

CONRAD KAIN

1883-1934

In the little village of Nasswald, Lower Austria, not far from Vienna, CONRAD KAIN was born on August 10th, 1883. His death occurred in hospital at Cranbrook, British Columbia, on February 2, 1934. These dates bound the life-span of a romantic philosopher and lover of hills, whose spirit never grew old.

According to Conrad, he began to climb at the age of three, earning his first money by it when he was sixteen, having learned the various routes on the nearby Raxalpe. Daniel Innthaler, a much-sought-after guide of the day, befriended him and sent him his first tourists.

Never a porter or an *Aspirant*, Conrad passed the guide's *Prüfung* when twenty-one, among his early patrons being Gottfried Merzbacher and Samuel Turner. Prior to 1909, Kain made many climbs in various districts of the Alps, especially in Dauphiné and on the aiguilles of Mont Blanc, becoming known as a guide of "very great promise" (*A. J.*, 28, p. 38). In the Dolomites he considered the Vajolet towers, the east face of Rosen-garten, Fünffingerspitze by Schmitt-kamin, the south face of Marmolata, and the north wall of Kleine Zinne as ideal and his favorite climbs. Fascinated by the Guglia di Brenta, he once went many miles out of his way to ascend it, and also spent part of a season in Corsica. His services were in demand, and German climbers considered him in the first flight of guides. Unfortunately we know little of his Alpine climbs, for his *Führer-bücher* were lost.¹

In 1909 Conrad came to Canada, and was guide at the Lake O'Hara camp. In the following year he was climbing at the Consolation camp, led the party which went up the Bow and down the Yoho, and accompanied Longstaff and Wheeler in their crossing of the Purcell Range.

Accompanying the Alpine Club of Canada's expedition to Yellowhead Pass and Mt. Robson, in 1911, he met Ned Hollister and Donald Phillips. Conrad made a daring solo ascent of Whitehorn (on his twenty-eighth birthday), and led Harmon to the

¹ Since the above was written, Conrad's diary covering his life up to 1910 has come into my possession. It contains a complete list of his climbs in the Alps and Corsica. It is a unique document, filled with dramatic incident.—*Ed.*

summit of Resplendent. His delight in packtrain travel was increased by the return journey from Maligne Lake to Banff by way of Wilcox Pass. He became interested in game, and spent at least one winter trapping with Phillips on Smoky River.

"In general," he wrote, "I adapted myself to the New World and its ways, but at times I caught myself meditating. Visions of the Alps and the Dolomites would flash through my mind, linked up with Old World memories—of life in the inns, with music and song. I realized that these were symptoms, universally known as 'Heim-weh,' but fortunately I was well fortified with a prescription for this malady. It read: 'Take life as it comes, and make the best of it, and always be your own adviser in small matters.'"

His acquaintance with Hollister gained him a place in the Smithsonian expedition to the Altai, which left St. Petersburg on June 8th, 1912, for the purpose of collecting mammals. Conrad afterwards found much amusement in showing his friends at home the Russian passport on which he was described as "professor," further proclaiming that "snaring mice can be just as exciting as hunting elephants if you get the point of view."

Conrad then revisited his old stamping-grounds in the Alps: "Quenched my three-year old thirst with beer and had a jolly time, living my youth over again. It was beautiful yet strange; it made me feel very lonely—I longed for the solitude that one finds in the Rockies; for the campfire and the care-free life."

In June, 1913, he landed in Canada, after a long voyage from England by way of Australia and New Zealand to British Columbia. On the way he stopped at the Island of Madeira, which ever after he thought the most beautiful place in the world. He attended the Cathedral Mt. camp in July, and in the following month made his notable traverse of Mt. Robson with Foster and MacCarthy.

The winter 1913-14 was spent in New Zealand with H. O. Frind, carrying out a fine series of climbs, returning to Canada for the Upper Yoho camp. In August he made the first ascent of Mt. Farnham in the Purcells.

During his season in New Zealand, his activity in searching for the bodies of S. L. King and his two guides, killed on Mt. Cook, brought him an engagement from the Tourist Department, and he became head of the guiding staff at the Hermitage in November, 1914. By his coaching of young native guides he undoubtedly

contributed much to the improvement of technic in the New Zealand Alps, a matter which in recent years has been given official attention.

Frind brought him back to Canada in the summer of 1915, attending the Ptarmigan Lake camp, and accompanying MacCarthy's parties in the Purcells, when the Big Salmon and Horsethief Valleys were explored.

Returning to New Zealand as private guide in September, he accomplished the traverse of Mt. Cook with Mrs. Thomson, of Wellington, in the following January—"a marvellous feat unequalled for daring in the annals of the Southern Alps" (*A. J.*, 39, p. 275).

Conrad was back in Canada for the Healy Creek camp in July, 1916, and led MacCarthy to the summit of Mt. Louis, after which they went to the Bugaboo Group of the Purcells and made first ascents of Howser and Bugaboo Spires, the latter considered by Kain to be his most difficult climb in Canada.

