

## The Ascent of Mt. Redoubt

J. E. JOHNSON

THE Rampart Range, lying 25 miles by trail southwest of Jasper, Alberta, is perhaps one of the most striking of all the groups that compose the Canadian Rockies. The name is well chosen, for the eastern and northern walls of the range are tremendous rock cliffs almost 4,000 ft. high. Mt. Redoubt (*ca.* 10,200 ft.) stands at the northern end of the southern part of the range, and is the first peak to strike the eye of the traveler who comes in from the north. However, owing perhaps to the forbidding aspect of its eastern cliffs, and to the lack of knowledge of its southern slopes and the difficulty of access to them, it was not one of the first to be assaulted.

The first attempt on the mountain was made from the Alpine Club of Canada camp in 1926. A party consisting of T. B. Moffat, H. S. Hall, Jr., and the author, led by Hans Fuhrer, made an attempt by the great ice couloir that descends on the north.<sup>1</sup> The objective dangers were considerable and the difficulty was of a high order. The party reached the northwest ridge of Redoubt late in the afternoon and turned back from there.

In 1927, F. H. Slark, with F. Rutis, made an attempt on the mountain. This party unfortunately was lost, and no trace was found by a search party. It was reported that there was no cairn on the summit, so it was presumed that the peak was still virgin.

At any rate, D. L. Busk and I determined to attempt the ascent in 1928. Thus, early in August, accompanied by the guide, Hans Fuhrer, we arrived at the ranger's cabin on Maccarib Creek. From this vantage point, we searched the peak with glasses, and agreed with Goodair, the ranger, that there seemed to be no cairn on the summit. And a good look at the northern and eastern cliffs convinced Busk, who had not seen the mountain before, that any attempt must be made from the other side.

Next day we traveled on to join our outfit at the camp site. This was at an altitude of about 6,600 ft. in the band of timber that stretches along above the south shore of Moat Lake, but we

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<sup>1</sup> *Canadian Alpine Journal*, Vol. XVI, p. 63.

were perhaps half a mile to the east of the end of the lake. The location was such that we were about equally distant from the two depressions in the divide on either side of Drawbridge Peak, and could reach either with a minimum of walking.

The plan was to bivouac in the col to the east, hereafter called "The Lookout,"<sup>2</sup> and to begin the climb from there. The cliffs below this col looked too hard for a party laden with the impedimenta for a night at 8,300 ft.,<sup>3</sup> so it was decided to ascend Drawbridge Pass, west of Drawbridge Peak, and traverse the south slopes of that little mountain into the Lookout; this route Hans and I followed in 1926 in the opposite direction, and knew it presented no mountaineering difficulty.

Accordingly, the party, including the cook, Joe Weiss, set out on the afternoon of the 12th, carrying food, firewood and bedding. On the way we passed what we took to be the site of Slark's last camp, just at timber line below Drawbridge Pass, but we did not stop to look at it or to search for the monument that had been erected somewhere near.

It snowed most of that afternoon and continued to do so off and on during the night, so that Redoubt was in an impossible condition when we woke; but the weather was clearing and we determined to have a closer look while we were there. After traversing endless scree slopes intermingled with outcroppings of disintegrating ledges, we came face to face with the western cliffs of Redoubt, being separated from them by a broad, easy, rock couloir. Here, with a little pocket glass, we had a thorough look, but the answer was still in doubt: it was easy as far as the bottom of the lowest of three distinct bands of rock which form the true western face and reach right to the summit; we picked out a possible route to the summit, but only an attempt would show whether it was feasible. The snow did not prevent our reaching the cliffs, so we pushed on up and across the couloir. But almost as soon as we had put on the rope and tried actual climbing, the snow forced us off the face into a verglas-filled couloir, which was impossible, and we turned back.

On returning to the Lookout, we found the cook just about to descend a second time to timber line on the south, to pack up more wood in case we wished to spend a second night on the pass.

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<sup>2</sup> Name suggested by C. G. Wates in 1927.

<sup>3</sup> Altitudes are approximate, but correct within 100 feet.

We stopped him, for a return to camp was in order; the mountain would not be ready for us for at least two days. The long, tiresome traverse back into Drawbridge Pass was frowned upon; we now had lightened loads, and we knew the search party in 1927 had ascended the north side of the Lookout,<sup>4</sup> so we determined to start straight down. The buttress proved surprisingly short and easy, and it was decided to abandon all idea of bivouacs and start any future attempt straight from camp.

