

Cariboo Climbing

STERLING HENDRICKS AND ANDREW JOHN KAUFFMAN, 2ND

THE seldom visited Cariboos are one of the most northerly and extensive mountain chains of interior British Columbia. They are also known—perhaps officially—as the McLennan Range, while the higher peaks are called the Premier Group. In this article the names of the peaks originally given by Allen Carpé and Don Munday are used. The region's center lies some 15 miles southeast of Tête Jaune, a station on the Prince Rupert line of the Canadian National Railroad, in the triangle of high peaks formed by Mount Titan (Sir Wilfrid Laurier, ca. 11,750 ft.), Mount David Thompson (Sir John Thompson, ca. 11,250 ft.) and Mount Kiwa (Sir John Abbott, ca. 11,200 ft.). The mountains are high and heavily glaciated, but not especially difficult for the alpinist.

The most favored approach, from Tête Jaune to the head of Sand Creek, provides far easier travel than exists in the neighboring Selkirks and Monashees. Several early mountaineers entered the area by this route and by neighboring Kiwa Creek. More recently, the explorations of Raymond Zillmer have indicated the possibility of other approaches and have likewise dissipated much confusion with regard to the country's complicated geography.

Zillmer's, Munday's and Carpé's accounts, as well as desire to visit new regions, inspired our trip in 1949. The party numbered eleven, but divided into two groups for convenience in travel and camping. The first group comprised Sterling Hendricks, Donald Hubbard, Alexander Fabergé, Chris Scoredos and Arthur Lembeck; the second, Andy and Betty Kauffman, Pim and Kenneth Karcher and Jane Showacre.

We had arranged with R. H. Laidman, of the L. & M. Air Service, Ltd., of Vernon, B. C.—a highly reliable outfit, which had cooperated magnificently with us in the Northern Selkirks the previous year—to drop most of our supplies on a 9000-foot snow field at the head of Sand Creek and immediately southeast of Mount Titan. Despite Laidman's recognized efficiency, we had certain res-

SUMMIT RIDGE OF MOUNT HOSTILITY

Photo, A. Wexler

ervations about this arrangement. None of us was personally familiar with the area, and it was inconvenient for anyone to accompany the plane. The best we could do was to provide Laidman with such descriptive material as was available in Zillmer's articles, together with his photographs of the area where the drop was to be made. Despite these uncertainties and poor weather, the remote-control operation was successful, largely because of Laidman's persistence and Zillmer's accuracy.

On July 12th Hendricks and the first group set out from the ranch of Hirsch Neighbor, a packer operating out of Tête Jaune, near the mouth of Sand Creek. They expected to reach the drop area in time for the scheduled delivery on the 15th. A good trail aids travel for the first four miles. Above this point, river flats and game trails are easy to follow to the tongue of the Sand Creek Glacier at about 4500 feet. A day and a half after the departure from Neighbor's ranch, a campsite was established on heather-covered slopes just north of the glacier's chief icefall.

An easy snow slope leads from this campsite to the névé east of Mount Titan. On July 14th the advance party reconnoitered the area and selected a drop-site very close to the col used by Zillmer and his son in crossing to the Canoe. This and the preceding day were two of the three clear ones of our season. Two of the summits forming the rim of the névé basin were climbed. A cairn containing a Canadian penny, left by Holway, was found on the first. Gentle slopes led from this summit to the slightly higher one at the north limit of the basin.

Meantime, on July 14th, the second party, with its dominant feminine contingent, started up from Tête Jaune by the same route. Despite numerous arguments as to the comparative merits of travel by creek-bed and through bush, they reached Sand Glacier in a little over a day. Since they arrived after the first of many rains had started, they pitched camp approximately half a mile down-glacier from the first party.

That afternoon both groups heard the plane exploring the country to the east and south and later watched it circle, on schedule; but high winds and poor visibility prevented a drop. Foul weather, which was to harass us for three weeks, now descended upon the Cariboo. Four of us shivered dismally, with wet feet and icy fingers, on the misty snow field one afternoon, vainly speculating that

skies might clear, and, at the same time, supplies arrive. Another day, when the plane once more circled around us in the mist, we practised glissades on a snow gully behind camp. Would it ever clear, we wondered? Supplies had run low, and rations were radically cut. With empty packboard and loaded rifle, Andy vainly searched for goat among near-by bluffs. We thought of Winnie-the-Pooh, with his honey-jars on the tree limb during the Terrible Flood. The sky cleared for a few hours on the 18th, and most of the party climbed to the drop area. While waiting for the plane, we ascended a small mound near by, and named it Icy Peak. Around midafternoon, the plane arrived and, to our delight and relief, dropped the supplies. With everything from beer to Primus stoves, we could now withstand a prolonged siege of storm.

