

# On the Eighth Day

by Ben Campbell-Kelly

Festering on the camp site, waiting for the weather to settle, I felt pangs of guilt as Blob (Wyvill) wandered around restlessly, obviously straining at the leash. Anticipating his reaction I had carefully arranged to leave all the rope at the foot of the Troll Wall, so there was no chance of our being lured on to easier rocks by the Romsdal sirens.

Unfortunately the Troll Wall was covered in snow, and the weather played true to Romsdal form: heavy rain. The boredom of our two week fester in the squalor of a crowded tent, broken only by the daily trek to the weather bureau, was at last rewarded by the dawning of a cloudless day. We leapt into action. At 3.30 the next morning, fortified with banana butties, we were hammering up the vast scree.

By the time we reached the bottom of the wall the edge had been taken off our keenness. All around, the ugly scree scarred the purity of the snow which hugged the wall. We were near the back of a huge amphitheatre whose stark walls gave the place an atmosphere of forbidding loneliness.

We unearthed our gear and set out to find a way across the deep bergschrund. After a while I cleverly fell into a crevasse which led to a chimney between snow and rock. As I pulled the haul sacks over the snow to the start of the first pitch, the Blob hopped around like some harlequinned Quasimodo, manhandling them in and out of holes and crevasses.

Then started the long day's endless rhythm of climb, haul, prusik, a rhythm to which we were to become slaves in the next week. Speed was essential to our chances of success: we constantly shouted out the quarter hours in order to keep whoever was leading from wasting time by dithering, and I goaded the Blob further by reminding him of the times Ed Ward-Drummond and I had taken on these pitches in 1970 (when we had traversed the route from the Great Terrace, half-way up).

Our progress was satisfactorily rapid and we made the first bivvy in good time, exhausted and thirsty. Two pints of water a day is very little when hard work has to be done, and the day had been warm. After shovelling off a few hundredweights of rubbish, we put up the tube tent. Our walkie-talkie contact with Robin Barley, back in the camp site, was a welcome relief, and we chattered happily about the technicalities of the day – mainly free climbing, with the odd section of aid.

The morning dawned brilliantly clear, and Blob was soon coughing his way up the rock. There had been a bug around the camp site and he was recovering from it; I'd woken with a sore throat so was determined to take it easy. The first day's climbing had been a variation found by Ed Ward-Drummond, and a couple of pitches over loose and vegetated rock saw us back on the French route at the foot of the second wall.

Looking up at the big clean groove above us, I felt pleased to be exchanging my Percy Thrower role for a rock-climber's. The rest of the day's work was enjoyable, mixed, aid and free climbing, the hauling becoming easier and easier as the wall began to overhang. Bare-armed, we pegged up the steep cracks.

Jumaring up to the second bivvy ledge, I looked across at the next pitch – Ward-Drummond's A4 variation. I wasn't really looking forward to it, and I couldn't help hoping that with a little luck I might be ill enough to persuade Blob to lead it the next day. Ignoring his suggestion to fix the pitch, I hastily diverted his attention to a fine drip deep in a crack above our heads. A few minutes' manipulation with a water bottle supplied us with an extra gallon of water – we certainly weren't going to suffer on this climb

The Direct route on the Trollveggen was climbed by five French climbers (Deck, Boussard, Cordier, Brunet and Fréhel) in 1967. They seized the route in 21 days. Subsequent attempts have all sought, unsuccessfully, to complete the route in one push. This year this 'pure' second ascent was achieved by Ben Campbell-Kelly and Brian Wyvill. The accompanying article records their experiences.

A surprisingly comfortable night in hammocks (both of which were suspended from the same two pegs) was soon shattered by the scorching sun; lethargically, we prepared for day three.

As I set out on the A4 pitch my mind was in a whirl. The bug really seemed to be biting and, coupled with the heat, made me hard pressed to get across to the aid section. A furious hot air current up the cliff enveloped me in the stench of our earlier eliminations, and I desperately fended off attacks by sheets of fluttering bog-paper with my trusty hammer. It was a trying time.

Hanging on a tottering block below the blind crack, with only minimal protection, I reckoned my chances of getting up at 50–50. But finally I was sitting in a belay seat at the next stance, thinking I must be getting old. Blob whipped up the French rope and I swung over and cut it loose. Booty at last – 200ft. of new perlon (only four years old!), a jumar and three alloy karabiners. In a happier frame of mind I subdued the next wide crack, never my speciality, with a combination of bongs, bad language and sheer terror. A final struggle over treacherous terraces and we were ensconced on the Great Terrace under the big white wall. It was like an oasis in a desert of rock. For once we really appreciated the meaning of horizontal.

