



## AAC Publications

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### **Alpine 2021 – An Overview**

Europe, The Alps

Spectacular scenery on the northwest face of the Cima de Gasperi. Photo by Emanuele Andreozzi  
**Late winter snow that took longer than normal to clear, ongoing COVID-19 restrictions in the first half of the year, and a surprisingly cool summer, when the mountains mostly escaped the intense heatwaves that plagued the rest of Europe, characterized the Alps in 2021. A small representation of the most interesting ascents follows.**

#### **Mont Blanc Massif**

A notable ascent took place on Mont Blanc on November 20 when Francesco Civa Dano and Guiseppe Vidoni pioneered a partial new line on the historic Brenva Face, the first new ground to be climbed there for many years. The face's Route Major (TD, Graham Brown–Smythe, 1928) is one of the great classics of the range but is climbed far less frequently these days; the approach is extremely exposed to serac fall.

In 1971, Pierre Mazeaud and Roberto Sorgato traversed left from a point low on the Major and climbed a buttress between the Major and the Pear routes, eventually finishing well left of the normal Major finish or the Gobbi-Ottoz and Seigneur direct variants. This route is highly dangerous, ED, and is thought never to have been repeated. Immediately left of the Mazeaud-Sorgato on the lower buttress is an open depression at over 4,000m, and Vidoni, who lives in Courmayeur, saw that a steep, 170m-high icefall had occupied this groove in November.

Starting early from the Col de la Fourche Bivouac, in excellent weather and snow conditions, the Italian pair followed the approach to the Pear Route until they could climb directly to the smear, which they reached at dawn. They found the ice to be good quality but thin, with even short stubby screws not penetrating fully at times. They completed this section in five pitches, then slanted across the snow slope above to finish up the Gobbi-Ottoz variant to the Major. They continued to the summit and down to the Gouter Hut that night, naming their route Cascata Major (1,300m, VI/5).

On the south face of the Grandes Jorasses, left of the Hypercouloir, stands a fine triangle of rock, its right edge a perfect pillar of seemingly compact granite. It is known variously as the South Pillar, the Pilier du Glacier Suspendu, and the Ghiglione Pillar. Piero Ghiglione and Arthur Ottoz made the first ascent in 1948, climbing more broken ground left of the true pillar but working right to finish near the crest (TD VI). There have been few repeats—possibly none of the original line—and the long access to the base has become objectively dangerous in recent decades. In May 2019, Jon Bracey and Enrico Bonino climbed an ice/mixed line that is probably quite similar to the middle-upper section of the 1948 route (5b WI5+ M6+).

The true crest of the pillar, an obvious and logical line, had been considered by many over the years, including Matteo Bernasconi, who throughout the last decade was a regular climbing partner of Matteo Della Bordella. In 2020, Bernasconi perished in an avalanche, and Della Bordella was motivated to complete one of Bernasconi's dreams

Della Bordella, Giacomo Mauri, and Luca Schiera skinned up to the Boccalatte Hut on February 23, set off at 4 a.m. the following morning, and in four hours had reached the foot of the pillar. Two 60m

itches (6a and 5+) on the left side of the initial buttress took them to the compact pillar crest.

Contrary to expectations—they were carrying bivouac gear, expecting a two-day ascent—the granite was extremely weathered and well-featured, and the three were able to climb fast over moderate difficulties (4+ to 6b). The pitch below the summit of the pillar was completely vertical but with great holds, and the temperature throughout was warm enough for bare-handed climbing. From the top, an easy ridge led to the glacier plateau and the Grandes Jorasses normal route, which they descended to the Boccalatte, arriving at 7 p.m. The 450m route (excluding the approach) was named *Il Regalo di Berna*.

The west face of the Petit Dru now has a hard new free route. Four members of the *Groupe Militaire de Haute Montagne* (Thomas Auvaro, Léo Billon, Jordi Noguere, and Sébastien Ratel) took four days to complete the climb (February 18–21) and a fifth to descend to the valley. (The ascent was live-streamed on social media by a cameraman filming from Montenvers.) With the Grands Montets lift closed, the team had to make the more arduous approach via Montenvers, and they ferried loads to the bottom of the face a week earlier.

