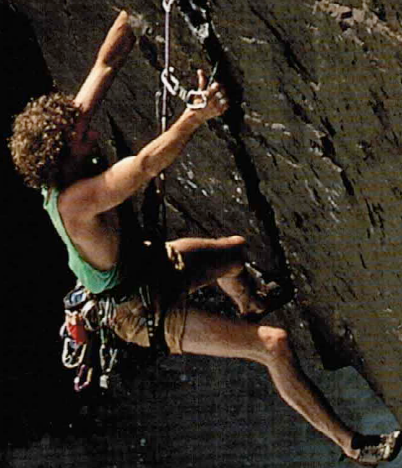


**High**  
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# ROCK ABUSE

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1997 round up

UK £2.60 US \$4.75 28FFr December 1997 No. 181





## Huge rock fall on the Dru registers over 2 on the Richter Scale and closes climbing for the time being

### The Alps

#### MONT BLANC MASSIF

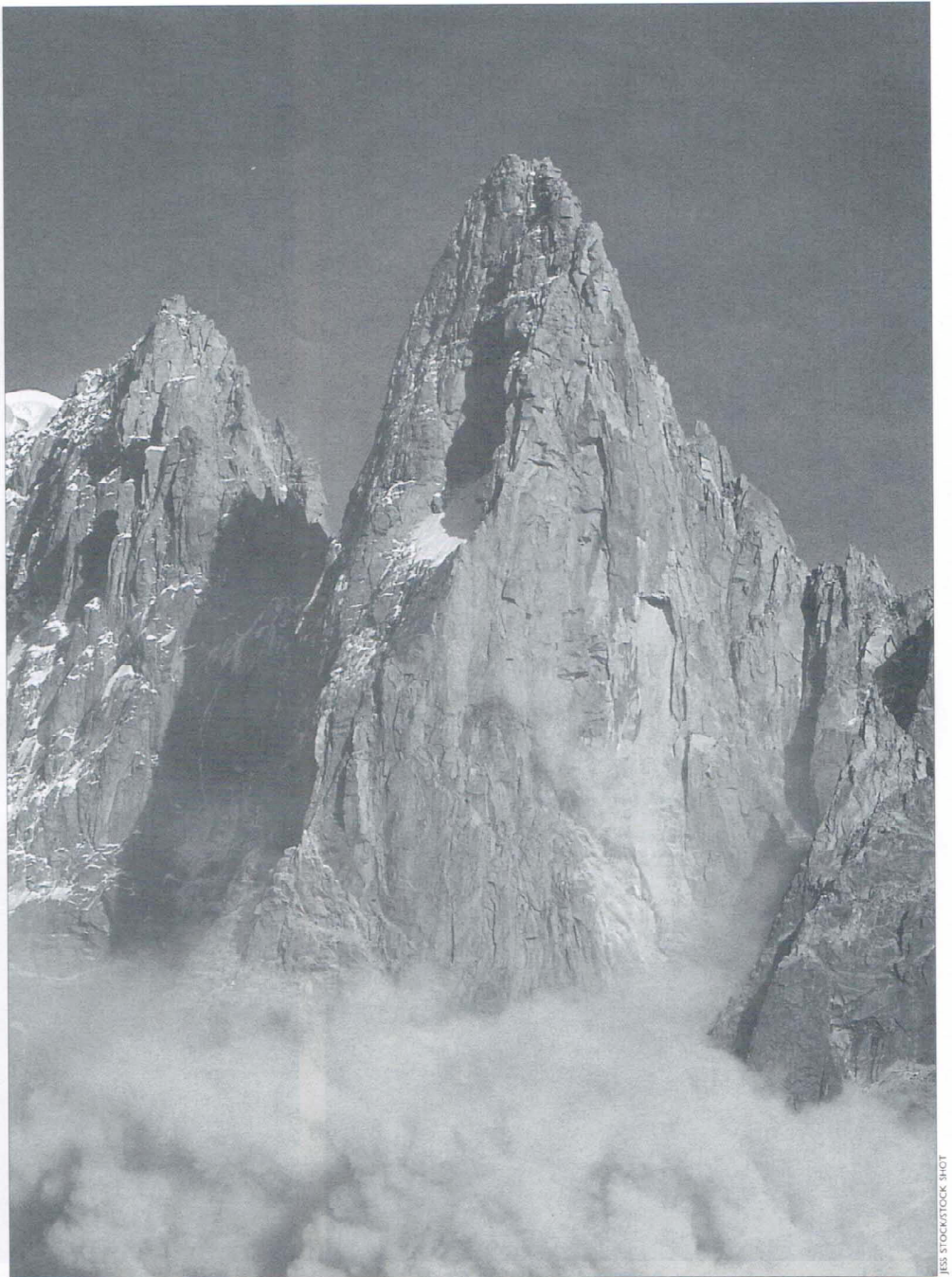
##### Petit Dru

On Tuesday 16th September two Swiss climbers, Pierrick Dentan from the Vaud region and Jacques Richon, a guide from Martigny, scrambled up to a bivouac on the Flammes de Pierre in preparation for an ascent of the classic *Bonatti Pillar* the following day. In common with many parties nowadays they anticipated rappelling to the foot of the pillar the next morning and climbing the route in the day. At the time the Mont Blanc region was being blessed with glorious autumnal weather:

Previously, during the main summer season, there had been a rather worrying amount of rockfall on and around the Pillar itself, with at least one fatality; a female Russian climber killed by stonefall. The routes' book at the Maison de la Montagne was becoming full of repeated warnings by parties going on to the climb and this in turn prompted Chamonix guides to recommend that the Bonatti and adjacent lines should not be attempted at the present time.

On Wednesday 17th the two Swiss Alpinists rappelled to the base of the pillar, noting a few more volleys of stonefall than they might normally expect. However, their fears augmented as they started up the route and began to feel what they describe as enormous 'settling movements' of the mountain. At about one third