

New Routes on Familiar Canadian Peaks

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PRIOR to 1933 the traverse of Mt. Victoria had been made three times,¹ in each case starting from Lake Louise, climbing North Peak, thence following the ridge over Main Peak to Abbot Pass. This route is long, requiring from seventeen to twenty-four hours, the minimum time from North to Main Peak being seven hours.

Ernest Feuz and I felt that could the traverse be made in the reverse direction it would be less strenuous, since a good start could be made from Abbot Pass, enabling us to reach the difficult part of the ridge in fresh condition, avoiding the six hours required from Lake Louise to the North Peak. There was, however, considerable doubt as to whether we should succeed, as on one of the many pinnacles of the ridge it had been necessary to rope off, and Rudolph Aemmer, guide of previous parties, had seen no way of climbing down without artificial aid. However, we decided it was worth while to attempt—the very doubt being in itself a challenge.

We left for Abbot Pass on the afternoon of August 14th. The following morning was gorgeous: Cool, clear and windstill. Starting from the hut up the familiar ridge at 5.30 A.M., the snow was in excellent condition, enabling us to reach the Main Peak in one hour and fifty-five minutes. Ahead of us stretched the arête, a bristling chain of gendarmes perched on a knife-like ridge, dropping almost perpendicularly on the O'Hara side. It was an imposing sight.

In actuality it was less formidable than it appeared. At 7.30 A.M. we started down to the first gap over loose shale and small boulders lying on a steep slope, a pitch which required caution to negotiate. Reaching the first gendarme we climbed it easily and descended again to the ridge. We climbed practically all of the gendarmes, making only two traverses on the Lake Louise side of the ridge, a procedure which required care as the rock was extremely loose and shaly. On the whole, the rock on the gen-

¹ 1909, G. W. Culver, E. Feuz, Jr., R. Aemmer; 1918, V. A. Fynn, R. Aemmer; 1931, E. Cromwell, R. Aemmer.

darmes was fairly solid. The ridge itself was less rotten than we had expected, and though narrow in places, never actually a knife-edge. The hand- and foot-holds were firm and fairly large and, if one took time in crossing the loose rock on the ridge itself, footing was not bad. We were able to keep up a fairly steady pace and found the going interesting and enjoyable. The south side of the gendarmes was vertical, the angle on the north being much less abrupt, a fact much in our favor, as the preceding parties had had to climb *down* the steep side—more difficult and slower procedure than to climb up it as we were doing.

After about an hour of continual steady climbing we reached the roping-off place. Above us rose the pinnacle, and we could see the rope hanging from the sharp nose on the south side. But to our astonishment we encountered no difficulty whatever in scaling the southeast face of the gendarme by way of good, if narrow ledges. Needless to say, we were immensely pleased, as our success was now assured. Upon reaching the Middle Peak at 9.30, we stopped for second breakfast, which by this time was most welcome.

No difficulty was encountered on the remainder of the traverse, affording some excellent bits of climbing on sharp ridges and up sheer pitches. The split² is in no way comparable to the one on Hungabee, nor are there any real technical difficulties. The last bit, leading onto North Peak, is easy, but is preceded by a nice scramble up a sharp needle, where we embraced a vertical ridge for about thirty feet. North Peak was reached at 10.30 A.M., exactly three hours after leaving Main Peak, thereby cutting down previous time records by four hours.

The day was so fine and the view so magnificent that we stayed on North Peak till noon, enjoying the sight of old friends such as Sir Donald, Columbia and Assiniboine. The descent to the tea house at the Plain of Six Glaciers was made in one hour and fifty minutes—the snow being in excellent condition, and permitting several enjoyable glissades on the Upper Victoria glacier. The total time for actual climbing from the Pass to the Plain was six hours, twenty minutes. We were out a total time of eight and a half hours.

² See *C. A. J.*, xxi, p. 21.

One may characterize this traverse as an interesting one, but with no major difficulties, though not for the novice. It requires a climber of average ability and stamina and we agree with Mr. Cromwell that due to the extremely broken-up nature of the ridge, two on the rope is preferable to three.

