The Lloyd George Mountains

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BECAUSE of improved transportation facilities by airplane, the unexplored region of British Columbia between the Finlay, Peace and Fort Nelson (Liard) Rivers is of increasing interest to mountaineers.

The Parsnip and Finlay Rivers, whose junction at Finlay Forks forms Peace River, occupy the orographic depression of the Rocky Mountain Trench N. of the great bend of the Fraser River. Peace River forces a way through the mountains to the eastern plains just as does the North Saskatchewan, the true Cordilleran axis (here the Pacific-Arctic watershed) having deviated westward of the Rocky Mountain Trench at Giscombe Portage. The mountain region under consideration lies 300 miles due N. of the Fraser bend.

John Finlay, of the Northwest Company, in 1824 ascended the river which bears his name as far as the Thutade Lake source (*Journal,* formerly preserved at Cumberland House, from which extracts were made by J. B. Tyrell). In 1873, Capt. W. F. Butler followed up the Omenica tributary (*Wild North Land,* 1874). R. G. McConnell, of the Canadian Geological Survey, in 1893 mapped the upper reaches of the river and was the first to observe the glaciers forming the source of the Warneford (N.) fork of Kwadacha River (*Ann. Rept. Geol. Surv. of Canada,* 1894). In 1912, F. K. Vreeland, exploring for the Biological Survey, reached Laurier Pass with pack-horses from Hudson Hope (*Geogr. Rev.,* xlvi, 2).

In 1916, P. L. Haworth made an extensive canoe journey from Hansard, in the Fraser Valley, to Finlay Forks and Fort Grahame, following up Finlay River and reaching the forks of the Kwadacha, from high ridges above which he saw the expanse of glaciers (*Scribner's Mag.,* June, July, 1917; *On the Headwaters of Peace River,* 1917).

The Fox River tributary of the Finlay, within the Rocky Mountain Trench, is connected by Sifton Pass with the Kechika branch of the Liard River. The ranges run parallel to the Finlay,

with peaks of the E. side of the system bearing more snow than those on the W. slope. Haworth named the highest summit Mt. Lloyd George. From his viewpoint in the E. angle between the Kwadacha and the Finlay he could see the entire unexplored region from Laurier Pass (S.) to Liard River (N.). There was no peak "taller than Mt. Robson. . . Much the finest of all these lay far to the N. E. . . . with three great summits, two of them peaks, the third and tallest an immense block . . . down the S. slope of it, filling a great valley, miles wide and miles long, there flowed a perfectly immense glistening glacier. . . It is the biggest thing in the whole Finlay country . . . I venture to predict that when the glacier has been more closely examined it will be found to be one of the biggest, if not the very biggest, in the whole Rocky Mountain system." S. E., apparently on the extreme E. side of the system, he saw a snow-capped mountain, possibly identical with an imposing snow mountain reported by Vreeland as being somewhat more than fifty miles N. W. of Laurier Pass.

In 1919, Haworth returned to the region, accompanied by A. P. Chesterfield (*Scribner's Mag.*, June, 1920). Fort Grahame is 65 miles upstream from Finlay Forks, the Kwadacha, the main feeder of the Finlay, joining the main stream 96 miles further N. Ascending the Kwadacha, they crossed a ridge in its upper course to reach Chesterfield Creek and Lake in one of the terminal forks of Warneford River—whose other sources are in Quentin and Haworth Lakes. Quentin Lake receives the drainage of the more northerly glaciers, reported by McConnell. Chesterfield Lake drains three tongues coming down directly from the peaks of Mt. Lloyd George, and, even allowing for retreat of the ice since Haworth's visit, it is apparent from his published photograph that the mountain would offer no serious difficulty to a competent climbing party. Haworth wisely and conservatively contents himself with estimating Mt. Lloyd George as "above 10,000 ft." He indicates that a long terminal branch of the Kwadacha encircles three-quarters of the massif to have its source on the E. or S. E. side of Mt. Lloyd George, and it is the drainage into this branch which accounts for the "white water." In the snowfields extending S. E. it is probable that Akie River has its source, and near this is the location of Vreeland's peak. The following mountain names from Haworth's sketch-map are included in the *Geographical Gazetteer of British Columbia* (Dept. of Lands, 1930) : Mt. Lloyd

George (Lat. 57° 45′; Long. 124° 43′), Mt. Haworth, Mt. Luke, Mt. Holben, Alcock Mtn., Chesterfield Mtn. Elevations are not given.

Early in 1937 the present writer learned that Donald ("Curly") Phillips expected to fly from Finlay Forks, with Drs. L. B. Kingery and S. L. Diack, for a hunting trip on Prophet River, and asked Mr. Phillips to make all possible observations of the Lloyd George region, which would be close at hand. What follows is his account, his sketch-map being entered on the 1933 map of Northern British Columbia (16 mi. = 1 in.), Dr. Diack kindly furnishing the flight photographs.

