



EXPERIENCE REPORT SOLO SPEED ASCENT PETIT DRU

Dani Arnold, August 15, 2021

Facts and Figures

Petit Dru (3733m) north face, Mont Blanc-Massiv,

Route: Allain-Leininger (31.7. – 1.8.1935)

Time: 1h 43min 35s

Wall height: approx. 900m

Difficulty level: TD+ (max. 5c)

A huge project comes to an end. It all started with the record on the north face of the Eiger on April 20, 2011. And now, more than 10 years later, I have managed to climb the sixth and last big north face of the Alps alone and fast, the Petit Dru.

In 2020, the project "Petit Dru" was in the first place. At that time, I climbed the wall for the first time with Michael Kräftner in 14 hours. It was very demanding. Twice I climbed in the entirely wrong place, just wasn't able to find the route! The feeling, that I could ever climb this wall alone, was bad. I took an additional 60m rope to deposit on the top. I decided to take that rope straight back down because of my doubts about ever doing this without a rope. The project has become a distant memory. It is the complexity of this wall that is demanding. It consists mainly of rock. However, the rock is covered with ice in many places, which makes climbing very dangerous and unpredictable. Simply waiting until it is warm enough and the water is no longer frozen, you cannot either, because if it is too warm in this wall, the rockfall begins. Or even whole rockfalls occur, such as in 1997, when the entire Bonatti pillar collapsed.

But as soon as I was back down, the project was present again. I was aware, that I had to wait for just the right moment. Otherwise, the risk was too high for me. It took patience. Then, in the fall of 2020, I was back on site. For one day, I studied the wall and waited to see if any rocks were coming down. It was calm. However, the zero degrees line was quite high, and somehow, I did not have a good feeling. I then decided to postpone it again.

I was already ready in June 2021. I absolutely did not want to miss the perfect time for an attempt. I prepared myself and drove to the Klausenpass to sleep and therefore to be well acclimatized. But the weather and the conditions were very unfavorable. It was only in July that Roger Scháli and I climbed the wall once. It was again very sobering. Still, lots of snow and water ice, and most importantly, we now knew exactly where the route was, yet it took just under 10 hours. And again, I had to wait.

The summer of 2021 was very troublesome, but for me also a chance. Maybe in August there would be another opportunity because it was always quite cold. In an average summer, August is way too warm and the wall of the Petit Dru much too dangerous.

On August 14, I traveled to Chamonix with Stefan Brugger. Stable weather was finally forecasted. Our goal was to go up to the bivouac on the first day and then if everything fits, climb through the wall the next day. I thought a lot about the right tactics. I then agreed with Stefan that I would try it alone if necessary, provided I had an excellent feeling, and the wall had good conditions. I wanted to climb up again with a rope. Some climbing spots were still unclear. On the other hand, I was also aware that if there is a good possibility that everything fits, I must also take my chance.

Stefan and I have comfortably set up the bivouac under the wall. Then we still went up together to the entrance, and during the whole time, it was quiet. No stone fell from this 900-meter-high wall. My

feeling was good. I decided in the evening to try it alone the next day. Because of the very fast-changing conditions, I decided to take a rope, harness, and belay material.

We had a good night under our stone. In the morning, I was very motivated but also agitated. Thoughts like "Is it a good idea or should I rather leave it?" circled around in my head.

In the morning, early still, a camera crew flew up with the helicopter to be there cinematically. We went together to the entrance. My eyes and ears recorded everything. If something had come down somewhere or if I had suddenly doubted myself, I wouldn't have started climbing. Fortunately, it remained calm. So, I started climbing at exactly 8:46.

The first part of the wall is rather easy terrain, technically not difficult, but conditionally demanding. Then it got steeper, and I felt better and better. One of the most unpleasant places was a wet chimney. At first, I thought I could get up there with my backpack, but that was hopeless. So, I had to take off the backpack, secure it to a sling, and always push it up in front of me while climbing. Two pitches further on followed a very unpleasant dihedral, which is also almost always wet and frozen. Fortunately, I found another line there on the ascent with Roger. This one was much more exposed and technically more difficult, but at least not wet or frozen! After the big ice field in the middle of the wall, it got a bit steeper again. I found my rhythm but never looked at the clock. I didn't care about the time, but I was very aware that I wanted to give everything now. Countless training and preparation tours for exactly this moment! It was not important for me to be extremely fast. But I really wanted to give everything. I wanted to prove to myself that I could do it.

The upper part has the crew filmed from the helicopter. And so, I reached the summit. First, I stopped the stopwatch and then just tried to breathe calmly for once. It was an awesome moment, but I was exhausted, especially in my head. This project was very difficult to realize, but it was one hundred percent worth it. The more energy I have to expand on something, the greater the satisfaction.

At the summit, I then immediately called Denise. She was also very relieved that everything went well. Also, Stefan and the film team, which was waiting for me down at the hut, were happy that it went so smoothly.

On the ascent with Roger, I again deposited a 60-meter rope, two expresses, a sling, two meters of accessory cord, and a knife at the summit. I then packed the material together and traversed to the Grand Dru. Then it went on to the rappel point, over which I reached the glacier and finally the hut. There the crew was already waiting. We did an interview. Then the helicopter came and flew them down into the valley. I then descended further and took the train from Montenvers to Chamonix. Stefan and I then went to eat, and a big bottle of wine was not missing.

It was only a few days ago that I realized that I have now made the fastest ascent on each of the six major north faces of the Alps, which also makes me a little proud. More than 10 years ago, this chapter began with the Eiger North Face and has now ended with the Petit Dru. I couldn't imagine a more beautiful conclusion. I would like to thank all the people who have supported me in any way. Without them, it would not have been possible. Thank you.