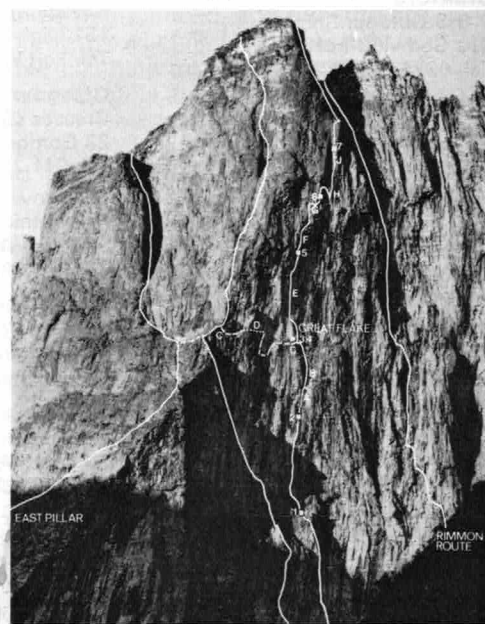
What a position to be in! We had four gallons of water, food for ten days and perfect weather, but I felt so exhausted I could have wept. "Blob," I pleaded as I crawled into my pit, "a rest day or I'll never make it."

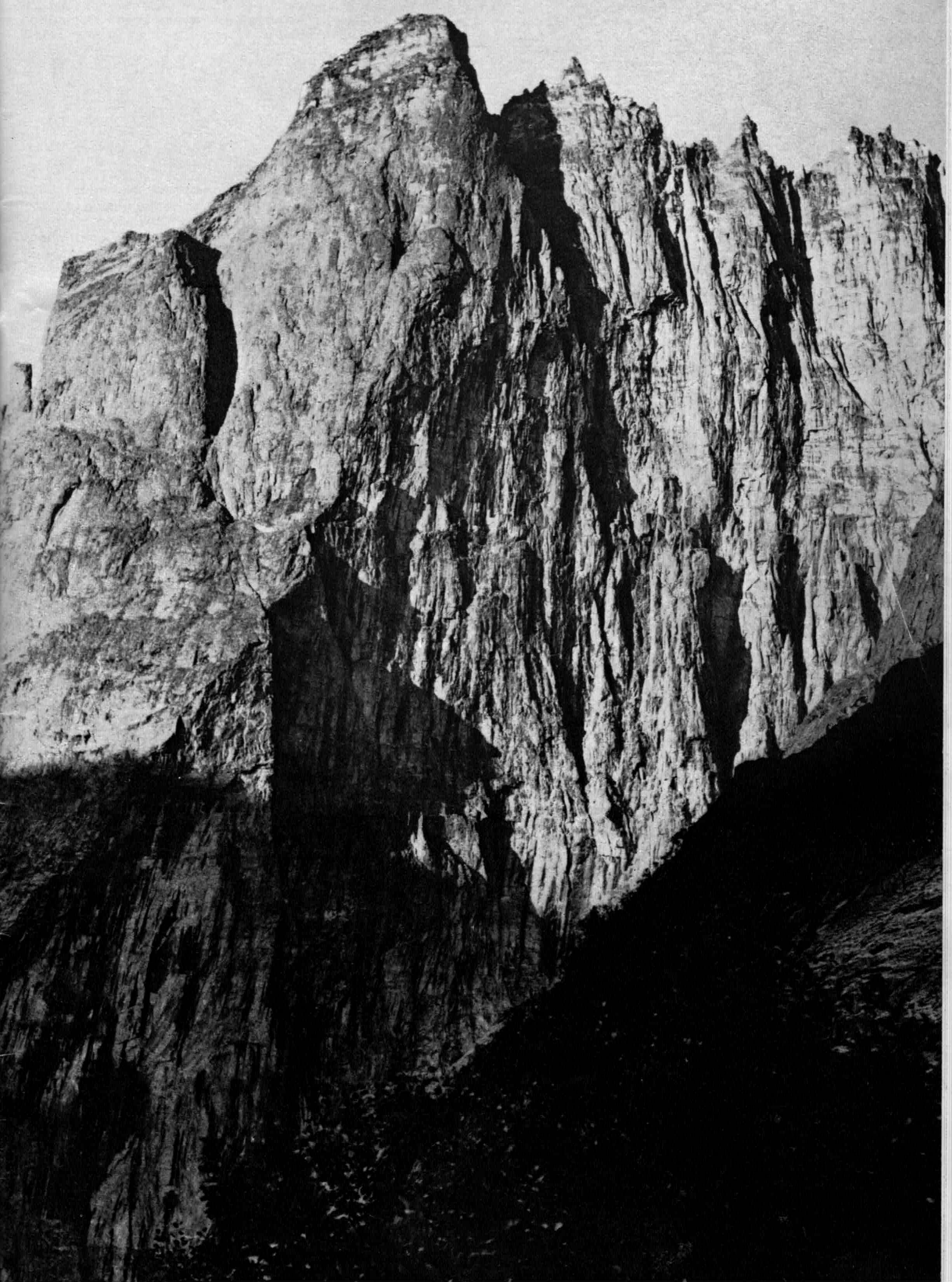
During the last three days we had been following a fairly obvious series of grooves, but now we had to face the nightmarish white wall which ended hopelessly in overhangs. We decided to spend the next day trying to find a line up the wall, retreating to the terrace for a second night. We both knew that there was no escape once we were committed to the wall.