Alex, Art and Sterling on the day of the drop set out to explore the Gilmour Névé and possibly to climb a peak at the head of the McClennan Watershed to the east. They ascended the center of the glacier draining westward from Gunboat Ridge. A network of large crevasses was threaded to reach a pass at the head of the Gilmour Névé. The level névé was crossed for about four miles to the base of a prominent mountain southwest of Mount Challenger. The north-west ridge of this mountain, which we later named Mount Withers (ca. 10,500 ft.), was ascended without difficulty to the summit.

A new deluge now descended upon camp, while twelve or more inches of fresh snow settled on the peaks above. On the 21st, during a brief lull, Jane, Betty, Pim, Ken and Andy scrambled to the top of Forks Peak, a 10,500-foot summit behind camp. Next morning, leaving the blistered and stiff Karchers behind, Betty, Jane and Andy started at 4.00 under starry heavens for Mount Challenger. The skies shortly turned grim once more, and the last part of this second ascent was made in a quiet, misty atmosphere. At 10.30 they ate an early lunch on the summit, then returned at a leisurely pace to camp.

Art, Arnold, Sterling, Alex and Chris set out at midday on the 20th to a bivouac near the group of peaks across the névé southeast of Mount Challenger, which by now we called the Carapé Group. The highest of these (10,750 ft.) is in the angle between the main McLennan and McLennan III, and is a prominent feature on several of Zillmer's published photographs. We named it Mount Carapé, and the second, Mount Chamberlin (10,700 ft.). Mount Chamberlin is

connected by a high and broken ridge with Mount Withers. The first attempt on Mount Carpé, which was made in the late afternoon of the 20th, was abortive, on account of the continuing storm. Next day, despite very low visibility and snow lying over the rocks, the peak was climbed by its north face, in four hours from the bivouac. The party returned in storm to camp.

On the 22nd Sterling and his group crossed over Zillmer's route to the Canoe, picking up two weeks' supplies at the drop area. On the 23rd Pim and Ken elected to establish a high bivouac on the Gilmour Névé, while Jane, Betty and Andy forced their way over the snow field in a blinding snowstorm and joined Sterling's party at the head of the Canoe. They accepted a most welcome dinner invitation at the new campground and spent the evening over Sterling's culinary masterpieces.

It would be almost superfluous to tell how, on the 24th, our entire party of nine plowed through a foot of fresh snow to carve a new route up the broad southern flanks of Mount Titan. There was nothing outstanding about the climb. When we reached the broad snow bump which makes up the summit, it was buried in fog. Most of the time, little could be seen but our own footprints, and the drenched cord which connected us with our closest companions. Occasionally one or another member of the party would tumble waist-deep into a crevasse.

Back in camp that evening, Sterling discovered, to his surprise and dismay, that one of his boots had largely disintegrated. It was imperative that someone return to base to pick up his second pair of shoes. The 25th, which opened with howling winds and snow over the campground, seemed ideally suited for this undertaking. Three of us trudged through a foot of wet powder snow back to the old campsite, thence once more over the high pass to our Canoe camp. Here we idled another day, the blizzard having suspended operations.

Almost everyone doubted Betty's good faith when she announced clear skies at dawn on the 27th and, despite vehement protests, began to pull drowsy forms from their sacks. Still, by seven o'clock we had started across the north Canoe Glacier, headed for Mount David Thompson.

Once more heavy snow hampered our advance. How we longed for skis as we painfully trudged, knee-deep and step by step, toward

our goal! The route was a circuitous one, whereby we skirted half-way around the mountain before we actually started up. At noon we had covered several miles, but were still at barely 9000 feet, with much hard labor ahead up steep slopes which glistened in their fresh white mantles. The boom of avalanches prompted a few casual statements about turning back. Still we plodded forward, alternating the lead at short intervals. The route slowly began to curve upward towards the mountain's northwest ridge.

Despite its freshness, the snow was in surprisingly good condition at this level. We made a hasty traverse beneath a bulging cornice, part of which had recently avalanched, then plowed our way up the northwest spur to the west summit ridge. It curved above us, while a flag of mist waved from its flanks. The slopes to our right dropped almost vertically, and the steep snow on our left rolled off in small avalanches. We stepped gingerly along the cornices, which cracked under our weight. About 15 feet below the true summit, Sterling, who was leading, announced: "This is the top—at least, it's as far as I'm going!"

