

# SNOW and MIXED CLIMBS

SÉBASTIEN CONSTANT

344 routes alpinism and ski mountaineering

**ENGLISH  
VERSION**

**ÉCRINS EAST,  
CERCES, QUEYRAS**

VOLUME 1

2010 Edition





From easy snow routes to mixed climbs, couloirs and gullies, Sébastien Constant provides the most extensive overview of mountaineering routes in the Ecrins (East), Cerces and Queyras yet published, unearthing forgotten gems and re-describing the area's great classics.

The eastern part of the Ecrins covers: Les Bans, the Pelvoux, the Ailefroide, the Barre des Ecrins, Roche Faurio, Les Agneaux, the Dômes de Monétier, the Têtes Sainte-Marguerite, the Combeynot, and Chamoissière, etc.

The western area, from the Meije to the Sirac, will be covered in volume two.

Volume one describes 344 mountaineering and ski mountaineering routes, giving full details of the approach, ascent and descent for each.

The aim of the guide is to unveil the possibilities offered by this vast corner of the Alps. It is an eagerly awaited work that will find its rightful place on the bookshelves of every keen mountaineer and ski mountaineer.

- 344 routes
- 55 normal routes
- 48 new routes
- 189 photo-diagrams
- 32 detailed maps
- 188 photos
- 60 brand new topos
- Short essays by skiers and mountaineers



