

ALPINE MEET, 1936.—FIONNAY.

By E. W. STEEPLE.

The centre for this meet was not chosen without a good deal of discussion. Various other centres were suggested, but were deemed either too remote or too expensive. Finally the Val des Bagnes was fixed upon as both easy of access and providing comparatively cheap accommodation—a matter of some importance with the franc at 15 to the pound. Moreover it was new ground to the whole party.

Eight members travelled by road, and one made an exhausting journey across country from Austria. The remainder caught the boat train at Victoria on July 25th, and travelling via Dover and Paris reached Martigny at 9.30 on the following morning, and Fionnay by auto two hours later. When fully assembled the party numbered 27, comprised of the following:—

F. G. Brettell, Mrs. Bréttell, G. S. Brettell, W. Forbes Boyd, Miss L. C. Brew, D. H. Chaddock, T. Clutterbuck, Miss K. P. Davis, J. A. Fiddian, Miss M. Jackson, L. R. Lloyd, Miss M. Logan, Miss I. Maxwell, G. H. Mottram, D. J. Munns, F. H. Restall, G. Restall, E. W. Steeple, H. E. Sturt, F. H. Thompson, Mrs. Thompson, H. Thorneloe, A. M. Wadsworth, T. Wadsworth, Miss Pamela Wall, F. E. Wallbank and Miss Barbara Whitehouse.

The day was very hot, and when the strenuous work of choosing bedrooms and depositing luggage therein was done, most of the party loafed about, though a few of the more energetic walked up the hillsides. The Fionnay valley is rather enclosed, so that one cannot see the mountains for hills. It was found, however, that there were some delightful walks on good paths to various alps, from which fine views were obtained of the Combin group.

The hotel accommodation was not particularly luxurious, but Fionnay is a simple little place, where Cook's tourists are rare birds. The food was quite good, but the fruit consisted chiefly of small and very hard pears.

On the first working day the party split into halves. One half practised step-cutting on the lower part of the Corbassière glacier, whilst the other half walked up to the Marcel Brunet hut

on the Alpe du Crêt. This hut is fairly new, and is so well-appointed that the other huts suffered by comparison. From the hut a large party climbed the Parrain, most of them continuing on to the Rosa Blanche, descending by the Alpe de Sevreu. The view westward from these peaks included many of the Chamonix Aiguilles.

In the meantime the glacier party had gone up to Chanrion, led by Wallbank. Here they had a day on the Pointe d'Otemma. They complained that the rocks were in a bad state of repair, but were charmed with the wonderful view from the summit. The Brunet party arrived in the evening, so the hut was fairly full. It was an interesting fact, and one on which the members of the party congratulated themselves, that in almost all cases they had sole possession of the huts; probably the chief reason being that they kept away on Saturday nights and Sundays.

The combined party again split up, the Wallbank group climbing the Ruinette, whilst Brettell's group did Mont Gélé. A small walking party made for the Col de Fenêtre, but fled before reaching it, being pursued by a huge mass of cloud pouring over from Italy. They reached Fionnay well and truly soaked, and on that evening there were several inches of snow round the Chanrion hut. The Ruinette party had a cold descent to the hotel by way of the Giétroz alp, where they became a little impatient when the guide sat down in a particularly draughty spot and prepared to eat a hearty meal. The Mont Gélé column, after descending to the foot of the glacier, toiled up the steep slope to the hut, having intended to do the Ruinette on the following day, but it snowed all night, so they returned to Fionnay.

