

# Stanford Coast Range Expedition, 1954

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AT NOON, June 25th, Bill Fisk, chief pilot for Kenmore Air Harbor, Inc., landed his red Norseman float plane so gently on the waters of Dumbell (Ghost) lake that his seven passengers never knew exactly when he had touched down. Six months of preparation had come to an end. Back in January six members of the Stanford Alpine Club, Bob Brooke, Nick Clinch, Gary Driggs, Jack Maling, Gil Roberts, Dave Sowles, and Andy Kauffman of Washington, D. C., began to organize a trip into the Coast Range of British Columbia. Utilizing the experience of the Sierra Club party in 1950 and the Hendrick's party in 1953, we spent the next few months working out the various problems of transportation, food, community equipment, and medical supplies. We would have to be able to spend over a month camped on the Upper Tellot glacier.

To have the maximum number of climbing days, we decided to fly in and fly out from Dumbell lake. The supplies were to be air-dropped. Because of the notorious reputation of the Coast Range for bad weather, we decided to drop a large supply of extra food, equipment, and gasoline so that we could cope with any emergency. The unpleasant prospect of spending five weeks in a tent, becoming intimately familiar with the bad habits of one's companions, was fully possible. As it turned out, our pessimism was well-founded. For 21 days we were confined to our tents. For 8 additional days we could not climb. Yet we were in the region for only 39 days. We used over 13 of the 15 gallons which we had had dropped. Most of it was used to melt snow. There was no running water at our camp site.

Despite the welcoming committee of mosquitoes, we were glad when the Norseman bumped into a log on the west shore of Dumbell lake and we eagerly unloaded our packs. Afterwards, we intently watched the Norseman depart, then turned and packed up through easy snow-covered bush, over gravel flats, along the base of the moraine to the snout of the Tellot Glacier where we pitched camp. The next day we began the long pull up the glacier. Soft snow and fog prevented us from reaching the site of Hendrick's high camp until noon of the third day. We located his cache and continued on for several hundred feet to the highest of several rock outcroppings, where we established base camp at about 9,800 feet.

The sky of June 28th was clear, but there was a solid overcast beneath us at 8,500 feet. We stamped out a drop area near the base of Dragonback. Most of the party, thinking that the air drop would not come, wandered up the peak. However, the Norseman climbed out of the Homathko River valley through the overcast, dropped our supplies, and promptly dove back under the cloud cover. We spent several exhausting hours gathering in the cartons and dragging them down to camp. All but one of the cartons was eventually recovered. We set up our Logan tent inside a snow-wall windbreak, took inventory, stacked the food cartons, and prepared for a long stay on the Upper Tellot.

The next day the weather turned bad, with the wind blowing snow. Kauffman, Maling, and some of the others built a snow house big enough to hold all seven of us. It served as the kitchen, dining room, and recreation hall for the remainder of the trip. The weather grew worse. The wind rose to gale proportions. To keep the two-man tents from ripping apart, we moved them from the exposed rock platforms we had built, on to snow and protected them on all sides by high snow walls.

On July 2nd the skies cleared sufficiently for climbing. Brooke, Driggs, and Sowles made a first ascent of a fine rock pinnacle between Mt. Tellot and the Dragonback massif, which they named Tellot Spire. They then climbed the west peak of Mt. McCormick by a new route on the west face. Roberts and Maling climbed Dentiform, while Kauffman and Clinch climbed Serra 3 from the Serra 2-3 col. The main difficulty on the ridge leading

up Serra 3 was a gendarme that had to be circumvented. It was turned by making a rappel down the Tiedemann side of the ridge and climbing up an icy chimney to the ridge, past the gendarme. The rappel was left in place to facilitate the return. On the way back to camp, Kauffman and Clinch climbed Mt. Tellot, beginning a tradition that all parties returning from the Serra 2-3 col should climb Mt. Tellot on the way home. The large quantity of snow and ice on the rock, combined with the freezing wind, made all the climbs more difficult than had been anticipated. We frequently used pitons for safety.