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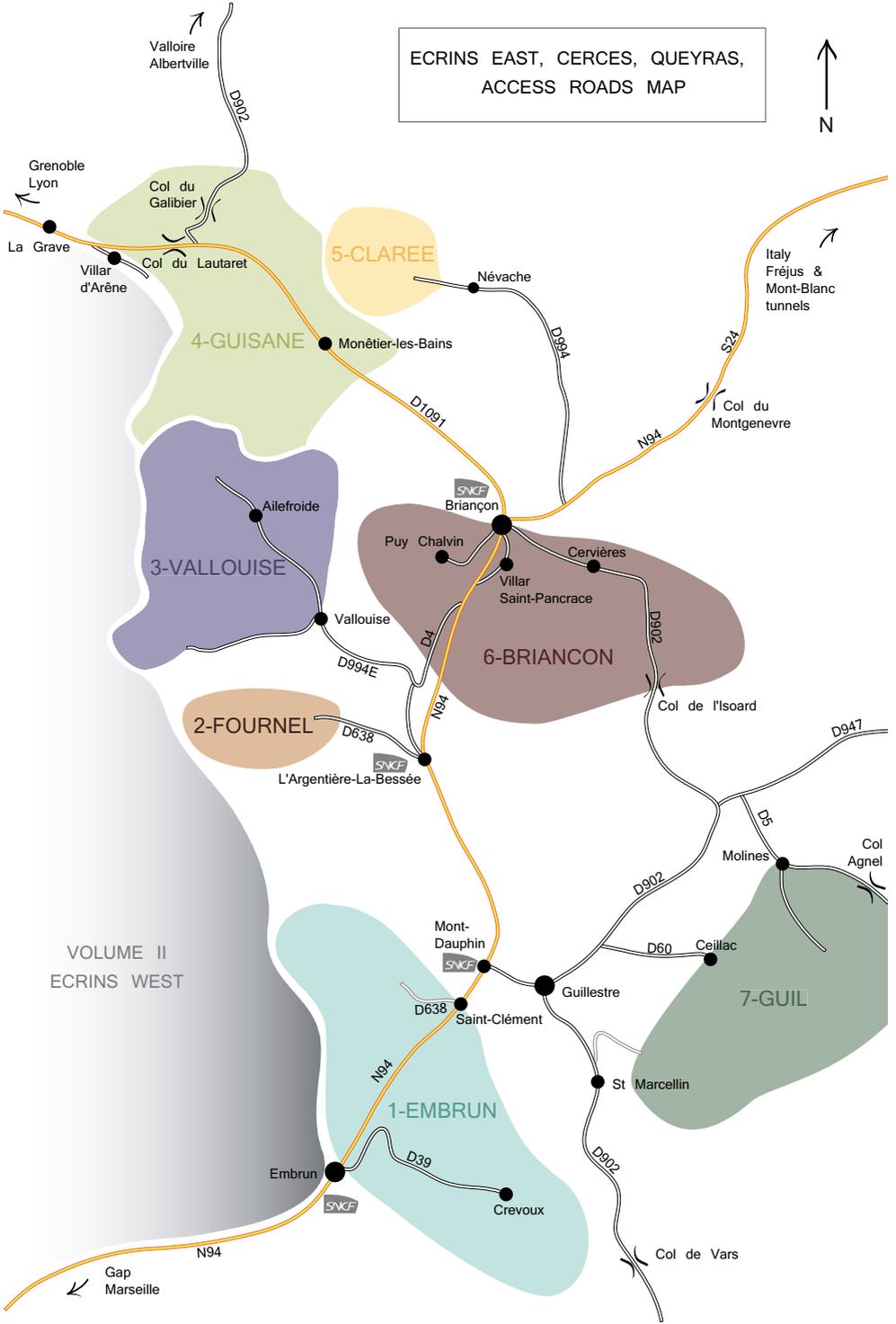
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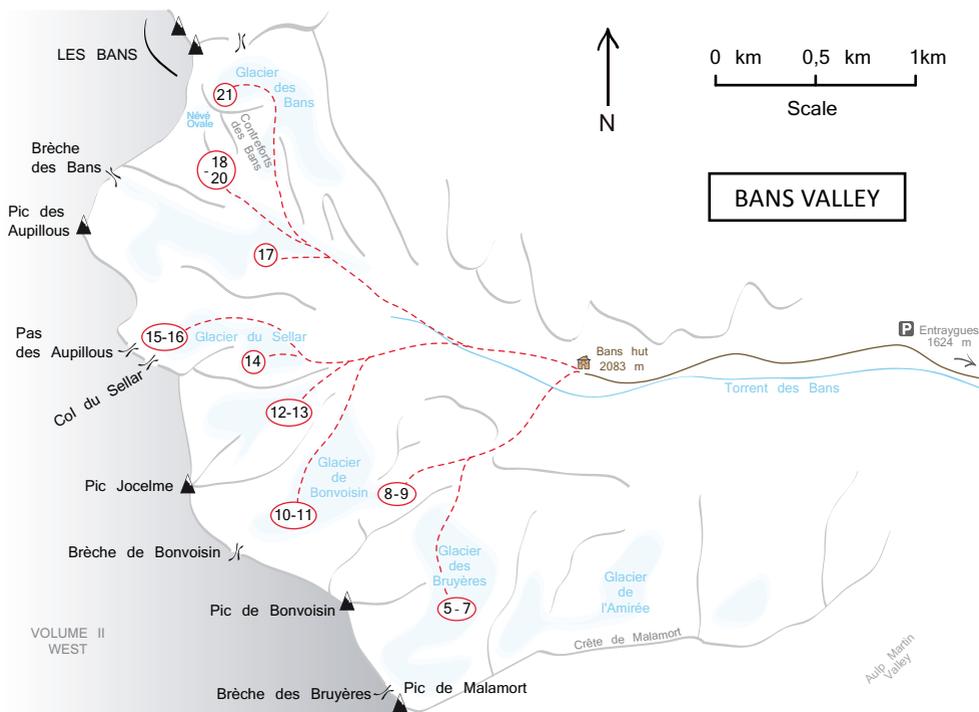


**TRIPLE**  
**ZERO**  **.fr**  
Light and Warm

ECRINS EAST, CERCES, QUEYRAS,  
ACCESS ROADS MAP



VOLUME II  
ECRINS WEST



## VALLON DES BANS

**A**ccess to this valley is very long in winter conditions. The best way of reducing the walk in is to wait for good conditions in late autumn/early winter or in spring, when the road is open at least as far as the Chapelle de Béassac (1472 m), and sometimes as far as Entraygues (1625 m). Looking through old guidebooks, I learnt that Jean-Pierre Engilberge, Eugène Estienne and Henri Mettrier made a remarkable sequence of first ascents on a single day in 1906. Starting with the Glacier d'Amirée Bruyère, they then climbed the E ridge of the Pic de Malamort and the long S ridge of the Pic de Bonvoisin before descending the normal route on the Chabournéou. An impressive feat, even today!

