

## VARIOUS NOTES



### EARLY CHAPTERS IN THE HISTORY OF MT. MCKINLEY

The great explorer-navigator George Vancouver in 1794 sailed up Cook's Inlet and saw "stupendous snow mountains covered with snow and apparently detached from each other." This is the first written record concerning the greatest mountain on the North American continent, known for many years to the Russians as "Bolshaia Gora," meaning Big Mountain.

In 1878 the mountain was reported by the Alaskan traders Arthur Harper and Alfred Mayo; the chief interest of which is that the former was the father of Walter Harper, who as a member of Archdeacon Stuck's party was the first man to set foot on the actual summit of the mountain.

In 1889 a prospector, Frank Densmore, travelled from Nenana on the northeast to the Kuskoquim River on the southwest across the foothills of the range.

However, it was not until 1896 that the mountain was brought to the attention of the public. In that year W. A. Dickey, a Princeton graduate approached the range from the south, and on his return wrote an account of his trip for the "New York Sun," naming the peak "Mount McKinley," unaware that it was known to the natives as "Denali."

Robert Muldrow and George Eldridge of the United States Geological Survey in 1898 calculated the height of Mount McKinley as 20,300 feet.

The first whites known to have set foot on the slopes of the mountain were Alfred H. Brooks and D. L. Raeburn, who in 1902 journeyed along the northwest foot of the range.

In May, 1903 Judge Wickersham and four men ascended the Kantishna from Fairbanks and attacked Mount McKinley by the Peters glacier on the west, being defeated by the cliffs of the North Peak. Shortly thereafter Frederick Cook with three companions approached by pack-train from Cook's Inlet, crossed the range southwest of the mountain and made an attack from near that point, being defeated at an elevation of 8,000 feet. They then continued around northeastward to the Peters glacier where they found the Judge's camp site. An attempt from here was likewise futile. However Cook rightly deduced that the practicable route to the summit would be "by the glacier that comes from the gap between the north and south summits, which glacier can only be reached from the Muldrow glacier." Yet when they crossed the

snout of the Muldrow on their way out via Harper Pass, he apparently did not recognize it as such.

The year 1906 added the first chapter of prime importance. Starting in May, Prof. Herschel C. Parker, Belmore Browne, Dr. Frederick A. Cook and W. R. Russell with the photographer Walter Miller and the packers Fred Printz and Edward Barrill went up the Sushitna and its tributary the Yentna by launch, thence across to the headwaters of the Tokositna by pack-train. No feasible route up Mount McKinley could be located however, and the party returned to Cook's Inlet where it broke up. Shortly thereafter Doctor Cook went off with the packer Barrill to the Tokositna and the glacier at its head which he named the "Ruth Glacier." On his return a few weeks later he announced that they had ascended Mount McKinley. Parker and Browne knew better, and many another was skeptical, but before Doctor Cook's book "To the Top of the Continent" appeared and accusations could be made, he had departed secretly for the North, whence he emerged in 1909 with his colossal polar hoax that brought about world-wide controversy and his downfall.

Alaskans familiar with the range were among the strongest doubters of Doctor Cook's story. The result was an expedition by the "sourdoughs" Thomas Lloyd, Charles McGonogill, William Taylor and Peter Anderson, who started in February, 1910 from Fairbanks by dog-team and reached Cache Creek via the Kantishna and Clearwater river bottoms. From this base camp they got onto the Muldrow glacier by an easy pass which they named McPhee, but which is now known as McGonogill (McGonigal or McGonnigle?). By March 25th they had carried their camp forward by dog-team to the head of the Muldrow where Lloyd remained. On April 10th Taylor, Anderson and McGonogill ascended the ridge, unroped and each man for himself, to the "Grand Basin," whence Taylor and Anderson climbed the North Peak of Mount McKinley and planted a pole on or close to the top.<sup>1</sup> Misstatements and discrepancies in published accounts led to some doubts concerning their success, but the pole was seen by Archdeacon Stuck in 1913 apparently on the top. No sign of it was seen by the Liek-Lindley party of 1932, when they ascended this peak, as well as the South Peak, the culmination of the mountain.

A little later in the same year (1910), Herschel Parker, Belmore Browne, John H. Cuntz, Merl LaVoy, Waldemar Grassi, H. L. Tucker, J. W. Tucker and Arthur Aten left Sushitna Station by launch and ascended the Sushitna, Chulitna and Tokositna rivers. From a base camp thirty-seven and a half miles from

<sup>1</sup> This ascent from a 12,000-foot camp to 20,000 feet in a single spurt, carrying a 14-foot flagpole, is surely one of the most extraordinary feats in the history of mountaineering.—*Ed.*

Mount McKinley, Parker, Browne, Cuntz and Tucker ascended "Ruth Glacier" and were able to duplicate Cook's alleged photographs of the top of Mount McKinley, thus proving the fake beyond cavil. In July with LaVoy added, they then advanced into the upper basin of the glacier, but after a long struggle they could find no way onto the mountain or practicable col across the divide. Their highest point was 10,300 feet on the southwest ridge. The retreat was made by the route in.

