

Mt. Assiniboine and Mt. Eon

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ONE Sunday morning in the latter part of August, 1934, I started to walk into Mt. Assiniboine for a ten days' trip. I had Christian Häslar as my guide and had chosen the route up Brewster Creek. Dufflebags had been sent into the Assiniboine camp a day or two before, so we had only the customary rucksacks to carry. The day was pleasant at first, but grew insufferably hot around noon. Forest fire smoke covered the mountains with its familiar haze, as there had been no rain for some time and the woods were very dry. Six days before, from the top of Mount Edith, Chris and I had seen ominous clouds of smoke rising from the Brewster Creek Valley. During the past week several camping parties, returning to Banff by that route had been forced to retrace their steps many miles to come in by Healy Creek. The trail was dusty and showed a surprisingly large number of game tracks. We lunched at the campsite where one first descends to the stream, a place which held for me the memories of two previous horseback trips to Assiniboine. Shortly after lunch, we passed the fire fighters, camped at the old cabins which stand with their dilapidated walls and falling roofs along the trail by a bend in the creek. Several pumps were working, their motors making an unusual racket for such a place. The fire had reached across the trail in only one spot but for several miles the trees were burned brown high up on the hillsides, and there the fire was still smoldering with the grey and barren cliffs just above. The valley was burnt over years ago and the trees now destroyed were mostly jackpine.

Some distance beyond the fire zone, the horse tracks on the trail gave way again to those of game—deer, moose and elk. Possibly the fire had something to do with their number. In the late afternoon we watched two bull-moose feeding on the creek below us. We had loafed along most of the day, but we now began to look for the cabin. I expected it at every little rise of ground, but it was six-thirty before we finally arrived. It stands on a little elevation, facing the cirque at the head of Brewster Creek. On the left is the cut in the mountains, which is the pass and

immediately below, is the stream and an open meadow. With three rooms and accommodations for eight to twelve people, it is a most convenient half-way camp and well equipped.

The second day was shorter, but far more varied and interesting. We were off at 7.30 to climb the switchbacks of lovely Brewster Pass. In early July it is a mass of snowbanks through which a pack train must struggle. Now the streams were mostly dry, the swampy meadows at the foot of Assiniboine Pass dried up and the woods so parched that I feared the clear and vigorous stream there also might be gone. A line of green bushes and a shout from Chris told me it was still there however, and we ate lunch by its side. We reached the Assiniboine Camp in the early afternoon, where we found everyone about to enjoy a very late lunch of trout caught in Marvel Lake by moonlight the evening before.

The forest fire smoke made Mt. Assiniboine a disappointing sight. It was impossible to trace the route up and field glasses only accentuated the haze. I was glad that in memory I could see it brilliantly clear and snow-covered, or peeking in and out of the clouds as they flew past, or bathed in light from a brilliant moon rising over Mt. Magog, or reflected in the still ice-bound waters of Sunburst Lake. Today a veil hung over it all and gave no promise of rising.

However, we determined to climb it on the following day and at four-thirty were off along the shore of Lake Magog. The snow slope coming down from the Assiniboine glacier almost to the lake looks from camp practically perpendicular. To my surprise, the place did not seem very steep and stones came down only on the far side. So Chris chose that route and we went up kicking tiny steps with the sides of our boots. This route was used by Henry G. Bryant and Louis J. Steele, members of W. D. Wilcox's party in 1899, when they ascended to the upper glacier on what was probably the first reconnaissance there. On the first ascent of the mountain a route was chosen up the rocks of Mt. Wedgwood by a waterfall and became the usual route. Lately the snow slope has been used by Strom and Kutschera from the camp and is without doubt the shorter, quicker way. On our return, several small stones came down which may indicate that the route up the rocks would be safer for a large party especially in the late afternoon.

Above on the moraine we stopped to eat and Chris fixed a large rock for a seat. "Here's a trilobite for you to sit on," he remarked, and sure enough there was a perfect specimen about two inches long and a smaller one beside it. I used the slab as a seat at breakfast and then Chris pried off the layer containing the fossil and I brought it home as a souvenir.

From the moraine, we went up over many ledges of broken rock which form the north face of Mt. Assiniboine. Strangely enough, they were not tedious then but on the descent they seemed interminable. We struck the ridge just below the yellow band of rocks and then real climbing began. It was steep but with good holds for hands and feet. We were on the ridge most of the time making occasional detours to the right. The distant views were blotted out with the smoke. To the left was a straight drop and magnificent views of the sheer walls of the east face. Snow plastered and windswept, they fall away three thousand feet. The drop is the more spectacular in contrast to the ridge and face which we ascended easily. As one climbs the drop is not visible; but a few feet to one side and it is there, dramatic in its suddenness.

The summit is a double one. On opposite sides of the higher peak two cairns are separated by a ridge on which cling the last bits of a snow cornice reminding one how snowy the peak would be in early summer. There was no view; even Marvel Lake could hardly be seen. The bare shores of Magog looked like a wide white boulevard encircling the lake.

We had not used the rope on the ascent, but coming down we roped up immediately below the summit until we were off the ridge below the steep yellow band of cliffs. We roped again for the last snow slope. On all the lower part of the mountain, small stones came down reminding us that it was late afternoon. We reached camp at 5.30 exactly 13 hours after we left.