**Access:** Follow the D504 from Vallouise towards Puy Aillaud. Go straight on past Le Villard to the car park at Entraygues (10 km from Vallouise). In winter conditions the road is closed at Le Villard (1250 m), which increases the walk in by about 2hrs. In this case, the best way to do routes in this valley is to spend a night in the hut.

### Bans hut (2083 m)

Staffed from mid June to mid September (+33(0)4.92.23.39.48) - 26 places. Winter room: 26 places, blankets, some pots for collecting snow, no cooking stove.

From the car park at Entraygues follow the path (on foot or on skis) up the left bank of the valley to the hut. 1-2hrs.

**Maps:** IGN TOP25 3436 ET – Meije Pelvoux

IGN TOP25 3437 ET – Orcières Merlette



PELVOUX, POINTE PUISEUX, S face

## PELVOUX - POINTE PUISEUX (3943 M) SW FACE

### 57. Mettrier Couloir

300 m, D (65°), 4hrs 30min from the hut. The traverse under the Glacier du Clot de l'Homme is exposed to serac fall.

FA: Jean-Pierre Engilberge, Eugène Estienne and Henri Mettrier, 13 July 1907.

📏 47, 76, 78

**Approach:** Go up the rocks behind the Pelvoux hut (II) to gain a wide shoulder that is followed to the top of the moraine (at around 2900 m). Traverse below the Glacier du Clot de l'Homme (serac fall). Continue heading W up ledges and névés/scree to the Bosse de Sialouze (3229 m). In summer conditions there is a short section of scrambling at around 3000 m (II, as for the Pelvoux Normal Route, #58). Head NE up the glacier towards the Col E du Pelvoux, going above the rock island at 3464 m. The couloir starts at around 3630 m. It can be seen on the right, on the small plateau just before the col.

**Route description:** Climb the diagonal couloir (45°), which includes two narrow sections (65°, 5/10 m, and then 55/60°). When the couloir widens, exit right onto rock (III mixed). Follow the upper slopes to the summit of Pointe Puisseux.

**Descent:** By the Coolidge Couloir (#58) or the Traverse of Mont Pelvoux (#68) and its variations.

**Strategy:** The warmer climate we are currently experiencing has led to the couloir becoming steeper than it once was. Starting from Le Pré de Madame Carle, one possible combination is to climb the N Couloir of

the Col E du Pelvoux (#86), and then continue up the Mettrier Couloir before returning to Le Pré de Madame Carle via the Traverse of Mont Pelvoux (#68) and the Torrent des Violettes et Névés des militaires (#69).

## PELVOUX - POINTE PUISEUX (3943 M) SW FACE

### 58. Coolidge Couloir, Normal Route

750 m, PD+ (45° snow), ski grade 4.2, approach: 1hr 30min-2hrs, ascent: 2hrs 30min, descent: 3hrs 30min to the hut, 5-6hrs to Aillefroide via the Glacier des Violettes. The traverse under the Glacier du Clot de l'Homme is exposed to serac fall.

FA: Christian Almer, Ulrich Almer and William Augustus Brevoort Coolidge, 15 July 1881.

📏 47, 76, 77, 78, 80

**Approach:** Go up the rocks behind the Pelvoux hut (II) to gain a wide shoulder that is followed to the top of the moraine (at around 2900 m). Traverse below the Glacier du Clot de l'Homme (serac fall). Continue heading W up ledges and névés/scree to the Bosse de Sialouze (3229 m). In summer conditions there is a short section of scrambling at around 3000 m.

**Route description:** Go up to and onto the Glacier de Sialouze. Bear right to reach the foot of the couloir, which gradually gets steeper and narrower (45° for the narrow section in the upper third). The couloir exits onto a small plateau (3830 m). Head NW across the summit plateau to Pointe Puisseux. Go up the final slope (35°) to the summit.

**Descent:** By the same route (the NE couloir does not get the sun until late in the day) or by the Rochers



Christophe Moulin

AH, THE GOLDEN AGE!

