

Conrad Kain

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ONCE AGAIN I have thoroughly enjoyed reading Conrad Kain's *Where the Clouds Can Go* (2nd edition), especially those parts covering his life and activities in Western Canada during the days of exploration and climbing in which I took part, accompanied by Mrs. MacCarthy who originally introduced me to the fascinating sport of climbing.

My first intimate acquaintance with Conrad was in 1913 when, en route by train to Mt. Robson, I was much pleased to learn that Mr. Arthur O. Wheeler, President of the Canadian Alpine Club, had selected me to join Colonel W. W. Foster on Conrad's detail for the first assault on Mt. Robson by the northeast route. Mr. A. L. Mumm of England and his guide, Interbinnen, had made attempts here but were driven back because of the great danger of avalanches from the mountain's northeast shoulder. Interbinnen himself told Conrad, "I never before saw death so near."

Our very interesting and strenuous first ascent and traverse of Robson accomplished Conrad's long-burning desire to conquer his "King of the Rockies" and a second climb of Robson with him at the end of camp cemented a feeling of confidence and companionship between us that endured for years.

Between climbing seasons, we worked together developing our home ranch, "Karmax," on the bench lands above Wilmer, British Columbia, at the headwaters of the Columbia River. This intimate association afforded us time for many long discussions about the social and economic problems that were much on Conrad's mind. However, the two subjects that inter-

ested him most were mountaineering and the beauties of nature, the latter seemingly ever present in his thoughts.

As his book indicates, after leaving his home in Austria he began a life not unlike that of a vagabond student, ever grasping for a better understanding of the world, its civilizations and its philosophies. His brain was never idle when there was an opportunity to learn interesting facts about the country in which he was traveling, especially about its mountainous areas, its wild life, and the people with whom he came in contact. His interest was never casual; when facts were learned, he stored them away for future use. Undoubtedly it was this training of his memory that made it possible for him, unerringly to remember and to retrace a route of ascent on a difficult mountain side, even in a blizzard such as was encountered on our descent after the third climb of Mt. Robson in 1913. Schauffelberger, Darling, and I confessed that, in the stinging sleet blast, we could hardly see anything, much less follow an unblazed trail.

Conrad and I made many climbs together in the lower Purcells, which were virtually in our back yard. Between the lines of his calm recitals about them, I can remember many very difficult and sometimes dangerous stretches of ascent or descent that the average climber would have stressed in graphic detail to impress the reader, but not Conrad. He well knew and frequently spoke of the lurking dangers always involved in expeditions into the mountains and took it for granted that the intelligent reader would understand that the real sport and satisfaction in reaching the summit of a mountain is measured by the difficulties and dangers of its ascent. Otherwise, as Conrad would say, "Why not go for a 'shtroll' in the park?"

I was amused by his reference to one extremely difficult and hazardous descent we once made of Monument Peak in the virgin territory of the Purcells. When, some time later, he pointed out our route of descent to an old prospector, the man gazed at it for a while and then retorted, "Say, Mister, you're either a fool or a doggone liar!" I must confess to the first, but we simply had to get back that night to allay the fears of the members of our party left in camp. In any event, I am sure Conrad never exaggerated the difficulties he overcame on any mountain.

Occasionally he was criticized for being stubborn, but I felt

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that when he disagreed it was firmness in his belief rather than stubbornness. His life had been filled with many varied experiences which produced fixed ideas that endured until further observation forced a change in his views. This character trait was shown in his philosophy concerning "the free man," about whom he frequently spoke. Conrad always maintained that only the man who worked for himself was free, and it may have been partly due to this feeling that he left my employ at "Karmax."

He then married our fine, efficient maid, Hetta Ferreira, bought a small truck farm in Wilmer, and with Hetta established a home. This step pleased me, for I felt it would have a settling influence on his life, which heretofore had seemed without definite purpose. The couple were well suited to each other and worked hard to develop their place, Hetta carrying on the work when, during the winter months, Conrad handled his trapping lines back in the mountains. We saw little of either of them for many months until I had a wire from Mr. Wheeler, asking that we come on at once with Conrad to join a search party for Dr. and Mrs. Stone, who had left camp to try a first ascent of Mt. Eon near Assiniboine. Fortunately, Conrad was at home and we left next day by train for Banff. This gave me an opportunity for a good long visit to learn how things were going with him.

