under psychological pressure from the masses of ice just above us, we hurry to the shelter of one of the pillars of the Brenva Spur. The slope becomes steeper but we are no longer exposed to falling séracs. The route follows the lower part of the pillar rocks, so we stay on the upper parts of the successive couloirs, which are wonderful to ski. Toward the lower third of the route, a small rocky ridge forces us to slow down a bit.

Pierre crosses the obstacle with ease by holding on to the rock while I use a less academic method of traverse jumping, almost losing my balance. This brief demonstration of style elicits a remark from my companion: 'Seb, I really thought you were a goner!'

The next slope is covered in soft snow and still splendid to ski. It finally becomes less steep and leads to the Grand Plateau at 3,500 metres. We are happy – we have just skied a magnificent route – but the day is far from over. To get back to the Helbronner cable car, we first have to go back up to the old Ghigliione refuge, then cross under the Tour Ronde and arrive before the last lift. These few hundred metres of difference in altitude confirm my impression of the Italian side of Mont Blanc: beautiful, but so damn big!

MONT BLANC - SOUTH FACE

- 1 **Brouillard Ridge**, AD+, *Bressoud, Dittert, Marquart, Marullaz, 1933*
- 2 **La Classica Moderna**, ED- 6c, *Barmasse, Pou, Pou, 2011*
- 3 **Polish Route, Left Pillar**, TD+, *Kowalewski, Maczka, Wroz, 1971*
- 4 **Brouillard Givrant**, ED- WI6, *Bellin, Boivin, 1985*
- 5 **Bonatti-Oggioni Route**, TD+ 6a, *Bonatti, Oggioni, 1959*
- 6 **Directissime Gabarrou-Long**, ED 7b, *Gabarrou, Long, 1984*
- 7 **Incroyable**, ED+ 8a/7b obl., *Cazzanelli, Della Bordella, Ratti, 2020*
- 8 **Les Anneaux magiques**, ED 6c/6b obl., *Anker, Piola, 1989*
- 9 **Via dei Dilettanti**, TD+ 6b A1, *Bessone, Manera, Meneghin, 1980*
- 10 **Cascade Notre-Dame**, ED WI6, *Gabarrou, Marsigny, 1983*
- 11 **Central Pillar**, TD 5c, *Dworak, Grochowski, Jedlinski, 1971*
- 12 **Jones Route**, TD 5c A1, *Jones, 1971*
- 13 **Hypergully**, ED WI6+ 5c A1, *Grison, Maily, 1984*
- 14 **Le Pilier du bout du monde**, ED- 6b+/6a+ obl., *Anker, Piola, 1989*
- 15 **Etica Bisbetica**, TD+, *Grassi, Meneghin, 1986*
- 16 **Bonington Pillar**, TD+ 5c A1, *Baillie, Bonington, Harlin, Robertson, 1965*
- 17 **Hypercouloir du Brouillard**, TD+ WI6, *Gabarrou, Steiner, 1982*
- 18 **Patagonic**, TD+ M6 5c, *Dumarest, Gabarrou, 2003*
- 19 **Grand Brouillard Spur**, TD+, *Gabarrou, Long, 1983*
- 20 **Brouillard Spur**, TD- 5c, *Bourges, Ducournau, Franchon, Mizrahi, 1975*
- 21 **Innominette**, TD WI5 5a, *Gabarrou, Long, 1985*
- 22 **Innominata Ridge**, D+ 5b, *Aufdenblatten, Courtauld, Oliver, Rey, 1920*
- 23 **From Dawn to Decadence**, TD+ 6b, *Clyma, Harlin III, Payne, 2004*
- 24 **Abominette**, TD- WI3 5a, *Gabarrou, Profit, Tavernier, 1984*
- 25 **Pilier dérobé**, ED, *Frost, Harlin, 1963*
- 26 **South Pillar of Frêne**, TD- 5c, *Dubost, Seigneur, 1972*
- 27 **South Pillar of Frêne Direct**, ED 6b, *Cartwright, Richardson, 1995*
- 28 **Directissime Jordi Bardill**, ED 6c A2, *Bardill, Piola, Steiner, 1982*
- 29 **Central Pillar of Frêne**, TD+ 7a, *Bonington, Clough, Dlugosz, Whillans, 1961/Bonatti, Gallieni, Guillaume, Kohlman, Mazeaud, Oggioni, Vieille, 1961*
- 30 **Grand Couloir of Frêne**, D+, *Abert, Afanassieff, Blanchard, Challéat, 1974*
- 31 **Boivin Variant**, D, *Boivin, 1986*
- 32 **Ciao Walter**, ED-, *Deniel, Gabarrou, O'Connor Croft, 2012*
- 33 **Bonatti-Zappelli Direct**, D+, *Bonatti, Zappelli, 1961*
- 34 **Peuterey Ridge Integral via Eccles Couloir**, TD+ 5c, *Hechtel, Kittelmann, 1953*
- 35 **South-East Face of Grand Pilier d'Angle**, AD
- 36 **South-East Arête of Grand Pilier d'Angle**, AD
- 37 **Eccles Bivouac via Glacier du Brouillard**, PD
- 38 **South-East Arête of Pic Eccles**, AD, *Croux, Ollier, Mackensie, 1895*
- 39 **Rochers Gruber**
- 40 **West Ridge of Aiguille Blanche de Peuterey**, D, *Croux, Croux, Orvenxi Jones, 1906*
- 41 **Central Spur of Aiguille Blanche de Peuterey**, TD-, *Olliviet, Roulin, 1974*
- 42 **Boccalatte Route**, D+, *Boccalatte, Pietrasanta, 1937*



