

On Foot to Distant Canadian Summits

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HOW fortunate is man to forget the ardors of back-packing that he once endured and how foolish is he consciously to plan for more. The only excuse to the knees that ache and the back that hurts is that one is but little out of pocket when the mountain is reached. There is recompense, too, in the independence from all save self.

Four: Rex Gibson, Bob Hind, John Southard and I, after ambitious planning, settled on the Clemenceau area as a worthy first objective for a summer's mountaineering on foot. Other expeditions, of which there had been three, had used pack trains from Jasper by the way of Fortress Lake to the Wood River and from there had back-packed along the slopes of Ghost Mountain to the Clemenceau Glacier. Ten years, since the last of these, has brought the region closer to the road and we could start from Sunwapta Falls that once was two days by trail from Jasper.

Late evening of July 6th saw us on our way up the Athabaska with a good trail easing the sixty-pound packs. Five hours of hiking brought us to the river below the mouth of the Chaba, where Warden Wells had advised rafting; four hours to build a raft and then a few minutes of wild poling and we were across. Camp that evening was at the old survey site below Fortress Lake. One look at the timber about the lake strengthened our resolve to find a way to Clemenceau up the West Chaba.

River flats and some bush as the stream swept to our side of the flats took us to the tongue of the West Chaba Glacier, and so easy was the day that there was still time to take part of the load to the névé above. The continental divide here is an unbroken wall festooned with ice from Mt. Noël to Amundsen. Clemenceau, although directly west of us, could best be reached by going N. along the glacier and then across the Amundsen-Brouillard col at 10,000 ft.; a mountaineer's way of snow and ice, steep for the last 1000 ft. The early part of the day was fair, but on the col at 4 P.M. was storm and between us and timberline was the Perry Glacier and what it might choose to bring. Three icefalls on the bare glacier were simplified by crampons

and after five hours we reached timber and established our fourth camp about 700 ft. above Carpe and Hall's base camp.

Two following days of rain gave us a needed rest and opportunity to move camp to a tongue of timber besides the Young-husband Glacier. July 12th, however, was clearing and brought out Clemenceau for the first time; its summit, 12,001 ft., not more than two miles to the W. and 6200 ft. above us. The day was saved by climbing a 10,000-ft. snow peak, the last but one on the ridge leading W. from Irvine. This, which is no less worthy than its neighbor, we named Chetin after an Everest porter. The route was along the Tusk Glacier around to the S. of Clemenceau and then up steeper ice directly to the peak; six hours. Here in near and distant views was a partial reward for our labors. Central peaks of the area lay in a tumbled mass before us and the top of Tsar rose above Pic Tordu in the S. foreground. Descent was by way of the ridge leading toward Irvine, to its low point and then down the N. glacier.

Dinner that evening consisted of soup (Erbswurst), spinach, potatoes, beef, apricots—all dried—bannock and cocoa. It was followed by the usual thunder and lightning welling up from the Columbia River Valley, which was only ten miles to our W. This spoke none too well for Clemenceau on the next day.

Morning was clear, however, and at 5.40 we were again on our way around to the W. It was our plan to take the same route as had the previous two parties on the mountain, Hall, Durand, Harris, Schwab in 1923; Ostheimer, Maclaurin, *Fuhrer* in 1927. This was up a snow corridor around the S. W. ridge and then up the crevassed Tiger Glacier, forming the W. face, to the crest of W. ridge, 800 ft. below the summit. Conditions must have been similar to those encountered by the other parties, snow to the top with the two bergschrunds well bridged. The summit was reached at 3.30 after an hour's wait for clouds to lift.

I have heard and shared in the belief that high mountains are poor vantage points, but now I am not so certain. The Selkirks and Purcells were clear from the Big Bend to the Howser Spires, with Sir Sandford, Iconoclast, Swiss Peaks and Sir Donald beckoning one for future years. To the S. E. were snow and ice, Columbia and its retinue, to the N. E. rock walls later to be visited. Any high Canadian summit carries the added charm of the unknown stretching to the limits of the horizon. Country unvisited,

mountains unmapped and unnamed, peaks rising clear above ice-fields with the endless bush of the lower slopes unseen.

Cocoa on the way down, over the Primus, and camp at 8.30. We had hoped for a traverse, but one would be difficult—there is nothing of promise on the N., E., or S.; the E. ridge has a double cornice.

One day fatigue and another rain left us but one climbing day. July 16th was brilliant after a cold and cloudless night, so we set out for the unclimbed central peaks by way of the Duplicate ice-fall; that we ascended near the Duplicate side, Ostheimer, Weber and Fuhrer's route of 1927, beneath Tusk now being out of the question. There were just enough leads to get us through and perfect crampon snow took us to the col between Sir Ernest, 10,400 ft., and Duplicate, 10,300 ft., at 10.30, four and a half hours from camp. Thirty minutes more and we were on the flat top of Duplicate. After a steep glissade on hard snow we started for Sir Ernest, rounding it on the N. and ascending the W. face in forty minutes. Our real objective had been Shackleton, but the new snow on the very steep E. ridge leading from Shackleton-Sir Ernest col prevented an attempt. The easiest route would be along the S. ridge, and it might be of value to some future party to know that the southernmost summit is the highest.

On the return trip to Sunwapta Falls, we gained the Brouillard-Amundsen col by ascending the N. slopes adjacent to the Young-husband Glacier, and then traversing around about 800 ft. below the top of Perry until striking the névé of the Perry Glacier. Within two days we were at the Alpine Club of Canada's base camp on the Athabaska below Lick Creek, and were ready to test a new region around the camps established up Fryatt Creek.