It was soon evident that both of them had worked terribly hard with the gardening, hunting, and trapping, which caused Conrad again to express himself about the "free man." "The free man," he declared, "is one who has a good, pleasant, and sure job at fair wages, who begins work when the whistle blows in the morning, has time off for lunch, knocks off work when the whistle blows at 4:30 in the afternoon, and is *perfectly free* till the whistle blows again next morning—*he* is the free man!" I expressed surprise at this great change in his views. He smiled and said, "We own our property now, but we never, day or night, are without worries for fear the crops may fail, hunting or trapping may be poor, we may get sick and can't work, and may fail to make payments on our home. While I was working with you and everything was fine, I never thought about those matters that now make slaves of Hetta and me."

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Thus, as is usually the case, socialism disappeared when they became owners of the home they had worked so hard to get and prized so highly. With that question settled, Conrad then asked me if I had ever heard what the men in the Valley called me. When I said no, and that I probably would be the last man to hear it, he replied, "Well, don't get mad! They say you're a slave driver." Much amused I asked him what he thought about it. "Well, I'm not sure," he replied, "just what those words mean, but I know you worked in the fields with the men and always set a good pace and worked harder than anybody else in the gang and seemed to like it. But now and then you would say, 'Boys, let's rest a spell.' I never thought a slave driver would act *that* way." Here again he found that the *Herren* in Canada were more democratic than in Europe, and he liked it.

It is regrettable that Conrad did not give any detailed description of his routine methods for dispatching animals caught in his trap lines, for I am sure, with his very friendly care and consideration of all domestic animals, he must have protected the wild animals as much as possible from unnecessary distress. He used to hint to the ladies that, whenever they wore their furs, they should ponder the question whether or not the pleasure and comfort given them is enough to justify the distress endured by the innocent animals involved in their procurement. The description he gives of his various little companions and his clever big dog, Bruno, that shared his quiet, lonely cabin in 1916 during the winter trapping, clearly shows a gentle nature that "longed for the solitude one finds in the Rockies, for the campfire and the carefree life."

Conrad made two trips to New Zealand, one with Herbert O. Frind, with whom he made many first ascents and traverses. It was due to Conrad's outstanding work in the recovery of the body of a local guide from an avalanche on Mt. Cook—February 25, 1914, that he was employed by the New Zealand government to carry on a guide's training school.

In 1926, after Conrad returned to the States to live, I lost touch with him, but was much interested in all I heard about the numerous explorations and climbing trips he made with various members of the Canadian and American Alpine Clubs in the northwest section of Canada. I was especially pleased to

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read that, August 10, 1933, his 50th birthday, he thoroughly enjoyed his climb of our old friend, Mt. Louis, with Henry Kingman. However, that climb evidently revealed to him that his many years of heavy climbing and hard work had taken a serious toll of his vitality. This realization, coming only six months after the crushing blow of the loss of his beloved wife, seemed too much for him to bear, although his philosophical habit of mind helped him to feel some consolation in the thought that he had given her many happy years during their life together. I feel sure, after the lapse of a long, lonely year, that he was happy to rejoin her in one of his Elysian flower-bedecked Alpine meadows.

The pages of his book contain many sage words of advice that should be read by all mountaineers interested in safe climbing. To the best of my knowledge, in all his years of heavy climbing Conrad always brought his *Herren* home without serious accident.

The brass plate on Conrad's ice-axe at the American Alpine Club in New York records Mt. Robson 1913, Mt. Louis 1916, and Bugaboo Spire 1916—three first ascents I was privileged to make with him. Remembering them, I put the name of Conrad Kain at the top of the list as the most interesting companion and the best and safest mountain guide in all the years of my climbing.