

Freighted and Unfreighted Ways in the Selkirks and Rockies

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IT is well known to many that the western slopes of the Selkirk range and of its outlying western foothills are, owing to copious precipitation, covered with some of the densest forests and undergrowth to be found anywhere on the American continent; that as one passes westward from the higher eastern ranges, the timber-line rises nearer and nearer to the tops of the lowering mountains, until on the western border of the Gold (Columbia) range there are few summits unmasked by forest. Not until the dryer Interior Plateau region is reached, further westward, do we find again a diminution of the forests and smaller vegetation.

In June last I found myself at Revelstoke in British Columbia, about to embark upon a geological investigation, under the auspices of Harvard University, that was destined to carry me far through the wilds of some of the less known parts of this country. A considerable part of the investigation, whose purpose was the examination of regional rock structures and their conditions of metamorphosis, took me into the all too heavily forested region west of Revelstoke, and even in the vicinity of the latter the almost tropical covering of the lower ground proved a serious handicap. Here, however, the mountains rise appreciably above timber line, and in many places above the permanent snow-line itself.

Mount Revelstoke Park possesses in the Clachnacudain range much wild glacierized country and some goodly summits that have scarcely, if ever, been visited, rising in some cases to close on 9,000 feet, while further to the north lies Mt. Moloch (10,208 ft.) and other comparable summits of the Big Bend. Time did not permit of our going far into this range, but a sporting little peak known as Pt. 7,983 ft., or Clachnacudain, West, (Wheeler), gave R. M. B. Roome and the writer an interestingly varied rock and snow climb by its southwestern side. Much bigger propositions lay to the north-eastward, but from our summit commanding views were to be obtained of the Selkirk range, and of such prominent outliers of it as the Albert Peaks, of most striking outline.

South-southwest of Revelstoke in the Gold (Columbia) range, along its eastern border, are several bold peaks exceeding 9,000 ft.,

but perhaps most challenging of all is Mt. Begbie, whose triple summit reaches 8,962 ft. A fourth ascent, by what is believed to be a new route over the northwestern arête, and a descent to the glacier via the eastern ridge, gave Roome and the writer a first-rate though not difficult expedition.

Other ascents in the range were those of Joss Mt. (7,900 ft.) and of Eagle Mt. (7,700 ft.), the latter affording a fine rock climb of some 1,000 ft. on the northeast face with a finish over the towers of the east ridge.

SELKIRKS

At the end of August, wishing to learn something of the nature of the main range of the Selkirks, the writer proceeded to Glacier, where the summer camp of the Harvard Mountaineering Club was situated. Moreover it was to be the long deferred fulfillment of a burning desire to see something of this, perhaps the finest, of the great ranges of the West. It had always seemed from the classic writings of the Rev. W. S. Green and Howard Palmer, in their well-known books on this range, that so much could be found in beauty of form, in extensive glacier setting, and in a more desirable and reliable structure for climbing, as to place the Selkirk mountains in a category more akin to the Alps than the Rockies. And the passage through in June on the C. P. R. express, when everything was immersed in cloud and gloom, gave the greater zest to the venture now.

Accompanying the writer to the camp was C. G. Crawford, of the second Mount Everest Expedition, now on a visit from England to the Rockies. The club party of nine had already been in operation for two weeks. The day following our arrival, Crawford and I led two ropes of three each across the Illecillewaet Névé to Glacier Circle and in our waywardness we must confess to having paid but little attention to the high "caravan doctrine," expounded so strenuously by the ex-president of that group, when putting our own individual party routes across that exposed tract of country!

However, next day (Aug. 27) the two ropes in orthodox concerted fashion attacked Mt. Fox by the long east ridge, which rises from the depths of Glacier Circle, and after nine hours of fairly leisurely, and never really difficult climbing, reached the summit.

The fine situation of the latter, the commanding view of the Illecillewaet Névé with Sir Donald beyond, and the great wall of the Dawson range so near at hand, make this a most excellent expedition and worthy viewpoint. The descent by the southwest face to the head of the Dawson glacier and return thence down the Fox glacier nearly cost the party a night out, owing to the complexities of the lower part of the latter glacier having to be tackled in the gathering darkness.

The following morning only A. B. Emmons and J. H. Kennard were eager to start out as late as 11.20 with the writer for Mt. Topham, from which to get a glimpse of the remoter beauties of the Purity range and the great Deville Névé, and if possible a short climb only. In little more than five hours we reached the top, by way of a sporting rock wall bounding the Deville glacier icefall on its eastern side, and the western slopes of the mountain. Three hours sufficed for our return to the Circle by the same route. It would be hard to find anywhere a more exquisite and impressive panorama than that from Mt. Topham. And what was so remarkable during the greater part of last summer was the prevailing clarity of atmosphere and absence of smoke, which in spite of the dry conditions in most parts of the mountains can probably only be attributed to the lack of severe electric storms that usually prove such a potent cause of forest fires. Another outstanding blessing last summer in British Columbia was the absence of mosquitoes and other flies from even the most notorious localities in the valleys and the lower country.