Our 'rest day' was glorious. We left all the gear on the terrace, and I let Blob lead me up the wall. It was superb climbing – a mixture of daunting free moves on very steep rock and pegging in overhanging positions. For the first time, unhampered by the hauls, I was really enjoying myself. It was just like a Cloggy summer; a brilliant sky, a beautiful view, and shirt-sleeves. Poised 4,000ft. above the valley, we saw the crowds of seemingly microscopic

*Features on the French Route on the North Face of the Trollrygen:*

- 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.
- Bivouacs*
- A. *The Ward-Drummond Variation*
- B. *Prusik*
- C. *Escape Traverse*
- D. *Tunnel behind flake*
- E. *A3 section*
- F. *A2 section*
- G. *Tension Traverse*
- H. *Pendulum*
- J. *Big Groove*









**Top left:** Campbell-Kelly on the Ward-Drummond A4 variation.  
**Bottom left:** The big groove pitch encountered on the second day.  
**Right:** Wyvill on the steep wall above the Great Terrace.

tourists who had invaded our camp site, and were now trying to invade our private vertical world with the aid of their telescopes. We fixed four pitches despite a number of wrong turns, abseiled down and cooked a vast meal: Hungarian Goulash, apples and creamed milk. Sadly we had neglected to bring the wine. Lying back and gazing down into the valley we felt real contentment.

At the crack of dawn we powered up the ropes to our high point – higher than any of the failed attempts had reached. What an amazing place! From the valley the white wall looks quite smooth, but on it we found good ledges and a multitude of features. The whole wall seemed to be composed of tottering and overhanging pillars; every level surface was heaped with sharp and dangerous blocks. That the French had avoided killing each other or chopping their fixed ropes seemed unbelievable.

After some route-finding problems, Blob disappeared up the French A4 pitch. The haul-line slowly moved further and further away from the cliff; when I finally sent the bags careering out into space, it was like launching a ship. Blob had muttered about bad rock; imagining exaggeration I had pacified him. As I brought down a huge rockfall just removing one piton, I regretted my platitudes. Christ, it must have been a gripper, I thought, as I pulled out pin after pin. Jumaring up beside a hideous wide crack which he'd free climbed, I found him crouched, very quiet and thoroughly subdued, on top of an enormous loose pillar.

A full 150ft. led to the next stance, a minute foothold about 30ft. below the roofs. What a pitch! Never desperate, but technical enough to keep the mind fully occupied, and all the time moving out and out. By removing every other piton I made it with two karabiners and a few pins to spare. It was a spooky place to be: ropes stuck out into space below, roofs jutted out above, while I perched there like some terrified budgie, shrouded in mist. When Blob arrived I gleefully announced that the roofs were his. He vanished into the clammy gloom.

After an hour he abseiled back down from the very lip in the dark, and I pulled him in from a good 30ft. away – 5,000ft. up. A fearsome struggle followed as we tried to rig our hammocks between cracks far too close together. I think I won – Blob complained all night. A miserable breakfast without any brew started day six.

