EUROPE

Alps

Mont Blanc, Brouillard Pillars, Right Pillar. The remote Brouillard Face, the face of cloud and mist, is separated from the Frêney by the Innominata Arête and consists of three granite pillars. The left or Red Pillar of Brouillard was climbed by Walter Bonatti and Andrea Oggioni after two arduous attempts and a final ordeal which is a part of Alpine history. The climb has not yet been repeated. The Brouillard Pillars are synonymous both in name and reputation with the worst in weather in a tenuous Alpine situation. Retreat is difficult. So it was in keeping with the reputation of the face that the first ascent of the Right Pillar of Brouillard should be shrouded in storm. Early in the summer, attempts on the pillar had been made by Poles and Englishmen (Peter Crew and company and the rival team of Chris Bonington and Rusty Baillie). Of these three parties, only the last had made significant progress. Chris and Rusty had, in fact, been plagued with bad luck, for in two attempts they had nearly completed the difficulties, to be turned back by lack of material and finally by the inevitable storm. Therefore, I had the happy experience of being invited on the final assault of a climb that was almost “in the bag.” To make up two ropes of two, a Scotsman, Brian Robertson, was invited. Chris and I would take the first rope. Age and experience sometimes have their compensations. Rusty and Brian would make up the trusty second. On August 24 just after midnight, we left the Manzino Hut, took about three steps and stopped. It was too warm, and
eerie clouds were boiling up around the mountain. No doubt about it—a storm was imminent. Oh well, a little exercise is good for one, and who knows, maybe the situation would look different later. After much hum-hawing, we plodded off. Five hours later, high on the Innominata Ridge, which separates the chaos of the Brouillard and Frêney glaciers, the scene had certainly changed. It had got worse. We had seen every known bad-weather sign. That was a new record! We had been warned! At last in the little bivouac box at Col Eccles, we decided to go on, regardless of the weather. An unusual experience it was, going against one's better judgment in defiance of weather. An ordinary climb would be one thing, but the Brouillard was quite another. Such extreme confidence! I hoped for the sake of the younger members of the team that it was not foolhardiness. We traversed the steep snow and ice to the base of the pillar unroped. Once on rock we roped and climbed. The beautiful, coarse, Mont Blanc granite fell away steeply. Occasional rope-lengths of iced cracks and snow arêtes reminded us of the altitude. Just to drink in the scene was enough to saturate the senses. Ribbons of ice, 1000 feet long, formed frozen cascades down smooth granite walls. To our backs, the coming storm tore its misty harbingers around the great pinnacles of the Peuterey Ridge, while the brilliance of cloud, sun and sky played competitive games. Finally the high-point piton was reached. A pendulum, a last lead, and the difficulties were over. We raced up the mixed climbing of the ridge, for we still wanted to bivouac as high as possible, since this ground was treacherous in storm. As the light began to fail, and a hint of lightning irritated the air, we became aware of our out-distancing the other rope-team. We could neither wait nor leave them behind. A decision had to be made instantly. We made it: to forego the summit of Mont Blanc. We literally ran down the fairly high grade, mixed climbing to the others, knowing that unless we got back to the top of the vertical pillar before darkness, we would be in trouble. To bivouac on this terrain with a storm was a needless risk. We got to within two rope-lengths of our goal, hacked out two adequate ledges from the iced blocks, and bivouacked. Soon Mont Blanc gave us a typical, spectacular electrical display with enough of a physical touch of current to arouse anxiety. In the morning it was still snowing hard. A white, slippery, and sometimes roaring cauldron was our well of descent. Rappel points were difficult to find, but our team worked smoothly. Rappel after rappel demonstrated the efficiency of organized team work. Despite the conditions—iced beards, wet and icy clothing—we four were happy. We had climbed our pillar, thumbed our noses at the weather and given full expression
to our climbing experience. We would make it down alive and with a margin of safety. It was all in a day's climb, and what an enjoyable climb! We were in our element.

JOHN HARLIN

*New Routes on the Aiguille du Plan and the Cardinal, Rassemblement International d'Alpinistes, Chamonix.* Memories of Chamonix: vin rouge, bad weather, talking politics, great meals . . . But what of climbing? We had come, forty of us from twenty countries, communist and capitalist alike, to participate in the International Alpine Assembly at France's *Ecole Nationale de Ski et d'Alpinisme* hopefully for three full weeks of climbing in the Mont Blanc massif. But the weather (according to school director Jean Franco, "the worst July we've seen in seven years") decided otherwise. Nonetheless, climb we did and the British and American delegates managed to make the only first ascents of the *stage*. Staggering under incredible loads of food (steaks were *de rigueur* for all hut meals), Steve Miller (USA), Chris Bonington (England), Tom Patey (Scotland) and I made our way to the Charpoua Hut to attempt the unclimbed west face of the Cardinal, a sort of miniature Dru crouching in the shadow of the Aiguille Verte. Eleven hours, fifteen pegs, many grooves, much grunting and a couple of tension traverses later, we were wandering about at the top of the 1350-foot face, looking for the summit in a snowstorm. (Miller has given more details of the route. They climbed broken rock to an ice gully. At a narrow point in the gully they ascended onto a ridge on the right and up past the base of a pinnacle. Icy chimneys gave access to the corner where the west and south faces meet. From there they were on easier ground to the summit.—*Editor.*) (400 meters, Grade IV, F8.) The descent down a rotten-snow couloir on the Couvercle side left us soaked to the skin and even my falling into a bergschrund after dark did not seem as funny as it should have. But a truly *cordon bleu* dinner in the steaming darkness of the hut dried out our spirits. Feeling very pleased with ourselves indeed, we went down the next morning to Chamonix, its cold, dripping streets and warm *bistros*. Driven out of Chamonix by a week of rain, Chris and I stowed our gear in Lionel Terray's station wagon and with a couple of hot-shot Belgian climbers drove to the sunnier clime of the Vercors range near Grenoble. Here we did penance for all our carousing by sweating our way up a couple of fine classic routes in a sultry summer heat, but this was not enough. . . So with Terray at the wheel (driving like Juan Fangio) and time running out, we sped back through the night to Chamonix, hatching a