Those were the days!  
It was better back then!  
Yes, but it's already been done!  
No-one has any respect anymore!  
In any case, there's nothing left to do!  
Nowadays, adventure starts at 8000 metres!

I would need a hundred pages to list all the idiocies the "have beens" or, rather, the "never beens" tend to come out with.

I'm sick of these old man's gripes, especially when they come from young mouths. During the 1990s, the last decade when the Oisans was more or less deserted in winter, the mountains were a sad and desolate place. The 1950s was the era of the great north face directissimas and of mountaineers such as Desmaison, Renaud, Chaud and Coupé. They were succeeded in the 1970s by the likes of Beghin, Bovin, Challéat and Autheman, motivated by the first major winter ascents. In the 1990s, I set out to push the bar a little higher with solo winter ascents in the Oisans. In this, I was truly alone.

From December to March, from the Olan to L'Ailefroide and the Meije, there was a distinct absence of other mountaineers, with the exception of a few old "grizzlies", generally kitted up to the nines and inspired by Gaston Rebuffat's *Glace, Neige et Roc* or Bernard Amy's *Techniques de l'alpinisme*. Nothing exciting was happening to draw the crowds out of the valleys.

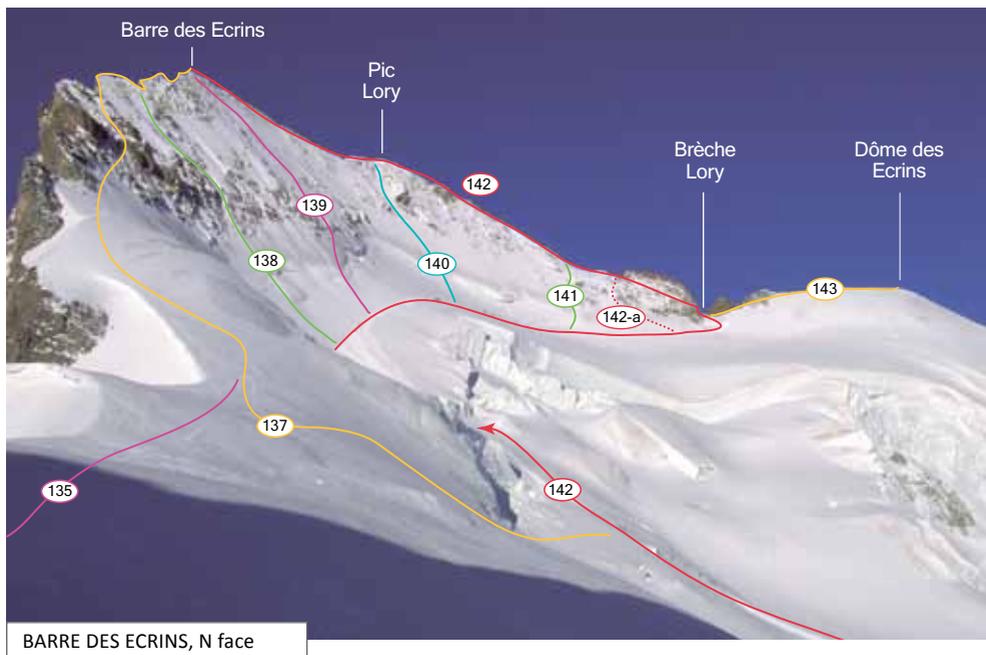
Then, at the beginning of the new century, the explosion of interest in icefall climbing provided a foundation for more ambitious projects. With summer ascents of north faces becoming ever more problematical due to dry conditions and constant stone fall, the season for climbing ice and mixed routes is now much earlier in the year. Helped by modern gear and the confidence developed on extreme ice and mixed routes in the valleys, climbers have finally begun to look to the heights in winter.

The "back of beyond" it may be, but ever more mountaineers are being drawn to the heart of the Oisans when conditions are good between December and March. Today, it is not unusual to see two or even three teams at the foot of La Raie des fesses (#88) or the Bovin Gully at Bonne Pierre (Volume 2). And, even though some blockheads still haven't worked out that it is stupid to climb behind another team on such narrow gullies, I am happy to see this influx of winter mountaineers. For several years now, every face has seen new teams scaling the slightest gully, couloir, or other weakness, giving it a name and a grade. And every winter these ephemeral lines attract more and more suitors.

