

## Storm and Snow in the Selkirks

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TO speak with pleasure of two weeks of perpetual snow and rain, of attempts on peaks which, ordinarily simple, were so cluttered with spring snow that progress was practically impossible, of fog, ice, wet clothes, damp tents, of endless risk from avalanche and storm, might at first seem incredible. Yet there are eight of us, members of the Harvard Mountaineering Club, who speak with pleasure of two such weeks spent in the Southern Selkirks between Glacier and Glacier Circle, and who speak of them not because of the hardships and frustrations encountered, but because we realized that we were moving at the time in one of the most beautiful mountain regions in the world.

War conditions in 1942 prevented us from spending much time in any mountain range—prevented us even from choosing the season in which we wished to climb. Although plans had been formulated in early spring by the H. M. C. to send a small group into the Selkirks, no definite decision was reached until we were selected to test Air Corps iron rations and Army equipment in the course of our proposed expedition.

Our group consisted of eight men, two of whom were members of the American Alpine Club, and all of whom owed faithful allegiance to the H. M. C. This group included Maynard Miller, William Latady, Thomas Furnas, William Putnam, Willson Day, Joseph Fitzpatrick, George Wilbur and myself. Briefly, our plan was to test the rations and equipment which had been entrusted to us and to accomplish as much climbing as possible in the time allowed us and in the bad weather which we dimly and fatefully expected. After two weeks of hectic and enthusiastic preparations, broken only by final examinations, we left Cambridge for British Columbia to step off the train at Glacier in the late afternoon on June 10th.

Base camp was rapidly set up on the banks of the Illecillewaet River near the site of the old Glacier House, on a dull, gloomy evening which characterized the weather of our entire trip. The train ride across Canada had somewhat wearied us, so we decided

to make one or two easy excursions before attempting any serious ascent. On the 11th, seven of us, leaving camp in the early afternoon, reached the summit of Mt. Abbott via the E. face, amid fog through which we curiously observed the Brocken specter. Our descent followed the trail along the Abbott-Afton ridge. The following day the entire group explored the limestone caves N.W. of Glacier. On the 13th, the weather having somewhat improved, attempts were made by two parties on Eagle Peak, one following the N. ridge, the other attacking the S. side, led respectively by Miller and myself. Deep spring snow and continual avalanches forced my group to reach the Eagle-Uto ridge somewhat S. of the col along the high gendarmes. From here, however, progress to the summit would have been easy. Unhappily, as we finished lunch on the ridge, a stinging sleet storm rolled out of the W. and we were forced to return through deep snowdrifts from a point about 300 ft. below the summit. Back in camp we found that Miller's party had experienced similar difficulties and had been obliged to give up.

While on Eagle we all had an opportunity to observe the magnificent snow peaks S. of the Illecillewaet névé, and consequently that evening we enthusiastically decided to cross the névé on the 14th with five days' supplies, consisting largely of iron rations, and drop down into Glacier Circle. But again the weather hindered our plans; heavy rain on the 14th discouraged any attempt to depart. Besides, Latady had developed a bad cold which prevented his leaving. On the 15th, disgusted with the constant rain we determined to send out an advance party which would camp high on the Illecillewaet to ski and await the rest of the group when the weather cleared. With supplies and loads averaging 70 lbs., Miller, Putnam, Fitzpatrick and I left Base Camp at 2 P.M. in a pouring rain. At 6.30, snow and sleet whipping our faces, we hastily pitched camp about 100 ft. below Perley Rock in the deep powder snow and crawled into our warm sleeping-bags.

For the following 36 hours continual wind and snow tried our patience to the utmost. To make matters worse, our tent, constructed of impervious material which caused moisture to condense along the walls and dribble into our faces, was always in imminent danger of collapse, although severely reenforced on all sides. Gas from the primus stoves caused severe headaches, and morale

was considerably lowered. Fortunately Fitzpatrick, stepping out of the tent momentarily towards 6 P.M. on the 16th, noticed Furnas and Wilbur slowly coming up from below. The newly arrived men cheered us up greatly, for although they brought news that Latady, still slightly ill, would probably not follow with Day until the 17th, they carried mail and a few luxuries with them.

The morning of the 17th dawned windless though cloudy. The six of us determined that if we were to reach Glacier Circle we should set out at once without waiting for Latady and Day, who could always follow. Reloading our equipment and donning our skis, we quickly climbed to the summit of the névé from which we started out at noon across the long flat waste towards the distant high peaks of Glacier Circle. Furnas, without skis, naturally trailed slightly, and Miller and Wilbur stayed behind with him to bring up the rear, while I blazed the way for Putnam and Fitzpatrick, who made up the vanguard. At 4 P.M., after many stops, we abandoned our skis at the edge of the névé and started down the cliffs and snow-covered grass slopes of Mt. Macoun towards Glacier Circle, whose beautiful lakes and forests were now clearly visible below. During this entire journey we felt strangely adventurous and solitary, not knowing what lay ahead, yet prepared for any eventuality.

