

celebrated Horace Benedict de Saussure, no person had conceived the idea of climbing its scarped flank. It was not even known whether the rarefaction of the air at elevations so lofty would not prove fatal to human life.

Saussure was not twenty years old when he first dreamed of attacking the giant of the Alps. In his first visit to Chamounix, in 1760, the young naturalist published it abroad in all parts of the valley that he would give a sufficient reward to the guides who discovered a practicable route to Mont Blanc. He even promised to pay the day's wages of those whose attempts proved fruitless. But his liberal offers led to no result.

It was not until fifteen years afterwards, in 1775, that four guides of Chamounix succeeded in reaching Mont Blanc by the mountain De la Côte, which rises above the village Des Bossons. This mountain, situated between the glaciers Des Bossons and De Tacconay, abuts on the waste of snow and ice which stretches uninterruptedly to the very summit of Mont Blanc. After triumphing over the obstacles which opposed their progress on the glaciers, incessantly intersected by immense crevasses, the four guides penetrated into a great valley of snow, which seemed as if it would directly approach Mont Blanc. The weather was exceedingly favourable; they encountered neither too precipitous slopes nor too wide crevasses, and apparently all things promised success. But the rarefaction of the air, and the reverberation of the sun's rays on the dazzling surface, fatigued them beyond endurance. Succumbing to weakness and weariness, they found themselves constrained to re-descend, without having met with any insuperable obstacle.

Seven years later, in 1783, three other guides of Chamounix—Jean-Marie Cottet, Jorasse, and Joseph Carrier—made the same attempt, following in the track of their predecessors; only they took the precaution of passing the night on the Montagne de la Côte, and did not venture until the following morning upon the glacier which ascends from it.

After traversing it in safety, they followed up the vale of snows which rises towards Mont Blanc. They had already reached a great elevation, and were pressing forward in blithe confidence, when the boldest and most courageous among them was suddenly seized with an unconquerable longing for sleep. He begged of his comrades to continue the ascent without him; but they refused to abandon him in such a condition, or to suffer him, as he wished, to sleep on the snow. Renouncing their enterprise, they all returned to Chamounix.

It is certain that even without the accident of this inopportune lethargy, these three men could never have reached the goal of their adventurous expedition. They would have still had a long distance to travel before arriving at Mont Blanc, and the heat fatigued them excessively. Moreover, they were without appetite; the wine and the provisions which they carried possessed no attractions for them. So that Jorasse said seriously that if he had to recommence the enterprise, he would not load himself with any provisions, but take only an umbrella and a smelling-bottle. When we picture to ourselves a robust mountaineer scaling the slopes of the Alps with an umbrella in one hand, and a flask of eau de Cologne in the other, we gain, by this singular image, a vivid idea of the anomalous difficulties and unfamiliar conditions which are associated with the adventure.