Two days later, August 15, the weather having been excellent in the interval, we set out at four in the morning for the Lookout. An hour and a half of easy scrambling brought us there for a short pause, before the traverse into the big couloir. This traverse I had made three times previously—twice earlier in the week and once on the return from the expedition of 1926—always fairly late in the day, and without any thought of rock avalanches; but this day, early in the morning, we were surprised by a fall that did not miss us by more than 40 ft., and left at least one member of the party in an uneasy frame of mind.

However, without further mishap we reached the base of the final cliffs only three and a half hours from the camp. (It must be said here that the only watch in the party went by spasms and made the telling of time difficult and uncertain.) Here a large breakfast was indulged in, as the plan was to take only one rucksack with a small amount of food to the summit. The view was truly glorious: On our left lay the Fraser group, Keystone,<sup>5</sup> Bennington, MacDonell and Simon, with the great upper névé of the Bennington Glacier and its thousand feet of icefall; then came Casemate (on which we turned covetous eyes), and its little brother Postern, whose northern cliffs are the sheerest I know; below lay the bare glacier of Bennington, melting to form a circuitous Geikie Creek; far away to the west could be distinguished what must be the Cariboo; then on the right came the wall of the Western Ramparts—Geikie, Turret and Bastion, three great teeth piercing the morning sky.

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<sup>4</sup>C. G. Wates (*Canadian Alpine Journal*, Vol. XVI) says that the buttress was only ascended by means of a fixed rope. The route used by the search party was to the east of ours which followed closely the ridge on the true right bank of the western snow couloir.

<sup>5</sup>Peak (10,200 ft.) on the continental divide between Bennington and Paragon. The name is not official.

But the rope was on and it was time to start. Hans led up, carrying the only ice-ax. I followed with his lightened pack on my back, and Busk brought up the rear, traveling light. The climbing started immediately with a steep bit up a slanting chimney; even before Busk had left the breakfast place, Fuhrer was stopped by an overhang. After a futile attempt to surmount it, he started right into the mountain, disappearing from my view, but soon re-appearing—to Busk—some 15 ft. over my head; at his word, I tied the sack on the rope, but had to follow to free it when it jammed. I found myself in a narrow, vertical crack, with the sky visible and the rope disappearing through a hole above my left shoulder (as I faced into the fissure); with some difficulty I turned around and squeezed through the hole to find Hans above me and the overhang surmounted. (I wish to make it clear that this was not a case of a chock-stone jammed in the chimney, but rather of the chimney running up under the face of the cliff where the latter overhung.) The chimney continued above this strange place, and more difficult climbing, always on extraordinarily loose rocks, brought us to the broad scree ledge at the top of the first band. Here we traversed to the right until the next band looked slightly easier, and continued the ascent, still bearing to the right and coming after a time into a vertical depression in the face. This is a couloir consisting of rock-worn and rock-strewn ledges, and is perhaps 50 ft. wide and quite steep; it extends from the base of the highest band of rock, which rises sheer above it, right down to the glacier.

We were forced to climb the ledges on the (true) right bank of the couloir for a few feet before working back onto the face on our left. As we were doing so, Hans suddenly called: "There's a rucksack!" He waited for us to join him, then dashed out into the couloir to retrieve it. A light tourist's sack was what he found; we opened it and examined the contents enough to satisfy us that it belonged to Slark, who had disappeared the year before in an attempt on the mountain, then cached it for further examination later, and proceeded on our way.

From the exposed position in the couloir and the battered condition of the contents, it was obvious the sack had not been left there, but had fallen for some distance. This gave us plenty of food for speculation and spread a feeling of uneasiness over all three.

The route now led away to the left out of the couloir, and soon brought us to a second broad ledge, the one separating the second band of rock from the final one. A traverse to the left, and a stiff scramble, and we were on a shoulder of the west ridge with the summit in sight. The final buttress of the ridge was turned by a short traverse onto the north face and an easy chimney, at the top of which we found ourselves a few feet from the summit and just below it—and there was no cairn!

