

# Alpine Ascents in the American Press, 1785-1897

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ALPINE historians have taken little note of the fact that, from the end of the eighteenth century, when Mont Blanc became news, the American press was alert to European mountaineering. It seems worth while, therefore, to present a brief and incomplete list of this reporting, from somewhat rare sources, in hopes of future amplification.

*New Hampshire Mercury* (Portsmouth, N. H.), October 4, 1785. Probably the first account of climbing on Mont Blanc to appear in America. It is the narrative of Bourrit's attempt in 1784, entitled "Account of the Discovery of the White Hill, or Mont Blanc in the Alps" (see *A.J.* 57, 214, and Graham Brown and de Beer, *The First Ascent of Mont Blanc*, 443), a translation from the French in the *Scots Magazine* for January, 1785. It meant fast work for a French pamphlet to be written, printed, translated and again printed in the *Scots Magazine* by this date, since Bourrit's attempt was made in the latter part of 1784. Someone must have quickly noticed the English version and sent it across the Atlantic to appear in October, 1785.

*Providence Gazette* (Providence, R. I.), May 22, 1820. "Visit to the summit of Mont Blanc by an American." This was the first American ascent, by Howard and Van Rensselaer, July 12, 1819. Apparently the first press account in English. See *A.A.J.* i, 327.

*National Intelligencer* (Washington, D. C.), November 18, 1820. The Hamel accident on Mont Blanc, August 29 of this year. See *A.J.* 58, 169.

*The Statesman* (N. Y.), October 16, 1827. H. H. Jackson's ascent of Mont Blanc, September 4, 1823, evidently taken from the *New Monthly Magazine* (London) of May, 1827.

*New-York American* (N. Y.), February 2, 1830. "Ascent of Mont

Blanc — by John Auldjo, Esq., of Trinity College, Cambridge." August 7-8, 1827. A lengthy account from a London newspaper.

*The Atlas* (or Literary, Historical and Commercial Register); New York, February 27, 1830. A correspondent of the *London Courier* furnished for that paper some extracts from a narrative of a visit to this "speculative height." The ascent of Mont Blanc by Charles Fellows and William Hawes took place on July 25, 1827, two weeks before that of John Auldjo. Each of them published privately in this year an account of the adventure, using identical titles. Benjamin Hawes wrote one of these from material supplied by his brother, William, and from this the press version was taken.

*The Atlas* (N. Y.), February 11, 1832. An amusing parody of an Ascent to the Summit of Mont Blanc, originally in Hood's Comic Annual, and reprinted in the *Keepsake* for 1832. Thus its transference across the Atlantic was rapid for the time. What follows will indicate the tone: "We was three ours gitting over the Glazier, and then cum to the Grands Mulletts, where our beds were bespोक — that is, nothing but clean sheats of sno, — and never a warmin pan. To protect our heds we stuck our poles agin the rock, with a cloath over them, but it looked like a verry little tent to so much mounting. There we was — all Sno, with us Sollitary figgers atop. Nothink can give the sublime idear of it but a twelf Cake."

*National Intelligencer* (Washington, D. C.), October 2, 1835. A long report of Parrot's ascent of Mount Ararat.

*The New Yorker* (N. Y.), September 24, 1836. Ascent of Mont Blanc by Alfred Waddington on July 8 of that year. A partial translation from *Le Fédéral* (Geneva) of July 15 appeared in the *Times* (London) on July 23, as well as a résumé in the *Literary Gazette* of July 30. The American version may be an independent translation as it is stated to have been taken from the Geneva account.

*The Globe* (Washington, D. C.), November 10, 1838. "Ascent of a French Lady to the Summit of Mont Blanc." Mlle. d'Angeville, September 4, 1838. One of the proprietors of the *Charleston Courier* was at Chamonix at the time and wrote the report from there on September 7, which was reprinted in Washington. We have found no earlier *press* notice in English. In *The New Yorker* (N. Y.), December 19, 1840, there is a detailed account taken from the *New Monthly Magazine* (London), of November, 1840.

*New-York Daily Tribune* (N. Y.), November 2, 1843. "Another Ascent of Mont Blanc," quoted from *The Rhône*, of Lyons. This was the

ascent of Dr. Edouard Ordinaire on August 25-26, 1843. Montagnier, in his bibliography, does not include the Lyons reference, which states that the doctor was accompanied by Edward Tairraz, "one of the sons of the proprietor of the London and England Hotel." "At half-past ten Mr. Edward Ordinaire, who preceded the other travellers with two of the guides, arrived at the top, where the rest of the party joined them some time afterwards." There is no mention of M. Chenal, further evidence that he was not in the party. Dr. Ordinaire was the first tourist to make two ascents of Mont Blanc, repeating his adventure on August 31 of the same year. Here again the news reached our country in remarkably short time.

*New-York Weekly Tribune* (N. Y.), September 13, 1851. Ascent of Mont Blanc by Albert Smith on August 13, 1851. The Atlantic cable had not been laid, so it is remarkable that this story appeared in the United States just one month after the event, as it was sent direct from Chamonix. The party "included Mr. Floyd, said to be the son of a General of that name, and a cousin of Sir Robert Peel, Mr. Phillips, a third Oxfordman, and Mr. Smith with sixteen guides, sixteen porters and a number of aspirants." No mention is made of the extraordinary list of provisions, a feature of other narratives. "When in the evening the party from Mont Blanc approached the village, nearly all the inhabitants assembled to meet them. Guns were fired in quick succession; the harps and fiddles of the valley were in requisition, and a sort of half comical half triumphal scene ensued. The travelers and guides looked very jaded and sun-scorched, and had very bloodshot eyes and rather dilapidated costumes, but, in other respects, seemed to be in tolerable condition."