Two days later, we packed over to Marvel Pass and camped there. A trail had been cut around the head of Marvel Lake and up to the pass where there is a fine camp-site. Dotted with lakes the pass is well worth a visit for its own sake. Across the valley stands Mt. Alcantara, similar in appearance to Mt. Eon; and Mt. Aurora with its two summits which has probably not yet been climbed. Mt. Gloria was directly above us, its summit hidden and itself hiding the three giants, Assiniboine, Eon and Aye. Mt. Magog peeps around the shoulder of Gloria. Our objective was

Mt. Eon and possibly Aye. So far as I know, Eon had not been climbed since the rescue party after Dr. Stone's accident. The first ascent of Aye was made this summer by Henry Crosby with the guide Rudolph Aemmer. We got a glimpse of the top of Eon as we came up the pass, but from our camp it was hidden by the great mass of Gloria. Chris climbed the hill back of camp, but was unsuccessful in getting a view of the peak. Neither of us had therefore seen the side we expected to climb.

Just before daybreak the next morning however, we started out for Eon which we hoped, like prosperity, was just around the corner. We struck high up on the slopes of Gloria and traversed around it. It has more than its quota of gullies and ridges. As we gained each ridge, we looked for Eon, but it continued to be Gloria. At last we reached the basin which separates the two peaks, and has at its head the Eon-Gloria col. So we reached Eon at last; a fine ridge stretched ahead of us and the peak towered above. However, it soon turned out to be the wrong ridge and far above us our way was blocked by straight slabs of rocks. So we began again to traverse the slopes of Eon as we had done on Gloria our feelings intensified by the necessity again and again of losing precious altitude. At last we reached the south face and the route seemed clear for us to ascend. But it was 10.30 and we despaired of reaching both the top and camp again that night. So feeling that no peak is worth staying out all night on cold bare rocks, we agreed to turn back defeated, if necessary. Secretly we both fixed two o'clock as the time to start the return. Fortunately one o'clock found us on the last little bit leading to the summit and fifteen minutes later we were on top by the cairn. We had expected to find Dr. Stone's ice-axe in the cairn; placed there, we thought, as a memorial to him. It was not there, nor were there any names in the cairn, although we took most of the stones down in our search. The only thing we found there was an old tobacco tin, small and rusted through into many holes. We later learned that the ice-axe was carried to the top and photographed there, but then taken down by the rescue party. The chimney where the accident occurred is really a couloir and is marked by a stone-man on top. All the rocks are loose on the mountain and seem to have a special propensity for slipping about under one's feet. The peak affords no climbing which gives joy to a climber for its own sake. It is a huge rock pile of slippery slabs and he

who wishes to think of it as a gorgeous mountain, should view it only from Wonder Pass or Mt. Gloria. We left our names in the rusted tin, replaced the stones of the cairn and hastened to descend. Chris chose a route which took us further over on the south face. The conspicuous yellow-topped tower which is a feature of the mountain was below us and served as a landmark. Often we came down in soft shale which moved with us. The most difficult part came near the base where the mountain falls off in straight steep towers and dreadful couloirs. On our way up we had noted a goat trail, and now descended to it. It was the most remarkable goat trail I have ever followed. Well-worn, extremely narrow but continuous, it traversed the whole mass of Eon, picking its way in and out of the couloirs, along perpendicular cliffs and invariably choosing the best and often the only possible route. We followed it for hours until it came into Eon-Gloria basin. Later we picked it up again on Gloria and it took us almost to the alplands of Marvel Pass, making easy the many tiring and nasty traverses into gullies and over ridges which we had endured that morning without such aid. Once we saw one of the trail makers just ahead of us on a ridge and three others far off but evidently disturbed by the invasion of their private boulevard. It wasn't quite dark as we lit the fire and ate supper, glad that both Eon and camp were ours.

I had hoped to climb Mt. Aye but the distance to Eon was enough to discourage us from going further. So after a day resting and taking pictures, we determined to explore the Gloria col which was directly above us. The cliffs looked steep and difficult from camp; but again the goats proved our friends. A trail appeared just above the first ledge, and led us along unerringly to the col. There Chris built a cairn visible from the pass, so that no one else will hesitate to take that route. From there we had a good view of the northeast ridge of Mt. Eon attempted by a party in 1920. After a scramble up a scree slope we came out on the highest summit of Mt. Gloria. Yet to our surprise, the cairn was on a lower one nearer the col. We therefore built another and sat a long time admiring the view. The wind had changed the day we arrived at Marvel Pass and later a sharp shower and hail-storm had cleared the air still more. The great cirque enclosed by Assiniboine, Eon, and Aye was before us and to the south the Royal Family and the War Generals made a

glorious panorama. We traversed over the other summit and descended again to the col. The next day we returned to the camp at Assiniboine.

The Brewster Creek trail to Assiniboine winds over two passes. A straight line over the ridge north of Og Pass would bring one down into the cirque at the head of Brewster Creek. It was Chris' idea that we should try this route. So on our way to Banff we left the Og Pass trail where it turns right over the pass and went directly up a shale slope above Og Lake. We came out on steep cliffs broken by couloirs with sides caked hard from falling rocks and snow. While Chris scouted for a route to descend, I looked down on the head of Brewster Creek. A lovely mountain lake lay there on a pleasant high bench, with the creek and meadows below and the cabin on the little rise of ground clearly visible beyond. A shout from Chris announced that he had found a way down and I followed his tracks to the ridge where he was last seen. It meant careful going to traverse the gullies and ridges of hard-packed gravel and rotten layers of rock to a couloir partially filled with snow, down which we went. Chris had to dig out steps in the dirt and stones with his ice-axe to afford me sufficient foot-holds. It did not take long, however, and in an hour we were down by the lake across which a little brood of ducks swam hurriedly at this unexpected invasion of their domain. Game trails down to the meadow made the bushwhacking easy below the lake and we soon arrived at the cabin. The next day, we passed the pumps still working at the fire which had started up again and a long hot dusty trail ended at Banff.