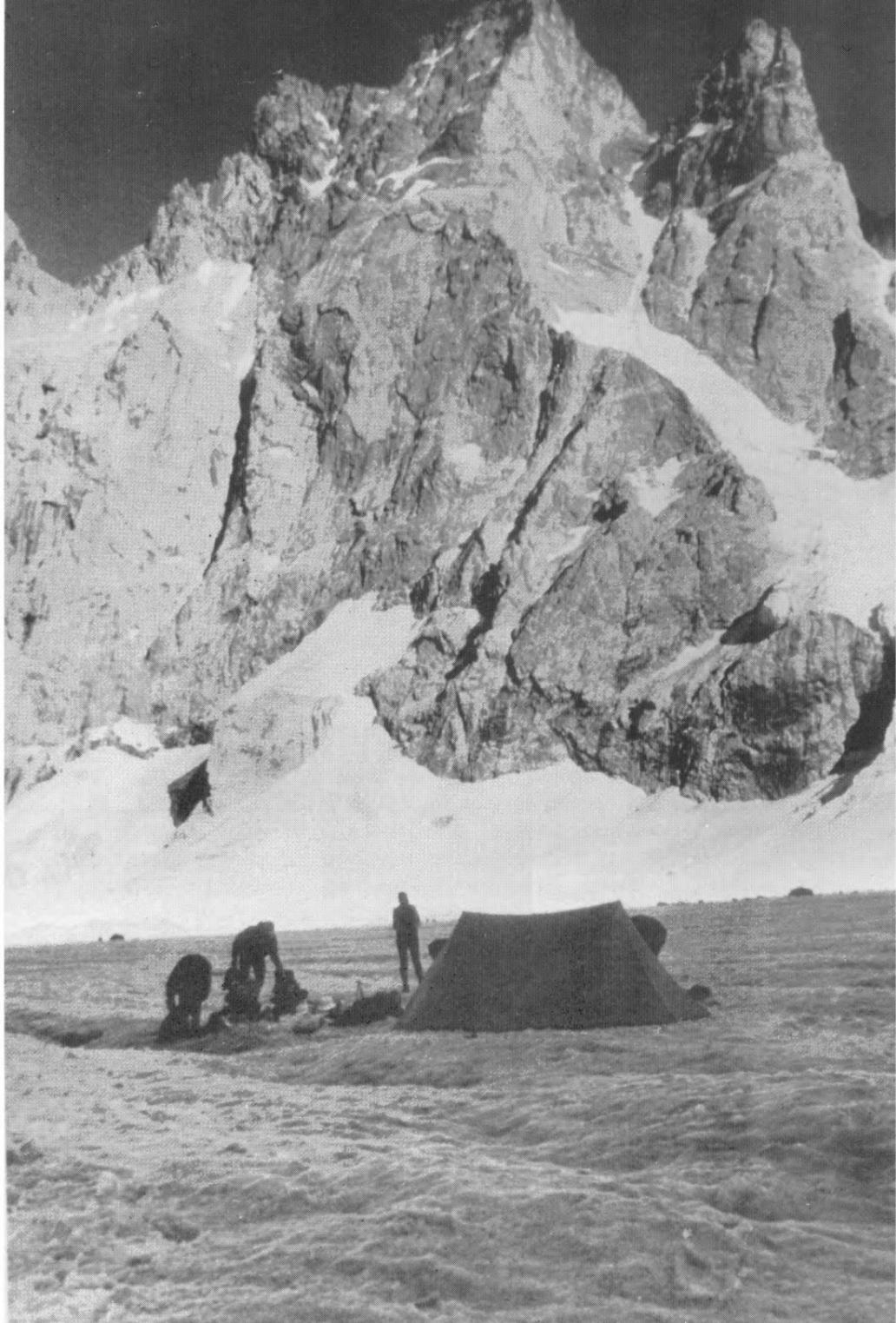


PELVOUX SOUTH FACE 3946m. (FROM PELVOUX HUT)