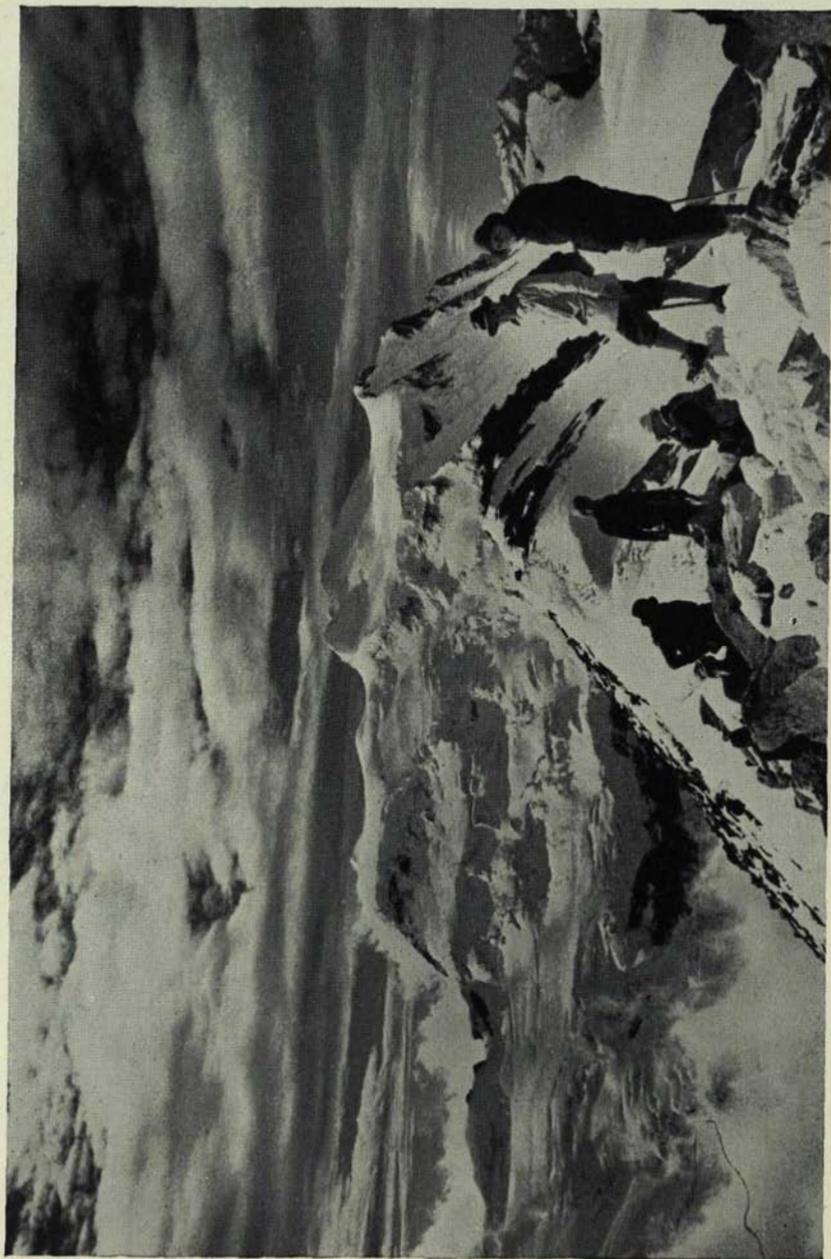
The next day, August 1st, was a wet day, a rest day, and also the national fête day. In the evening the firework display, defying the rain, went off quite successfully, and some members helped the Swiss to celebrate by shuffling round a small and crowded room to the blaring accompaniment of the local brass band.

On August 2nd the split halves combined again, and went off to the Panossière hut. A few members distrusted the weather and remained behind, but actually it cleared up quite well, and the faithful were rewarded with a lovely Alpine evening in the magnificent surroundings of the hut. On the following day a

large cavalcade ascended the Grand Tavé, where there was another beautiful view. A little column of chamois was seen wending its way up a ridge on the Tournelon Blanc. Later in the day Brettell nobly undertook to go down to the alp for some milk. It was a long and rough journey, but when he regained the hut there was still quite a lot of milk in the can. Several more members wandered up during the day, and there was again a full house. The weather had now completely recovered.

