

the base of the Goûter. They then mounted a ridge of tolerable steepness, whose rocks, broken or dislocated by the action of the atmosphere, did not offer an easy road. But the temperature was not very low—it never touched zero—and in an hour they had crossed the ridge. Arriving at a certain elevation, they discovered the Lake of Geneva, which can only be seen from the loftiest points of the foundations of Mont Blanc.

A glacier forms the plateau which extends at the foot of the Aiguille du Goûter. It was seven in the evening when they reached this advanced position. The glacier abutted on a bridge of snow, which it was absolutely necessary to traverse, but which, as it overhung a frightful precipice, presented a most perilous trajet. In crossing it, each traveller placed himself between two guides, who held between them a long alpenstock, forming on the side of the precipice a sufficient support to steady his steps and re-assure him against danger.

After crossing the narrow snowy isthmus, they attacked the ridge, or backbone, of the Aiguille du Goûter. But here their progress became both slow and painful. The acclivity was far steeper and more abrupt than that which had brought them to the base of the Aiguille. The rocks, loosened and disintegrated by the action of the atmosphere, crumbled under their feet, or gave way in their hands, when they sought to assist themselves by grasping hold of them. Frequently, when at a loss for some slight stay or holdfast, the traveller was forced to seize the leg of the guide who preceded him. Freshly fallen snow filled the hollows or interstices of the rocks. The middle of the ridge was often inaccessible, and they were constrained to traverse the dangerous *couloirs* which bordered it. All these obstacles increased as they drew near the summit of the Aiguille.

After five hours of this fatiguing labour, the incline gradually grew steeper, and the quantity of fresh snow augmented at each step.

Balmat, therefore, went forward to survey the remainder of the ascent, but speedily returned with the information that the newly fallen snow was so dense in the upper parts that the summit could not be attained except at the risk of life, and that the mountain-peak was covered two feet deep in snow, which rendered progress impossible. His gaiters were, in fact, covered with snow even above the knee.

Great as was the regret which they experienced in abandoning an enterprise so auspiciously commenced, Saussure and Bourrit wisely resolved to prosecute it no further. At the point where they halted the barometer showed an elevation of 11,250 feet.

The guides now urged an immediate departure. The sun's rays had melted the snows and rendered the descent dangerous. But walking cautiously, and supported by their guides, the travellers returned without accident to the plateau at the base of the Aiguille du Goûter, and thence re-descended to the cabin.

The rock on which this enterprise had been wrecked was the lateness of the season. Saussure resolved to repeat the attempt in the following year, but at an epoch which should render less probable and less formidable the obstacle of fresh-fallen snow. As a preliminary, and to lighten as far as might be the fatigue of the last day's ascent, he ordered his favourite guide, Pierre Balmat, to construct a new hut at a point considerably above the Pierre-Ronde—that is, at the foot of one of the