

## Ascent of Mount Bell

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THE summer of 1936 marked an all-time high for population on the Franklin Glacier and its tributaries. Three closely cooperating parties, frequently camping together and always planning together, brought eighteen persons to break the loneliness and solitude of the Mt. Waddington region. From the eastern seaboard there were Elizabeth Woolsey, Allan Wilcox, William House and Fritz Wiessner. Into her own hinterland, Canada sent William Dobson, James Irving, Elliot Henderson and Lawrence Grassi, supported by Don Baker, Ken Austin and Denver Gillan as packers, and Arthur Mayse reporting for the *Vancouver Province*. Sunny California contributed Richard Leonard, Hervey Voge, John Riegelhuth, Ken Adam, Raffi Bedayan and Bestor Robinson, three of them veterans of the 1935 Sierra Club Waddington expedition.

On July 25th, our intermediate base on Dais Glacier had many of the aspects of a Los Angeles real estate boom, so great was the population. Some of the more mercenary minded were preparing to stake out lots and sell pieces of scenery, scenery of incomparable beauty, for we were just emerging from a blizzard that had brought us all down from the high camps and, by liberally plastering the cliffs with snow, had ended for at least three days all possibility of venturing again on steep rock faces.

Behind us were several weeks of active and enjoyable mountaineering. The Canadians had made a first ascent of Mt. Vigilant; the Californians had done the same with Mts. Cavalier and Halberdier. By ascending and descending through an avalanche-raked couloir in comparative safety during the cold of two successive nights and by rock climbing of a high order, Wiessner and House had finally placed man's mark on the S. peak of Mt. Waddington. Some of us had enjoyed two attempts on the same peak by the S. arête, alternating climbing on snow and ice. Although it appeared that the peak could be ascended by this route, it would involve a long rope-down, a ticklish rope traverse and probably the use of pitons for direct aid, which, combined with the length of the climb on the arête, would necessitate a bivouac on the peak.

The storm from which we were just emerging on Dais Glacier had driven us off the peak and prevented any attempt to complete the route.

And now there was just time enough for another peak. Longingly we had often looked at the great pyramidal bulk of Mt. Bell, which dominated the Coast Range N. of Fury Gap in the same manner that Mt. Waddington dominated it to the S. Hall and Munday had looked at the peak from the top of the Franklin-Klinaklini divide—otherwise it was unreconnoitered as well as unclimbed.

So four of us, Austin, Voge, Bedayan and myself, descended to the broad ice plain formed by the junction of the Dais, Portal and Fury Glaciers, an ice plain which in turn gives birth to the mighty Franklin. The new snow was deep and unpacked. Our light duraluminum snowshoes, weighing less than a pound apiece, fully justified their inclusion in our list of equipment.

Our route lay N. W. up the easy slope of Portal Glacier, almost to the Franklin-Bell Glacier divide, then to the right up a narrow tributary to a sudden drop-off into the Bell Glacier. We were on the summit of the Coast Range. To the N. W. lay Mt. Bell, Mt. Dorothy, Remote Peak and other unnamed and unascended mountains, terminating in the deep gorge of the Klinaklini where it cuts its way through the range. To the E. and S. E. the main crest swept in a huge semicircle past Mt. Chris Spencer and Fury Gap and on to Waddington, Combatant and Tiedeman. Across Bell Glacier a clear but sporty route beckoned us to try Mt. Geddes, but the sun had set and the chill air bid us camp. Here in a huge snow hollow, protected by hundred-foot banks, we pitched two of our four-pound tents, which had proved their worth so many times during winter in the High Sierra Nevada. It was the kind of a campsite one never forgets.

Next morning early we were off. A choice of routes lay before us—either to drop 3000 ft. onto the Bell Glacier and continue on its curving surface to the eastern arête of Mt. Bell, then up a grueling 6000 ft. over rock and ice to its summit; or, on the other hand, to contour across three glaciers and join the E. arête 2000 ft. below the summit. The first alternative was rejected as involving too much work and too little sport.

Contouring the three steep glaciers proved an enjoyable but seemingly unending succession of step cutting, bergschrund jump-

ing, steep traversing and bridge crossing. Then we reached the E. arête. Here was a ridge designed by Nature, while in a humorous mood, to vex mountaineers. From a distance each new obstacle appeared impossible to surmount, but when reached a way led on. Sometimes it was a snow knife-edge so narrow that we kicked steps clear through it; sometimes it was an overhanging ice-cliff; sometimes an apparently bridgeless schrund. Always, however, on close approach there was a way around, over, or through.

Late in the afternoon of July 26th the entire party stood on top admiring the awful drop into Bell Glacier on the E., Dorothy Glacier on the S., while only a short distance to the W., but over 11,000 ft. below, rolled the Klinaklini River.

A council of war brought a unanimous vote in favor of extending the first ascent into a traverse. Then down the S. W. summit slope we slithered, on down through the headwall of a glacial cirque, by way of 2000-ft. couloirs filled by ice and snow. In part it was safe glissading; in part ticklish rope work. We felt we had had a full day of mountaineering when, at 9.15 P.M., we came out on a rock shelf hanging above the Dorothy Glacier. It was time to stop.

Out of Voge's capacious rucksack came our Neoprene-covered bivouac sheet. We picked out the softest rocks, leaned against the wall, pulled the sheet over us, munched a few iron rations and talked of camp, hot meals and warm sleeping bags until we passed into that state of fitful and chilly coma that some mountaineers call sleep.

The following day we found a steep but simple route up the ice-covered headwall of the Dorothy Glacier. We were now back on our old friend the Portal Glacier. It only remained to travel for several hours in a fog, relying, with many doubts, on our compasses for directions, then a short side trip to recover our tents and bags and down the Franklin Glacier to Icefall Point. Here we saw grass and trees, running water and flowers. Even the buzz of the mosquito was welcome. We realized that although snow and ice and rock may have its challenging appeal, man feels at home only among living things.