height, taking the standard line up the pillar, they were engaged on an eight metre high section when the entire flake on which they were climbing suddenly parted company from the wall. As luck would have it this 20cm+ thickness of rock more or less settled where it was; in balance but totally unstable.

Sometime during that coming night an enormous rock fall occurred on the West Face of the Dru. All reports to date estimate the fall to be 90m in height, 30m wide and five metres thick, though the devastation caused as this scoured the face below was obviously far greater, as seen on the photographs. The impact was registered as far away as Sion in Switzerland's Rhone Valley and has also variously been reported as between 2.0 and 2.5 on the Richter Scale. Reports that the fall origi-



**Above:** The Dru and the dust cloud from the huge second rock fall which has postponed climbing on the West Face.

nated in the big groove line of the Harlin/Robbins American Directissima do not appear to be confirmed by the photographic evidence, which shows that it is the big roof on the French Directissima at the base of the Red Shield, and the rock to the right, that has fallen away. It would seem that the lower part of this route (all pitches, much of which was loose already), plus the initial section of the American Directissima and the lower sections of the neighbouring 1986

Camison/Grenier route, Absolu, the 1975 Thomas Gross Route, Catherine Destivelle's 1991 creation and probably, but not certainly, the lower part of the Bonatti, have all been destroyed. Two French climbers bivouacking on the Hemming/Robbins American Direct (still unaffected) that night were apparently very impressed.