*New-York Commercial Advertiser* (N. Y.), February 13, 1852. A naive description of Mont Blanc and the guides. "My first and only Alpine excursion was to the *Mer de Glace*, one of the great, indeed the greatest, glaciers of the Alps. . . . One visit is enough." "Jacques Balmat, one of the most daring and experienced, was the man who made the first ascent [Mont Blanc] when he was seventy [*sic*] years old."

*New-York Commercial Advertiser* (N. Y.), July 31, 1854. The Solitary Traveller. An English tourist's account of crossing Mont St. Bernard alone, in a communication to Eliza Cook's Journal. "Some of my friends in England had strongly urged me not to attempt the St. Bernard without a guide, because of the danger. Experience has, however, taught me that the services of a guide are needed less often than most people imagine, and I like to be alone. The skeletons of unhappy Frenchmen are still sometimes discovered in crevices of the rocks. . . . I saw dimly

through the rock a large black cross on the top of the slope; if that could be reached, there would be a hope of seeing the convent; so, mustering all my strength, I succeeded in climbing up to it and putting my arm around it, I wiped my eyes for a fresh survey. Heaven be praised! there is the convent, and nearer than I thought. Between me and it lay an untrodden bank of snow in the hollows of the rock. It was deep, and might be treacherous; but I had become desperate, and rushed across it, laughing and shouting under some wild, uncontrollable impulse, to open the door of the hospitable building. I leaped up the steps, and in another moment, was in the long passage which runs from one end of the edifice to the other, and in safety. If ever a heartfelt thanksgiving was offered to the good St. Bernard, it was on that occasion."

*New-York Commercial Advertiser* (N. Y.), September 25, 1854. "Ascent of Mont Blanc by a Lady." The ascent of Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton on August 21 of that year is described in a letter from Chamonix dated August 25, the day on which the American, Dr. Talbot, began his ascent and reached the Grands Mulets. See *A.A.J.* iii, 66.

*Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* (N. Y.), April 19, 1856. "Description by one who climbed Mont Blanc of his experiences."

*The Home Journal* (N. Y.), October 1, 1859. This contains a two-column review (3200 words) of the first series of "Peaks, Passes and Glaciers," published by the Alpine Club in 1858. It is one of the earliest reviews, certainly the most lengthy, to appear in America dealing with a work on Alpine climbing, and, although unsigned, is written with skill and insight. It was probably the first time that readers in this country were confronted with such technical terms as *sérac*, *névé*, *arête*, *couloir* and *bergschrund*.

*The World* (N. Y.), September 26, 1860. A lengthy review of Tyn-dall's *Glaciers of the Alps*, with biographical notes and his ascent of Mont Blanc.

*The Century, A Weekly Journal of Literature, Science, Art* (N. Y.), October 11, 1860. Ascent of Monte Rosa, from Tyndall's *Glaciers of the Alps*.

*Utica Herald* (Utica, N. Y.), August 28, 1865. The Matterhorn accident of July 14. The Atlantic cable had just been laid and news could now reach the American press rapidly. The accounts in this country did not include condemnation of climbing such as appeared in England.

*Syracuse Journal* (Syracuse, N. Y.), November 3, 1866. In a letter from Berne dated September 23 John Wilkinson described his ascent of

Mont Blanc on September 14, this being reprinted in the *Evening Transcript*, also of November 3. See *Early American Ascents*, 43.

*The World* (N. Y.), September 15, 1869. "Ascent of Piz Languard," a long letter from the Hon. S. S. Cox.

*Evening Transcript* (Boston, Mass.). European correspondence; an account by M.M.W. dated September 7-9, 1870, dealing with the Randall-Bean accident on Mont Blanc. There was also a note, dated Geneva, September 14, in the *Daily Advertiser* (Boston), September 16, 1870, and a notice in *N. Y. Times* of October 13. See *A.A.J.* v, 333.

*Boston Transcript*, August 16, 1879, and *Christian Register*, August 30, both contained notices of Dr. Moseley's accident on the Matterhorn (first American fatality on this mountain), August 14. See *A.A.J.* xii, 43.

It should be added that climbing in this country also received attention at an early date. There is much material, but the following will indicate its extent:

*The New Yorker* (N. Y.), September 9, 1837. Extract of a letter to the *Charleston Courier*, dated Sulphur Springs (near Asheville, N. C.), August 19, 1837. "On Monday a party was formed to ascend to the top of Black Mountain, said to have been ascertained by the measurement of Professor Mitchell, of Chapel Hill, to be the highest mountain in the United States, being about 300 feet higher than Mount Washington in New Hampshire, which towers 6,428 feet above the level of the ocean, and which geographers are wont to rank as the highest point of land in the Union. The party consisted originally of Dr. Dickson, Dr. Hardy, the esteemed and highly popular physician of Asheville and its vicinity, Mr. Johnson, a tutor in the South Carolina College, and myself." The mountain is the present Mount Mitchell.

*Kenosha Tribune* (Wisc.), December 1, 1853. "The First Recorded Ascent of Mt. St. Helens, in Oregon." From the *Oregonian* (Portland). Ascent of Wilson, Smith, Drew and the writer of the account.

*Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, D. C.), November 25, 1854. "First Ascent of Mt. Hood, in Oregon." Narrative of the editor of the *Oregonian* (Portland) who started on August 4 with a party under the leadership of Capt. Barlow.

*Utica Herald* (N. Y.), December 2, 1876. "Climbing an Unexplored Mountain," Hazard Stevens' ascent of Mt. Rainier.

All of these newspapers have been secured for the American Alpine Club library, and further references will be welcomed.