Still another onslaught was commenced on February 19th, 1912 by Parker, Browne, LaVoy and Aten. Starting from Sushitna Station by dog-team they journeyed up the Sushitna, Chulitna and Tokositna rivers, crossed the range on April 10th after a seventeen-day struggle on the ice, and descended to the McKinley fork of the Kantishna, whence they proceeded to the Clearwater and established base camp on a little tributary, now called "Cache Creek," on April 24th. The final advance from the head of the Muldrow glacier was not commenced until June 5th by Parker, Browne and LaVoy. Successive camps were established at 11,800 feet on the col, 13,600 feet on the ridge, 15,000 feet at the gateway to the Big Basin, 16,000 feet and 16,615 feet. From the latter, two successive attempts were made on the South Peak, the first narrowly missing complete success when they were stopped by a severe storm only a few hundred feet from the highest point in distance and probably very close to an equal altitude. Lack of eatable food—their pemmican having proved indigestible—precluded their remaining longer for further attacks, and the retreat was begun at once. Two days after the return to base camp, occurred the great earthquake of July 6th which shattered the northeast ridge. Civilization was regained by way of the Tanana and Yukon rivers.

Although Mount McKinley had been conquered, there remained the necessity of someone standing upon the highest point before an actual first ascent could be claimed. On March 17th, 1913, Archdeacon Hudson Stuck, Harry P. Karstens, Robert G. Tatum, the half-breed Walter Harper, and an Indian boy started from Nenana with dog-sleds for the Cache Creek base camp where they arrived on April 10th. Freighting to the head of the Muldrow glacier took them until May 9th. The great northeast (Karstens) ridge was found to be so riven and shattered by the earthquake of the year previous, that it required three weeks of step-cutting before they could establish camp at the gateway to the "Grand Basin," which point they called "Parker Pass." Further camps were made in the "Grand Basin": on June 3rd at 16,500 feet; on June 5th at 17,500 feet; and on June 6th, at 18,000 feet. From the latter the South and highest summit of Mount McKinley

was ascended on June 7th by Stuck, Karstens, Tatum and Harper, the party being favored with clear weather and good conditions. On the 8th they retreated to their camp at the head of the Muldrow, and on the 9th arrived back at base camp, whence they returned by boat on the Kantishna, Tanana and Yukon rivers to Tanana.<sup>2</sup>

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#### MEMORIAL TO DR. PACCARD

At the International Congress of Alpinism, held in Chamonix during August, 1932, there was unveiled a bronze portrait medallion of Dr. Michel Gabriel Paccard, who, in company with Jacques Balmat, made the first ascent of Mont Blanc, in 1786.

The project was instigated by several American members of the French Alpine Club, and while it never became official business of the American Alpine Club, the following members contributed: Burr, Comstock, Gilmour, Hall, Hickson, Ladd, Linton, Malinckrodt, Montagnier, Schwab, Thorington and Waterman. Unofficial contributions were also made by the A. C., S. A. C. and C. A. I., the C. A. F. making up the small balance required.

Arrangements were in the hands of Mr. H. F. Montagnier, who represented the American Alpine Club at the Congress. The medallion was executed by the French sculptor, Paul Sylvestre, and cast by the firm of M. Susses frères, of Paris. The design is based on the youthful profile portrait by Bacler d'Albe.

The placing of this tablet on the wall of the *Hotel de Ville* at Chamonix does belated justice to Dr. Paccard, whose cooperation in the ascent was overshadowed by Balmat's attempt, abetted by Bourrit, to secure all credit for himself; and by the twisted publicity given later by press-agent Alexandre Dumas. The controversy carried on by Alpine historians for over a century was ably summarized in Dübi's *Paccard wider Balmat*, in which the doctor is placed on an equal footing with the peasant in achieving the conquest of the great mountain.

Balmat is already commemorated at Chamonix: by the medallion before the churchyard, and by the statue in which he is pointing the way to de Saussure.

At the Paccard celebration, on August 28th, the official unveiling took place before the Mayor of Chamonix; General Dosse, Governor of Lyon, and commanding the 14th Army Corps; M. Raymond de Saussure; the 7th Battalion of *Chasseurs Alpins*; and a large gathering of delegates and spectators. H. E. Signor

<sup>2</sup> Sources: "The Conquest of Mt. McKinley," by Belmore Browne and "The Ascent of Denali," by Hudson Stuck.