

Climbs from the Fay Hut

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THE recently erected Fay Hut of the Alpine Club of Canada is situated behind the peaks that wall in Moraine Lake, in the Lake Louise district of the Canadian Rockies. Its accessibility as a climbing center attracted Cromwell and myself and decided us to spend a ten days' holiday there last summer. The number of peaks ranged about, many of them comparatively short climbs, make it particularly adapted for the start of a summer's activities.

The hut is reached most easily by the Vermilion Pass road and the lower part of Prospectors Valley. A short two hours by motor from the Chateau at Lake Louise will bring one to Marble Canyon, at the junction of Prospectors Valley with the Vermilion River. Arrangements can be made in advance to have horses ready, and five hours with them should see one at the head of the trail in Prospectors Valley, under the cliffs on which the Fay hut is situated. In times of low water one might perhaps even dispense with horses altogether; but there are three fords of Tokumm Creek, and in mid-July last summer, when the water was not high, it was fully 3 ft. deep at the first two.

Less than an hour after leaving the automobile road, we felt so completely separated from the noise of civilization that we might have imagined ourselves a hundred miles, instead of ten, from the C. P. R. After some four hours, the trail begins to make more and more use of the stream bed, and then it becomes necessary to keep an eye out for a very large boulder, on the northerly side of the stream, a very prominent landmark from the trail. On reaching this boulder, we had been told to continue on until we should cross the next tributary coming in from the north, then to strike up the westerly bank of the latter, over open slopes, whereupon we would soon again meet the trail. An apparent short cut up the near (east) bank of the stream, which we followed, ended in an alder thicket, and should be avoided.

Within an hour from Tokumm Creek, the trail swings to the right and crosses the small stream. Here the ground was steep, and the stream a series of cascades, over great boulders, and all through its bed a tangle of uprooted trees jammed among the rocks.

The fresh character of this *débris* showed that it was of recent origin. We carefully explored its possibilities and concluded that our horses could go no farther, although beyond the crossing we could see good trail for some distance. Accordingly, the animals were unpacked and sent back to pasture in the valley, while Cromwell and I packed our ample supplies up the hot slopes. Only four days out from New York, this was excellent training.

The trail leads up across open talus slopes to a wall of rock. Two faults have split this, one a little to the right of where the trail touches it, the other a little to the left. We tried the latter. A steep scramble up finely shattered rock, with the help of some small trees, and we were on a pleasant plateau above the cliffs, but with no sign of any hut. Ten minutes higher, a freshly felled tree gave us a clue, and in two minutes more we stood before the comfortable Fay Hut. Subsequent trips showed the right-hand fault up the rock wall to be easier and quicker than the left.

The hut is delightfully situated at about 7000 ft., among larch and other timber, which, unfortunately for those approaching from above, blends all too well with the light green of the roof. A hundred yards off is a stream of clear water. A stock of staple provisions is maintained, but should not be drawn upon except in emergency. There is plenty of firewood, and a supply of kitchen implements, blankets and other necessities—only the beds were designed for very short Swiss guides, so that our feet projected a foot or more over the ends; but a roomy attic enabled us to sleep in comfort on its floor. There is also an excellent sheet-iron stove, but it requires watchfulness, being near the beds and wall, which began to smoke more than once. A sheet of asbestos would be a most valuable acquisition.

The bench on which the hut is situated is cut off from above as well as below by cliff belts. At the extreme easterly end of the upper wall, another fault has opened an absurdly easy passage in what would otherwise be quite a difficult pitch. The route from the Fay Hut to the half-dozen peaks about the Fay Glacier lies up this passage, then over easy slopes, populous with marmots, to the glacier. Here one can either step right onto the ice, or follow the east bank of the glacier to a rocky bastion which splits it into two parts just opposite Mt. Little. Either route is equally simple, but the latter is perhaps the more interesting, disclosing some beautiful calcite veins in the rock. Then, too, the reactions of the glacier to

