

GRANDES JORASSES, POINTE CROZ [4110m]

LESCHAUX BASIN

No Siesta

Difficulty: VI 5 M7 A1

Vertical height: 1000m

Time: 3 hrs 30 min for the approach/2 to 3 days for the route/5 hrs for the descent

Gear: 2 sets of Aliens, 2 sets of Camelots up to blue 3, wires, 10 pegs, ice screws

Period: Autumn and winter

Access: Leschaux hut (2431m)

First ascent: Stanislav Glejdura and Jan Porvaznik, 21 to 23 July 1986

'No Siesta: just the name worries a lot of alpinists. The north face and the first people to repeat the route, François Marsigny and Olivier Larios in September 1997, have forged for it a solid reputation. Statistically, the greatest chances of success are for an assault at the beginning of autumn: quite long days, potentially clement temperatures, snow that sticks on the first 20 and final few metres... if the preceding months have been rainy. These are the external factors that will contribute to success. For the rest, the ball is in your court. You have to be at ease on the gully pitches because it is here that you can save precious time by climbing together. On steep ice, you must be able to run up grade 5 pitches in order to climb safely, especially when fatigue starts to set in. For the drier sections, contenders have to choose between two techniques: aid or dry tooling.



After suffering the acrimony of the climbing community, this way of climbing, as old as alpinism, has rapidly become widespread and is now an integral part of the mountaineer's arsenal. Isn't it more comfortable to have one's hands in warm gloves round the handles of ice axes than to crimp on the edge of a snowy crack in -5° temperatures? Just like training on sports crags, practicing dry tooling on bolted cliffs allows climbers to quickly become at home with these techniques. In recent years, the number of dry-tooling crags has increased greatly and, thanks to the 'reasonableness' of new routers, there have never been any conflicts with 'bare-hand' climbers. Like many alpinists, I came to mountaineering from rock climbing. I have retained a deep respect for the rock, and obviously I wouldn't scrape my crampon points on single-pitch climbs that are usually climbed in rock shoes. On the other hand, on loose or holdless rock, I have absolutely no qualms about reaching for the drill.

For me, you shouldn't try and copy nature onto an inadequate medium. Let me explain. If you create overly small holds that can only bear the passage of a small number of climbers, the route will quickly become unclimbable. Consequently, I tend to make good-sized holes, drilled to a depth of around 3cm and of a reasonable diameter, that is 12 to 14mm. Thus, the first goal of the exercise is to 'get a feel' for your axes, and then to be completely relaxed, to grip the handles of your axes with your fingers half uncurled. It isn't necessary to train on extremely overhanging ground. However, the experience of No Siesta shows that a leader capable of climbing M9/10 will be able to climb carrying a sack, so there is no need to sack haul. All this helps save time but, most importantly, it means much less rope work. In fact, the challenge for tomorrow is to climb in a single day routes that are currently done with a bivouac.'

Jean-François Mercier, mountain guide, rescue worker with the PGHM in Chamonix and mixed climbing specialist

APPROACH

From the Leschaux hut (reached in 2 hrs 30 min from Montenvers station), go down to the Leschaux Glacier. Go up to the north face of the Grandes Jorasses between Pointes Walker and Whympfer. Depending on the state of the glacier, either go straight up to the foot of the route or follow the base of the Walker Spur (3 hrs 30 min).

ROUTE DESCRIPTION

Warm-up pitches below the immense, smooth field of Pointe Croz.





The ice smears on P6. The MacIntyre and Alexis Gullies and the Japanese Couloir can be seen above and left.

Cross the bergschrund on the right of the large snow slope between the two spurs. On the initial slopes (50–55°), head towards the first hard section, which consists of an ice smear on slabs (75–80° in good conditions, or M6 in average conditions). If the ice smear has not formed, climb the corner (20m to the right, 2 bolts). Go up the steep little corner above the smear (pegs, A0–A1 or M6) to less steep ground. Continue upwards, first trending right, then moving back left (reasonable bivouac for 2 or 3 people). Climb four pitches to get to the ridge above the Poire, then head right to the mixed ground beside the monolithic shield.