Today's equipment and techniques allow mountaineers to climb quickly and efficiently, and to descend easily. The new generation has adopted a different approach to the mountains and I, for one, don't regret this change at all. Adventure in the Alps is only beginning...

Christophe Moulin on *Rappelles-toi que tu es un homme*, P1 (M8) Couleau Valley, 2004.





BARRE DES ECRINS, N face

## BARRE DES ECRINS (4102 M) NW FACE

### 137. NE Ridge

300 m, AD (45/50° and III+ rock), approach from the Ecrins hut: 3hrs 30min, ascent: 1hr 30min, descent to Le Pré: 6hrs. The steep section of this highly crevassed route is exposed to serac fall (between 3300 and 3900 m, directly below the Barre des Ecrins).

FA: probably by Alexander Burgener and Paul Güssfeld, 18 June 1881, approached via the S face of the Brèche des Ecrins.

📷 131, 141, 143, 144, 149

**Approach:** From the Ecrins hut, head SW along the left bank of the Glacier Blanc and go over the "difficult step" (as for the Barre des Ecrins Normal Route, #142). Continue heading SW until just below the Col des Ecrins. The route above this point is exposed to serac fall from the lower line of seracs. Go diagonally leftwards across the upper glacier. Due to glacial retreat, this section of the face has become steeper and serac falls are more frequent. In winter and spring it is possible to go up the centre of the upper glacier (between 2 areas of seracs) - be careful, the numerous crevasses in this area run in both directions. Gain the snowy shoulder of the NE ridge at around 3800 m.

**Route description:** Traverse right from the snowy shoulder to below the cliffs at 3950 m (mixed). This 30-m step is climbed via a chimney (III/III+, mixed). Several lines are possible. Follow the ridge to the summit.

**Descent:** By the Whymper Descent Couloir (#141) or the Normal Route and the NW Ridge of the Barre (#142) and its variants.

## BARRE DES ECRINS (4102 M) N FACE

### 138. Whymper Couloir

150 m, AD (50°), ski grade 5.2, approach from the Ecrins hut: 3hrs 30min, ascent: 1hr, descent to Le Pré: 6hrs. The steep section of this highly crevassed route is exposed to serac fall (between 3300 and 3900 m, directly below the Barre des Ecrins).

FA: Christian Almer, Michel Croz, Adolphus Warburton Moore, Horace Walker and Edward Whymper, 25 June 1864.