Two days later another smaller but significant fall occurred and the combined effects have produced a huge rock scar that is clearly vis-

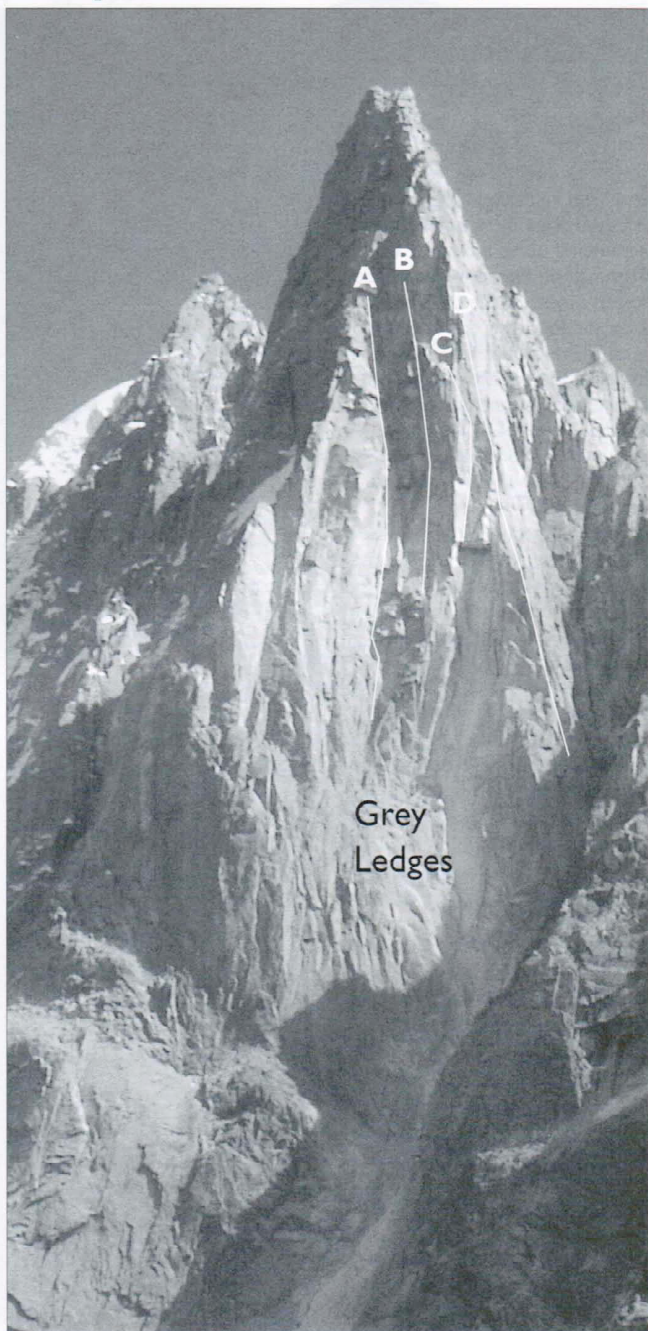
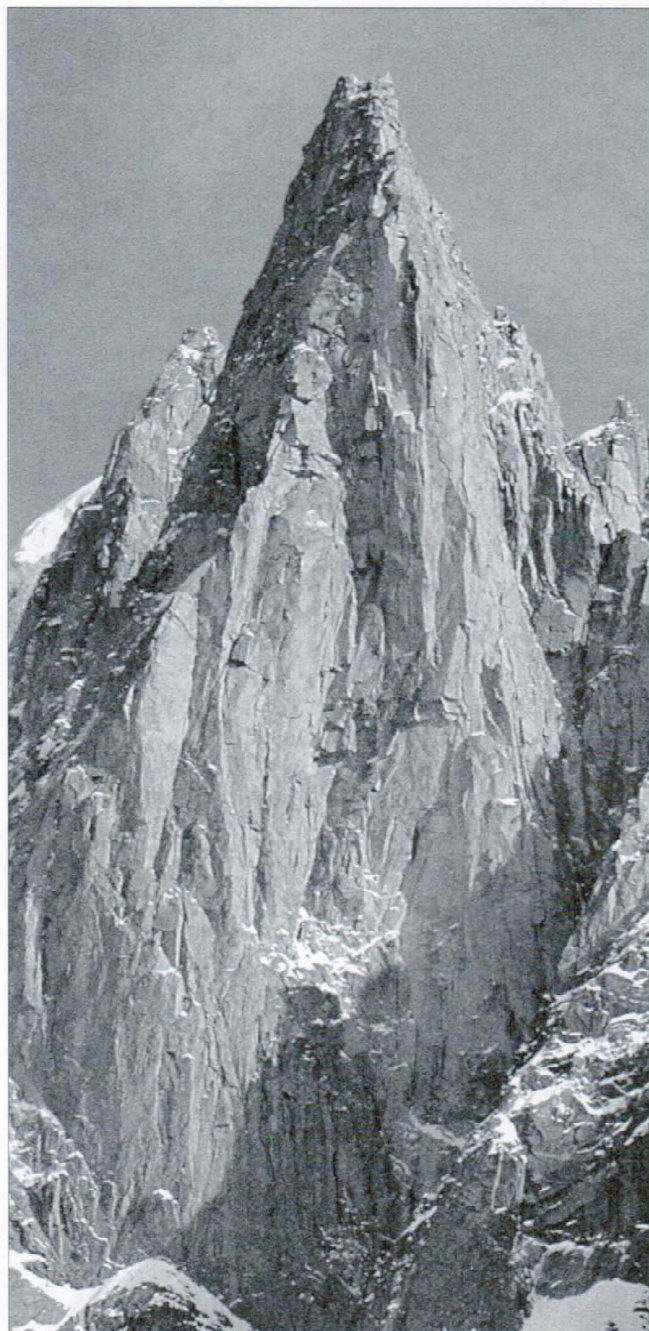
ible from the valley and has radically changed the appearance of the face. It will undoubtedly be a very long time before climbing on the Dru is once again recommended and climbers set about creating 'new routes' where the well-known classics have disappeared.