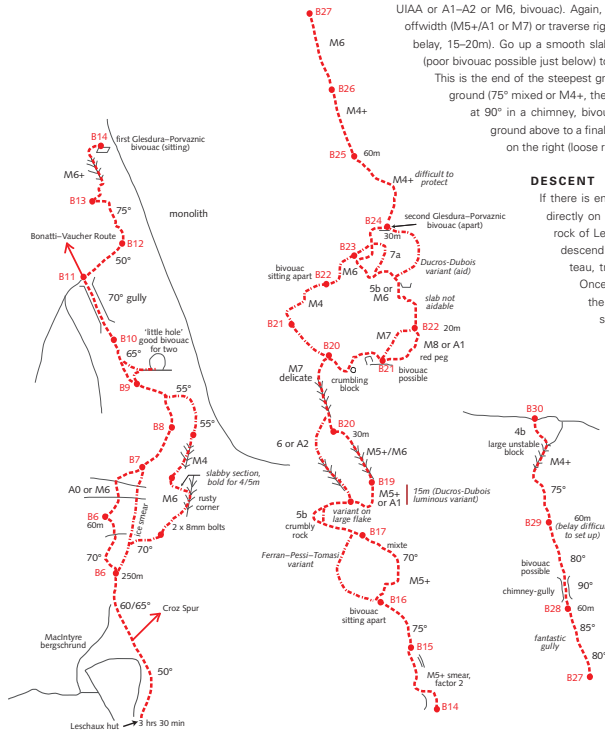
Climb a mixed pitch to get to the second hard section, a 30m corner (pegs, A1–A2 or M6+). Exit right onto a small bench (bivouac) and go up the sometimes-steep mixed ground beside the shield. Make a slight detour left to get round a band of poor rock, then move back horizontally rightwards to the foot of a smooth corner (5b). The original route climbed this corner and exited rightwards (VI UIAA or A2 or M8); however, the Michaël Dubois and Pascal Ducroz variant is better: climb down for a short distance, then go over a small overhang to get into the corner (15m, A1 or M5+). Climb the corner on poor rock for another pitch (A1 or M5+). Go up the corner to a rightwards traverse.

At the end of the traverse, climb down and traverse across to a large, distinctive flake (VI UIAA or A1–A2 or M6, bivouac). Again, there are two options. Either climb the overhanging offwidth (M5+/A1 or M7) or traverse right to climb a very short wall (red peg, A1 or M8, same belay, 15–20m). Go up a smooth slab (4c or M6, a few pegs in situ). Make a detour left (poor bivouac possible just below) to get to and climb a final wall on the right (A1 or M5+).

This is the end of the steepest ground. Head diagonally leftwards across classic mixed ground (75° mixed or M4+, then M5) towards the fantastic gully (85°, a short section at 90° in a chimney, bivouac possible above and left). Continue up the mixed ground above to a final steep section that can be climbed either on the left or on the right (loose rock).

DESCENT

If there is enough snow to prevent excessive stone fall, descend directly on abseil (3 x 60m) and go across a snow slope to the rock of Le Reposoir. Otherwise, go up to Pointe Whympet and descend the spur directly below the summit. At the glacial plateau, traverse right to a series of four abseils (bolts, 30m). Once on the Grandes Jorasses Glacier, contour across to the rocks of Le Reposoir. Move onto and go down the spur, staying more or less on its crest. About 100m before the end of the spur, either stay on the crest and do three or four abseils (stainless bolts and chains) to get to the Grandes Jorasses Glacier, or bear right across snow slopes to get to the Planpincieux Glacier. If the state of the glacier allows, go down beside the west flank of the Rognon de la Bouteille to the ledges above the Bocalatte hut. Follow the cairns to the hut. See photo p. 171.



Right-hand page, top
On the lower section of the face — one of the three pitches shared with the Bonatti-Vaucher.

Bottom
A very thin ice smear followed by an obvious corner.