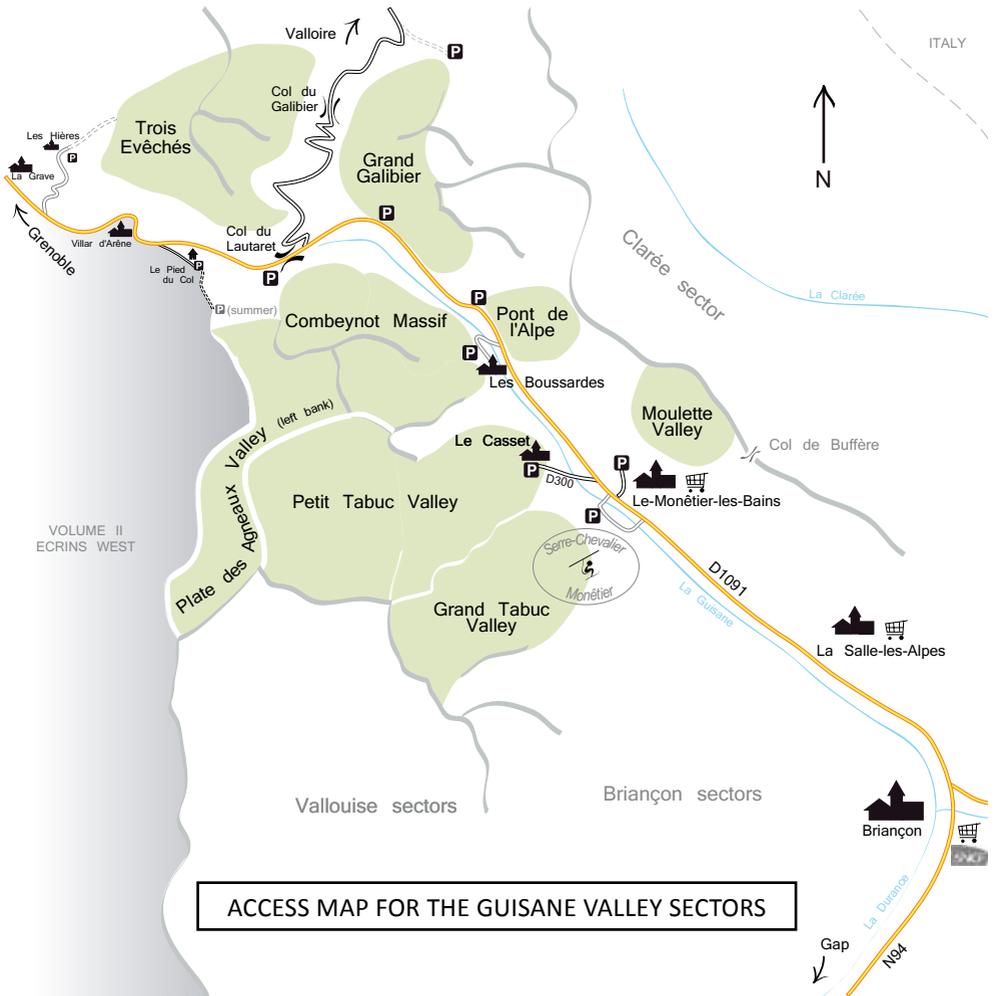
📷 131, 141, 143, 149

**Approach:** From the Ecrins hut, head SW along the left bank of the Glacier Blanc and go over the "difficult step" (as for the Barre des Ecrins Normal Route, #142). The route above this point is exposed to serac fall from the lower line of seracs. Go diagonally leftwards across the upper glacier. Due to glacial retreat, this section of the face has become steeper and serac falls are more frequent. In winter and spring it is possible to go up the centre of the upper glacier (between 2 areas of seracs) - be careful, the numerous crevasses in this area run in both directions. Go between two areas of seracs at around 3850 m. The route starts 100 m right of the SE Ridge (#137).

**Route description:** The bergschrund can sometimes be difficult to cross. Go up the vague couloir to exit about 100 m E of the summit. Follow the SE ridge to the summit.

**Descent:** By the same route or by the Whymper Descent Couloir (#141) or the Normal Route and the NW Ridge of the Barre (#142) and its variants.

**Strategy:** Whether on foot or on skis, June is the best time to do this route.



*The Guisane Valley is easily accessible all year round. Many of the routes near the Col du Lautaret come into condition with the first snowfalls of the winter. During the ski season, the lifts at Serre-Chevalier can be used to shorten the approaches to some of the areas. In summer the lack of mountain huts means that solitude returns to valleys such as the Grand and Petit Tabuc.*



*Sédric Wellem enjoying the sunshine and spring snow (La diagonale du roi).*

## PIC DES PRÉS LES FONTS (3358 M) NE FACE

### 210. NE Face Direct

**300 m, AD+ (50° and mixed), Ski grade 5.2, approach from Monétier: 5hrs, ascent: 2hrs, descent: 4hrs.**

*FA: Alain Boell and Jacques Boell, July 1927, via the islands of rock in the upper section. First ski descent: Ulysse Perrier and Bastien Ferrier, 7 May 2009, reached from the E face of Roche Jabel as a round trip from the Glacier du Casset. After descending the NE Face Direct they went back up to the Brèche du Casset and descended the Petit Davin.*

 189, 203, 208, 227

**Approach:** From the car park at the foot of the slopes at Monétier-les-Bains, go up to the crown-shaped moraine (2540 m), then follow the remnants of the glacier westwards to the foot of the NE face. For the first part of the approach either:

- Go up the wooded ridge (NW) above Les Grangettes,
- Follow the Tabuc Valley to around 1800 m, then climb out of the valley via a wide, SE-facing couloir that provides a route across the steep slope on the left bank (the descent from Montagnolle comes out at the foot of this steep slope).

