

The Last of the Bugaboos

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ALL the main summits in the Bugaboo Group of peaks of the Purcell Range in British Columbia had been climbed but one, the South Tower of Howser Spire. The formidable bergschrund on the N. E. face had never been crossed. This was the only side of the peak that offered any possibility of ascent. Our climbing party of seven, members of the Mountaineers of Seattle, went into that region in August, 1941, to climb. We decided that this peak would be our first objective.

On Tuesday, August 5th, Lyman Boyer, Tom Campbell, Helmy Beckey and myself left our base camp at 4.00 A.M. to attempt a route we had picked out from the previous day's scouting. We arrived at the lower lip of the bergschrund at 8.00 A.M., just 900 ft. below the summit. We chose a route over the bergschrund slightly to the left of the extended line of the ice finger above.

After four hours of step cutting our party ascended the upper lip of the bergschrund and 80 ft. up a 60° ice slope to the smooth rock slabs at the lower left-hand corner of the ice finger. Driving two pitons into the rock wall we anchored our party for safety while we studied the route beyond this point.

We next chose the rock chimney along the left side of the ice finger in preference to the dangerous problem of cutting steps up the ice. We removed our crampons, and the lead man used felt-soled shoes to go up the mixture of loose rock and ice in the chimney. This chimney led into a second chimney, then out on a broken rock face with patches of ice and snow intermingling. Occasionally we drove in a piton for protection.

At 7.00 P.M. we climbed over an ice arête onto the rocks of the shoulder at the head of the ice finger. We had gained 500 ft. of elevation. We had 400 ft. of unknown rock beyond this point. The shoulder offered a possible bivouac. We spent the next two hours constructing a level rock floor between the ice and some large boulders. Into this sheltered refrigerator we huddled. Between shifts during the night we discovered we had a crag rat stealing what was left of our food supply.

At 7.00 A.M. we were sufficiently warm to go on. Four hours of route work on the ridge convinced us it was too risky to continue. We then followed a narrow ledge out on the N. E. face, circled around the lower part of a snow patch in a steep rock-jammed couloir, crossed a glaciated slab which ended in a steep gully filled with broken rock, ice and snow. From this point on our route was up again.

The steep gully ended in a vertical crack a foot wide and 25 ft. high. At the top of the crack on the left was a horizontal slot in the wall that proved excellent to jam a leg in for security in belaying. Climbing up the sloping rock face above the crack we came into a deep cut on the ridge 150 ft. above our bivouac shoulder.

The N. wall of the cut was nearly vertical with a 45° finger traverse that widened toward the top to admit a foot. Two more scrambles up lichen-covered blocks led to a resting place in front of a 40-ft. wall that looked impossible. In front of the wall was a small 15-ft. gendarme. Reaching from the gendarme to the wall we drove in a piton for aid. We then followed a scoop along the wall to a vertical part. Driving in a piton for direct aid and using a slight projection for the right foot the lead man crawled up over the rounded lichen-covered rocks at the top of the wall. The lead man moved on to a suitable anchorage and the rest of the party followed.

From here the summit could be seen about 100 ft. above. This gave us encouragement considering it was 3.30 P.M. Going along the ridge we next encountered 50 ft. of a 60° slope with parallel vertical cracks to serve for hand and foot holds. The last 50 ft. was gained by walking along a broad summit ridge, a relief for the nerves.

We reached the final summit at 4.00 P.M., hastily erected a cairn and placed a small tin tube therein. Remaining roped in as parties of two and using two 200-ft. five-sixteenths-inch ropes for rappeling we started down at 4.30 P.M. We had come up a lot of loose stuff so we proceeded rather slowly downward.

We reached our bivouac camp at 8.00 P.M. The decision there was to go on, the weather was still clear and the moon was out. It was 2.30 A.M. the following morning when walking down with crampons in a *Dülfersitz*, the last man in our party stepped down on to the lower lip of the bergschrund. We felt something like Columbus discovering land. It took 50 hours for the round trip

by the time we reached our basecamp, starved, sleepy but happy in our success.

For future ascents this peak can be done in less time. We lost valuable time in route finding. We were safeguarding the second party most of the time with our five-sixteenth-inch *reepschnur*. A lone party of two would be a faster method for climbing this peak. The summit elevation according to our aneroid was 10,800 ft. Thorington gives the approximate elevation as 10,700 ft.