

In the Bugaboo Group

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THIS seldom-visited group is surely deserving of greater popularity. The climbing compares favorably with that of the minor European centers, and it is easy to reach; our camp being only a day and a half from Spillimacheen in the Columbia River valley. Spillimacheen itself is but a morning's motor run from Golden, B. C., and is served not only by a bus line, but also by the Canadian Pacific Railway, a branch of which ascends the valley.

A part of the Purcell range, the peaks are the westernmost of truly Alpine character, and contain several summits of an altitude well over ten thousand feet. The rock is largely granite, firm and weatherproof, lending itself to a mountain architecture truly startling. Some of the pinnacles seem quite inaccessible, and will succumb only to a formal siege, if at all. The best efforts of our finest rock climbing specialists would not be wasted here.

The first party to visit and describe the district was that of Dr. Longstaff and Mr. Arthur O. Wheeler, in 1911.¹ They were much handicapped by bad weather, and did practically no climbing. The second party was that of Dr. J. W. A. Hickson, with Eduard Feuz, Jr., in 1916. They were driven back by bad weather from several attempts on the Howser Spire, and finally left after a severe snowstorm had made further efforts obviously useless. Later in the same season Captain A. H. MacCarthy's party, led by Conrad Kain, had better fortune, and made the first ascents of the two highest summits, with several others not mentioned in his article.²

Conrad Kain is now an outfitter, and has a ranch at Wilmer, B. C. We met at Spillimacheen the fifth of August, 1930, Conrad with his outfit, including George Rennenkampf as wrangler; Peter Kaufmann, of Grindelwald, guide, and the author. The weather was perfection, and every omen indicated that it would continue so for some time to come.

Toward the end of the next day, we turned up the southwest fork of Bugaboo Creek, known as Rocky Point Creek, enjoying occasional glimpses of a most impressive crown of sharp rock peaks walling in the *cirque* at the head of the valley. At dusk we made

¹"Across the Purcell Range of British Columbia," by T. G. Longstaff. *C. A. J.*, Vol. III, 1911, p. 26.

²"The Howser and Bugaboo Spires, Purcell Range," by A. H. MacCarthy. *C. A. J.*, Vol. VIII, 1917, p. 17.

a well-sheltered camp in the woods near the toe of the Bugaboo glacier. A clear stream flows close to the camp site, and the level ground on which we pitched our tents was a much appreciated luxury. From here it took only about two and one-half hours to reach the actual climbing, over easy glacier and moraine.

The glacier extends southwards into the group, in shape resembling the wrist and fingers of the right hand, the little finger being severed from the rest by a large moraine. The peaks rise around the edge of the hand, and between the fingers; the back of the hand being a large ice plateau.

The morning of the seventh we left camp at a very comfortable hour, planning to do no more than make a reconnaissance of our principal quarry, a peak we had christened "Snowpatch" because of a prominent little snow slope half way up the north side, the attainment of which is probably the key of the ascent, if it be possible. Conrad came a short way with Peter and me, returning to work about the camp.

We ascended the glacier to the ice plateau, and turning to the northwest followed the crest of a long steep moraine to the foot of "Snowpatch." We followed its rocky wall around to the right, seeing as we progressed less and less hope of climbing it. If it were made of well riveted boiler plate it could appear no more difficult, and most of the north wall actually overhangs. The secondary glacier—the little finger—on which we now stood led steeply but easily up to a col between "Snowpatch" and the "Spire"; the latter being one of the peaks conquered by the preceding party. At the col we took a rest and looked the country over.

The only unclimbed peak that seemed at all possible was the "Pigeon Spire," immediately before us. Leaving the lefthand mountain behind, as being clearly hopeless from this side, we walked across the glacier to the southern end of the long ridge, and after a short rest, began our climbing, having left all impedimenta behind except a piece of chocolate and the kodak. The difficulties met as far as the southern summit were not very serious. The aspect of the ridge from there, which leads up to the shoulder was so formidable that we seriously considered a retreat. However, one cannot tell by looking, so we descended to the saddle and discovered that the climbing was far easier than we had any reason to expect, and soon found ourselves on a shoulder, separated from the summit block by a deep notch. This face of the summit was abso-