Rockfalls on a cataclysmic scale such as this have not been uncommon in the history of the range, though the recent massive rock avalanches from the Brenva Face of Mont Blanc, together with this in-

JES. STOCK/STOCK SHOT



## Warm spring provides early crop of routes on Qualido



**Above:** An old photo of the Petite Dru before the rock fall. **Above:** The damage clearly visible and an indication of where some routes go or went. **A.** American Directissima, **B.** French Directissima, **C.** Thomas Gross Route, **D.** Bonatti Pillar.

cident on the Dru, seem to point towards renewed activity. Early this century a huge fall from the left side of the Grand Pilier d'Angle and the region of Col Peuterey significantly lowered the height of this col, the debris descending most of the way to Courmayeur. The original route up the West Face of the Blaitière, climbed by Allain and Fix in 1947 all but disappeared a few years later in a gigantic rockfall, leaving the way 'open' for Joe Brown and Don Whillans to make

their now classic ascent in 1954. And on the nearby Grand Chamois two of the finest routes on the West Face, the original route up the central or Coqueugniot Pillar (Joel Coqueugniot and Bruno Dineur, 1970) plus the 1974 Direct line up the pillar by the Carpentier brothers, and part of a Remy Route, were destroyed in 1980 with the total collapse of the right side of the pillar.

*INFO: Alain Delizée/Stevie Haston/Hilary Sharp/Ed Watson.*

### BREGAGLIA/MASINO

Initial reports suggest that the weather in this granite land was as appalling as elsewhere in the Alps during the early part of the summer. However, a very dry winter followed by unseasonably high temperatures in March allowed local activists to start work on their projects early in the year. Notable successes occurred on Monte Qualido where there was one important new route and a couple of

excellent aid eliminations. Readers are referred to the full photoguide and information on this formation in INFO 160.

### Monte Qualido

The well-tested team of Sonja Brambati, Adriano Carnati and Paolo Vitali were quickly at work on a new line up the steep and compact walls between the 1982 Boscacci/Masa/Merizzi route, Il Paradiso può Attendere (950m of climbing: VII and A3 or IX- all free