If it had not been for the club program, as well as the lack of adequate provisions, some of us would have dearly loved to linger longer at Glacier Circle and its well equipped cabin, for there can be few, if any, rivals of it as regards excellence of position and charm of surroundings, and with numerous scarcely-visited mountains and glaciers to explore.

On August 31st in a bitterly cold wind and some snow the writer led J. H. Kennard and J. C. Gray up the northwest ridge of Mt. Sir Donald, Crawford following with A. Carscallen and A. B. Emmons. The frigid conditions made halts inadvisable, and we reached the summit in 3 hrs., 55 mins., from the Sir Donald-Uto col, the second party arriving within 40 minutes. Leaving the summit at 11.40 we descended by the ordinary route to the Vaux glacier and were back at Glacier at 3.55, following a good

deal of delay with blueberry-gathering in the woods, as an addition to our supper menu.

The Harvard Camp having terminated, Crawford and I resorted to excellent quarters at the house of Mr. Hartley, the Forest Warden at Glacier, where we were joined by Lady Rosemary Baring. We had heard that the east and south faces of Mt. Tupper had never been climbed and resolved to have a look at them. Starting on September 3rd from the Hermit Hut,¹ the three of us attained Tupper Crest, and then traversed below the south face of Mt. Tupper's highest summit to the arête that runs steeply down from the latter in a south-southeasterly direction. The face and the arête appearing extremely steep and uninviting we reconnoitered round into the gap separating the Camels' ridge from the eastern ridge of Mt. Tupper. The prospects of reaching the summit of Tupper from this direction seemed somewhat doubtful, and opinions differed amongst the male element in the party as to whether we should proceed or retreat, until the casting vote of the lady member committed us to the attack. Crawford led off from the gap and making light of the steep lower rocks, put us well on our way upward before he decided he was having all the fun and handed over the lead to me. The upper part proved surprisingly straightforward, and even capable of variation in many places, and at three o'clock—1 hr., 30 min. only from the gap—we found ourselves on the summit rocks and feasting upon the beauties of the Hermit range and of Sir Donald, as well as on the remnants of our provisions. A quick descent by the ordinary route brought us back to Hermit Hut so pleased with life, that it was not till another night had been spent in its pleasant precincts (though not too cleanly interior), that we made our way back to Glacier.

The writer was anxious to see something of the east side of the Sir Donald range and its structure, and moreover it appeared that no route had ever been made up Mt. Sir Donald from that direction. Accordingly the same party of three crossed the Sir Donald-Uto col at 6.30 A.M. on September 5th and made their way unimpeded down the Uto glacier for a distance of about one and a quarter miles. The cliffs of Mt. Sir Donald on the north and northeast drop so abruptly to the glacier that for a long time we despaired of effecting a lodgment on them. However, when

¹ The hut is placed at the 6,750 ft. contour on Wheeler's 1:60,000 map (1906): this seems to be 6-700 ft. too high.

we had descended to an altitude of about 7,230 ft. by aneroid, this was eventually accomplished, and the ascent of a steep wall of three hundred feet brought us on to the great glacierized shelf of the east side of Sir Donald, which provides the southern affluent of the lower Uto ice stream.²

Neglecting the more difficult looking ascent to the upper northeast arête of the mountain rising abruptly above us, we decided to make for what appeared from this aspect to be the main ridge of the mountain. Two hours of step-cutting, varied with easy rock work, brought us at 8,700 ft. to what turned out to be not so much an eastern ridge, as the broken edge of a great structural slab of the mountain. Thence followed about 1,200 ft. of crag, buttress, and slope of a monotonous and very unstable character, until we found ourselves at an altitude of 9,900 ft. on the east-southeast ridge of the mountain. Unexpected difficulties on the latter, necessitating at one place a complicated roping-off operation from a pinnacle into a gap in the ridge, delayed our arrival at the summit until 5 o'clock. And can there be another summit in all the Selkirks, where the enthralling panorama will more likely compel protracted delay? The ascent from the Uto glacier had taken 8 hrs., 45 mins., and at such a late hour of the day we had, of course, to forego our intention to descend by the northwest ridge. And even so, going down the ordinary route, we found ourselves at dusk (7 P.M.) at the bergschrund of the Vaux glacier and resorting once more to an *abseil*, in this case from an ice-pinnacle, to negotiate the abrupt declivity of the wasted and expanded *randkluft*. This, however, was not the last of our troubles, for since our descent of the glacier but six days previously, many snow bridges had disappeared, and the passage across several large crevasses in the gathering darkness proved a matter of no little difficulty. It was a somewhat fortunate and not unthankful party that eventually reached the comfort of the Hartleys' chalet at Glacier at 11.25 that night.

