

Some Climbs in the Selkirks

GEORGIA ENGELHARD

AFTER two weeks of climbing in the Canadian Rockies, where the brittle limestone rock is always a menace, where one often toils arduously up long scree slopes until one reaches the actual climbing, and where we had been sinking up to our knees in soft snow on the ice-fields of the Yoho Valley, it was indeed a joy to grip the solid quartzite of the Selkirks. Here one can quite safely hang by the very tips of one's fingers on almost vertical rock faces, and, besides, there is the delight of walking through shady forests of huge evergreens which provide rich dark frames for glistening glacier tongues that sprawl downwards into deep valleys.

On August 3, 1931, the Swiss guide, Ernest Feuz, and I arrived at Glacier and made our headquarters with the very hospitable fire warden, Bill Hartley, and his wife. The great advantage of Glacier as a climbing center is that not only are the peaks all quite accessible, but even those of not very great altitude often offer difficult climbs on which one can develop technique without expending too much energy in reaching the interesting part. Many of the peaks, such as Mt. Rogers and Mt. Hermit, have easy routes, with more exacting ones as well for the experienced climber. It is my purpose in this paper to describe a few of the less well-known ascents out of the twenty-four which we made during our three weeks' sojourn in this Canadian Switzerland.

Terminal Peak (9,991 feet) is in reality a rocky spur on the southeast side of Mt. Sir Donald, and appears like a buttress rising above the much-crevassed expanse of the Illecillewaet Glacier. On August 8, at 4 A.M., Ernest and I set out in the shadow of Sir Donald's massive peak, from whose summit a golden cloud banner streamed into the pure morning air. Reaching the glacier at Perley Rock, we climbed steeply up it to the base of our peak, which rose a vertical wall, 2,000 feet above us. After a bite of "second breakfast" we put on sneakers and started up the north face. We encountered some difficult pitches where

the only holds were those of friction. To add to the difficulty, the smooth rock, although apparently dry, was quite moist, and proved exceedingly slippery under our rubber soles. After an hour on the face, we gained the sharp knife-like ridge which rises abruptly several thousand feet from the green Beaver Valley, with the Beaver River like a silver ribbon curling down it. We proceeded along this arête, encountering interesting overhangs in several places, and gained the tiny summit, five and one-half hours after our departure from Glacier. And we were amply rewarded for our labors. Close at hand towered the eastern walls of Sir Donald, while to the south and west as far as the eye could see lay snowfields bordered by peaks; to the east, across the rolling Prairie Hills, the Rockies, from Mt. Assiniboine to Mt. Columbia, glittered in the blue distance. Among them old friends, such as Victoria, Vaux and Balfour, from which I had earlier in the season scanned the Selkirks, were easily recognized. After an hour on the summit, we made our descent by the fairly easy west face, to the glacier, a few hundred yards from where we had left our boots in the morning. However, crossing glaciers in sneakers, even for a short distance, is not to be recommended.

The next day, we walked to the Hermit Hut, which we made our headquarters for the three days following. We climbed Mt. Tupper (in three hours from the Hut in a fog which hid the peak from us until we were within 500 feet of the summit), and Mt. Hermit, which provides an hour and a half of first-class rock work, and made the traverse in five and a half hours of Mt. Rogers (by the southwest rock ridge), Mt. Fleming, Grant Peak and Swiss Peak. All of these involve not only excellent rock work, but interesting stretches of ice and snow as well. They come closer than any peaks in Canada that I know of to resembling the aiguilles of Chamonix, and although considerably lower, provide bits of climbing which are unrivalled. We descended to Tupper Glacier by a very steep snow couloir on the east face of our peak and regained the Hut in three hours.