A year later Conrad married and settled on a little farm at Wilmer in the Columbia Valley. His wife, born in British Guiana, spoke several languages and had a gift for handling animals. Largely to her fell the management of their small fur-farm, where they raised mink, marten and chinchilla rabbits. She and Conrad were good companions for sixteen years, her death in the early part of 1933 being a great blow to him. We hold the memory of them, beside the white cottage, window-deep in sweet-peas and currant bushes, waving good-bye as we started homeward towards the dusky foothills of the Rockies.

During several following seasons Kain was employed by the Interprovincial Survey, making many climbs along Athabaska and Bush Rivers. In the winter he trapped, on one occasion making a solitary journey into the wild area west of Thompson Pass. He also acquired an outfit of horses and took out hunting parties in the Purcells. He was one of the few who used Simpson's Crossing of Kootenay River, and Cross River, as a route to Mt. Assiniboine. In March, 1919, he made a solo ascent of Mt. Jumbo on snowshoes, the first winter ascent in the Purcell Range.

In 1921, Kain was at the Assiniboine camp, ascending Mt. Eon after the fatal accident, and assisting in bringing down Dr. Stone's body.

In 1923 he accepted an engagement with Ladd and myself to visit the Columbia icefield, North Twin and Saskatchewan being

among our prizes. Jim Simpson was outfitter, and to hear Conrad trading stories with him was to know where Munchausen left off.

In the following summer he accompanied Strumia and myself on a long season to Athabaska Pass, where Mt. Hooker fell to us, and to the Tonquin and Robson areas. Kain remained at the camp of the Alpine Club of Canada, conducting parties up Mt. Robson—to the risks of which he was keenly alive. Later, he went with Palmer and Hickson up the Athabaska, ascending King Edward.

Conrad spent some six weeks in the autumn of 1925 hunting bear in southwestern Alaska, but seems to have done little mountaineering in this or the two succeeding years.

In 1928, Cromwell, Hillhouse and I visited the Purcells, Conrad taking us to the head of Toby Creek. The first ascent of Earl Grey, and the traverse of Jumbo to the Lake of the Hanging Glaciers were of his devising. So attractive did it prove that Cromwell and I returned in 1930, Peter Kaufmann being with us in addition. Conrad conducted us up Dutch Creek, source of the Columbia, joining us in the first ascent of Mt. Findlay, but otherwise contenting himself with running the outfit. Later, however, he went with Cromwell and Kaufmann to the Bugaboos, participating in several ascents, but became ill while attempting Bugaboo Spire and was obliged to desist.

During the following summer, Cromwell and I, with Edward Feuz and Kain, explored Findlay Creek to its head.

In 1933 my wife and I went with Kain to the Bugaboos for topographical purposes. Conrad was by way of regaining his old spirits and regaled us with many a fine tale. Late in July, Kingman joined me at Lake Louise, Conrad meeting us there, the combined party going with Simpson to Bow Lake. From Peyto Lake several new ascents were made, with final crossing of the snowfields to Yoho Valley.

Conrad, who had not been away from the Columbia Valley since 1925, enjoyed himself hugely, visiting old friends at Banff, climbing such peaks as Lefroy and Louis (on his fiftieth birthday), and looking in upon the camp in Paradise Valley. While there he met Professor and Mrs. Richards, of Magdalene College, who went with him to the Bugaboos. After ascending Pigeon Spire, they made a long first ascent of the highest summit of the Bobbie Burns Group, just to the north, descending Warren glacier throughout its length. Conrad was enchanted with the new views

of his beloved Bugaboo Spire and wrote at length of his plans to return there with us another season. But his last climb was over.

His name is borne by a finger-like peak of the Robson area, which he himself selected. Nasswald Peak, in the Assiniboine Group, was ascended and named by him. Birthday Peak, in the Purcells, was climbed on his natal day. In the Southern Alps of New Zealand, Mt. Conrad, in the Murchison district, holds him in remembrance.

Conrad, with little assistance, wrote well, several of his papers appearing in various journals.² His famous tale of the "Million Guide," humorously describes his adventure when, disguised as a tourist, he hired a guide to take him up a peak. "I do not tell that story any more," he said to us last summer—meaning only that the years were passing.

To evaluate Conrad Kain as a guide alone is as difficult as it would be rash. One met him in Canada when youthful impetuosity was a less driving force, while average climb and climber were not of the caliber he had known in the Alps. On such peaks as Robson, Louis and Bugaboo Spire he showed what he could do when required; in his solitary fight with Whitehorn he evidenced his own spirit of enterprise which took no thought of consequence.