When the four set off up their chosen route, which approximated the former Harlin-Robbins *Direttissima* (much of which was destroyed in a 2005 rockfall), they were unaware that in winter 2015 two Spanish climbers, Josep Maria Esquirol and David Palmada, had spent 14 days on this line before bailing a little over 300m from the top (though they still gave their attempt a name: *Abdruits, 6a M5 A5 70°*). The French followed the Spanish line for the first third of the face, then made a variant, before rejoining the last seven pitches of the Spanish line. Almost immediately above the 2015 high point, they found the crux: a dangerously loose pitch of 7a. A further five pitches of sustained 6b/6c led to easier ground and eventually the summit.

The rock was generally sound, and the climbers felt the hard dry-tooling pitches would have been very much harder climbed conventionally with hands and rock shoes (perhaps 7c). The route was largely protected with nuts and cams, and was named *Base* (1,000m, 7a M8+).

## **Ecrins Massif**

Cyril Dupeyré, Benjamin Ribeyre (France), and Erin Smart (USA) are three active guides based in La Grave on the north side of the Ecrins. Over three consecutive days in August 2020 and a fourth in late August 2021, they opened the first new route in six years on the south side of the Meije (3,984m). *Athée Pieds* (700m, 970m of climbing, 20 pitches, 7c 6c obl) lies entirely to the right of the historic but infrequently climbed south face of the 3,973m *Doigt de Dieu* (700m, TD+, 5+, Chaud-Walden, 1951. (The route's original finish contained—remarkably for the era—a short section of 6b.) The Chaud-Walden route, with mixed quality rock, was soloed in 2016 by Ribeyre.

The new route weaves up the steep, compact wall below the shoulder immediately right (east) of the *Doigt de Dieu*. Most of the belays are bolted, and around 40 protection bolts remain in place, of which 14 were placed in the compact rock of the crux sixth pitch.

Paul Bonhomme continues to make big, bold, and new ski descents in the Alps. His goal during the 2020-21 season was to complete 10 such routes, each more than 500m and 50°. All were completed, including the east face of the 4,135m *Combin de la Tsessette* (via a 1,200m line called the *Les Piliers de Bagnes*; the 900m *Merci Mamans* on the southwest face of the *Bietschhorn* (3,934m); and his last, on May 28, the 950m southwest face of the *Täschhorn* (4,491m), which he named *X*.

Bonhomme and a regular skiing partner, Vivian Bruchez, first climbed the proposed ski line on the *Täschhorn* and then skied from the summit, replacing skis with crampons near the base to downclimb a narrow 5m section. After descending the top part of the east face and *Mischabelgrat* (south-southeast ridge), the pair dropped into the southwest face from *Brèche* 4,350m and followed

the line climbed in 1956 by Erich Vanis and Hans Chval Kremslehner, moving west near the bottom to finish down the 1935 Biner-Taugwalder start. [See also Bonhomme's feature article about this ski season for the 2022 AAJ.]

Apart from near the bottom of the face, the ski line is to the east of the historic 1906 original route, often cited as one of the greatest mountaineering feats of all time. Climbed by guides Josef Knubel and Franz and Josef Lochmatter, together with Valentine "VJ" Ryan and Geoffrey Winthrop Young, and rarely since, it is seriously exposed to rockfall in summer, and still graded TD+ today.

## Dolomites

In the first week of March, stable high pressure sitting over the Dolomites prompted a flurry of activity on the vast northwest face of Civetta.

Lorenzo d'Addario and Nicola Tondini made the first winter ascent of Dulcis in Fundo (ca 400m, IX-, de Blasi-dal Pozzo, 1988) on the Torre di Alleghe. Neither had previously climbed the route, but they completed it in a day. On Punta Civetta, Titus Prinoth and Alex Walpoth made the first winter ascent of Chimera Verticale (600m, 15 pitches, IX, Bau-Beber-Geremia-Matteraglia, 2008). The pair required two bivouacs. Walpoth had previously repeated the line, situated between the classic Aste and Andrich routes, in summer 2014. Another first winter ascent was completed on W Mexico Cabrones (1,150m, 33 pitches, VIII-) on Punta Tissi, first climbed in 2001, solo, by Venturino de Bona. Alexander Baù, Thomas Gianola, and Giovanni Zaccaria, who had all climbed this route at various times in summer, combined forces to make the winter ascent with two bivouacs.

The Dolomites continue to be explored for ephemeral ice and mixed climbs, for which there still appears to be great potential for those able to snatch good conditions when they arrive. One of the foremost protagonists is Emanuele Andreozzi (Italy), who with various friends climbed three big new lines in the spring.