Pointe Louis-Amédée

Mont Blanc
de Courmayeur

Aiguille Blanche
de Peuterey

Grand Pilier d'Angle



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MONT BLANC - SOUTH FACE

ONE QUALIFYING ADJECTIVE COMES BACK IN EVERY DESCRIPTION OF THE SOUTH FACE OF MONT BLANC: HIMALAYAN. UNLIKE THE FRIENDLY SNOWMAN ON THE NORTH SIDE, THE SOUTH FACE IS A HUGE AND WILD ROCKY CIRQUE, A SUCCESSION OF RIDGES AND DEEP COULOIRS. THE MOST FAMOUS OF THEM, THE CENTRAL PILLAR OF FRÊNEY, STARTS AT ALMOST 4,000 METRES. FRAMED BY THE BROUILLARD RIDGE TO THE WEST AND THE SUPERLATIVE PEUTEREY RIDGE TO THE EAST, THE SOUTH FACE IS DIVIDED INTO TWO GLACIAL BASINS BY THE POINTE INNOMINATA. THE FAMOUS RIDGE OF THE SAME NAME, WHICH STARTS ABOVE PIC ECCLES, IS IN FACT A CLEVER ROUTE UP THE FACE AND NOTHING LIKE A RIDGE. ON THE LEFT, THE BROUILLARD GLACIER AND THE PILIER ROUGE, ON THE RIGHT, THE FRÊNEY GLACIER AND THE CENTRAL PILLAR, TOPPED BY ITS FAMOUS CHANDELLE, THE SITE OF ONE OF THE WORST TRAGEDIES IN MOUNTAINEERING HISTORY.

Right:
The Central Pillar of Frêne.

