

A TRIPTYCH OF DOLOMITE CLIMBS

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The Rib of the First Sella Tower

The first part of this climb mainly consists of scrambling over rather friable and uncertain rock until one arrives on the ridge, and then goes straight up to a point opposite the base of the large crack which runs up in the centre of the face. This crack which looks rather uninviting from below, is stiff and rather steep, but sufficient holds allow one to ascend steadily. At the top of the crack one traverses again to the right along a ledge until a piton is reached, and from here the ascent is continued on a slabby wall. About thirty feet up there is an overhang which requires judgment and balance, after which it is a case of carrying on up the sloping slab until a hundred feet of rope has been run out. At this point one comes to a large stance, and from here a yellow wall is ascended on the right which leads to a shoulder which is impressively exposed. A short traverse of ten or fifteen feet is made to the foot of a chimney, or more correctly a shallow groove, which is climbed straight up with difficulty, and after this there is an easy scramble to the summit. The general standard of this climb is grade four, the last pitch being grade five. This last pitch is well guarded with pitons, and if one wishes four of these may be used. There are two on the yellow wall, one on the shoulder and one in the crack. The climbing in the groove is extremely difficult, and the use of the piton and the karabiner can be of great help.

The Kinne Crack on the Funffingerspitze

The Kinne Crack is the thin twisting crack that runs across the face of the Funffingerspitze from right to left. It is a climb which is pleasant and difficult but persistently more strenuous than that experienced on walls and faces of the Dolomites as a general rule. The ascent by this route is varied in technique and also in degree of exposure; at many points, in particular the stances, the climber is safely embedded in a cave or deep in a crack, but often on the pitches it is necessary to move on to the very lips of the crack and proceed upwards by bridging. At other points the method is to climb directly on the left-hand wall of the crack and in other places to proceed by backing up, though often all three methods are used on one pitch.

The route starts from the small buttress that runs down to the left of the Schmitt Kamin. The first two hundred feet is climbed on easy rock to where a yellow band of broken and friable rock runs across to the main face of the Funffingerspitze. The traverse here is

easy, and though the footholds are not too good the handholds are large and plentiful. There are also pinnacles of rock behind which the rope may be placed for added security. Beyond the traverse a short direct ascent by a twenty-foot crack leads to a good stance, and from here onwards the climbing is almost entirely done in the crack, by bridging, backing up, and climbing on the walls of the crack, sometimes deep in the crack, at others on the very lip. All the pitches are very difficult, several having overhangs to be turned. The most difficult part is about two-thirds of the way up where a long pitch presents in its middle, two overhangs in quick succession, the second not abundantly blessed with holds. From there on the route is continuously entertaining until it emerges on the ridge of the peak between a pinnacle and the continuation of the ridge to the top. This continuation of the ridge is the last pitch and has no real difficulties except in the middle where a bottomless groove might be found difficult to start. I found that to climb the outside of the left wall for about four feet, then to step on to the inside of the right wall and with a pull bring the whole body into the groove overcomes that difficulty. From the top of the pitch scrambling for another hundred feet brings one to the summit of the Funfingerspitz.

One of the delights of this climb is the varying picture of the surrounding country obtained from the depths of the caves where the stances are. The sharp walls of the crack outline and define a small area so that at one moment one is looking straight at the Sella Towers which are framed for one's admiration and a moment later everything has been removed from the picture except the glacier running straight to the top of the Marmolata. This I can assure anyone who wishes to do it is a delightful climb.

The North Wall of the Second Sella Tower

The climb commences from the triangle of screes between the second and third towers of the Sella Group, about one-third of the way along the base of the Second Sella Tower. In nearly every case the distance between stances is about a hundred feet. The first pitch is up and very slightly to the climber's left on good holds and at not too great an angle. Above this a direct climb ahead on steep rock leads by way of small holds to a piton and belay about twenty feet below a pronounced overhang of blackish rock. From here the ascent continues on steep rock to a piton with a rather tattered bit of rope two to three feet in length. The overhang is not climbed, but a downward traverse is made for some twenty feet, followed by a direct ascent of steep rock by a crack with a small overhang in the middle. This traverse is, I think the hardest part of the climb; the first part is holdless and almost without footholds except for an outward and

downward sloping ledge. The traverse is commenced by edging along the ledge and using the tattered rope as a support. When the fingers have reached the end of the rope and the left arm is fully extended, it is possible with the right hand to get a hold with three fingers in a small horizontal crack and move slowly into a better position. Another piton on the traverse allows a karabiner and running belay to add confidence for the rest of the traverse, after which the route goes straight up the crack to the next piton. Above this the steepness is less on the climber's right and two pitches which are relatively easy are next climbed. Here it becomes necessary to make a second traverse to the right, which is longer but not so difficult and is made across on to the rib. The climb from this part then continues directly to the summit. It is consistently steep; indeed at the top it is steeper than ever and more or less follows a series of cracks one above the other, each of which having an overhang in the middle. Towards the summit the climbing steepens, one pitch being very difficult as it ends on a stance without a piton and where we were unable to find a point where our piton would grip firmly. This meant bringing the second man up on as minute a belay as ever was used with an eight hundred foot sheer drop down below. The next pitch continues up the crack and moves slightly to the left, leading most unexpectedly to a slab. One moves half way up the edge of the slab and then traverses across it on somewhat thin holds; one more pitch and the top is reached. This is a most delightful climb, being very exposed with small hand and foot holds and requiring throughout the climb careful judgment on the picking of hand holds and the choice of way. There are no proper belays anywhere and belays are supplied by the use of pitons and karabiners. It is a delightful climb of one thousand feet of grade five standard except for the two pitches in the middle section.