Indeed, we were already overextended. The entire ridge ahead of Sterling, which consisted of a double cornice, had started to avalanche on both sides under the weight of his ice-axe, a bare foot beyond his highest steps. Since the position of those behind was precarious (the cornices sank ominously under our weight), we hastily descended to safer territory. The ascent had taken ten hours. The return, despite the considerable distance involved, was to consume little more than three.

Storm prevented climbing on the 28th. Next morning Jane, Betty, Art and Andy had to return to the Sand Creek Camp. Here Pim and Ken joined them on the 30th, with tidings of good luck despite the weather. They had climbed all the peaks on the rim of the Sand Creek Névé, and then had established a bivouac on Gunboat Ridge. From this they had climbed all four peaks of Gunboat Ridge and Mount Challenger, as well as the small peak in the Gilmour Névé near the col above Sand Creek. They also attempted Chamberlin, which appears to be the most interesting peak of the Carpé Group, but were turned back by storm and questionable snow conditions.

On the 31st, which was one of the three perfect days, Betty, Jane, Art and Andy ascended a 10,000-foot minor summit on the

ridge between Mounts Goodell and Aspiration. The entire group then broke camp and returned down Sand Creek to Tête Jaune.

The group of five at the Canoe camp made full use of the clear day in climbing Mount Hostility (10,950 ft.), the highest unclimbed summit of the region. It is a beautiful peak, with a long eastern ridge, between two forks of the Raush River. The route followed that to Mount David Thompson until the col (Munday's David Pass) was reached, and then followed up the southeast snow slopes to the eastern ridge about midway to the summit. This ridge was rather sharp and, though fairly easy, gave the best climbing of the summer, because of its poor snow conditions. The summit was reached by midafternoon. The return trip was made down the easier southerly snow slopes, circling around toward David Pass.

After the usual siege of bad weather, conditions improved enough to allow travel farther to the south. Don, Chris, Arnold and Sterling climbed through the upper part of the north Canoe icefall to gain the névé east of Mount David Thompson, and then turned south towards a prominent rock peak, which we called Matterhorn, between the north and south Canoe Glaciers. When the crest of the glacier was reached, however, an easy way was seen leading to the south Canoe Glacier. A council was held to decide among climbing Matterhorn, which would have taken an hour; crossing the south Canoe Glacier toward one of the peaks on the Canoe-North Thompson divide, which would have meant an unprepared bivouac; and climbing one of the peaks on the ridge leading southeast from Mount David Thompson. The last objective was selected. Its slopes were reached by descending slightly to the south Canoe Glacier, and then climbing an old avalanche track to the ridge. A curving snow ridge led to the summit of Mount Crescent (ca. 10,200 ft.), but further progress to the south was cut off by the tremendous drop on the south side of this peak. The weather, which had improved only slightly, now broke; and the return to camp was made in storm.

The day after the ascent of Crescent, camp on the Canoe was broken, and the return trip made to the base camp. Supplies were picked up en route. We then set out for another try at the Carpé Group. When the Carpé-Chamberlin col was reached, over steep snow above the bergschrund, a gale was blowing; and we decided to descend to the head of McLennan III Glacier for a bivouac. A satisfactory site was found by six o'clock. Since the weather was still

high, we set out to climb a 10,000-foot peak to the southeast. This is the one on the left of Zillmer's picture "Looking south to Glacier at head of McLennan III," published in the 1947 *Canadian Alpine Journal*.

An hour was adequate time for kicking up the northeast snow slopes, and the return took only 30 minutes. The storm settled down during the night, and the following morning was bleak. The tracks of the previous day were the only guide back to base camp.

Plans next called for climbing up the west wall of the Sand Creek Valley to the Kiwa ice field north of Mount Titan, and crossing it to Carpé's Mount Kiwa (11,250 ft.). The days were spent in keeping dry instead, and soon the time for leaving the country was at hand. On the last day Arnold, Don, Alex and Sterling set out up the steep ridge leading to Mount Bivouac (10,200 ft.). This is a good scramble. The summit was reached just in time to get a view of Mount Kiwa, to the west, before driving snow returned. The bivouac site of Munday and Carpé is still well preserved, and we could appreciate the dejected attitude of the figure in Carpé's photograph.

Storms followed us down the valley. When the train came through at 2.00 A.M., the hills were completely uninviting, as were the dripping slopes of the Rockies.