On the first day of April, with Matteo Faletti, Andreozzi tackled the north face of the Cimon della Pala (3,184m), an elegant spire in the Pale di San Martino group that is often referred to as the Matterhorn of the Dolomites. The pair followed a logical line up an obvious series of chimneys, gullies, and ramps to create Elements of Life (900m of climbing, AI5 M6). The ice was in excellent condition; the face receives no sun at this time of year, keeping the temperature well below freezing even when warm elsewhere.

The new route, to the right of Via degli Allievi (AI5 M4, Colomba-Vidoni, 2019), begins with a 100m icefall first climbed by an Italian team in January 2020. Above, it links lines of weakness and at one point traverses a spectacular shark's fin snow crest in the middle of the wall. The pair reached a notch on the summit ridge only 20m below the top, but, disappointingly, conditions prevented further progress—it was, after all, April Fool's Day. They rappelled and downclimbed from this point along the left side of the north face.

On the 20th of May, with winter long gone but the Dolomites still covered in deep snow, Andreozzi, Faletti, and Santi Padros (Spain) took advantage of the unusual conditions to climb a huge ice/mixed line on the north-northeast face of Cima Tosa (at 3,173m the highest peak in the Brenta Dolomites). This is the rock wall left of the famous Canalone Neri (AD and skied from time to time). After camping below the face, the three left at 2:15 a.m. and took 16.5 hours to complete Pazzioni Primavernale (around 1,000m of climbing, AI6 M7 90°+) to the summit plateau. They slid and downclimbed the Canalone Neri, regained the tent and skis, and were back at the road by 11 p.m.

The first half of this route follows the 1933 Castiglione-Detassis (IV and V), then traverses left to cross the Piazz Route (IV+/V, Michelson-Piazz, 1911) before leaving it to climb the right-hand of two huge, previously untouched chimneys. No gear was left on the route.

Ten days later, Andreozzi and Padros were below the northwest face of the Cima de Gasperi (2,994m) in the Civetta group. They had walked up to the Vazzoler Hut in relatively warm temperatures above green valleys, but when they stepped out of the winter room at 2:15 a.m., they met a hard frost. The goal was a huge gully/depression left of the northwest are te (750m, Andrich-Bianchet-Zancristoforo, 1935), and they were surprised to be able to climb the first 300m unroped. Things then became more intense, with a few hard and sometimes unprotected pitches. The climb finished up a large chimney, which proved to be easier than it had appeared from below. At the exit, they traversed left across the 1934 Benedetti-Zanutti route for three pitches to a col on the northeast ridge, which they reached after 9.5 hours climbing. From there it was a straightforward descent on snow to the hut. The route was named Alchimia (800m, 11 roped pitches, AI5+ M6+).

## **Swiss Alpine Rock**

Two notable free ascents of alpine rock routes took place in the summer/fall, both in Switzerland.

The steep, monolithic north face of the Petit Clocher du Portalet (2,823m), at the east end of the Mont Blanc Massif, has always been a forcing ground for free climbing. In 1989, Philippe Steulet climbed the old Darbellay aid route at 8a, the first time that a climb of the eighth grade had been established in the Western Alps. In 2001, Didier Berthod and Francois Mathey climbed a splitter crack on the orange wall left of the fourth pitch of Etat du Choc, the Remy brothers' 1983 strenuous crack feat (280m, nine pitches, 7a). Graded 7c+, this fantastic new pitch ended in the middle of nowhere.

Twenty years later, Fabian Borter and Bertrand Martenet bolted a continuation of the 2001 line, called Histoire sans Fin, on or close to the are te left of Etat du Choc. With the help of Berthod, who had recently returned to climbing after a long absence living in a monastery, they climbed the line but were not able to free it. This fell to Sébastien Berthe (Belgium), who redpointed the full route on August 6. After the first three pitches (6b+) of Etat du Choc and the 7c+ fourth pitch, the six new pitches are graded 7c, 8b+, 7c, 8b, 8a+, 6b+. His partner on this ascent was Siebe Vanhee, who returned on the 9th for his own redpoint. The two feel it may be the finest long granite route of this level in Europe.

Seeking little-frequented corners of the Alps during the early days of COVID-19, Peter von Kanel and Silvan Schupbach investigated the unclimbed west face of the Dundenhorn, above (and northeast of) Kandersteg in the Bernese Oberland. In the spring of 2020, the Swiss pair established an eight-pitch route on excellent limestone, protected entirely by traditional means.