Continue past the Chantriaux Couloir (#209). The route climbs a shallow depression that starts at the top

of the face. It starts at around 3350 m, to the right of a rocky rib and 50 m E of the foot of the E Couloir (#211) of the Col des Prés les Fonts.

**Route description:** Go up the depression (mixed steps). Above, the line turns into a couloir that widens and merges into a snow slope. Climb up to the left-hand edge of the slope (40/45°). Follow a series of steepening couloirs to the summit. Veer right at first, then head left below the summit rocks to gain a final narrow couloir (50°, mixed). Go diagonally rightwards across a hanging slope to the summit.

**Descent:** By the same route or by the SE Couloir (#200), going back up 50 m to the notch at 3170 m, and then descending the NE face via the Chantriaux Couloir (#209).

**As a descent:** From the summit, descend a steep hanging slope (50°) diagonally rightwards to gain a narrow couloir (50°, mixed). Go down this couloir to the foot of the summit buttress, then head diagonally leftwards to a wider couloir that leads to the snow slope (40/45°). Go down this snow slope, bearing left towards the bottom to avoid the mixed ground at the foot of the route. Follow the moraine to the valley.

## LES AGNEAUX – NW SUMMIT (3634 M) N FACE

### 242. La Calotte

800 m, AD- (45/50°), Ski grade 4.3, approach: 2hrs 30min (from the hut) or 3hrs 30min (from Le Casset), ascent: 3hrs 30min, descent to the moraines: 3hrs 30min.

FA: Christian Almer, William Augustus Brevoort Coolidge and Christian Roth, 17 July 1873.

📷 197, 227, 229, 230, 232, 235, 237

**Approach:** At around 2400 m, head SE and go under the frontal moraine below the lakes. Follow the right bank of a narrow valley (SW of the Plates du Réou d'Arsine) to the foot of the N branch of the Glacier du Réou d'Arsine. Go up to a small cirque due E of Pointe 2875 m. The slope ends at a couloir on the right-hand side of the cirque (same start as #240 and #241).

**Route description:** Climb the couloir (40/45°) to a flatter area, then go up the right bank of the Glacier Supérieur d'Arsine towards La Calotte. From the foot of the summit slope, move onto the left bank (bergschrand to cross in summer conditions). Climb a sort of couloir (to the right of the rocks) that finishes quite low on the NNW ridge (45/50°). Go past the rocks on the ridge and continue up the snow slope, staying to the left of the rock (45°). Above the area of rock, follow the crest of the ridge to the summit.

**#242-a Left-hand variant:** AD (50°). When the bergschrund is open and the couloir does not inspire

confidence it is possible to climb between the Direct (#241) and La Calotte (#242). Head diagonally rightwards up the slope (45/50°) to get to the left-hand side of the NNW ridge and La Calotte (#242). Continue up the snow slope, staying to the left of the ridge (45°). Above the area of rock, follow the crest of the ridge to the summit.

**Descent:** By the same route or by the Descent Route via the Brèche du Réou d'Arsine (#239, not always in condition, especially in summer).

**As a descent:** From the summit, descend the crest of the NNW ridge. Just before the rocky section of the ridge, move onto the E flank (45°). Go over a step on the ridge, then descend the indistinct couloir that bounds the left-hand edge of the cirque. Descend to the Glacier Supérieur d'Arsine (40/45°, abseils possible). Continue down the right bank to a flatter area at around 3100 m, staying to the right of a rocky crest that emerges from the glacier. Gain a narrow, NE-facing couloir that goes through the middle of a cliff to a cirque to the E of Pointe 2875 m (40/45°, 50 m, abseil possible).

**Strategy:** Over the years, variant #242-a seems to have become the most logical way of climbing La Calotte. As the glaciers retreat it may be that La Calotte (#242) will be more frequently in condition and provide a more logical descent than the Descent Route via the Brèche du Réou d'Arsine (#239). Climbing La Calotte and descending the Davin Couloir (#237) is a superb combination.



Agnès Foulon and Jérôme Verdier on the summit ridge of La calotte on Les Agneaux.

## POINTE LOUISE (NOTCH AT 3510 M) NW FACE

### 270. Louise fine

600 m, TD (4 ice), approach from the hut: 3hrs 30min, ascent: 4-6hrs, descent: 4hrs.