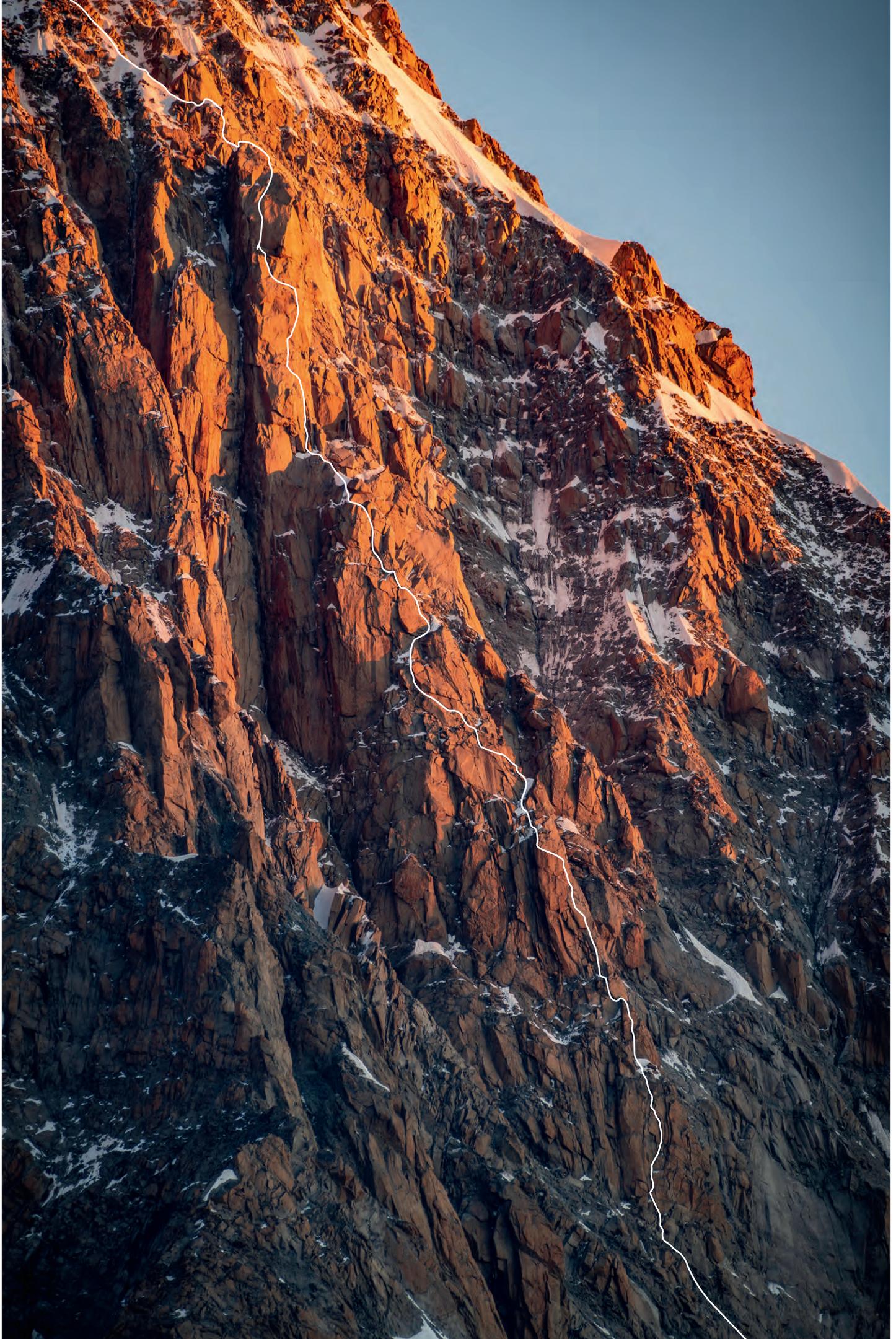
A SHORT HISTORY

It is almost unbelievable that a party dared to attempt this face in the 1870s, for the final wall is a vertical cul-de-sac. In 1874, however, James Aubrey Garth Marshall, Johann Fischer and Ulrich Almer reached 4,200 metres on what would become the Innominata Ridge, when a snow bridge gave way under their feet. Marshall and Fischer died in the fall, but Almer managed to escape from the crevasse and descend alone to Courmayeur.

A year later, James Eccles carried out a reconnaissance near the point that would bear his name, without finding a passage to the summit. The inspiration came to him when he saw an illustration in a London bookshop: the Peuterey Ridge could be climbable from the Frêne side. In 1877, after the inauguration of the Chamonix–Courmayeur crossing via Col de Rochefort (to avoid paying the Col du Géant tax), he embarked on the ascent with his guides Michel-Clément and Alphonse Payot. After a night spent at the site of the current Eccles bivouac, the party crossed the Frêne glacier then the Grand Pilier d'Angle before arriving at the summit of Mont Blanc in just six hours. Other parties had beaten them to the summit via the normal route and had left their rubbish. Already, Eccles wondered if it might not become necessary to implement a permit system for Mont Blanc.

His route was bold and the question now was of how to make it more direct and elegant. The German explorer Paul Güssfeldt, accompanied by the 'prince of guides' Émile Rey, Christian Klucker and César Ollier, found the solution in 1893 with the combination of the Blanche de Peuterey via the Brenva side, and the Peuterey Ridge itself. Although Aiguille Noire was climbed in 1902, it was not until 1953 that Richard Hechtel and Günther Kittelmann followed the most obvious route, also the longest in the Alps: the Peuterey Integral, the skyline between Aiguille Noire, Aiguille Blanche, Grand Pilier d'Angle and Mont Blanc. The Brouillard Ridge was climbed from Quintino Sella in 1911 by Karl Blodig, Humphrey Owen Jones, Josef Knubel and Geoffrey Winthrop Young. As for the Innominata 'ridge', the last major route on Mont Blanc, despite numerous attempts at the turn of the century, it wasn't before 1919 that it was first climbed by Stephen Lewis Courtauld, Edmund Gifford Oliver, Adolf Aufdenblatten, and Adolphe and Henri Rey.

The other great prize on this side, the highest-altitude wall in the Alps, was the famous Central Pillar of Frêne. With its overhanging cap, the eighty-metre-high Chandelle, the difficulties promised to be extreme, and the best climbers of the era were racing each other. At the beginning of July 1961, three Italians, the famous Walter Bonatti, his client Roberto Gallieni and his partner Andrea Oggioni found four Frenchmen, Pierre Mazeaud, Robert Guillaume, Antoine Vieille and Pierre Kohlmann, at the Fourche bivouac. All were



headed for the Central Pillar and they decided to join forces. On the second day, after a bivouac at the foot of the Chandelle, bad weather arrived. Lightning struck the giant rod and hit Kohlmann, frying his hearing aid and nearly sending him over the edge. The summit was close, half a day's climb at most, whereas a retreat would be extremely difficult and dangerous. Bad weather never lasts long in summer, so the decision was made to wait. A third day passed, then a fourth, with snow falling without interruption. On the morning of the fifth day, the climbers realised that they would soon not have enough strength to climb up or down. It took Bonatti more than fifty abseils in a landscape transformed by snow to reach the base of the pillar and then, via the Gruber rocks, the Frêne glacier. In the meantime, they endured a fifth bivouac in a crevasse at Col de Peuterey.