His first ascents of named peaks in the Rockies and Purcells exceed fifty in number, but the list is incomplete. His new routes the ordinary climbs are countless.³ He held the unique record of having led the first ascents of the highest peaks of the Rockies and of the Purcells, and is the only one thus far to have ascended the three loftiest summits of the Canadian Rockies. In New Zealand he climbed fifty-nine mountains, of which twenty-nine were first ascents. He reckoned his total of great climbs to be in excess of a thousand.

More clearly than any other, Conrad laid down the methods by which a guide might hope to maintain the confidence of a party: "First, he should never show fear. Second, he should be courteous to all, and always give special attention to the weakest member in the party. Third, he should be witty, and able to make up

² "The Ascent of Mt. Robson," *A. J.*, 28, p. 35; *C. A. J.*, vi, 19. "The First Ascent of Mt. Whitehorn," *C. A. J.*, vi, 49. "Records of Ascents in New Zealand," *A. J.*, 28 p. 345. "The Eastern Valleys of the Purcell Range," *Bull. Phila. Geogr. Soc.*, xxvi, 69. "Reminiscences of Seven Summers in Canada," *A. A. J.*, i, 290. "Long Ago on Mount Cook," *A. A. J.*, i, 481.

³ A fragmentary list which he made of his Canadian climbs contains the names of 192 separate peaks.

a white lie if necessary on short notice, and tell it in a convincing manner. Fourth, he should know when and how to show authority; and, when the situation demands it, should be able to give a good scolding to whomsoever deserves it."

On rock, in his prime, Kain was unquestionably a finished performer; on snow and ice his judgment was sound, with step-cutting unfailingly conforming to the needs of his party. Wide experience in various districts had taught him many tricks with rope and belay. He lacked a quick comprehension of topography, a phase where amateur may excel guide, making up for it by his route-finding ability on the mountain at hand. Even on new peaks he preferred to traverse and would cleverly find a way down. On snow he was inclined to use the rope too little, but backing his decision by uncanny knowledge of snow conditions, his youthful experiences as an expert ski-runner, and his Canadian adventures on winter trap-lines standing him in good stead.

With an axe in the woods he was the equal of Phillips or Simpson; he was a good and clean cook, and handled horses with gentleness, talking to them as if they were children. His great capacity for weight-carrying and enduring hardships was continually overtaxed.

Conrad was always wondering whether, with greater educational opportunity, he might not have accomplished something in medicine or natural science, but feared that he would have been less content.

Of later years he had begun to write down some of his observations, which had they been completed, would assuredly have made a biography as interesting as that of Christian Klucker. Kain was a voluminous reader on all subjects, and his avid curiosity concerning human nature was to have been embodied in a chapter called "Unspoken Thoughts of a Guide," which, to say the least, would have been revealing. He could talk of many things, from the history of Austrian royalty to the intimate domestic habits of marten and muskrat, and there was always something to learn from him. Born with gifts of laughter and vivid expression, he sensed that the world was quite mad.

There was an almost oriental facility in his story-telling, and the last of a thousand-and-one nights would not have ended the spark of mischief in his eye, the gay mimicry in his voice, or the subtle gesturing of his hand.

No desire to rush peaks or to break records was to be found in Conrad Kain, and his increasing proclivity for lingering near timberline may be attributed largely to his appreciation of mountain beauty, as it was understood by guides in the Golden Age of mountaineering in the Alps. "Eile mit Weile" was a proverb learned from Sepp Innerkofler in the days of his youth. He knew full well that life is not compounded solely of action.

In his philosophy there should be no evident sadness in parting: "It is good to have been once young," he said, "if only you have happy memories." The song must go on. He played a part in the inspiring moments of many lives, and gave more to life than he asked of it. "He will be much missed," wrote his neighbors in the Columbia Valley, "for he was a kind, honest man."

Kain was undoubtedly the most glamorous figure in Canadian mountaineering, and those who climbed with him know that his death separates all that went before from whatever the future may bring forth, rounding out (as it almost does) the first half-century of Canadian alpinism, during which the principal peaks of the Rockies and the Interior Ranges were conquered. Guides in days to come will scarcely have such great experience in travel, of new ascents, of trail-breaking.

A candle burned at both ends—a brave soul gone too soon. Let it be remembered that some of us would have given our right hands to delay Time's turning down of Conrad's glass.

J. M. T.

TOM WILSON

1859-1933

TOM WILSON, last of the Canadian Pacific trail-blazers and explorers, died at Banff on September 20th, 1933, at the age of seventy-four.

His life was so full of meaning in everything pertaining to human interest that, in order to do it justice in the space allotted, the principal historical points of his career must be passed over very briefly.

Wilson was born at Bondhead, Ontario, on August 21st, 1859. At the age of sixteen he began to seek adventure and went to Sioux City, Iowa, on the western frontier. From there he returned to Barrie where he had been educated, and later joined the Northwest Mounted Police. When the first exploring parties were organized in connection with the building of the Canadian Pacific he applied for a discharge and in 1881 joined Major