August 4th. A party of 14 (not, of course, all on one rope) set out soon after 4 o'clock, with a magnificent collection of stars overhead, for the Combin de Corbassière. They found this climb most enjoyable, particularly the delightful little rock ridge leading to the summit. This ridge is well seen in the photograph, facing the spectator. Most of the party carried on to the neighbouring peak, the Petit Combin, otherwise known as the Grand Follat. Excellent views were obtained, though clouds drifted up as the day advanced. Of those who remained at the hut, Miss Logan went with a porter up the Tavé; the rest ambled gently down to the hotel, followed later by some of the climbing party. On the previous evening a couple of porters had been sent up to the hut with extra provisions, including a number of delicacies. Consequently the six tigers who stayed on for a second night, in order to do the Grand Combin, feasted royally.

The Combin men left the hut at 2 o'clock on the following morning in two parties, led respectively by F. G. Brettell and one of the guides. The going was good as far as the breakfast-place, but on the Corridor there was a great quantity of loose, powdery snow, tiring to wade through. On one section this loose snow seemed to have no bottom, and as no footing was obtainable a species of breast stroke was resorted to. Higher up there is a break described in the guide book as a "coupure." This is really a canyon-like crevasse. Making a wide sweep round this the party cut 150 steps up the ice-wall, and breaking through the cornice, traversed below the first peak and reached the summit at 8.30. It was bitterly cold, and they hurried down by the same route. A snow avalanche fell when they had reached the lower slopes, but did not come near them. The hut was regained at 1.50. (On the photograph of the Grand Combin the upper part of the Corridor will be seen running up the face from right to left. The lower part is hidden by the shoulder of the Combin de Corbassière).



GRAND COMBIN from the Combin de Corbassiere.

W. Forbes Boyd

The next—and last—expedition was to the Mont Fort. The hut is reached from Lourtier through the quaint, steeply-tilted village of Sarrayer. It was a hot and thirsty day, and the girls at the village inn had a busy time. It must have been quite a windfall for them.

The Mont Fort hut is well situated for distant views, as it stands outside the principal mountain groups. It is a popular hut in the ski-ing season. The Mont Fort itself was reached the next morning in four hours, an easy day with a grand prospect from the summit. The return was by the Louvie alp.

In addition to these expeditions a number of charming walks were found above the valley, and many visits were paid to the Alpe de Louvie and the Alpe du Crêt, two very choice spots. The little inn at Mauvoisin was also very popular. It is pleasantly situated and, as several members discovered, the omelettes are good.

Owing perhaps to a late season, many varieties of wild flowers were still in full bloom, sometimes in great profusion, adding considerably to the charm of these rambles.

A few bouquetins are carefully preserved in this district, and from the Brunet hut several fine beasts were observed, with the aid of the gardien's binoculars, on the lower slopes of the Parrain.

A day or so before the meet terminated its members were greatly distressed on hearing of the fatal accident to George Restall whilst descending the Matterhorn. He had been a very jolly member of the Fionnay party during the first nine days of the meet, and had made several ascents, including that of the Ruinette.

The party was well served in the matter of guides. Two had been engaged—Charles Luisier and Maurice Bessard, both local men. They were pleasant and capable, and gave great satisfaction.