July 3rd was stormy, but the weather cleared up again on July 4th and the entire party tramped up Mt. Shand. Sowles, Brooke, and Maling then climbed Mt. Heartstone. Kauffman, Clinch, Driggs, and Roberts did both peaks of Mt. Argiewicz. On the west peak of Mt. Argiewicz, Kauffman, with a shaft belay around his mended ice-axe, held Clinch's 25-foot slide down a steep snow couloir. Andy had broken his axe chopping steps in the ice while going up to the Serra 2-3 col. Maling had put it back together with wood screws, wire, and tape.

The weather closed in again for over a week. During a brief lull in the storm a reconnaissance party, consisting of Driggs, Maling, Roberts, and Kauffman, went out to find a route through the two icefalls by Mt. McCormick to the Radiant glacier. They returned to camp on a compass course, struggling into the driving snow.

Finally the elements relented. After a day of drying out and preparing camp for the next storm, we turned our attention again to the Serra and Claw ridges. Driggs and Sowles made an excellent traverse of Upper Claw Peak, Harvard Claw, and California Claw. They climbed Claw Peak by a new route on the northeast face, probably the most difficult rock climb of the trip. Meanwhile, the rest of the party climbed Serra 1. Snow and ice on the slabs of the regular ridge route made part of it infeasible. Roberts made a fine lead up a chimney on the south face, using one piton for direct aid. That night when Driggs and Sowles returned from their traverse, we celebrated Driggs' 20th birthday with a birthday cake made of chocolate-covered Logan bread, complete with the proper number of candles.

The next day, July 14th, we divided into two groups and packed down to the Radiant Glacier to attempt Mt. Tiedemann. One group, Kauffman, Brooke, Driggs, and Clinch, avoided the lower icefall on the route to the Radiant by cutting up over the shoulder of Mt. S and wading down soft snow slopes. From the shoulder they got an excellent view of the proposed route up Mt. Tiedemann, which passed up the Radiant Glacier icefall to the saddle between Damoclese Peak and Mt. Tiedemann and then up the ridge to the summit. The second group, Sowles, Maling, and Roberts, descended through the lower icefall and reached the Radiant Glacier first. It was the superior route and was used by the entire party on the return trip to the Tellot Glacier.

The Radiant camp was most enjoyable except for the lack of water. It was warm and, for the first time in several weeks, our boots didn't freeze solid during the night. We left camp at 4:30 A.M. and began the long 5,000-foot grind to the top of Mt. Tiedemann. The snow was in such bad condition that we sank in up to our knees even before the sun came up. We therefore changed the lead every half hour as we climbed up for about 2,000 feet over fairly well bridged crevasses. After crossing under several tottering séracs, we gained the upper section of the icefall. The way appeared clear. However, large crevasses, which ran from one side of the icefall to the other, threatened constantly to stop us. One crevasse was 50 feet across. A lone ice bridge spanned it, but the far wall was overhanging. Sowles, with the help of two ice-axes and a shoulder stand from Roberts, led up over this obstacle, which was the crux of the climb. Later in the season, or in a drier season, the climb might be impossible, as such crucial snow bridges might be gone.

We slogged on up into the upper basin of the icefall and then up steep snow and rock to gain the saddle between Damoclese Peak and Mt. Tiedemann. After a delicate traverse over 300 feet of snow-covered rock, we gained the long and very beautiful snow arête leading to the summit. At 5:00 P.M. we were on top. It was the second ascent by a new route of the third highest peak in provincial Canada. The first ascent was made by Hans Fuhrer, Henry Hall, Jr., Sterling Hendricks, and Rex Gibson in 1939 by

the Chaos Glacier. We gazed at the spectacularly rugged country around us, dominated by the bulk of Mt. Waddington, and then began the long descent to camp.

Under a threatening sky we broke the Radiant Glacier camp and packed back up to the Tellot Glacier. On the way back we discovered that a large sérac in the upper icefall had collapsed, wiping out 75 feet of our old tracks. When we finally reached the snow house and the battered Logan tent of the Tellot camp, we felt that we had returned home.