FA: Matthew Boothe, Raphaël Borgis and Sébastien Constant, 11 March 1995.

📷 244, 155, 247, 252, 253, 255

**Approach:** From the Alpe de Villar d'Arène hut, go up the right bank of the Plate des Agneaux valley to Valfourche, then follow the path S until it disappears into the moraine. Go straight up to the NW face. From around 2450 m, go up the couloir on the right bank of the Glacier de Tombe Murée to the foot of the face. The route is to the left of two distinct gendarmes on the summit ridge. Start at the large snow cone on the right-hand side of the face.

**Route description:** Go up a narrow couloir, climbing several steps (a short section of grade 4 ice). Continue up the central névé, escaping right. The couloir then becomes very narrow and winds up the face (45/55°, a sustained narrowing at 75/80°). Curve round left to avoid a large gendarme (3555 m), exiting onto the ridge to the E of it, not far from the peak at 3512 m.

**#270-a Upper variant:** The Apéro Finish (FA: Laurent Perrod and Elisabeth Revol, 7 April 2007). This direct finish climbs an overhanging cracked corner with a compact slab on the left wall (M5/M5+). From the finishing notch, climb down a couloir on the S face. Abseil (60 m) down the final section to get to the glacier.

**Descent:** By the S face. Abseil from the ridge to the snow slopes, which are descended diagonally eastwards. A second abseil (on the left bank) may be necessary to get to the glacier. From here, either go down the Glacier Blanc or go back to the Plate des Agneaux by climbing the Col de la Roche Faurio and descending the N Couloir (#268).

**Strategy:** This enclosed gully is sustained without being too difficult. The narrow sections are incredibly atmospheric. The most logical descent is by the N Couloir of the Col de la Roche Faurio. The other solution is to descend the Glacier Blanc but this means a long trip back to the start point.



POINTE LOUISE, NW face



Raph Borgis in the bottleneck of Louise Fine.



*Cécile Thomas on the crux of the traverse of Les brumes de la sérénité (3+ ice).*

## FONT SANCTE - E SHOULDER (3240 M) N FACE

### 337. Les Y

280 m, AD (50°), Ski grade 5.2, approach from the chapel: 2hrs, ascent: 2hrs, descent: 2hrs.

*First ski descent of the left-hand branch: Gérard Chantriaux and Alain Paret, January 1993, starting from the summit plateau.*

 324, 326, 327

**Approach:** Go round the lake from the chapel and head N up the moraines to the foot of the N face. The couloir starts in the middle of the cirque, at around 2950 m, and finishes directly below the E gendarme (3275 m). Its right-hand edge is marked by a long line of cliffs. Start as for #338.

**Route description:** Go up the wide couloir, which gradually becomes steeper and narrower before dividing into two branches. Climb either branch for 100 m (50°). The two branches merge at the large flat area below the E gendarme. Exit onto the shoulder of the ridge, at around 3240 m (left of the E gendarme).

**#337-a Right-hand finish:** AD+ (55° snow and mixed), Ski grade 5.3. From the foot of the fork of the Y, bear right and continue up the N face to gain the E ridge 100 m W of the E gendarme (3275 m). In this case, descend by the Normal Route.

**Descent:** By the same route or by the Normal Route via the E gendarme (#332).

## FONT SANCTE - PIC N (NOTCH AT 3270 M) N FACE

### 338. L'écharpe

320 m, AD- (45/50°), Ski grade 5.1, approach from the chapel: 2hrs, ascent: 2hrs 30min, descent: 2hrs 30min.

FA: Unknown.

 324, 326, 327

**Approach:** Go round the lake from the chapel and head N up the moraines to the foot of the N face. The couloir starts in the middle of the cirque at around 2950 m and finishes directly below the Pic N. It is bounded on the right by a long line of cliffs. Start as for #337.

**Route description:** Go up the wide couloir, which gradually becomes steeper and narrower. At around 3060 m, bear right across the wide hanging snow slope (above the lower cliffs) to a steep notch (3270 m) to the E of the Pic N.

**Descent:** By the same route or by the E Ridge (#333).

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