ROCKIES

The same party of three shortly after this returned to the Rockies and made the ascent of Mt. Louis, and then of Mt. Victoria by the ordinary route from Abbot pass.

²The features of this face can be well seen in a photograph opposite p. 411 of Howard Palmer's "Mountaineering and Exploration in the Selkirks."

In August the writer had paid a flying visit to the Alpine Club of Canada's camp at Maligne Lake during the last few days of its existence. No words can do justice to the grandeur and quality of scenery of this lake, at the southern end in particular, and no greater praise perhaps could be conferred upon it than that by a Swiss friend of the writer's who was ready to admit that Maligne rivaled any lake in his own country! Privileged, indeed, are those who have beheld it, and who were able in addition to experience the hospitality of the A. C. C. there this last summer. The climbing accomplishments from the camp will have been recorded elsewhere.³

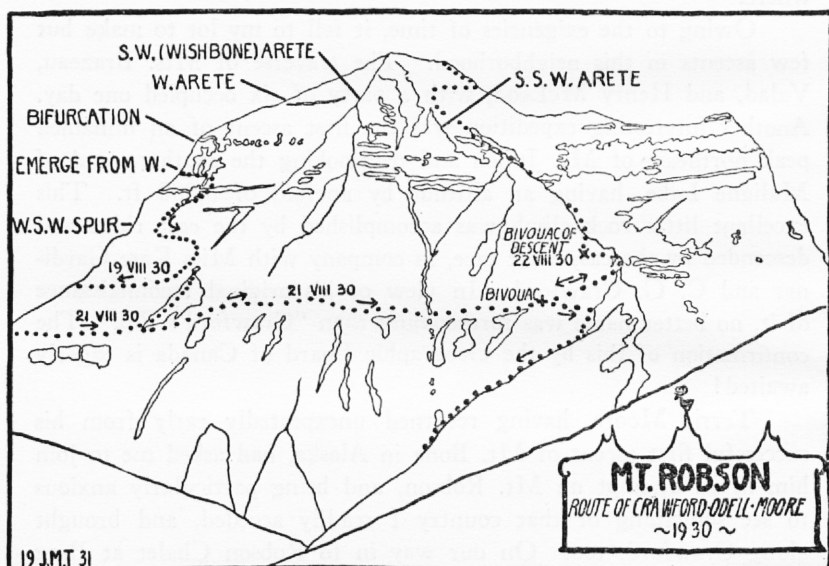
Owing to the exigencies of time, it fell to my lot to make but few ascents in this neighborhood. The traverse of Mts. Brazeau, Valad, and Henry McLeod, with a party of six occupied one day. Another interesting expedition was the first ascent of an unnamed peak northeast of Mt. Julien and overlooking the southern end of Maligne Lake, having an altitude by aneroid of 8,800 ft. This excellent little rock climb was accomplished by the east ridge and descended by the easy west face, in company with Miss Kate Gardiner and C. G. Crawford. In view of his original reconnaissance of it, no better name was forthcoming than "Crawford's Pip." The confirmation of this by the Geographic Board of Canada is eagerly awaited!

Terris Moore, having returned unexpectedly early from his successful first ascent of Mt. Bona in Alaska, had asked me to join him in an attempt on Mt. Robson, and being particularly anxious to see something of that country I readily acceded, and brought along Crawford, too. On our way in to Robson Chalet at Berg Lake we met Miss Helen Buck and Dr. A. J. Gilmour and learned from them and from the two Fuhrers (guides) accompanying them, further details as to the latter's search for N. D. Waffl, who had not returned from a solitary attempt on the western face of the mountain on August 4th. Full details are given elsewhere in this journal as to that sad loss, the various attempts to recover effects and the probable nature of the catastrophe.

From a high bivouac at about 8,100 ft. on the talus slopes below the great upper cliffs on the western facet, on August 19th, we made an attempt on the mountain. Our route lay up the wall of a notable couloir that seams the western facet in its northern half,

³ See *Canadian Alpine Journal*, 1931.

and the considerable difficulties of this ascent, occasioned largely by verglas, forced us to the right and eventually out on to the crest of the west-southwest spur that supports the main western arête of the mountain. It may be mentioned that the western facet is the truncated end of the western arête that rises prominently above Emperor Falls and is a feature that has been somewhat unnecessarily referred to locally as the "Little Wishbone arête": whereas the original and plausibly named "Wishbone arête" is well seen from the valley of the Grand Forks. The unexpected difficulties of the facet, and the general conditions of verglas on the mountain, caused



us at about 10,800 ft. to abandon the attempt and to make instead, in the time left at our disposal, a search for any effects of Waffl that it seemed likely might be found further across on the open reaches of the western face. We were, however, unsuccessful in this and in the end had considerable difficulty in descending the skirting cliffs of the face, having to rope off at one place. This was quite close to the glacier avalanche fan, where the Fuhrers and Joe Saladana and Hargreaves had during the last few days found certain articles of Waffl's clothing and equipment.