In the Clemenceau region the entire day was spent on ice and snow; the tongue of the glacier being only a hundred yards from camp. Fryatt Creek, on the other hand, offered rock and, to the surprise of all, far firmer rock than is usually met in the Rockies. Mt. Bélanger and the peaks at the end of the valley, in particular, are massive red quartzite and one can actually climb steep faces. From these peaks we were rewarded with closer view of the region to the W. around the Hooker icefield. On clear evenings at the Clemenceau camp, Serenity would be tantalizingly close, but here it was actually within reach. Thus, it came that we again shouldered packs and started for distant horizons.

Rex Gibson, Bea McNeil, Polly Prescott, Marguerite Schnellbacher and I left the A. C. C. camp in the upper Fryatt Creek Valley at 8.45, July 29th. We crossed the *Olympus-Parnassus* col to Lick Creek and the low snow pass to the W. across the continental divide. This by easy stages took us to the green, marmot-infested alp above Alnus Creek, and by early evening to a camp in the valley between the N. and S. Alnus Glaciers.

Here was our most pleasant camp of the summer; a flower-covered glade in the heavy timber beside the creek, with Serenity and its neighbors flooded in the light of the waxing moon. The creek troubled us, but by morning it was low enough to permit a dry-shod crossing. By 6 o'clock we were climbing up through the open timber bearing toward the S. Alnus Glacier with Serenity as our objective. Striking above the icefall on the bare glacier we crossed to the base of the col E. of Serenity. From here rotten rock led to the col, which was gained at 9.45.

Continuing around to the S. we struck up the S. E. face immediately to the W. of the S. E. glacier. Easy rock led to the base of the snow slope, 500 ft. below the summit. This was thin snow on ice, and required considerable care. We broke through the cornice at 1 P.M. and soon afterwards reached the cairn erected by Carpe and Palmer in 1920. The view seemed almost to transcend that from Clemenceau, which now was the nether pole twelve miles to the S. Around us was the Hooker icefield with Hooker itself to the W. Wood River and Fortress Lake were at our feet, and beyond them Ghost rose with its spotless mantle of hanging glaciers. The green timber of Clemenceau Creek led S. to the mountain itself and at its foot we could see our camp site of the other day, with ribbon-like glaciers running back into the icefield.

Ours was the third visit to Serenity, a second ascent having been made by Schoeller and *Rähmi* in 1928. It is probable that the same route has been followed on the upper part by all three parties, although the mountain could be climbed almost anywhere on the E., S. or W. The return was varied and some rather fair rock work was encountered by one rope. Serenity was the only reward for the labors of the trip, for the breaking up of the A. C. C. camps made it necessary for us to return the next day.

Midday of August 1st found us with a new supply of food riding the train W. to try our fortunes on Robson; Rex Gibson, Bob Hind and I. There are three usual and worthy objectives for any party on Robson (12,972 ft.); to ascend the mountain by any route, by a safe route, or by a new route. Actually, the best of plans too often run afoul of the weather; the steady W. wind bringing snow and storm even down to the bivouac sites. We fortunately enjoyed the crystal clearness of a general barometric high and found the mountain in far better conditions than have existed since 1924.

It was our plan again to follow in the footsteps of Hall, who in 1934, with *Hans Fuhrer*, had climbed the mountain by approximately the route of descent used by McCarthy, Foster and *Kain*. This crosses the lower glacier and ascends past the upper icefall on its E. side, and after crossing the upper glacier continues along the ice ridge formed by the S. E. and N. E. faces. Our camp was at the A. C. C. upper bivouac site below the lower icefall. From here in the light of the full moon we saw a great mountain to the S. which puzzled us since it seemed so near at hand. Reason convinced us that it was none other than Clemenceau from the summit of which only the trace of Robson had been visible.

We left the bivouac at 4.30 and after crossing the lower icefall put on the rope and crampons to try our luck with potential avalanches sweeping the lower glacier; these could be outrun. Within two hours the rocks of the gully forming the E. side of the upper icefall were reached and these were safely climbed far to the left; the gully itself was free of snow and probably safe. We crossed it above the last serac of the icefall and gained the upper glacier which we crossed bearing toward the W. to avoid overhanging ice formations. Here on safe and easy ground I, leading at that time, selected a poor route and tried to save it by climbing an overhanging ice wall. On the second attempt I came off and pulled Bob with me, falling some 60 ft. down steep ice to gentler slopes below. There I met an ice axe, that had been used as a foot hold, and broke the full brunt of the fall with my neck on its end. This was bad and it was an hour before we were again on our way, disconsolately. The summit, after considerable ice work, was reached at 1.30.

From the summit we could see the redoubtable northwest arête and its ice-coated gendarmes. The upper part of the ridge is really

ice of the steep north glacier. This year one could probably have traversed along on the S. face below the ridge, the rock, although very smooth looking, being free of snow. There is, however, even a better way that I have long looked at; namely, the rounded ridge leading steeply down toward The Helmet to the N. We looked at it closely and were convinced that the climbing would have been only reasonably difficult and absolutely free from dangers of falling ice or cornices. Our condition, however, made it impossible for us to take the opportunity for a traverse that comes so seldom to one on Robson. We reluctantly turned our backs on these temptations and returned to camp, in five hours, by the route of ascent.

The summer's wayfaring ended with the precipitous hike off the slopes of Robson and then along the cedar-lined Fraser trail back to Hargreave's place. As one now writes from the ease of a chair never does a vestige of the back-packing labor rise to plague the memory of a perfect summer. Through the bush and beyond the ridges are still snow and ice lands of incomparable beauty for those with the will to go.