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Climbing on 18-19 June 2024, Simon Richardson and Michael Rinn established a new route along the South Ridge of Punta Vardaz in the Mont Blanc massif. Rinn reports.

🔙 👤 MICHAEL RINN 19 JULY 2024



Climbing the South Ridge of Punta Vardaz in the Mont Blanc massif (Simon Richardson, Michael Rinn 18-19/06/2024) 📷 Simon Richardson / Michael Rinn

Two years ago, Simon Richardson and I were at the foot of Punta Vardaz (aka P3095) to scout out a new line on this attractive rocky summit. Always keen to search for new territory, the Italian side of the Mont Blanc massif particularly appeals to us because the infrastructure with cable cars and lifts is not as developed as on the French side. This allows us to climb in a style that suits us best: starting from the valley floor and reaching the summit via a previously unclimbed route without bolts or additional aids. For us, this type of ascent simply makes the most sense and we always have great fun working out new routes.

One of the ideas for this project was to find a route that connects Val Ferret with the Glacier du Géant as elegantly as possible – in other words, a climbable hut approach from the valley floor to the Torino hut (a counterpart to this can be found in Val Veni with the hut approach to the Capanna Quintino Sella, which, according to Italian climbing historian Luca Signorelli, is a climb of itself). The South Ridge of Punta Vardaz is an obvious line when seen from the valley, and we think, it has not been climbed yet. And as if that was not enough, the summit offers a logical connection to the Aiguilles Marbrées - and thus access to the upper glacier basin.

So much for the planning. In 2022, however, the conditions didn't suit us for an ascent. This June, the stars aligned and our motivation levels were high, although there was still an exceptional amount of snow and mild temperatures for the season. We waited in vain for a night frost, which would make the snow flanks safe and easy for us to climb. However, the rock and cracks were dry, so we committed to the route.

Since the first ascent in 1990 by Gian Carlo Grassi, to our knowledge only two further teams have been active on the mountain: Tony Penning opened the route "Voie Pellin" on the east face in 2005. And a little further right in 2008, an Italian team set the route "Diretta allo Scudo, le Demon du Midi" using a number of bolts.

Our goal at the end of the first day of climbing the South Ridge was to find a suitable place for a bivi about halfway up the summit, which turned out not to be a great problem thanks to the numerous snow patches. Overall, the route proved to be logical and relatively homogeneous. The rock in the upper half is somewhat brittle in places, otherwise compact and solid granite predominates. The line of the route is obvious and ends at a beautiful summit. But there, the climbing is far from over. This descent is somewhat unusual, because after a 50 m abseil and subsequent 50 m traverse of a corniced ridge, the route continues uphill for a further 430 m to the southern summit of the Aiguilles Marbrées. Suddenly a scary moment: in the steepest section, our fears about the mild temperatures came true and I triggered a wet snow avalanche while leading, which fortunately did not cause any serious problems. Shortly below the Aiguilles Marbrées, we reached a small plateau from which you can descend to the Glacier du Géant and reach the Torino hut in about 20 minutes.

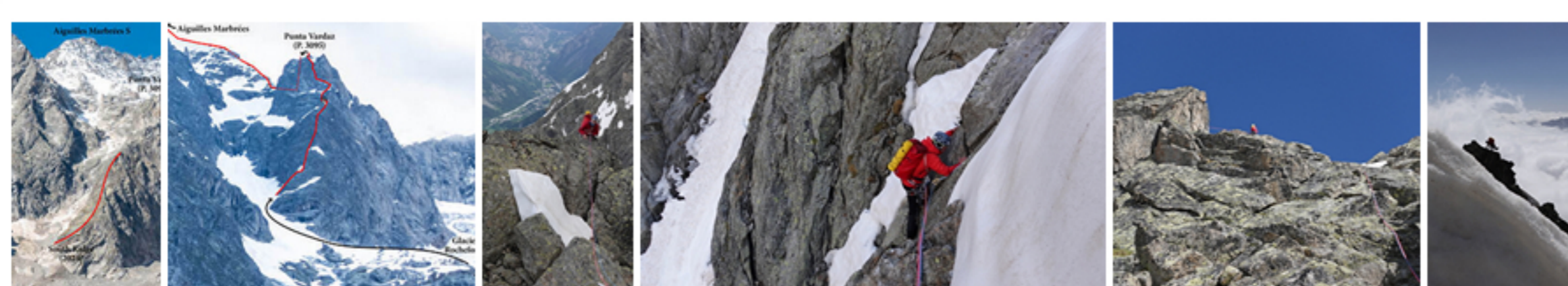
We suggest naming the 3095m-high summit Punta Vardaz in reference to the small hamlet of Vardaz directly below in the valley – a continuation of the tradition of naming mountain features after settlements in Val Ferret such as Rochefort, Tronchey and Pra Sec. And also to give a worthy name to a mountain, which was first climbed by Gian Carlo Grassi. Honour to whom honour is due.

Summary:

South Ridge on Punta Vardaz (3095 m): 550m climbing distance, 495m vertical elevation to the summit of Punta Vardaz + 430m vertical elevation to the southern summit of Aiguilles Marbrées, D, 5c, trad/clean, 14 pitches, First Ascent on 18 – 19 June 2024.

by Micha Rinn

Info: [vertikale-welten.de](https://www.vertikale-welten.de), [camp.it](https://www.camp.it)



📷 See all photos