Our next venture, the traverse of Mt. Lefroy, proved less successful. We left the Plain of Six Glaciers at 5.00 A.M. on August 16th, crossed the lower glacier to the cliffs on the north side of Lefroy and scrambled up by way of the ladders, a highly disagreeable undertaking as torrents of ice water from the melting snow on the plateau above poured down the clefts in which the ladders are placed, and having neglected to take a raincoat, I was drenched to the skin when we crawled out onto the big boulders above. It was still early in the morning, the rising sun just reddening the Victoria glacier across the Pass. The air was distinctly crisp, and as my soaked clothing was icy I was not averse to the fast pace that Ernest set as we scrambled up several extremely rotten cliff-bands to the north arête which we followed to the summit. This arête is easy, consisting of broad, shaly ledges with here and there a traverse across a steep ice slope, requiring step-cutting, on the Abbot Pass side. We did not use a rope, the summit being reached in five hours. Here we paused for a bite to eat and a chance to examine the arête ahead of us. We intended to traverse it to Glacier Peak, descending to Lake O'Hara by way of the col between Glacier Peak and Mt. Ringrose. At close range the ridge had a formidable appearance, bristling with gendarmes, and cut up by them not only longitudinally but also laterally, with a tremendous drop-off of almost 5,000 ft. on either side.

We put on the rope and started off, traversing the first three pinnacles south of the summit without difficulty. Then we were confronted by a drop-off of some 125 ft. above a narrow ridge, leading to the main arête on which rose many fantastic, sharp needles. The Victoria ridge was child's play by comparison. We found it necessary to traverse along the Paradise Valley face on loose scree lying at a precarious angle. We hugged the wall to our right as much as possible, but found it of little use, as everything we touched broke off. The extreme rottenness of the rock made the going disagreeable, and once I was horrified, when, stepping on what appeared to be a solid boulder, it shot down the declivity, starting a rock-slide onto Ernest, who was leading down

ahead of me. Fortunately the slide did not materialize into a serious one, but Ernest received a badly cut hand, and we were made keenly aware of the seriousness of our position. It became necessary to climb up a bit on the east wall in order to gain more solid footing and an adequate anchor-place. From here I climbed down about 30 ft. to the little saddle in the ridge, but found it impossible to proceed further. On both sides steep couloirs filled with loose stones, ready to slide at a moment's notice, fell away into the valleys. The ridge ahead, knife-like and jagged, was so rotten that it tottered and broke as soon as one so much as touched it, and the tiny ledges on its sides were loaded with scree. About 100 yards ahead the ridge overhung on the north side, with no obvious way of getting around it. I shouted to Ernest that I saw no way of going on. He climbed down to me, and after a careful examination of the ridge we decided that it was impossible to make the traverse. Were the rock solid it would be possible, though none too easy, but considering its extreme friability we considered it almost suicidal to proceed further, as there were neither safe anchor nor roping-off places visible, and the whole arête showed too great a willingness to topple over. So after two hours of very disheartening labor we made our way back to the main summit and thence down the ordinary route to Abbot Pass and Lake O'Hara (eleven hours total time). We built a cairn on the nose above the drop-off, which I believe is the furthest point yet reached on the south arête.

On August 18th we climbed Mt. Hungabee by Val Fynn's route (third ascent by this route), proceeding via the broad ledges on the south side of the snow couloir leading to Ringrose col, crossing the couloir to the north side near the top, thence continuing by the north arête. In one place it was necessary for Ernest to stand on my shoulders in order to get up onto a smooth, holdless slab above his reach. We reached the place where the usual route joins the north arête in five hours of practically continuous climbing, and made short work of the nice pitch along the summit ridge, by far the best piece of climbing on the north arête. (Total time, five and a half hours.)

This route has little to recommend it, being longer than the usual route, the rock on the lower part of the north arête disagreeably rotten, with climbing largely on broken cliff-faces. Descent was made by the usual route, which is pleasantly easy without being dull.