Later in the same week, after having climbed Sir Donald by the magnificent northwest ridge in six hours and twenty minutes from Warden Hartley's cabin, we proceeded to the Nakimu Caves in Cougar Valley. Here we had two days of climbing on the rocky peaks bordering that charming alpine valley, with its sparkling, flower-bordered* streams and grassy uplands. The

ascent of Copper Peak, at the head of the valley, a sharp pinnacle, proved to be the most difficult climb of the summer, although less than 9,000 feet in height. On August 17, we left the tea-house at 5 A.M. and walked up the gradual slopes of the Cougar Valley to the base of Copper Peak, which rises with startling abruptness from the alplands. The ascent by the south ridge is very spectacular, being on continuously exposed faces, sometimes by tiny ledges along which one's feet move with infinite caution, while one's fingers clutch any minute crack or prominence on the smooth rock, and sometimes by wriggling up splits in the rock, with but one foothold, the other foot dangling in space. The peak provides two good hours of such work, where every faculty must be alert and every muscle in proper coordination so that movements may be quick yet certain.

From the rusty summit of Copper Peak we descended a jagged ridge to a little col between that peak and Mt. McGill, up whose slabby south face we made our way, encountering an interesting chimney and a good deal of rock with unfavorable stratification. It was noon when we reached the summit, and the day being exceedingly warm, we spent a couple of hours basking in the sun. We were only roused by the annoying attentions of an eagle, whose insistent swooping in our direction finally drove us to our descent by the west ridge of McGill to the tiny glacier at its base.

The next day we climbed Mt. Bagheera, the highest peak of the Cougar Range, by the long west arête, which was always interesting, but only presented two places where there was any really serious climbing. We had intended to make a complete traverse of the mountain, but the approach of a thunderstorm drove us off our peak via the south face, and we returned to the Caves at 1.30 in the afternoon.

A few days later, after making the traverse of Dome, Rampart and Afton, rocky sentinels of the Asulkan Valley, and after having been forced by the weather to take an unwelcome rest, we made the ascent on August 28 of Mt. Macoun (9,989 feet), which was one of the most enjoyable expeditions of the summer. Not only were the crossing of practically the entire length of the Illecillewaet Névé and the rock work on Macoun of great interest, but I also saw Glacier Circle and the Dawson group near at hand.

It was a most unpromising morning when we started, being suspiciously warm and sultry, with thick fogs hanging way below timberline. We made our way up the steep trail to Perley Rock, and when we stepped on to the ice at 6.45 A.M., yellow fogs were curling over the Hermit Range, and inky clouds descending upon the vast white snowfields over which our way lay. However, we proceeded steadily, threading our way among crevasses, and finding the snow, which had been melted into a trench-like formation by the sun's heat and which gave the glacier the appearance of a frozen ocean, rather annoying to walk upon. By eight o'clock we were well over to the southern end of the névé, about six miles from Perley Rock and two miles from the base of Macoun, whose black peak was still shrouded in dark clouds. After a short halt for second breakfast, none too pleasurable thanks to the cold and the fog, we proceeded again; however, in a slightly more hopeful frame of mind, as small patches of blue sky were appearing in the east, and there was a play of feeble sunlight on a few of the peaks.

By 8.30, when we had negotiated the rather difficult, if short, piece of rock work above the bergschrund at the base of Macoun, the morning was crystal clear, and the peaks were appearing one by one, glittering and proud, out of the enshrouding clouds, and even the distant Rockies, freshly snow-covered, sparkled with gem-like clarity against a sky of ethereal blue. Both Ernest and I were in ecstasies of delight, and we made fast work of the smooth slabs on the northeast face below the narrow jagged summit arête which one traverses a short distance to the peak. This was the second ascent of Macoun by this route. From the peak there is a commanding view of the Dawson Range and of the Deville Glacier, tumbling in a mass of séracs and crevasses into Glacier Circle, whose green meadows lay, a small spot of emerald set in a circle of peaks and glaciers, 5,000 sheer feet below us. Beyond to the south stretched an unrivalled panorama, while to the east the Rockies, and to the southeast the Purcells, seemed to lead into infinity.

After a two-hour sojourn, we descended by the west face, which at first offered no difficulties, so we unroped. But about half-way down we encountered some vertical bluffs which forced us to bear to the south. Eventually we arrived on the glacier much farther towards Glacier Circle than we had intended, for it

lengthened our walk across the Illecillewaet Névé by a mile or more. Here we found that the strong sun had softened the ice considerably. In some places rushing streams had to be forded and the surface in general was very slushy. We arrived home just twelve hours after our start, and, after an ample supper, retired at about 9 P.M.