Two days later a search was made in company with Miss Buck and Dr. Gilmour of this same avalanche fan. Its crevasses and

randkluft were examined. Crawford, Moore and I then traversed round, at about the 8,000 ft. contour, to the south side of the mountain and from a bivouac at about the same altitude were successful, on the 22nd, in reaching the summit of the mountain. The lower glacier gave quite straightforward going on crampons, and few steps had to be cut until we had surmounted the rock-glacis that at about 10,900 ft. supports the great upper ice-fall wall. From there onwards the rotten ice surface, on which one's crampons gave insufficient security, necessitated long stretches of cutting. Arrived at the terrace, about 11,900 ft., that forms a break in the vast ice cataract of the southern side of Mt. Robson, we traversed eastward beneath the great ice wall which supports the summit crest. The direct ascent of this feature at its south-southwest edge appeared feasible, though lengthy, owing to the numerous ice bulges and pitches, and was apparently the route adopted by W. B. Putnam and J. Hargreaves in their ascent in 1922.* We hoped, however, for a better alternative at the southeast edge of the ice that overlooks the Robson glacier, and which had been utilized in the first ascent of 1913 and in 1924. Our hopes were not fulfilled, for above some initial schrunds we found at intervals steep ice pitches and long stretches of ice slope veneered with the rottenest texture of ice crust, into which each step had to be deeply cut, and Crawford and I were only too glad to relieve one another fairly frequently in leading. At 2.30 we had polished off this 1,000-ft. culminating feature of the mountain, and our arrival on the delicate and corniced summit ridge synchronized with a partial clearing of the banks of swirling mist, which afforded, by glimpses of the remoter surroundings, an impressive realization of Robson's towering supremacy.

The greater part of our staircase had to be recut on the descent, and though no time was lost, we only succeeded in reaching the lower ice-fall (9,000 ft.) by about 10 o'clock, where struggles with crevasses in the dark and the eventual negotiations of a steep rock wall, brought us to a halt on a platform with sufficient space for a night's bivouac. This platform was just below, but fortunately adequately protected from, the calving wall of the (lower) ice-fall, beneath whose tottering cliff we had passed at top speed in the morning. Now in the darkness we scarcely wished to repeat the

* See *C. A. J.*, Vol. xiii, p. 39, 1923; and *Sierra Club Bulletin*, February, 1929.

experience at a slow crawl. As we eked out the long cold night on our ledge, it was trying to realize that our earlier bivouac was but 700 ft. below us, and at the first streak of dawn we lost no time in running the gauntlet of the ice cliff over its disgorged wreckage of ice blocks, and in descending to our gîte for a hot breakfast and a sleep in the morning sun. It was not till 4 P.M. that day that we had unravelled the intricacies of the descent and arrived at Kinney Lake, to be welcomed by Miss Buck and Dr. Gilmour and escorted to the Hargreaves' ranch.

Mt. Robson is technically quite the hardest ice ascent the writer has made in the Rockies or Selkirks, and in his opinion it can be classified with the big ice climbs of the Alps as far as its southern route, as above described, is concerned. Unlike many of those climbs it possesses definite hazards that appear to be unavoidable under the present conditions of glacierization:⁵ chief amongst these are the upper and the lower ice-fall walls below which, and within deadly range of which, in each case a passage must be made. It is believed that the danger of the lower ice-fall wall might be circumvented by a route, involving greater difficulty, entirely up the rocks that bound the glacier on the west. The latter possibility would also avoid a potential risk of avalanches down the channel of the lower glacier from the upper ice-fall. But the hazard of the upper ice-fall wall remains, and must remain, until a radical change in ice conditions takes place and on such a steep face only a very pronounced waning of existing glacierization will ever effect this.

The statement in the "Climber's Guide"⁶ that a sound route on Mt. Robson has yet to be found still holds good. It may, as there surmised, lie up the "Wishbone arête" of the western face, but as yet no satisfactory way of reaching that arête has been found.

⁵ See *Alpine Journal*, Vol. xxxvi, p. 420: "A Climber's Guide to the Rocky Mountains of Canada," p. 213. The route could not, however, be said to be easy this year.

⁶ *Loc. cit.*: p. 213.