I just couldn't understand why Blob took so long on that pitch. Every few minutes I'd enquire civilly, "How's it going?" "O.K., shan't be long," was the reply. Then, as the rope hung stationary in my hands, I'd be kicking viciously at the rock, futilely cursing his slowness. After what must have been three hours I finally followed him. I was furious – and, God, wasn't I going to tell him!

Going across the roof I was flabbergasted by the audacity of the position, hanging out 3,000ft. above the screes. O.K., so the climbing wasn't more than A2, but what a stupendous pitch! The final pendulum round the lip would have made my hair stand on end, but for my crash hat. Filled with admiration for the lead, I forgot all my earlier frustration and congratulated him whole-heartedly.

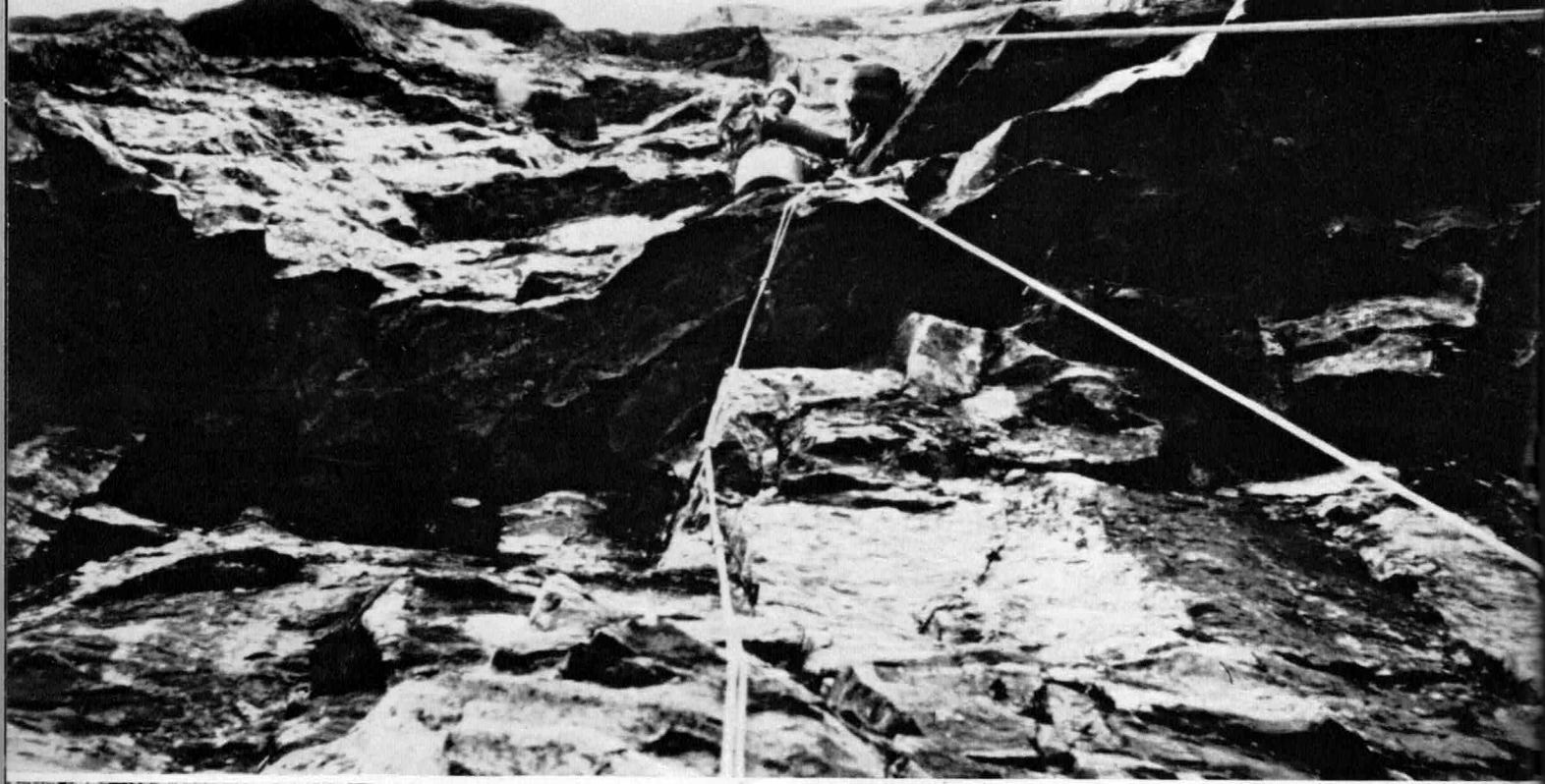
We were now on the summit walls, and I moved up quickly on incredibly compact rock. Free climbing was now becoming a necessity! The French description was very vague here, and Blob had to make a difficult pendulum and traverse. After an interminable time he made a stance.