The clear weather now brought our long-deferred expedition to Mt. Bonney to the fore, so we arose at one the next morning, and with a lantern, started at 2.30 A.M. up the steep, wooded Mt. Abbott trail. The full moon was high in the sky, casting a silvery light on the Great Glacier, which sprawled like a giant octopus in the shadow of Sir Donald. By five o'clock we had scrambled on to the ridge of Mt. Abbott and beheld the unusual sight of the moon setting behind Mt. Bonney while the sun rose in the east, bathing the Asulkan Glacier and the snowy southern peaks in an almost blood-red glow. We descended from Abbott ridge on to the tiny, but exceedingly glassy, Afton Glacier, and proceeded thence around the shoulder of Mt. Afton over huge slabs of broken rock.

For the next two hours we traversed the lower ledges of Mts. Afton and Rampart, not altogether pleasurable work, in the direction of Lily Col, between Mt. Dome and Mt. Swanzy. We reached Lily Col at 7.30, five hours after our start, and from there it was only an hour of first-class rock-work up the steep slabs on the south face of Mt. Swanzy until we stood on its corniced summit. We had encountered nothing of particular difficulty, though it was all climbing requiring the use of hands and arms (not to mention fingers) as well as feet and legs. After a short rest we descended over snow and broken rock to the col between Swanzy and Clarke's Peak, whose summit was reached after a thirty-minute walk up broken rock. We then descended the narrow ridge, quite pinnacled, to the col between Clarke's Peak and Mt. Bonney, whose impressive vertical walls rose directly before us. However, we found the bluffs sufficiently broken to be quite easy to negotiate, and we gained the top (10,250 feet) at 11 o'clock, eight and one-half hours of practically continuous climbing. It was bitterly cold and windy, the view was badly obscured by smoke, and ominous clouds were gathering, so we halted only half an hour for lunch. We had originally intended to return by our route of ascent, but the large

amount of uphill work and the disagreeable stretch from Lily Col to Mt. Abbott made us decide to try another route.

We unroped and proceeded to traverse the ridge of Mt. Bonney, which is quite broad and very easy going, sloping off gradually on the left to the huge Bonney névé, in strong contrast to the sheer drop on the right to the Bonney Glacier. It took us about an hour to traverse half the ridge, and finding a place on the north face which looked fairly easy, we started to climb down. Our descent was rapid and fairly simple to a point about 200 feet above the glacier, where we struck exceedingly smooth rock with a huge, yawning bergschrund, sadly lacking in snow bridges, at its base. For a while it looked as though we could not cross but an hour of reconnoitering disclosed a snow bridge, just strong enough to permit a rapid passage of two persons, and we thereby reached the glacier. Over this we sped, detouring around several large crevasses, too wide to be jumped. In another hour we unroped on the terminal moraine above some grassy meadows at the source of Loop Creek.

Then followed three hours of exasperating bush work above the bed of Loop Creek through thick underbrush, over dead-fall, through masses of Devil's Club whose spines scratched our hands, and above the steep canyons, keeping ourselves from slipping down by holding on to the thickly laden blueberry bushes. At last we reached the stream bed, but high water forced us back into the forest again. The labor here was almost more than any actual climbing, and far less pleasurable. After a while we struck the old railroad grade, but even that was so overgrown with alders that it was difficult to travel along and not until five o'clock did we crawl out of the underbrush near Glacier station hot and dirty, stained with huckleberries and our clothing and hair full of evergreen needles. A little later, we arrived at Hartley's, just in time to avoid a violent thunderstorm. We were not sorry to be able to rest after seventeen hours of almost constant climbing, though we were by no means too tired to do justice to Mrs. Hartley's excellent cooking.

We left Glacier the next day. But I shall always look back upon those three weeks as holding some of my pleasantest memories of fine and varied climbing, and of unparalleled scenery. Nor shall I forget the excellent company and guiding of Ernest, who did all within his power to make every ascent as engrossing and pleasurable as possible—and who certainly succeeded.