Once again the clouds descended and we were pinned to our camp for a week. Our activities were confined to digging out the tents and repairing the snow walls. Anxiety mounted as the storm raged on unabated. It appeared as if we wouldn't get a chance to attempt our main objectives, Mt. Waddington and Serra 4. At last the weather cleared up on July 23rd. Although it was originally planned that the entire expedition should attempt one objective and then try for the other, lack of time prevented this. It was decided that we should split up. A group of four would pack down to the Tiedemann Glacier to try Mt. Waddington. The three remaining climbers would try Serra 4. If we were lucky, we might gain one of our objectives and, if we were extremely lucky, we might even gain both.

Roberts, Maling, Driggs, and Brooke immediately packed up and left for the Tiedemann. Clinch, Kauffman, and Sowles remained behind. The recent storm had plastered the mountains with more snow. Although it was taking a chance with the treacherous weather, we decided to postpone the attempt on Serra 4 for a few days to give the snow a chance to consolidate and melt off. While we waited, Kauffman and Sowles made the first ascent of Famine Spire, one of a group of pinnacles near Mt. Shand which we named the Four Horsemen. The next day Sowles, Kauffman, and Clinch went down the Tellot Glacier and climbed Porthos and Aremis, two of the Four Guardsmen peaks. A long snow gully was followed which led up to the

MT. TIEDEMANN FROM MT. S

Shows route followed up the Radiant Glacier icefall.  
Gary Driggs in foreground.

Photo, N. Clinch

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ridge between the two peaks. Several easy rock pitches led to the summit of Porthos, the highest of the four peaks. Aremis was pleasant scrambling. Since there was no cairn on the top, it might have been a first ascent.

The next day, July 25th, Kauffman and Sowles started off at 2:00 A.M. for Serra 4, 12,200 feet high, the highest unclimbed peak in provincial Canada. By sunrise they had reached the Serra 2-3 col. Although the snow was deeper on the Serra Ridge than at the beginning of the trip, they rapidly passed over Serra 3's obstacles and reached its summit by 7 o'clock. Pausing only for a moment to glance at an avalanche crashing down Mt. Munday, they descended from the summit and began the long traverse to Serra 4. Balancing along a narrow snow ridge, they reached the top of the first gendarme. Instead of continuing along the top of the jagged ridge, they dropped down onto the west face of the ridge and began traversing in a northerly direction along a ledge system. After numerous pitches of snow and snow-covered rock, they reached the end of the system. A large gendarme blocked the way to the summit ridge, but an icy gully dropped parallel to the ridge, on the Tiedemann slope, to a point beyond the gendarme. Using a fixed line, they rapidly descended the gully, which curved down away to the Tiedemann glacier as they left it and circled the base of the gendarme to just below the ridge. Rotten snow and high-angle rock led back to the main ridge. Some snow-covered rock and more sharp snow arêtes brought them to the base of the summit tower. After seven rock pitches of moderate difficulty Sowles and Kauffman reached the summit of Serra 4 at 4:00 P.M. The expedition had achieved one of its major objectives. The weather had been deteriorating during the entire day and was now getting worse. Rapidly and efficiently they returned along the ridge back to the summit of Serra 3. They continued on to Serra 2-3 col as it began to snow. The descent off the col was an extremely careful one, but below it they hurried, glissading and trotting toward camp, arriving at 9:00 P.M.

### STILLETTO - SERRA RIDGE

from Mt. Munday. Bob Brooke in foreground.

Photo, G. Roberts

Snow fell all the next day. On July 27th it cleared up again and Kauffman and Clinch climbed Mt. McCormick by the regular route. On the 28th Sowles and Clinch traversed some of the peaks of the Upper Tellot basin, including Mt. Tellot and Tellot Tower.

Early on the morning of the 29th, the Mt. Waddington party returned, having left the Tiedemann glacier at 3 A.M. to make the 4,000-foot climb back up to the Tellot. They reported Mt. Waddington covered with snow and ice. The snow conditions going up the Bravo-Spearman col were so bad that within 15 minutes after the sun had come up they had to crawl on their hands and knees with their 60-pound packs in order to make any progress at all. With bad weather apparently closing in, they retreated to the Tiedemann Glacier.