Zing! A ringing in my head sang out that a hefty stone had selected me from the motley and that I was still alive to hear it. We were about halfway up the first ascent of the meet, Pelvoux via the Couloir Coolidge, and already several had had to drop out - John O'Keefe to escort his daughter down, John Richardson with a bad stomach and Andrew Llewellyn with faulty crampons. This left Bill and Gordon Russell, John Llewellyn, Ian O'Keefe and me. After a few thoughts about my helmet left at the campsite, I did not feel any worse for the incident and decided to carry on cautiously. Shortly after this decision, whiffs of three inch grapeshot hurtled onto us, but at least we were now all alerted to dodge a bit. However, Ian collected a cut on the hand and Gordon one on the shin.

Bill decided to go for some broken ground to the left of the upper part of the couloir. We soon realised that his was the main stonefall arsenal, as the slightest misplacement of a foot sent a chunk hurtling down. The last few hundred yards seemed endless, as unfitness exacted its toll and I slumped exhausted on the snow summit. We arrived at 10.15 a.m., having left the hut at 4.27 a.m. On the way down John and Ian elected to go down the upper part of the couloir, the former thus collecting a thump on the spare helmet I had lent him. Well, at least the weather was good. The early morning tricky bit was easy in daylight and Bill and I then sat down to remove our crampons etc. when a final comment from the mountain appeared in the shape of a six inch boulder which, having detached itself from the glacier snout, trundled its way into Bill's open rucksack. A little more to the right and it would have given him quite a noticeable blow in the lower back. This would have been fair shares, as everyone else had collected a chip off this ancient block. We took the hint and sloped off to even greater unpredictability in the shape of the mad warden of the Pelvoux hut, who had thrown several rages the night before, notably when we had wanted to have a window open in the steamy dormitory. We were back at the hut at 1.47 p.m. I suddenly felt rather sick and decided to move off immediately. The innumerable and beautiful natural rock gardens on the way down kept my spirits up and John kindly monitored my sluggish descent back to the campsite, where Sue Richardson efficaciously ministered to the cranial groove. This entertainment proved to be a camera-clicking crowd puller.

GERRY GEE



PIC COOLIDGE 3774m. FROM CEZANNE

The Temple Ecrins Hut is the normal starting point for the ordinary route. However, since it is situated on the La Bérarde side of the Col de la Temple, it is not convenient for a climb from the Ailefroide side. The Col is very rocky and not good for a bivouac. It therefore seemed a good excuse to camp the night on the glacier. This was a new experience for most of the party and received enthusiastic approval. Tents and cooking gear were shared out amongst the party and, after a short drive up the valley to Cézanne, we began the long trudge up the moraine of the Glacier Noir arriving at our camp site in the late afternoon, in an amphitheatre surrounded by the Pelvoux, Pic Sans Nom, Coup de Sabre, Ailefroide, and east ridge of the Pic Coolidge, a superb situation.

Taking care to site the tents well out of range of the evidence of falling debris, we soon had a brew on with a meal to follow, and felt smug as we watched other parties grinding up to the col. Later the smug feeling turned to minor concern when we were circled several times by a helicopter. Eventually he seemed satisfied that we were not in any difficulty and, to our relief, disappeared down the valley, leaving us to enjoy the sun setting on the surrounding tops.

After a reasonable night's sleep (far better than sleeping in a stuffy hut) we made an early start up the couloir which placed us on the Col de la Temple before sunrise and, in fact, before parties coming up from the Temple Ecrins Hut. After a short break to photograph the sunrise rising behind the outline of Andrew Llewellyn, an interesting scramble over rocks and snow led to the summit with very fine views of the south face of the Ecrins, Costa Rouge Arête of the Ailefroide, and Les Bans much further away. After another bout of photography which involved a fair amount of lens swapping between the members of the party (we all seemed to have Olympus OM10s) the party set off down to the col and into the couloir. The couloir had been ascended in the dark and in frozen conditions without much bother, but now with full sun on it, we became aware of the large amount of loose rock which we managed largely to avoid by climbing down the right hand side. Even so, we were glad when we reached the bottom and turned a corner out of range of other parties above.

