

ridges of the Aiguille du Goûter. He recommended him at the same time to make various explorations on that part of the mountain, so as to determine on the most feasible route.

Pierre Balmat took to himself two other guides, and on the 6th of July 1786 they went to pass the night in the hut at the Pierre-Ronde. They started at day-break, and following the same track which Saussure had taken, ascended to the Aiguille, and finally to the Dôme du Goûter; but not without severe suffering from the rarefaction of the air.

While Pierre Balmat and his friends were ascending the Aiguille du Goûter by the incline of the Pierre Ronde, three other Chamounix guides attempted it by another route—that is, by the Montagne de la Côte. As it was then believed that the Dôme du Goûter was the only way by which Mont Blanc could be approached, some of the Chamounix guides had divided into two troops, to test the comparative facilities of the two routes leading to the Dôme. François Paccard, Michel Cachat (surnamed *The Giant*), and Joseph Carrier, composed the second detachment. They were joined by another guide, Jacques Balmat, who for some years had been independently seeking the road to Mont Blanc, and for whom was reserved the glory of first discovering it.

The two groups of guides having reunited, traversed a vast snow-field, and gained the long ridge which connects the Dôme du Goûter to Mont Blanc. But this ridge, which strikes between two precipices, each 6000 feet in height, is so narrow, and of so abrupt an ascent, that it proved utterly impracticable to reach Mont Blanc by it. The guides only acknowledged this evident fact with much reluctance. Jacques Balmat, however, persisted in continuing the adventure. He risked his life on the narrow ridge, and to move forward was obliged to place himself on all-fours upon the species of *dos d'âne* (ass's back) formed by this terrible escarpment. His companions, frightened at his temerity, abandoned him, and redescended to Chamounix.

After brave but fruitless efforts, Jacques Balmat was forced to desist from his impossible enterprise. He retraced his steps, still straddling along the ridge, like a child on his grandfather's stick. But he found himself deserted by his companions, who, we may add, felt no great sympathy for him, because he had followed them without their consent. The gallant mountaineer, piqued by their cowardly abandonment, resolved to remain alone in these frozen wastes and desolate wildernesses until he had discovered a practicable mode of ascending Mont Blanc.

Instead of returning to Chamounix, he descended to the Grand Plateau, where he resolved to pass the night.

The Grand Plateau of Mont Blanc is a slightly-inclined plane, of about 2000 square acres, situated upwards of 9750 feet above the sea; swept by continual avalanches and exposed to the most biting winds; for it is surrounded on all sides by peaks of snow, where the traveller can find neither rock nor stone to serve as a shelter or a resting-place. Even during the summer, and in the sun, the thermometer here marks always zero. In this awful desert Jacques Balmat, without covering, having only his mantle and his alpenstock, spent the night, crouching under a crag, and but poorly defended against a small, drizzling, frozen snow, which fell incessantly.