GRANDES JORASSES, POINTE WALKER [4208m]

LESCHAUX BASIN

Serge Gousseault Route [North Face]

For a photo of the line, see route 90

Difficulty: VI 5 M6 5c A1

Vertical height: 1100m

Time: 3 hrs from the hut to the foot of the route/2 days from the foot of the route to the summit/5 hrs for the descent

Gear: 2 sets of Aliens, 2 sets of Camelots – blue 0.3 to blue 3, wires, 12 pegs, ice screws

Period: Autumn, winter

Access: Leschaux hut (2431m)

First ascent: Giorgio Bertone, Michel Claret and René Desmaison, 1 to 18 January 1973

The Superdirect on Pointe Walker is a legendary route on a legendary face. The length, the quality and the difficulty of the climbing demand expertise in every aspect of mountaineering: snow, ice, mixed and rock.

The first attempt on the Superdirect was the theatre from which the death of an alpinist was broadcast on live radio. On 11 February 1971 René Desmaison and Serge Gousseault climbed back up the ropes they had fixed on the lower buttress of the Walker Spur the day before. The climbing above was too difficult and too steep to be done free, so they had to aid a lot of it, which made their progress extremely slow. A succession of bivouacs in the winter cold began to take its toll and fatigue started to set in. On the 15th it snowed and Serge Gousseault's hands started to get frostbite. On the 17th it was sunny but windy, Gousseault was showing signs of increasing fatigue. He dropped an ice axe, climbed ever more slowly and stopped answering when Desmaison spoke to him. The bad weather returned the next day. Gousseault was exhausted and could no longer move, so Desmaison had to haul him up the route. On the 19th Desmaison climbed every pitch, then descended to retrieve the gear, went back up and hauled Gousseault up. On the 20th the weather was good but Serge Gousseault died on the 21st. When he got down René Desmaison was arrested but released without charge. He went back to the wall with Giorgio Bertone and Michel Claret in 1973 to finish the route.

Pitch eight is one of the rare easy pitches on the Serge Gousseault.



APPROACH

From the Leschaux hut, go up the Leschaux Glacier and cross the bergschrund of the Shroud (3 hrs).

ROUTE DESCRIPTION

Cross the bergschrund and climb the gully on the right for two pitches (60–70°).

P4: Descend and traverse right (15 to 20m, 4a) to a system of leftward slanting chimney-cracks.

P5: Follow the ramp diagonally leftwards (mixed, 90° snow), belay at the foot of the chimney on an 8mm bolt (possible snow plug, delicate to clear).

P6: Chimney, then 95° snow plug (clean it away down to the rock, mantelshelf, chimney. Narrow slot, leave the sack before the narrowing).

P7: Easier mixed.

P8: 50° slope. Bear right.

P9: Climb the short wall at the top of the slope, following a rightward-slanting crack system on the right (5a or A0). Fixed ropes.

P10: Go straight up a rock pitch (5b/c). Varied pitch, all on the feet (snow to be cleaned from the footholds, climb without gloves). Gain the first ramp and climb it for three pitches (bivouac, large ledge).

P14: The first ramp ends at a short wall; climb it on the right via a steep and direct crack system.

P15: Second ramp, two pitches of 70–75° ice.

P17: Climb the left-hand side of the smooth convex slab.

P18: The ramp becomes a chimney-crack. Avoid this chimney by climbing the wall on the right (A1, bivouac).

P19: Delicate mixed and off width crack.

P20: Climb the upper ramp for three pitches of 70–75° ice to a shoulder at the top of an island of red granite.

P23: Make a slightly descending traverse leftwards across mixed ground to a couloir.

P24: Climb gullies/icefalls for two pitches (85°, then 80°).

P26: Go up the snow slope (55°) to the foot of a system of chimney-cracks. Bivouac.

P27: Traverse diagonally rightwards along a crack to get to a rightward slanting crack system that leads to a snowy shoulder (5c).

P28: Continue up another crack system on the right (5c), belay on a shoulder.

P29: Move left from the shoulder and continue up steeper cracks in fragile red rock (bolt, duvet and rucksack frozen into the ice), belay at the foot of a slab.

P30: Follow the ledge on the right (20m) and go up an arête. Traverse 4m left and gain a flared, icy corner. Do not climb the pegged cracks on the right (more difficult variant).

P31: Continue up the corner and steep cracks: ice and difficult mixed.