The next day, Vieille was the first to die of exhaustion. A few hours later, Guillaume succumbed as well. The evening found the five survivors at the foot of the short ascent to Col de l'Innominata. Bonatti, a superman, broke the trail up to the col, but Oggioni, spent, could not go any further. After several hours of immobility, Kohlmann finally unroped and joined Bonatti and Gallieni at the summit, while Mazeaud stayed with the dying Oggioni. Kohlmann, delirious, became

convinced that the Italians wanted him dead and attacked them with his ice axe. He got lost in the storm and died the next morning in the arms of the rescue team. Bonatti finally found the Gamba hut (now Monzino) in the middle of the night, filled with rescuers who had not dared venture outside. Mazeaud spent one last bivouac alone with Oggioni's body before being rescued the following morning. Of the seven who started, only three survived. The pillar was finally climbed a month later by the Anglo-Polish team of Chris Bonington, Ian Clough, Jan Dlugosz and Don Whillans.

A CLIMBER'S STORY: LISE BILLON

24 February 2021

On the summit of Mont Blanc, wrapped up in our down jackets, Fanny looks at Maud and me, and says, 'Oh, I'm a little emotional'. It's true that this is a beautiful summit, especially in the middle of winter! For me, the south face of Mont Blanc is the fulfilment of one of my oldest mountaineering dreams. The wild and steep side of the mountain. When I first started climbing, reading all the stories, I told myself, 'When I grow up, I'll go there!' Well, I am still not very tall, but this is the second time I've found myself climbing the Brouillard Ridge this year. And I can assure you that no matter how many times you climb it, it never feels any shorter!

Looking on in admiration in front of Aiguille Noire de Peuterey from the Eccles bivouac.





On the Brouillard glacier on the way to the Red Pillar of Brouillard.

The first time was last summer. The conditions were ideal. Fanny and I wanted to visit the [Red] Pillar and its beautiful granite. We had already climbed a lot of granite, so we thought that the Gabarrou–Long would be just right for us. We had been quite intimidated by the stories of our friends and the topos telling us how endless the summit ridge is, so we opted for a night in Monzino and a bivouac at the top of Pointe Louis-Amédée. We took our time on each pitch, waited for the sun at the base and generally enjoyed ourselves: we were carrying our home in our backpacks.

The climbing was steep and sustained, the granite was different to that of Argentière or Combe Maudite. Not a single bad pitch! But when we got to Pointe Louis-Amédée, it really wasn't that late. And we were in summer, the days are long. We looked at each other, no need to discuss, it was already agreed: let's keep going! We got to the Goûter hut just before the doors closed, our friends waiting for us with slices of tart and spots in the dorms. No need for duvets, no need for stoves. For the second time in two years, I had been carrying my bivouac on my back for nothing; I would have to reconsider my tactics.

The second time was in winter. In my imagination as a young climber, the south face of Mont Blanc in winter was for even taller climbers! I was still the same height as last summer, and looking at Maud and Fanny, I realised that they weren't very tall either.

We were at the Eccles bivouac and it was our first time at altitude this winter. I felt for the clients we bring up here who have just arrived from Paris. In my body and in my mind, we were

at least 6,500 metres above sea level, to the point that we had to spend an extra rest day at Eccles.

The idea was to go to the Frêne Pillar side, because we didn't really want to do the Brouillard Ridge all over again, even if the Hypercouloir, across from us, looked very attractive with its beautiful ice conditions. But our friends who had gone climbing while we were resting gave us negative feedback on the conditions on the Frêne Pillar. We ended up giving in to the charms of the Hypercouloir, an aesthetic ice streak that leads straight to the Brouillard Ridge. One good thing about a south face is that you climb in the sun: even in the middle of winter, you really don't get cold. Climbing ice in the sun is really pleasant!

After the last snow slopes, we were back on the infamous ridge. We were at over 4,000 metres and getting short of breath. As we went along, unable to speed up, I looked at the summit and, inspired by Livanos, I couldn't help but think: 'And the summit, already far away, keeps not getting any closer.' We shed a tear on the top. Were we now in the 'big league' since we had done the south face in summer and winter? I don't really know, but no matter what, it was the realisation of a beautiful dream.