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MONTE NERO 3344 m

H Couloir

FIRST ASCENT: I. Bazzani, F. De Stefani, C. Santus, 1979.

MOUNTAINEERING GRADE: D+, II, 80° (3 on ice) and M3 in the right conditions.

TOTAL ASCENT: 400 m

ASPECT: NE

SUPPORT BASES:
Rifugio Segantini 2373 m
+39 0465 507357
www.rifugiosegantini.com

CHARACTERISTICS:
Snow and ice gully with a section of mixed terrain.

EQUIPMENT: Standard ice climbing gear and equipment for glacier travel, 4-5 ice screws (shorter ones preferred), one 60 metre rope, rack of cams (micro to medium), 4 pitons (universal and knifeblade) for the belay anchors. Snowshoes can sometimes be useful for the approach and descent in the given periods. Skis can also be used but the descent is rather discontinuous.



090

What is a "classic route"? A route with a long history, a popular route, a fashionable route? If classic status is judged at least partly by the number and frequency of repeats, then the H Couloir on Monte Nero on the Amola side of the Presanella Group most certainly deserves it. It is a modern classic, both in terms of its relatively recent discovery and its characteristics. The crux is short and technical, tackling snow, ice and short sections on rock to be climbed with axes: just the type of mixed terrain that has become established as the modern style of winter mountaineering.

ROAD ACCESS

Val Rendena (South Tyrol, IT). Following the SS239 that links Tione and Madonna di Campiglio, between the villages of Pinzolo and S. Antonio di Mavignola, look out for signs pointing to the Val Nambrone and the Laghi di Cornisello by a hairpin bend. Reach Rifugio Nambrone and continue along the road (usually open when not covered in snow). After a few hairpins, ignore the junction leading right towards the Laghi di Cornisello and keep left towards Malga Vallina d'Amola. Drive along the road as far as possible (usually just beyond the fork when the road is still snowy).

APPROACH TO THE HUT

Follow path 211 to reach Malga Vallina d'Amola. Continue beyond the farm, staying on path 211, to reach a moraine crest on the right (leaving path 211b in the valley on the left) and follow this to reach the hut (1 h departing from 1950 m, just beyond the fork mentioned above).

APPROACH

From the hut traverse across gentle slopes and valleys to the NW. With scant snow cover the paths and signs to Bocchetta del Monte Nero and Presanella are visible. Leave these paths as they wind up the first moraine ridge (the right-hand crest in the direction of flow) and continue diagonally right to reach the entrance the valley with the Vedretta d'Amola above. Ascend along the valley floor until the obvious gully which cuts diagonally across the NE face of Monte Nero. Follow an increasingly steep slope to reach the start of the route. 1.30-2 h.

ROUTE

The gully is immediately steep, presenting two successive steep cliffs (ice or compacted snow). The steepest section reaches a gradient of 80° for a few metres but is shorter with abundant snow. Follow a long snowy section at a gentler gradient (45° and 50°). After a vague bottleneck (60° and ice with poor snow cover) the gully bears left. Shortly after, enter into a corner-gully

The crux: the second chockstone.



wedged between the rocks on the right. This is the crux of the route: belay at its base (stance to be equipped on rock). Ascend slabby terrain (slab ice, 60°) to reach a chockstone forming a low vertical step. Climb this (M3 or, in good conditions, hook the ice above the boulder) then continue at a moderate gradient to arrive below the next boulder. Before reaching this, it is possible to build an anchor on one of the rocky banks; alternatively, rope up and move together. Overcome the second boulder wedged in a smooth-sided corner (M3 or hooking the ice in good conditions) to exit the crux section (70 m total from the start of the corner-gully). Continue straight on, following a vague snow gully at an average of 50° (possible mixed sections in dry conditions: easy but delicate) to reach the summit ridge. Cornice usually avoidable on the right. 3 h.

DESCENT

Move west along the easy and snowy summit ridge, heading for the broad col that separates Monte Nero from Monte Bianco di Presanella. Here join with the Presanella normal route which leads back to Rifugio Segantini via the Bocchetta di Monte Nero. Descend S along a slope leading towards the basin between Monte Bianco and Monte Nero (protruding rocks towards the end of the slope, cables and anchors visible in dry conditions). Traverse high up in the basin, heading SE to reach another protected section (ladders and cables) which leads up to the Bocchetta del Monte Nero. On the other side, a steep section equipped with ferrata cables in dry conditions leads to the easy slopes below; follow these E (paths visible with poor snow cover) to reach Rifugio Segantini.

FAVOURABLE CONDITIONS

Usually climbed in late autumn, the H Couloir is also possible in spring, as long as the temperatures are low (the route faces the sun, particularly in its lower section, with some risk of detached ice) and the snow is well compacted and stable. Ideal conditions occur fleetingly after heavy wet snowfall, which allows the ice to encrust onto the face, followed by stable anti-cyclonic periods (usually in mild autumns with bad weather periods coming from the south). On this route more than most, everything is condition-dependant: when conditions are truly excellent, the crux section in the corner-gully is characterised by snow and ice and the ascent and descent are generally easier when snowy. In normal conditions, it is more likely to encounter moves on rock (good hooks for the axes) on the two chockstones. Finally, in dry conditions the route changes dramatically and the grade is higher: rock is the dominant feature of the crux (III+ on rock, M4, athletic climbing required on the chockstones), the icy cliffs at the base of the route are higher and there is ice and mixed terrain even on the easiest sections of the couloir.

SKI-TOURING

Possible, especially in spring, although admittedly a little contrived with several sections on foot. Follow the descent route described above.



The two snow-covered icy walls at the start of the route present a short but steep challenge.