P32: Easier mixed and 70–75° ice.

P33: 70° ice.

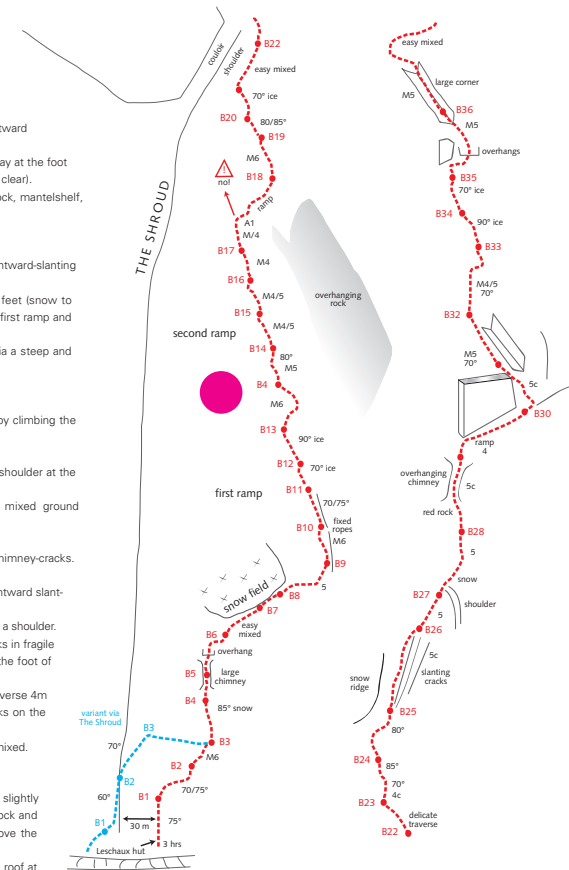
P34: Go over a steep wall (A0 or 5b). Look for a rectangular block slightly to the right of the middle of the couloir. Go up to beside the block and belay on a peg. Climb a difficult and hard-to-protect corner above the bottom of the block.

P35: Continue up the leftward-slanting corner (thin ice), turn the roof at the top on the left (difficult mixed), then climb the gully above.

P36: The short final couloir. Steep but quite easy climbing over unstable blocks leads towards the cubic block at the top of the Cassin Route, below the summit cornice.

DESCENT

Via the Grandes Jorasses normal route. See photo p. 171.



99 | GRAND PILIER D'ANGLE [4243m]

ITALIAN FACE OF MONT BLANC — BRENVA BASIN

Divine Providence

Difficulty: VI 7b max. 6a obl. M3. One of the longest and most difficult routes in the massif. The approach from the Col Moore to the foot of the route is exposed to serac fall from the Paire

Vertical height: 900m from the bergschrund to the summit of the Grand Pilier d'Angle/300m of technical climbing/600m from the GPA to the top of Mont Blanc via the Peuterey Ridge

Fixed gear: In-situ belays, sometimes needing to be backed up, a few pegs in the pitches

Gear: 2 sets of Camalots — blue to grey, Aliens — black to yellow, wires. It is not usually necessary to place pegs, but a few pegs and a hammer may be useful

Time: 2 days/2 hrs from the Fourche bivouac to the foot of the route (bivouac at the top of P9)/5 hrs from the top of the pillar to the summit of Mont Blanc

Period: Summer

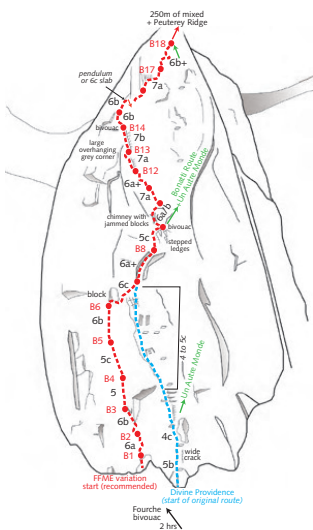
Access: Torino hut (3371m), Italy

First ascent: Patrick Gabarrou and François Marsigny, 5 to 8 August 1984

'Divine Providence, a divine route that I was lucky enough to do the first ascent of with Patrick Gabarrou in July 1984. Enthusiastic and passionate, I had spotted the line while climbing the Bonatti-Gobbi the year before. Carrying heavy packs, we headed over the Col Moore, having checked the gear one last time the previous evening at the Torino hut. During our preparations I had said to Patrick that I didn't want us to have any bolts in the bottom of our rucksacks, 'just in case'. At the time, I was obsessive about climbing cleanly, so I had laid down an ultimatum: If he took bolts, I wasn't going. Despite our careful scrutiny of the face with binoculars, we were heading into the unknown, not knowing whether we would be able to climb that enormous shield by fair means.

On the evening of the second day I came out of the immense corner that runs leftwards across the shield and began setting up a belay on the left-hand end of the platform above it. I first placed a small nut in a blind crack, then I hammered in a Lost Arrow number five and started taking in the rope. However, tickled by the slightest of doubts, like a feather landing on my shoulder, I decided to place a number four Friend (original model with a rigid shaft) behind a detached flake in order to back up the belay. Patrick began jumaring up the rope I had fixed, taking out the runners as he went. When well with the platform on which I was sitting, he took out the last-but-one nut, thereby putting the tension of the rope vertically on the last placement, a number two Friend, which immediately stripped, sending Patrick and the enormous haul bag attached to his harness for a ten-metre pendulum directly on the belay. The sudden tension on the rope ripped out the nut and the peg from the belay, leaving us suspended from the number four Friend I had hurriedly placed behind a flake whose solidity I hadn't really tested. I turned to tell him not to move so I could back up the belay by quickly hammering the Lost Arrow back into the crack. When Patrick eventually joined me on the ledge, we took stock of our situation. Two alpinists lost on a majestic wall, one with a couple of broken ribs, and only 24 metres of rope still intact. That was enough for one day, we would bivouac there...

The Peuterey Ridge marks the end of a long granite voyage.



Above
The corner on pitch 17 ends at a 7a roof.

Left
The first pitch (5b) of the original route.

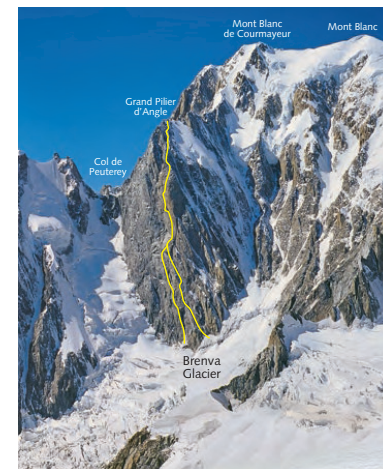
The next day I set off in the lead, as Patrick was in a lot of pain from his damaged ribs. I weaved my way up the cracks and through the roofs above us as best I could and, after a long and strenuous day, we finally reached the top of the pillar. We were relaxed as we set up our third bivouac because we knew we would be able to get off the mountain, no matter what. All we had to do was climb the top part of the Peuterey Ridge to get to Mont Blanc.

Alive and sheltered under a starry sky, we chatted long into the night, talking about our lives and our ambitions, some of which we shared. We searched for a name for our new route, and I suggested Divine Surprise. Patrick, true to his faith, preferred Divine Providence, which I accepted without hesitation. You might think that after sharing such an ordeal we would have stayed friends for the rest of our lives. But it was not to be: the vagaries of life sometimes put distance between people. Today, all I have left from that great adventure are a few wonderful memories and, sometimes, the random resurfacing of retrospective tears. A few months after Divine Providence, I finally decided to become a guide.'

François Marsigny, guide and instructor at ENSA

APPROACH

From the Fourche bivouac, go down to the Brenva Glacier (abseil or fixed rope). Go over the Col Moore to the foot of the Grand Pilier d'Angle (2 hrs). The traverse from the Col Moore to the foot of the route is very exposed to serac fall — you will already be relying on divine providence...





The 7a corner on pitch 13.

ROUTE DESCRIPTION

The route is described with the variation start climbed by a French Mountaineering Federation team in the summer of 1992. This start is more difficult than the original route but the rock is better. Climb cracks to the left of a large distinctive roof for three pitches (6a, 6b, 5) until below a large block. Traverse right below the block (6c, bold). Continue diagonally rightwards between the overhangs (6a+, airy) to join the original route. Head rightwards and slightly upwards across stepped ledges (5c) to a chimney. Climb the chimney (6a, bivouac spot) to some small black roofs, which are turned on the right. Climb a crack (6a/b) to get to a large, leftward-slanting corner that is followed for three pitches (7a+, 6a/b, 7b or C2). Exit via a pitch of 7c or A2, then by cracks (5c), and gain a platform. From the left-hand end of the platform, climb a short corner (5a) to another platform (bivouac). Traverse right and climb a crack (20m, 5b). Climb another crack on the left (25m, 6a), then follow the subsequent crack rightwards (15m, 6b). A pendular abseil rightwards leads to the base of a corner. Climb the corner and go over a roof (7b+ or A2). Continue up a crack system on the right (6a) to a platform. Go up stepped ledges (4c, bivouac spots) to gain the northeast ridge of the Grand Pilier d'Angle and follow it to the summit. Follow the Peuterey Ridge to Mont Blanc.

DESCENT

See route 16.

100 | GRANDES JORASSES, POINTE WALKER [4208m]

ITALIAN FACE OF THE GRANDES JORASSES — FRÉBOUZE BASIN

Little Big Men

'Grandes Jorasses north face? No, not this time, not today. You will have to go a bit further, lose yourself on the other side, find the Orient and Buddha's smile. Catch a ray of sunshine, attach a swing to it. Play, play until you are gasping for breath; laugh, laugh until you are breathless, in the regular movement of the swing. That's the goal, nothing else, the summit is just a chimera to which, paradoxically, we cling.

Forgotten face, face that I love. Distant, beautiful, as if inaccessible, perched so high above the crevassed glaciers. Climb a direct, that's Phil's project, a knight on the eternal quest for the perfect wall. We met again with renewed joy after years of solos, after Le bon, la brute et le truand on the south face of the Fou.'

Lionel Daudet, mountain guide

Overshadowed by the Grandes Jorasses' legendary north face, the east face is the most remote wall in the Mont Blanc Massif. Getting to it is complicated, especially in winter. If you start in Italy, the road along Val Veny is closed, so you have to hike up cross-country ski trails for 20 kilometres. If you start in France, you have to climb a 400-metre gully to get to the Col des Hironnelles and then go down the other side. Little Big Men brings together every facet of mountaineering in a single route: icy gullies, mixed ground, good rock, loose rock, free climbing and aid... The rock is particularly sound on the summit buttress, although there are still a few areas with suspect flakes. Little Big Men was named in homage to two great alpinists who died a few days before the first ascent: Jean-Christophe Lafaille (on a solo winter ascent of Makalu) and Damien Charignon (in an avalanche at Serre-Chevalier).

Lionel Daudet starting the first pitch (A3) on the compact buttress.



Difficulty: VI 5 M6 A3 6a

Vertical height: 1200m

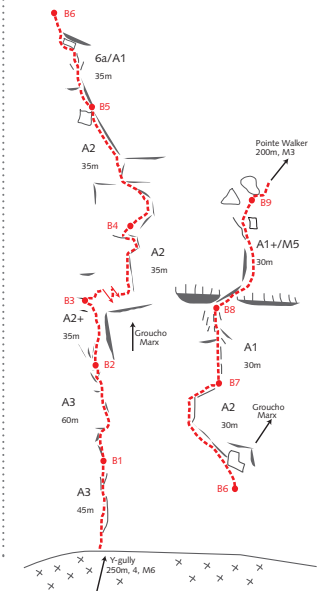
Time: 6 days

Gear: 2 sets of Aliens, 2 sets of Camalots from blue 0.3 to grey 4 plus 1 purple 5 and 1 green 6, wires, 10 knifeblades, 5 Lost Arrows, 6 bird beaks, 2 copperheads, 6 universal pegs of different sizes, 5 angles of different sizes, skyhooks, ice screws

Period: Winter

Access: From the Leschaux hut (2431m) or from Italy via the Gervasutti bivouac (2835m)

First ascent: Philippe Batoux and Lionel Daudet, 16 to 22 March 2006





Philippe Batoux on the second pitch, 60 metres of A3.



A classic situation on long routes — descending in bad weather.

APPROACH

From the French side: Leschaux hut, then the Col des Hironnelles gully (III 3 M5, 400m. Approach: 3 hrs for the hut/5 hrs from the hut to the Col des Hironnelles/1 hr from the Col to the foot of the lower buttress. From the Italian side: Go up to the Gervasutti bivouac from Planpincieux (3 hrs in summer/1 day in winter) and then to the Col des Hironnelles (3 hrs).

ROUTE DESCRIPTION

Climb the Col des Hironnelles gully (good bivouac at the col). Move onto the south side of the col to get to the gullies on the east face. Climb the gullies and set up a bivouac at the top of the snow slope. From here, either fix ropes on the 300m of difficult climbing on the headwall (capsule style), or climb the headwall in a single push (portaledge needed).

An area of easy mixed (M4/M5) divided by snow slopes leads to the Tronchey Ridge, 150m below the summit of Pointe Walker (6 hrs for the lower buttress/2 to 3 days for the headwall/6 hrs for the mixed ground below the summit).

DESCENT

From the summit, climb down the Tronchey Ridge (200m) to a line of abseils (60m) that lead to the top of the headwall. From the headwall, there are abseil stations every 100m to the Leschaux Glacier. It is also possible to descend by the Grandes Jorasses normal route, see route 90 and photo p. 171.

The 101st

LAFAILLE ROUTE ON THE PETIT DRU [3733 m]

For the line of the route, see photo on p. 162 (yellow arrows)

Difficulty: VI A3+ 6c M5

Vertical height: 900m

Time: 1 hr for the approach from the Grands Montets cable car station/8 days for the route/3 hrs to abseil down the route

Fixed gear: In-situ belays, a few bolt heads on some pitches

Gear: 12 bird beaks, 5 copperheads, skyhooks, 2 or 3 sets of Camalots (2 green 6) and 2 sets of Aliens, 30 pegs of various sizes, portaledge, 80m static rope for the abseil from the jammed block at the top of pitch 21

Period: Winter

Access: Grands Montets cable car

First ascent: Jérôme Arpin and Jean-Christophe Lafaille to the top of P12 in 12 days of climbing in December and January 2001, then Jean-Christophe solo to the top of P21, 12 to 20 February 2001. Caught by bad weather, he finished up the Allain-Leininger Route on the north face of the Dru (route 76). Guillaume Avisaris and Philippe Batoux to the top of P24, 2 to 10 February 2004

‘It was better than my wildest dreams. It was really the type of difficulty and beauty I was looking for in the Alps. The granite on the Petit Dru is magnificent. I used all the techniques I had learnt over the years. It is the most beautiful line I could have climbed. I can stop now without any problem...’

Jean-Christophe Lafaille talking about his route on the Petit Dru in an interview for the film *Les Amants des Drus*

Jean-Christophe Lafaille was an exceptionally gifted alpinist. An all-rounder, he had climbed several new routes in the Mont Blanc Massif, on the Grand Plier d’Angle, the Fréney Pillar and the Grandes Jorasses. The last new route he did in the area was his final step before moving on to bigger mountains. After the Dru, it was impossible for him to do more, better, harder or longer in this massif. He had to look elsewhere.

The route climbed by Jean-Christophe Lafaille is unique in the Alps for its length, the logic of the line, the quality of the granite and the sustained nature of the difficulties. It is comparable with the great routes on El Capitan in California. Because the lower section is exposed to stone fall, the route is best climbed in winter. However, at this time of year the technical difficulties are often increased by the cold, by the snow and ice that accumulate in the cracks and by changeable weather. The route combines all the different facets of aid climbing on granite — sections on skyhooks, pendulums, a few copperheads and an incredible 25-metre crack climbed on bird beaks! For everyone who loves the massif, it is a true invitation to adventure. This is why I decided to include it as the 101st route, but without giving any details so it retains its mystery and continues to inspire the dreams and nourish the ambitions of future generations of alpinists.



Pitch 20: A3+ on skyhooks and blind cracks