By the time I arrived it was getting late; no time for any more climbing. Unable to contain myself any longer I vented my feelings: "Two-and-a-half pitches in a day! Two-and-a-half miserable bloody pitches – they'll be laughing at us



down there. How long can the weather last?" In a paroxysm of rage I swore that I would lead all the next day. The radio call did nothing to lift the cloud of depression that had settled around us, and the predicted rain hit us like molten misery an hour later. We lay, swathed in polythene, in our hammocks, damply clinging to the rock as the rain beat down.

After six hours our gear was sodden. I'd dropped a packet of oatcakes in my hammock and the gluey mess was over everything. Miserable, we set out. It was absolutely sheeting down – real mountain weather. Looking up, I was completely blinded by water on my glasses. But under the next overhang there was a big fat French peg, so at least





**Top left:** Wyvill on the big aid pitch through the roofs.  
**Bottom left:** On the summit walls just after the roof pitch.  
**Near left:** Wyvill, damp but cheerful, in his hammock at the seventh bivouac.

Ten feet further on we were stopped dead. Of the three different lines we tried, two became blank walls; the third, a wide crack, had a huge loose block in it. There was no chance of getting past it. For six hours we tried; all the time it poured down. Had we had bolts, they would have solved nothing.

Cold and despondent, Blob traversed across on pins, lowered himself a hundred feet, and swung over to a groove about fifty feet to our right. I followed, but I was so heavily laden with gear and wet ropes that I couldn't even remove two good pins. As I neared the Blob he beamed up at me and, swinging on to the stance, I looked up at a perfect groove and, not two feet away, a yonking crack line. I nearly kissed him, but settled for a truly emotional hug. We were on the way out at last.

Blob shot up, and as I led through the rain started to ease. Half-way up the next pitch I reached down to unclip my etrier when the last peg nearly came out in my hand. It had gone in like a church bell, and I just couldn't understand why it was loose; then the same thing happened with the next peg. I reached up to a small ledge and found it had a big slot at the back. Suddenly I began to understand; I was on one of those famous expanding flakes. Hastily dropping a 2" angle down the back, I hit it once and moved on smartly!

Following Blob again I was truly impressed as the groove turned into a vertical corner, most of which he had free-climbed. With darkness upon us I found Blob in a sit-sling underneath a torrent of water cascading off the overhang above. We managed to string the tube tent over our heads, though its protection was miserably inadequate. Wet cagoules were exchanged for duvets; thankfully these were terylene filled – down would have been useless under that waterfall. Wrapped around each other we spent a dismal night, Blob in his sit-sling, me standing in etriers. It was so dark that I couldn't even make a brew.

Despite the discomfort, the thought of moving out of the shelter and into the torrent was depressing, and I put it off as long as possible the next morning. In fact it wasn't too bad; I soon pegged the last of the 'aid' pitches to a small ledge and a few rusty French pegs.

At last we came into the sunshine; I stripped off my cagoule and wallowed in the warmth. An exhausted Blob came up slowly, his hands badly affected by water. The top was still 700ft. away, but we would be out that day.

We dumped everything – food, water, wet clothes, fuel. Eight hours later I was cursing our lack of foresight as I sat underneath the final pitch. We had climbed all day in the sunshine and were sapped by dehydration.

Jumaring up, I was nearly weeping as my soggy hands were torn to shreds by the rough, sharp rock. How could so much pain come from a mere 24 hours of immersion? I crawled over the top; my misery was made complete as Arne Randers Heen seized my hand in a ferocious grip and asked me to smile for the camera.

Relaxing in the sun, I reflected on Doug Scott's article about the 'Greatest Rock-Climb in the World', and attempted to compare it with our experience. No Saletical transcendence for us; just a hard upward slog. Was *ours* the real perception?

#### **SUMMARY**

**Norway. Romsdal Valley. Trollrygen, North Face.** The second ascent (first without seige tactics) of the French Route. Eight days in July, 1971. Ben Campbell-Kelly and Brian Wyvill. 3,900ft., Grade 6 sup. with pitches of A2, A3 and A4 and free climbing of up to HVS.