We arrived in the Circle at 6.30 P.M. and I immediately sent Fitzpatrick in search of the cabin, while directing the others, who were hampered by their loads, in finding the easiest way down. As the last man reached the valley, Fitzpatrick returned saying he could not locate the cabin. With dreadful visions of another night in the impervious tent, Miller and I scoured the valley for the hut, which we found by chance a little after dark, and hurried back to the others whom we had left at the base of the cliff. Here to our surprise and alarm we found that Latady and Day—whom we no longer expected—had followed us closely and were now descending the cliffs and grass slopes by flashlight. Putnam, Miller and I hastened up to help them over the most difficult places, and, after some difficulties, we all settled down exhausted at 2 A.M. in the comfortable cabin.

The 18th proved a day of rest. Wandering through Glacier Circle and over the lower Deville Glacier, we watched avalanches tumble from near-by peaks and looked through the rain-clouds

for an interesting mountain to attempt the next day. Towards evening a red beam of sunlight brightened the snow on the N. wall of Selwyn, whose story-book summit rose gracefully from its E. ridge. Miller, Fitzpatrick and I decided then and there to try to climb that ridge. The others, still somewhat fatigued, or suffering from sore toes, resolved to stay around camp.

At 6.00 A.M. on the 19th the three of us crossed the Deville Glacier and, ascending an easy but interesting rock couloir E. of the Deville icefall, soon found ourselves on the upper glacier. Here our first difficulties began: fresh snow concealed the surface of the heavily crevassed glacier, so that two hours were required to cross to the base of Selwyn's E. ridge. Progress then proved easier, though the sky, cloudless a little earlier, now became heavily overcast and fog concealed the near-by peaks. At 2 P.M. a series of soft snow slopes, somewhat in danger of avalanching, had to be negotiated carefully and slowly. Caution was needed in avoiding the large snow cornices that overhung the N. face. Towards four a break in the clouds showed us well above the summits of Topham, Macoun and Fox, and we reasoned that we now stood at about 10,900 ft., about 200 ft. below the summit, dimly visible through the fog and about 300 yards away. At 4.30, however, just as we had overcome the last difficulties, a severe storm, which apparently had been raging all day below, closed in on us. On Fitzpatrick's advice we decided, regretfully, to return.

It was fortunate we did so. Back on the glacier at 6.15 we found no trace of the morning's route, which had been completely covered by fresh snow. A new route had to be blazed across rapidly, as approaching darkness would cut off our retreat. In our hurry, we neglected our customary caution, and in the rush an unseen snow bridge on which I was treading suddenly collapsed, precipitating me 25 ft. below the surface of the glacier. Luckily Miller and Fitzpatrick rescued me in short order, and thereafter we carefully sounded for blue ice at every step.

Exhausted by our activities of the day we reached the cabin after an 18-hour trip to find the rest of the group somewhat alarmed by the lateness of our return. We now learned to our great pleasure that Wilbur and Furnas had succeeded in climbing Mt. Topham during the day without difficulty, while Putnam, Latady and Day explored the lower Deville Glacier.

Meantime our supplies were exhausted and it was imperative to return to Base Camp. Accordingly, on the morning of the 20th, we set out in two separate groups on the long, wearisome, wet and hungry journey home. We left Glacier Circle only late in the day, crossed the Illecillewaet névé in the fog by compass course, and were overtaken by darkness as we entered the woods below the glacier. After considerable trouble finding the fords across the brooks below the Vaux and Illecillewaet Glaciers, we stumbled wet, starved and exhausted into Base Camp late at night, growling at the weather, yet retaining vivid and enjoyable memories of the wonderful snow country we had left behind.

Most of the 21st was spent eating and recovering from our experiences of the previous six days. As the afternoon wore on we watched the sky begin to clear for the first time since our arrival. Late in the day Putnam and Furnas, somewhat more hurried than the rest of us, left for home. On the 22nd, our first rainless and cloudless day, we made an abortive attempt on Uto, but were forced back by serious avalanche conditions and waist-deep powder snow along the N. ridge.

The 23rd saw us packing and preparing for departure. Though we wished our trip had been planned at a better season, when the summits would have been within easier reach, and when more propitious skies would have smiled upon us, we did not regret visiting the Selkirks. On the contrary, we felt that our group had gained invaluable experience, experience which can be obtained in the mountains only at times of stress under difficult situations. All of us, except Miller, who had previously visited the Selkirks, had discovered a wonderful new mountain range, which we know will call us again in less troubled times. All of us felt the healthy glow of satisfaction which comes only from battling with the elements. But—far more important—we had learned that obstacles, however insurmountable they may at first appear, can always be overcome by confident human beings, working together towards a common goal.