Starting out from Finlay Forks we had hardly reached our elevation of 13,000 ft. before the big peaks and glaciers of the Redfern and Akie loomed up a little to the right of our course, and a little later the Lloyd George mountains came out of the fleecy clouds, and as we got closer the icefields started to show up.

Looking down on the icefields that surround the Lloyd George peaks, I realized that I could form no estimate of distance from the plane, so I timed it as we flew past to the E. of the snowfields and peaks, and it took just ten minutes. But the longest way is from S. E. to N. W. What looks like the highest peak is on the N. W. corner of the snowfields, with another S. E. of it, with drainage into both Haworth and Quentin Lake branches of the Kwadacha River. There are two or three more peaks on the N. W. corner of the snowfields, with drainage into the Muskwa River, Tuchodi and Haworth. The longest tongue of the glacier comes down to the Muskwa, and has the easiest gradient. But there is no landing for a plane on that side.

Going in I estimated that we were about 1500 ft. above the peaks, but that was only a guess, although the pilot said that would be close to it. To get something more definite going back, the pilot set his altimeter at Zero on Tuchodi Lake to check its elevation at Finlay Forks, a known altitude. We then raised 9000 ft. and crossed the icefields about the middle, with the peaks on both sides of us. Midway across we were just level with the peaks, as looking over them we could just see the horizon in the distance beyond Sifton Pass. Checking at Finlay Forks we found Tuchodi Lake to be 2960 ft., and the highest peaks of the Lloyd George group approximately 11,500 ft., which is high even in the Columbia icefields.

It hardly seems possible that these mountains can be so high, but we checked it both ways, and cannot be very far out, as we had perfect weather both times and there should not be much variation in the instruments.

Coming back we skimmed over the icefields and directly over Haworth Lake, which is four or five miles long and a good landing place for planes. It is about 4000 ft., and leaves plenty of hard climbing to get up to the snowfields, as it will be mostly rock since the glacier does not come down anywhere near the lake. We passed too fast to get any real idea how difficult it will be to get up the rocks, especially as we were directly over the route that would have to be taken. You cannot see much under a plane.

All climbing will be tough in that country from treeline to the snowfields, and you will have to camp thousands of feet above timber or wood to do any actual climbing. The snowfields are clear of crevasses except where the glacier tongues lead down, and there will be miles and miles of snow travel between the peaks. The peaks are all snow ridges, with knife-sharp crests right from the snowfields to their summits. From two of the peaks on the S. E. corner there are two of the longest medial moraines I ever saw, coming down to the big tongue that goes into the Muskwa.

Sizing it up on our two flights I am of the opinion that it is the toughest climbing proposition in this country. By that I don't mean it is dangerous, as the peaks look fairly easy once you get up to them. But the distance from base camp to icecap is the great endeavor and calls for a lot of rock climbing, possibly water and ice worn. Once up you have arctic conditions and miles of snow travel from peak to peak. It looks to me as if skis would be the logical method of travel once you were up on top of the icecap.

The main snowfields and glaciers in that country seem to be in the S. E., toward Redfern Lake. We could see these icefields at a distance of 50 miles or more, and trappers we met said there were places you could travel 30 miles or more on continuous ice. This is at the head of the Akie, and the main branch of the Kwadacha, which is not on any of the maps, but is the one that carries all the glacial water that muddies the Finlay. The other two branches coming from Haworth and Quentin Lakes are quite clear, just as Haworth states.

It only takes two hours to fly in to Haworth Lake from the Forks, and although we used a small plane with only 800 lbs.

carrying capacity, they have a large one operating out of Fort St. James that carries a couple of tons. That is the only way to get in there, as it takes a month each way with horses. It is a safe flying route, as you have landing water under you most of the way, with only a few minutes over land from Whitewater to Haworth Lake.

There are quite a few peaks along the main range N. of Lloyd George that will go to 10,000 ft., and, boy, they are rough; it is the roughest, toughest country I was ever in, with glaciers at the head of nearly every creek!

From the foregoing, even allowing that official altitudes will be lower than estimates, it is evident that the Lloyd George area presents a challenging new field for mountaineering. Curly Phillips will arrange airplane transportation and accompany an expedition desirous of visiting this snowclad range. There is certainly a low glacial pass across the group between the heads of Muskwa and Kwadacha Rivers and, if the size of glaciers is an indication, it is probable that lofty peaks, possibly rivalling Mt. Lloyd George in elevation, will be found in the S. E. part of the group.