Schupbach came back in the fall to look at a better and more direct finish, checking out the final pitches from the top. In September 2021 he equipped the route with fixed ropes so he could work on a redpoint ascent. This took place on October 15, with the support of von Kanel, when Schupbach completed the sustained route Tradu ndition (8a, 7b+ obl), climbing the final pitch (6b) for the first time—the first free ascent was therefore also the first complete ascent of the route. Apart from cams and nuts, a few pitons and Peckers were used, all left in place to facilitate repeat ascents. The climbers feel their new line is probably the most difficult trad multi-pitch route in Switzerland. They would like to see the Dundenhorn remaining a bolt-free zone.

— Lindsay Griffin, AAJ



## Images



Santi Padros following the second pitch of Alchimia on the northwest face of the Cima de Gasperi.



Spectacular scenery on the northwest face of the Cima de Gasperi.



Santi Padros dry-tooling pitch 18 (M7) of Pazzione Primaveraali.



The excellent goulotte on pitch four of Alchimia, Cima de Gasperi. Santi Padros



Emanuele Andreozzi looks for protection in the upper chimneys of Pazzione Primaveraale, north-northeast face of Cima Tosa.





Matteo Falletti on the tricky fifth pitch (WI5 M5) of Pazzione Primavera, north-northeast face of Cima Tosa. The spire behind is the Campanilo Basso.



Pazzione Primavera on the north-northeast face of Cima Tosa. The large gully to the right is the Canalone Neri.



The east face of Mont Blanc. (GP) Grand Pilier d'Angle. (S) The rock buttress of the Red Sentinel. The Red Sentinel route climbs the mixed spur immediately above. (1) Cascata Major. (2) Route Major.



The west face of the Dru in winter with the new line on new rock, Base. This is the only complete and existing route between the American Direct (left) and Voie des Papas.

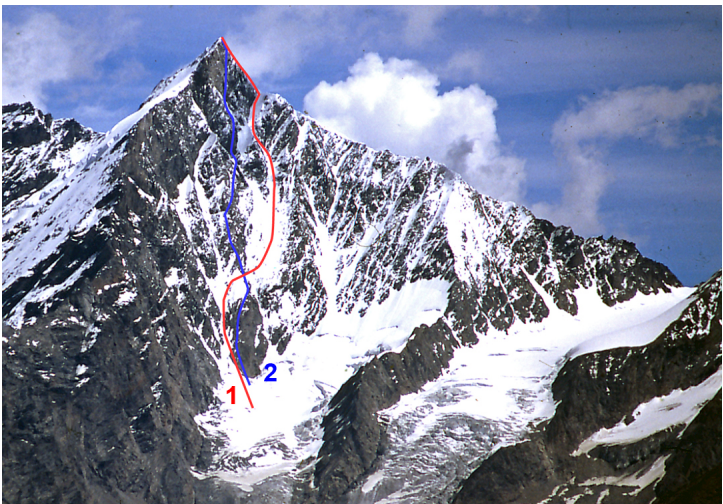


Il Regalo di Berna on the south face of the Grandes Jorasses. The top of the pillar is connected to the snow plateau of the normal route by a short ridge of UIAA IV.





Il Regalo di Berna on the south face of the Grandes Jorasses. The top of the pillar is connected to the snow plateau of the normal route by a short ridge of UIAA IV.



The southwest face of the Taschhorn with (1) the historic 1906 route, an ascent well ahead of its time and still rarely climbed today. (2) the ski descent by Bonhomme and Bruchez.



The north face of the Petit Clocher du Portelet and the superb left arête taken by Histoire sans Fin. Immediately to the right, the prominent right-facing crack and corner system is Etat du Choc.



Tradündition on the west face of the Dündenhorn, Bernese Oberland.



Silvan Schüpbach on pitch one (7c+) of Tradündition on the west face of the Dündenhorn. After a bouldery start on mediocre rock, the climbing quickly becomes excellent.





Silvan Schüpbach on the crux pitch six (8a) of Tradündition on the west face of the Dündenhorn. This pitch is mainly protected by short knifeblades and a couple of peckers, all left in place to facilitate repeat ascents.



The south face of the Meije above the Etancons Glacier. (A) Pic du Glacier Carré. (B) Grand Pic. (C) Doigt de Dieu and the line of Athée Pieds. (P) Promontoire Ridge, the normal route up the Meije, reaching the left side of the hanging snowfield – the Glacier Carré – then climbing the left skyline ridge of the Grand Pic.

## Article Details

Author	Lindsay Griffin
Publication	AAJ
Volume	64
Issue	96
Page	236
Copyright Date	2022
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions