



## Newsletter

MATTERHORN 2015

Post 4 — Friday June 30<sup>th</sup> 1865  
from Chamonix

**A First up the Grandes Jorasses**

# 150 Years Ago — First Ascent of the Matterhorn

## It is Summer 1865

And how many un-climbed Alpine peaks will have been conquered by the time the cool damp air of Autumn returns?

Mountaineers, many of them British, are planning their routes and engaging their favourite local guides to assist. So I, whose scribbles usually cover London society events and gossip, have packed my notebooks and pens with my climbing ropes and nailed boots. I will follow those

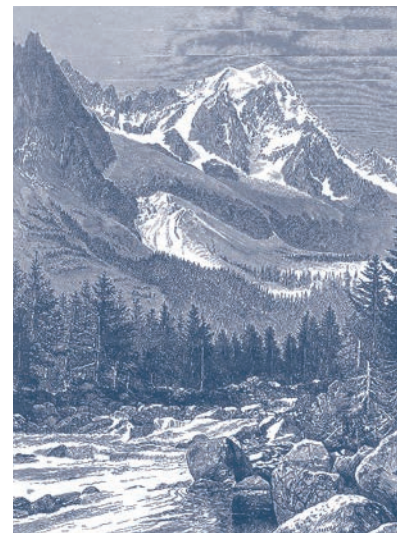
intrepid climbers, witness their achievements and post back my reports. Many of the summits of Europe have been conquered over the last fifty years, those left must rank as among the most challenging. Grandes Jorasses, Aiguille Verte, Matterhorn – who will be the first to set foot on your proud peaks?



## The Story So Far

Edward Whymper, with his guides Croz, Almer and Biner, have cut impressive tracks across the mountains.

They made a first ascent of the Grand Cornier, a third of the Dent Blanche and sought out some innovative routes across Cols and Passes. They spent some challenging days making attempts on the Matterhorn from the Italian side but without significant progress. Now it feels that everyone is congregating at Chamonix.



The Approach to the  
Grandes Jorasses

## A First up the Grandes Jorasses

From Courmayeur, Mr Whymper achieved a First Ascent of the intimidating Grandes Jorasses. It was a magnificent achievement, although he and his guides were slightly frustrated to have reached only the slightly lower western peak of the mountain.

his party decided upon as they made their descent. I would hazard a guess they are lucky that they all escaped with their lives!

### Crossing of the Col Dolent

Mr Whymper aspired (although did not expect, as he admitted with his ironic smile) to find a way from Courmayeur to Chamonix that would improve on the Col du Géant. His passage sounded to me neither easy nor quick, required a level of excellence in the guides rarely found and a lot of good manila rope. They spent 7 hours of intense axe work descending an ice filled couloir with a gradient over 50°. Mr Whymper was enthusiastic in his praise for his guides. These are men whose mountain skills will henceforth be sought by many of our climbing brethren.



A Glissade

The ridge to the eastern summit eluded even them. But he was most excited about the glissade that the snow rather than the judgement of



Crossing the Col Dolent

### A First Ascent of the Aiguille Verte

Edward Whymper, Christian Almer and Franz Biner (Croz is now waiting for the arrival of Mr Birkbeck), were the first men to reach the snowy dome of the mountain I thought would hold out – the colossal Aiguille Verte. Mr Whymper described the view from that lofty summit as the most captivating he has had the fortune to witness. He was enthusiastic also about Almer's master-

ful route finding, choosing a couloir different to that which Whymper himself had proposed, that turned out to be entirely successful.

### But while we caroused, moods in town turned sour.

Canons fired in celebration of a successful ascent of the Aiguille Verte and we greeted Mr Whymper at the hotel with Champagne. But while we caroused, moods in town turned sour. A squabble, verbal abuse turning to blows, started with the Chamonix guides ganging up on Biner and Almer. They call them the "German Guides", and their crime was making the first ascent of what the locals call "their" mountain! I

believe the whole situation might have escalated to ugly violence had not the gendarmes arrived promptly.

### Tomorrow Mr Kennedy and Mr Whymper take a stroll on the glacier.

But I have to lament the occurrence of such a brawl. Why does Chamonix not celebrate this brave success, whosoever achieved it? This first ascent is bound to bring more visitors, from whom all will benefit. The rivalry between these towns is more bitter than any between the tourists who are endeavouring to climb these peaks.

Tomorrow Messrs Kennedy and Whymper take a stroll on the glacier together to discuss routes up the Aiguille Verte, as Mr Kennedy hopes to achieve the second ascent sometime in the coming days. I do wonder if they also share thoughts on the Matterhorn. Maybe not!

Nobody, however, is climbing anything for now. The weather is gloomy. We must wait for it to clear. ■

Front page: Chamonix Guides already have a guild that organises their work



In the Valley of Chamonix



Douglas Hadow

### The English Climbing Fraternity Gathers

Mr John Birkbeck and the Reverend Charles Hudson have left London. Their luggage includes contraptions, including a portable ladder and wire rope, that Mr Hudson believes will facilitate the more tricky sections of his scrambles. Although Mr Hudson intends this year to undertake some serious mountaineering, he is accompanied by two young men, Messrs Campbell and Hadow, whom his generosity has inspired him to introduce to the wonders of the Alps.



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Experience the 1<sup>st</sup> Ascent of the Matterhorn "live" on the web.

#### Imprint

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