

The first ascent of the Matterhorn, by Gustave Doré.

Whymper and party left Zermatt early in the morning of July 13, heading to the foot of the Hörnli ridge, which they reached 6 hours later (approximately where the Hörnli Hut is situated today). Meanwhile Carrel and six other Italian guides also began their ascent of the Italian ridge.

Despite its appearance, Whymper wrote that the Hörnli ridge was much easier to climb than the Italian ridge:

We were now fairly upon the mountain, and were astonished to find that places which from the Riffel, or even from the Furggen Glacier, looked entirely impracticable, were so easy that we could run out.

After having camped for the night, Whymper and party started on the ridge. According to Whymper:

The whole of this great slope was now revealed, rising for 3,000 feet like a huge natural staircase. Some parts were more, and others were less, easy; but we were not once brought to a halt by any serious impediment, for when an obstruction was met in front it could always be turned to the right or left. For the greater part of the way there was, indeed, no occasion for the rope, and sometimes Hudson led, sometimes myself. At 6.20 we had attained a height of 12,800 feet and halted for half an hour; we then continued the ascent without a break until 9.55, when we stopped for fifty minutes, at a height of 14,000 feet.



When the party came close to the summit, they had to leave the ridge for the north face because "[the ridge] was usually more rotten and steep, and always more difficult than the face". At this point of the ascent Whymper wrote that the less experienced Hadow "required continual assistance". Having overcome these difficulties the group finally arrived in the summit area, with Croz and Whymper reaching the top first.

The slope eased off, and Croz and I, dashing away, ran a neck-and-neck race, which ended in a dead heat. At 1.40 p.m. the world was at our feet, and the Matterhorn was conquered. Hurrah! Not a footstep could be seen.

Precisely at this moment, Carrel and party were approximately 400 metres below, still dealing with the most difficult parts of the Italian ridge. When seeing his rival on the summit, Carrel and party gave up on their attempt and went back to Breuil.

The Matterhorn tragedy, by Gustave Doré

After having built a cairn, Whymper and party stayed an hour on the summit. Then they began their descent of the Hörnli ridge. Croz descended first, then Hadow, Hudson and Douglas, Taugwalder father, Whymper with Taugwalder son coming last. They climbed down with great care, only one man moving at a time. Whymper wrote:

As far as I know, at the moment of the accident no one was actually moving. I cannot speak with certainty, neither can the Taugwalders, because the two leading men were partially hidden from our sight by an intervening mass of rock. Poor Croz had laid aside his axe, and in order to give Mr. Hadow greater security was absolutely taking hold of his legs and putting his feet, one by one, into their proper positions. From the movements of their shoulders it is my belief that Croz, having done as I have said, was in the act of turning round to go down a step or two himself; at this moment Mr. Hadow slipped, fell on him, and knocked him over.



The weight of the falling men pulled Hudson and Douglas from their holds and dragged them down the north face. Taugwalder, father and son, and Whymper were left alive when the rope linking Douglas to Taugwalder father broke. They were stunned by the accident and for a time could not move until Taugwalder son descended to enable them to advance. When they were together Whymper asked to see the broken rope and saw that it had been employed by mistake as it was the weakest and oldest of the three ropes they had brought. They frequently looked, but in vain, for traces of their fallen companions. They continued their descent, including an hour in the dark, until 9.30pm when a resting place was found. At daybreak the descent was resumed and the group finally reached Zermatt, where a search of the victims was quickly organized. The bodies of Croz, Hadow and Hudson were found on the Matterhorn Glacier, but the body of Douglas was never found. Although Taugwalder's father was accused of cutting the rope to save himself and his son, the official inquest found no proof for this.

Second ascent

The summit

On July 16, two days after the first ascent and the catastrophe, Jean-Antoine Carrel set out to crown Whymper's victory by proving that the Italian side was not unconquerable. He was accompanied by Amé Gorret, a priest who had shared with him the first attempt on the mountain back in 1857. Jean-Baptiste Bich and Jean-Augustin Meynet completed the party. Giordano would have joined them, but Carrel refused absolutely to take him with them; he said he would not have the strength to guide a traveller, and could neither answer for the result nor for any one's life. After hearing Sunday mass at the chapel of Breuil, the party started. Amé Gorret has described this ascent with enthusiasm: "At last we crossed the Col du Lion and set foot upon the pyramid of the Matterhorn!" On the following day, the 17th, they continued the ascent and

reached Tyndall's flagstaff. "We were about to enter unknown country," wrote Gorret, "for no man had gone beyond this point." Here opinions were divided; Gorret suggested ascending by the ridge and scaling the last tower straight up. Carrel was inclined to traverse to the west of the peak, and thence go up on the Zmutt side. Naturally the wish of Carrel prevailed, for he was the leader and had not lost the habit of command, notwithstanding his recent defeat.

They made the passage of the *enjambée*, and traversed the west face to reach the Zmutt ridge. A false step made by one of the party and a fall of icicles from above warned them to return to the direct line of ascent, and the traverse back to the Lion ridge was one of the greatest difficulty. A falling stone wounded Gorret in the arm.

At last they reached the base of the final tower. "We stood," wrote Gorret, "in a place that was almost comfortable. Although it was not more than two yards wide, and the slope was one of 75 percent., we gave it all kinds of pleasant names : the corridor, the gallery, the railroad, &c., &c." They imagined all difficulties were at an end; but a rock couloir, which they had hitherto not observed, lay between them and the final bit of ridge, where progress would be perfectly easy. It would have been unwise for all four to descend into the couloir, because they did not know where to fix the rope that would be needed on their return. Time pressed: it was necessary to reduce the numbers of the party; Gorret sacrificed himself, and Meynet stopped with him. Very soon afterwards Carrel and Bich were finally on the top. Meanwhile Giordano at Breuil was writing in his diary as follows: "Splendid weather; at 9.30 saw Carrel and his men on the Shoulder, after that saw nothing more of them. Then much mist about the summit. Lifted a bit about 3.30, and we saw our flag on the western summit of the Matterhorn.