After sitting out one day of rain, they decided to try Mt. Munday, leaving at five in the afternoon to make a night ascent. By nine that night they had finished the rock climbing and waited for an hour for the snow to consolidate. Then came the tedious process of kicking steps. The cold encouraged them to maintain a brisk pace. By 3:30 A.M. they had reached the end of the ridge. Here they put on their down jackets and bivouacked for two hours, waiting for light. With the first faint glow on the horizon they donned their frozen boots and reached the summit in an hour. A very rapid descent brought them back to their Tiedemann camp where they slept for a day before starting back for the Tellot camp.

It was now time to leave the Upper Tellot. We put extra supplies, including food, several gallons of gasoline, and a traction splint, in a large well-marked cache. While Kauffman and Sowles packed up everything and arranged the loads for the trip down to Dumbell lake, Brooke and Roberts climbed Serra 3, and Driggs, Maling, and Clinch climbed Serra 2. At one point snow conditions forced the Serra 2 party out on the Tiedemann face, but after several high-angle rock pitches, the regular ridge route was regained. It was a perfect day to end the expedition's climbing.

On the 31st everyone, except Brooke and Roberts who wanted to enjoy their surroundings in good weather, left for Dumbell

lake. On the way down Driggs and Clinch detoured over to Nabob pass, a very scenic spot and worth the side trip.

Finally we arrived at the gravel flats and received a rude shock. In just one month a tremendous undergrowth had sprung up. What had been a walk in was now a terrible bushwhack out. We spent a miserable day in the slide alder, bog, and devil's club, chased by hordes of mosquitoes. The thought that an airplane would fly us out over this country if we reached Dumbell lake sustained us.

In groups of twos and threes we arrived at Dumbell lake and waded the short distance from shore to Serendipitous Isle, named by the Hendrick's party the year before. It seemed like heaven to us after spending over a month camped on snow. We were scheduled to be picked up on August 3rd. However, by six o'clock that day, the planes hadn't arrived so we had given up hope. After finishing a very meager dinner, we had gone to bed, when suddenly Kauffman yelled, "I hear planes." It was not an unusual yell, as probably 50,000 planes had been heard and announced that day, but this time it was true. The planes landed and, after greeting the pilots, we threw most of the gear on board, although some of it accidentally ended up in the lake. Taking off, we raced the fading light to the head of Butte Inlet where we landed and spent the night. The next day we were back in Seattle.

As we flew out and watched the mountains disappear in the distance and the dense Homathko River valley fly by beneath us, we thought with admiration of the hardy souls who had pioneered the region by backpacking heavy loads through the terrible bush. But their efforts and struggles were worthwhile. They had opened up one of the most beautiful and rugged mountain areas in North America.

#### *Summary of Statistics*

ASCENTS: Mt. Tiedemann, 12,800 ft., July 15th, second ascent—new route; Mt. Munday, 11,500 ft., July 28th; Serra 1, 11,900 ft., July 13th; Serra 2, 12,000 ft., July 30th, second ascent; Serra 3, 12,140 ft., July 2nd, July 25th, July 30th, second, third, and fourth ascents; Serra 4, 12,200 ft., July

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25th, first ascent; Dentiform, 10,500 ft., July 2nd; Claw Peak, Harvard Claw and California Claw, 9,500 ft., July 13th; Mt. Tellot, 11,500 ft., July 2nd, July 28th, July 30th; Tellot Tower, 11,300 ft., July 28th; Tellot Spire, 11,000 ft., July 2nd, first ascent; Mt. McCormick, 10,800 ft., July 2nd (new route), July 27th; Mt. Shand, 11,000 ft., July 4th; Mt. Argiewicz, 11,000 Ft., July 4th; Mt. Heartstone, 10,000 ft., July 4th; Unnamed pinnacle, 9,800 ft., July 12th, July 29th, first and second ascents; Famine Spire, 9,400 ft., July 23rd, first ascent; Porthos, 10,500 ft., July 24th, second ascent; Aremis, 10,500 ft., July 24th, first ascent; Dragonback, 11,000 ft., June 28th, July 28th.

PERSONNEL: Robert C. Brooke, Nick Clinch, Gary Driggs, Andrew Kauffman, Jack Maling, Gil Roberts, David Sowles.