the pressure exerted upon it, where the rocky bastion splits it in two, are interesting to those who have time to wander about a bit. From the head of this bastion, one gets a clear idea of the three bands of massive black rock, so characteristic of the Lake Louise region, and at the same time the cause of most of its difficulties. This black rock has no bedding planes, is extremely massive, and weathers in almost vertical, smooth cliffs, cut only by equally smooth couloirs. The lowest band is perhaps 300 ft. thick, and the most difficult to surmount. The upper two bands are much thinner, say 50 ft. each. The rock between the black bands is greyish limestone or dolomite, broken by numerous horizontal ledges, and cut vertically by innumerable chimneys. The chief risk is the danger of falling stones on the faces, and this must be guarded against, as most of the climbs are face climbs. Some of the peaks (Nos. 3, 4, 5) have steep scree slopes on at least one face. This scree is exceedingly angular, and for this reason lies at a steeper angle than is usual in the Alps. Conversely, at this steep angle, it is less stable, and an ascent of one of the scree slopes, except at the edge where it is coarse, is quite out of the question. For descending, it is an easy and rapid boulevard.

Arranged in a rising order of difficulty, one might list the peaks as follows: No. 4, No. 3, No. 5, Mt. Little, Mt. Fay. Mt. Quadra and No. 6 could no doubt also be climbed from the Fay Hut, but we did not do so.

Mt. Fay is mostly a snow and ice climb. The others have little snow, except for the easy glacier at their feet, which, however, has a number of crevasses here and there. The views are similar from all the summits, and the stupendous cliff dropping down to the valley of Moraine Lake is everywhere the feature. On this side can be seen the C. P. R., and the automobile road from Lake Louise, with frequent cars winding up. On the other, as far as one can see, no sign of civilization, only the dense alder thickets of Prospectors Valley leading to the wild Misko Pass, and wilder country beyond; and still farther on, Goodsir capped with clouds, the commander of that tremendous wall of peaks leading away to the southern horizon, the Ottetail Range.

Nos. 3, 4, and 5 should take about five hours each from the Fay Hut and back. No. 2 (Mt. Little) took us something over six hours, by a route up the south face. This face has an exceptionally heavy development of the lower black band. In its center, a light folding has created a cracking-up of the rock, which offers,

in one place only, small and uninviting footholds, but enough of them to make a crossing possible. From the top of this small fold, one can steer a course almost directly up, to a point just to the left of the summit towers. Thence a rather easy but exposed arête leads to the summit in a few minutes.

Mt. Fay required some nine hours, including excursions to one side up some pinnacles, for photographic purposes. For Mt. Fay, it is necessary to cross the eastern lobe of the Fay Glacier. This is very hummocky, and in some places the ice actually seems to flow up hill. These hollows are very swampy on the return, and one will do well to follow an even contour around, rather than a straight line through, the depressions. Eventually, following this arm of the glacier, one reaches a cirque, with a well-defined snow couloir leading up to the left of the summit of Mt. Fay. A quite sizeable bergschrund guards the foot of the couloir, and it was only by some very neat work of Cromwell's ax that we reached its upper lip. In the couloir at first it was easy enough to kick steps; then it hardened a bit, and cutting became necessary. Still it steepened, and at the same time the ice became harder. Finally we were driven out to the left, and scrambling over some decidedly rotten rock, we reached snow slopes higher up that led with a minimum of step cutting to the summit arête, and to the top. Here was a curious sight. On one side a perpendicular cliff descends to Consolation Lake. On the other, some 50 ft. of scree lead to a cliff that drops off, less steeply than on the Consolation side, to the Fay Glacier. In the middle of this scree, and parallel to the edge of the cliff, was a trench some 10 ft. deep. Apparently the outer part of the top is giving way, and this trench represented the amount of the settlement. Before long, it will no doubt come away altogether and seek the valley, with a result similar to the so-called "moraine" of Moraine Lake.

The accompanying sketch map is designed to show the immediate surroundings of the Fay Hut in greater detail than does Sheet 15 of the Interprovincial Boundary Commission Atlas, which should be obtained by anyone intending to climb in this region.