It was probably fully as far and as long in time from the place where we found the sack to the top as it was from the breakfast place into the couloir, but I have little memory of the physical aspects of that part of the climb. My thoughts required most of my attention and they were not pleasant ones, but there was the human, if unsportsmanlike, hope that we might make a first ascent, and when no cairn was visible, that hope seemed realized.

But the satisfaction was short-lived, as we found a piece of brown wrapping paper lying among the rocks; this was the only sign of previous human presence, and I know that I, for one, tried to persuade myself that it might have blown there, a theory which reason made untenable. We looked all round, then sat down to eat a little chocolate; it was at this moment that I noticed something blue in a crack under a large block. This proved to be a cigarette tin and contained a sheet of paper rolled in tinfoil. On the paper was written:

Redoubt, Aug. 3, 1927, 10 hrs. 25 min. from  
camp at foot of Barbican Pass<sup>6</sup> above Moat Lake.

F. H. SLARK, *A.C.C.*

F. RUTIS

We could no longer doubt, but our misgivings increased. They had fallen on the descent. Would we do the same? What had fate in store for us in the next few hours? A shot of whiskey helped the nerves, but did not ease the situation, especially as a few flakes of snow began to fall; fortunately, they were not many and soon stopped.

We gave a glance at the awe-inspiring north face of Dungeon and laughed ironically at an earlier plan to traverse the ridge from Redoubt to that peak, a ridge that seemed to me much more broken

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<sup>6</sup> Obviously Drawbridge Pass was meant.

than the teeth of the Zmutt, and that I knew to be infinitely more rotten.

There wasn't much more to see, and we were in no mood to admire the scenery, so the descent was begun; we went as quickly as possible and, at the same time, I think we all were more cautious than ever before. The route of the ascent was followed; this would have proved extremely difficult had it not been for the small cairns Busk had built at strategic points and for his great skill in finding them again.

Thus in what seemed like a short time, we were back in the couloir where the rucksack was cached. We took such articles as might be of value in proving identity, and left the rest there. Another hour and a half saw us back at the "hole in the wall" and down to the breakfast place, with the difficulty all behind. As nearly as we could judge, this spot was between 600 and 800 ft. below the top, and it had taken us, traveling light, 7 hours, not including halts, to go up and down, or an average of about 200 ft. an hour, which, for a party of three, must be considered exceptionally slow. If the rock had been good, the climbing would have been of more than average difficulty, but the rock was so rotten that we had to move one at a time for practically the whole distance, and each move had to be made with extreme delicacy to avoid knocking loose rocks on the heads of those below. Many times the hand- and foot-holds were loose and would have broken away with wrongly applied pressure. We were extremely glad to have it over.

The rope off, we started rapidly across the big west couloir and the scree slopes for the Lookout, where it was necessary to re-rope for the descent of the buttress. We were back in camp at 6 o'clock, just 14 hours after the start. Our guesses at the time seem to have been fairly accurate, for the cook had heard us on top at 11, which was the hour we thought right. I should say that the total time should be divided as follows: 7 hours for the ascent, an hour on top, and 6 for the descent.

My conclusions as to the accident are both definite and vague. I feel certain that the party tried to descend the inaccessible-looking cliffs just below the summit and above the couloir where the rucksack was found. On such a face I doubt whether anyone could hold another on the rope; perhaps one of them slipped; perhaps—and this is very likely on Redoubt—a hand- or foot-hold gave way and the climber fell, pulling the other with him. It is interesting

to note that in the rucksack, along with a camera and other articles, there was a pair of climbing boots; they seemed to me too small for Slark, who was a big man, and I concluded that Rutis was climbing in kletterschuhe and that Slark carried the other's boots in the only rucksack. This, however, will probably never be known, as we did not see the bodies, and they must be lodged somewhere in the lower part of the couloir.

Dr. J. W. A. Hickson<sup>7</sup> brings up the question whether the men were roped. I think they must have been, as no climber would go where they seem to have fallen without being roped.

I feel certain that Slark and Rutis did not ascend the west face or they would never have attempted to descend where they did. This leads to the conclusion, formed by the search party in 1927, that they ascended by the main or northwest ridge of the mountain, although this is by no means definite.

Owing to the looseness of the rocks and the steepness, Redoubt must be considered both a difficult and a dangerous climb, and now that the ascent has been made and verified, my advice is to keep off.

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<sup>7</sup> *Canadian Alpine Journal*, Vol. XVI.