In the early morning, we had been forced to leave the tents erected because the tent pegs which had pushed easily into the ice the night before were frozen in solid the next morning. However, this situation was turned to advantage since we were able to take time off and brew up whilst sitting in the shade. After packing up

the camping equipment, it was much easier to walk down with our heavy packs to the Cézanne car park. I think that everybody agreed that it was well worth the extra effort of camping to be well away from crowded huts.

JOHN O'KEEFE

AILEFROIDE EAST SUMMIT 3871m. FROM SELE

'L'Ailefroide: up the valley to the hut, follow the pipeline, then straight up and it's on your left'. With this precise guidance a column of Rucksackers and retainers headed out west along the lower valley, wooded and pretty, gently upward to the stark and raw upper valley. A desolation of stones and rock. Huge boulders newly fallen the Pass as it was ten thousand years ago? The retainers reached a limit, picnicked, and returned. The main party found that there was, as promised, a path zig-zagging up the cliff ahead. The new Sélé hut was reached and used by some, whilst three Kinder-bivvy enthusiasts chose a night in the open.

Three-thirty a.m. One bivouacker remained bivouacked, such was the comfort he'd found. All others met together, found and

*The President and Gerry Gee on the summit of
Ailefroide John O'Keefe*



followed a pipe from new to old Sélé huts, then still in a state of dullness appropriate to the hour took the obvious line upwards. One hour later some member more awake than the rest bethought it prudent to comment that the mountain in view lay to the right, not to the left. Much debate, then a decision, and then a desperate fording of torrents and eventual arrival at precisely the correct spot for the ascent proper. One disappointed group set off down from here, with assorted ills that had not been shaken off, leaving just four to continue.

The dawn came, calm, quiet, perfect. The route became more and more interesting: varied, unexpected changes around each corner, and in fine positions. It was a beautiful morning. The summit reached with other parties way behind. The clearest of views, peaks recognised near and far, plenty of time to sit, eat and enjoy a very pleasant twenty minutes. And then down, the descent as interesting as the ascent. Reached the bivouac site and brewed, and brewed. Then on down the valley, passing tourists and feeling grand. Through the wood, arrived at camp, dropped the sack off, lay back on the grass, closed eyes and reflected - a superb day!

JOHN LLEWELLYN

BARRE DES ECRINS 4102m. (FROM CARON HUT)

Dave Ashworth's late arrival at the Refuge Caron should have been rewarded by an unqualified welcome. The spirit was willing but on our forced reorganisation of our sleeping shelf even the usually sanguine Harold Woolley had cause to remonstrate with his fellow Rucksackers.

It was a relief to arise at 3.30 a.m. Brian saw to it that we were all away on time. Sleepwalking up the glacier, we arrived at the Col des Ecrins at 6.0 a.m. The North Face is a pleasant snow climb amid impressive scenery. By making our way alongside the deep track we found good going. At the Brèche we had to wait until the first part of the route was free. The climbing up to the Pic Lory and then on to the Barre des Ecrins was most enjoyable. Just a little time later we were joined by Dave, John Richardson and Harold Woolley. The big clouds building up led to superb views - we thought we could see Mont Blanc in the distance. The descent needed a little care but all went well back to the brèche. The Dome de Neige only takes an extra fifteen minutes and was well worth the trouble. The snow conditions were good to the Col des Ecrins and we were soon back at the Refuge Caron. From there the walk back by the side of the Glacier Blanc is interesting until one meets the crowds an hour or two out from the car park.

It was quite a meal that night in Ailefroide. I was a little too tired to do it justice and nearly fell asleep walking back to the campsite. A little sad to think that it was all over, yet already plans were being drawn up for next year's meet.

BILL RUSSELL