lutely unclimbable, but a traverse around it seemed just possible, using a narrow vertical chimney to descend upon the northwest face, which turned out to be less savage than it had appeared from below. Sloping ledges brought us around to the north ridge, which we gained by an interesting "jam-crack" just large enough to permit the insertion of right foot and knee. This led away at an angle of approximately forty-five degrees, and after thirty or forty feet petered out into a "finger traverse," the key of the climb. While I belayed the rope as securely as I could, Peter crept carefully along, supported as much by the friction of his clothes against the rock as by the narrow crevice into which he slipped his fingers. The ridge once gained, ten minutes of easy going brought us to the cleft summit and a magnificent panorama of the group, the Howser Spires especially appearing to great advantage. We stayed to enjoy the view until shortly after three o'clock, the actual climbing having taken about three hours, and descended by the south arête and the glacier on the southeast side. Thus encircling the peak and arriving at camp at a quarter to seven.

On the eighth Peter and I decided to have a look at the southeast side of the group, and ascended the "Thumb" glacier to the north ridge of the mountain which, with Howser Peak, forms the retaining wall of the glacier system. The climbing is very easy, and we soon made the traverse, descending on the further side again to the upper snow basin of the Bugaboo glacier, which we crossed to the col at the foot of the west arête of Howser Peak. The latter we climbed after lunch, finding *en route* a cairn left by Captain MacCarthy and Conrad, on the 28th August, 1916. We descended by the main branch of the glacier, having to dodge on the way stones dropping from the western face of "Rock Ridge Peak," which is the principal contributor to the moraine of the right bank.

Followed a day of rest because of rain, and on the tenth, we decided to celebrate Conrad's birthday by an attempt on "Center Peak," also called "Marmolata." The weather held us back until quarter after nine, when the slight drizzle ceased and the sun began to show. Wet through by the woods, we quickly dried off walking up the glacier and moraine to the foot of "Snowpatch." From here we crossed the southwest glacier arm to the prominent depression, almost a saddle, in the north ridge of Center Peak. The route is unmistakable, the ridge leads straight to the top, and affords excellent and interesting climbing, in places of a high degree of

difficulty. These pitches might be flanked by traverses on one face or the other, but the ledges are so sloping, and the rock so loose, that it is easy to do the sporting thing and keep as much on the crest as possible. Just below the summit, we were stopped by a vertical, holdless pitch some twelve to fifteen feet in height. This Conrad beat by taking a back-stand furnished by Peter and myself, inserting the pick of his ice-axe into a horizontal fissure, and swarming up the handle until he could get his fingers into the crack. From there he swung out to the right, found a small ledge, and was up. I didn't find it very easy, being the last. The axe came away, and I was left suspended like Mahomet's coffin, 'twixt heaven and earth, until a long pull, and a stout pull, brought me also to the top. We had used some three hours on the ridge, and it was now 5 o'clock. Consequently we gave up the idea of attempting a descent by the south ridge, and returned the same way, reaching camp at 9 o'clock. The following day I had an opportunity to inspect that same ridge, and was heartily glad we had not attempted it, as it breaks away in giant steps, and to rope off from them would have required far more rope than we possessed.

On that day Peter and I ascended the main glacier branch, and traversed the two little peaks at the head of it, which we called "Thimble" and "Flat Top" for obvious reasons. They are entirely devoid of mountaineering difficulties, but make a very pleasant rest day, and the latter, especially, offers a sensational view of the southerly wall of the Howser Spires, which from this vantage point appear quite as impressive as the Chamonix Aiguilles.

On our last day we were turned back in an attempt on the Bugaboo Spire, one of the party becoming indisposed just under the great gray tower; this is a magnificent climb, and will some day be ranked with any in the Canadian Alps. It was the one I enjoyed the most, in spite of non-success, and I look forward to another tussle with it and its even more difficult neighbor. A good supply of *mauerhaken*, plenty of rope, and *kletterschuhe* are not to be despised in this district.

To the northwest of this glacier basin lies another, immediately adjoining, about which are grouped several peaks which would well reward a climbing party. As far as I know they have never been attempted, and perhaps not even visited. Conrad believes he can take a pack train there, and it is something well worth a trial. To whomsoever it falls, "*Bergheil*" and lots of luck!