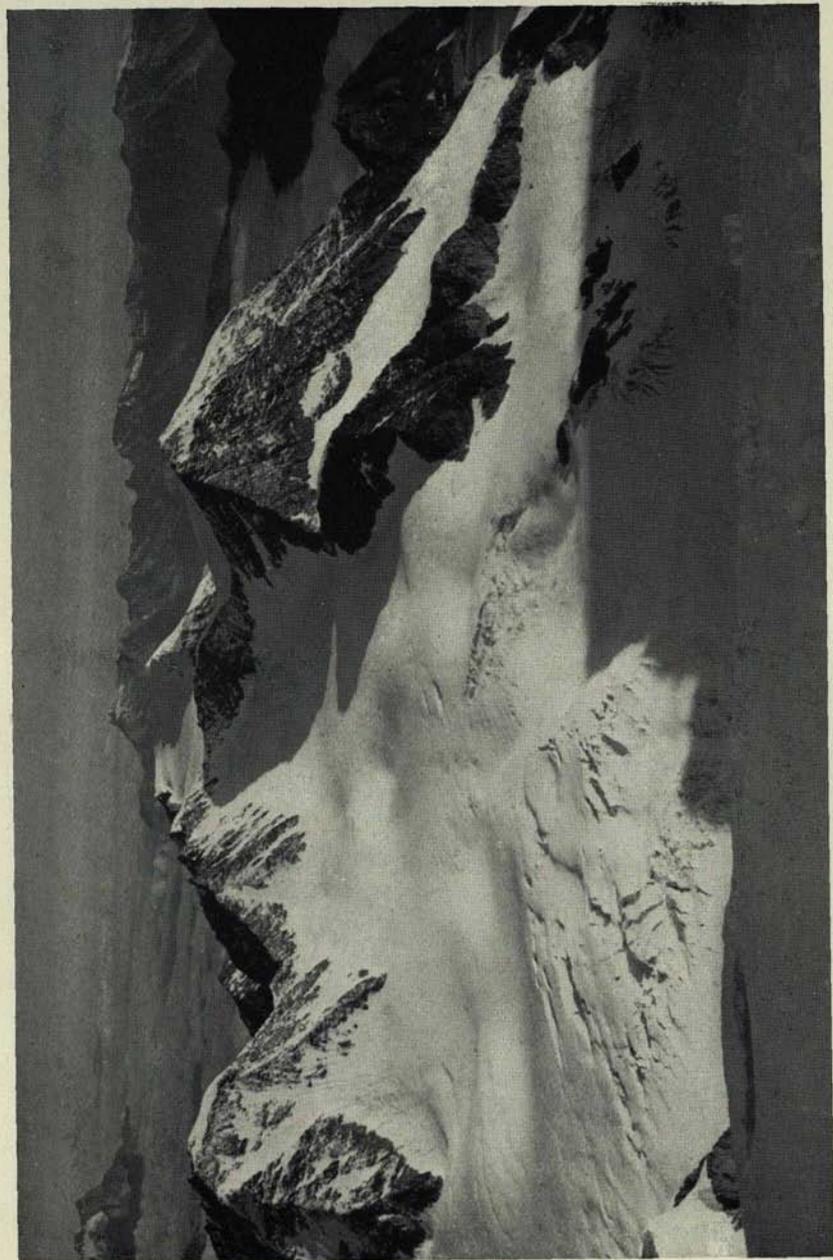
It was felt that the meet had been very successful, thanks to the untiring efforts of F. G. Brettell as leader. An entirely new district had been thoroughly explored, and despite the break in the weather a good number of peaks had been ascended. The varying heights of these are shown in the following list:—

Grand Combin	....	....	14,164	feet
Ruinette	....	....	12,728	,,
Combin de Corbassière	....	....	12,187	,,
Petit Combin	....	....	12,045	,,
Mont Gélé	....	....	11,539	,,
Pointe d'Otemma	....	....	11,135	,,
Rosa Blanche	....	....	10,984	,,
Mont Fort	....	....	10,925	,,
Le Parrain	....	....	10,702	,,
Grand Tavé	....	....	10,348	,,

The total number of "man-feet" ascended was about 631,000. Given continuously perfect weather more, perhaps, might have been done, but who in the Alps experiences these ideal conditions?

On August 8th the party started down the valley, and gradually disintegrated (a few had left on the previous day). Some caught a train at Martigny; the road parties packed themselves into their cars; whilst others, with a little more time to spare, spent a few days at Zinal, Zermatt and in the Chamonix valley.

A great number of excellent photographs were obtained. Prints of these were afterwards circulated amongst those who took part in the meet, a work which was kindly undertaken by Mrs. F. H. Thompson. A selection of lantern slides was also made, and shown by the leader of the party at a meeting in December. They evoked many happy memories.



THE CORBASSIÈRE GROUP from the Grand Combin.

G. S. Brettel