

A Challenge on Mount Adamant

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FROM the mountaineer's point of view, the Granite Range of the Northern Selkirks probably represents the culminating point of the Interior Ranges. Its firm rock, soaring to almost 11,000 feet in a series of sharp spires, its multitude of cascading Nantillon-like glaciers, its extensive snow fields and concentration of peaks combine to form an alpinist's paradise. The country's inaccessibility and the intricate nature of the climbing have served to keep many summits unscaled. At this moment some of the finest peaks, such as Gibraltar, the Lower Blackfriar and the Gothic Spire, remain untouched.

Two years ago, Benjamin Ferris and Bill Putnam had visited the region with me and made several fine conquests. Ever since, we had longed to return. In 1950, unfortunately, both Bill and Ben were committed to European visits, and other companions joined me in the new undertaking. We were five: Betty Kauffman, David Michael, Dr. Alexander C. Fabergé and myself. After David, Betty and I had engaged in two rather strenuous training climbs at Moraine Lake, we drove to Golden, B.C., on 13 July 1950. There, in a local saloon, the remaining members of the party joined us.

With the faithful help of Bernie Garand and other members of a Canadian Government survey party camped on the Columbia 40 miles below Golden, we drove to Swan Creek, where we inflated our rubber boat for the struggle across the river. Bernie and his companions, whom we had met somewhat by chance, proved to be more than mere interested spectators. Their suggestions, hospitality and gratuitous muscular and mechanical aid served to boost the expedition's morale substantially. During the two-day fight which followed, against the worst mosquitoes the country had seen in 50 years and against tangles of slide alder, jackpine and devil's club, we often reminded ourselves of their keen interest and support. We finally set up housekeeping on July 15th at the 1948 campsite at Fairy Meadow. We found our "colossal" cairn and stone house still in good condition and our old food cache untouched by pilfering quadrupeds.

From Fairy Meadow the chief attraction (and there are many) is Mount Adamant. It is the highest peak of the range, rising to a point 10,950 feet above sea level. It is prominent and not far away, but the approach is intricate and somewhat roundabout. The mountain had been ascended only once before, in 1912, from the opposite (south) side, by a party consisting of Howard Palmer, E. W. D. Holway, Rudolph Aemmer and Edward Feuz, who considered the ascent difficult and perhaps dangerous. The peak had not been climbed from the north. Several attempts had been considered and suggested, but none had ever been made. From the outset, then, since we were in good physical condition and the weather was promising, we resolved to center our energies on Adamant. Little did we realize what lay in store for us.

There seemed to be three distinct ways whereby Adamant might be scaled from our camp, in addition to two more remote possibilities. Not one looked easy. Eventually, we came to grips with three of the proposed routes; and, since all five entered into our calculations, it may be appropriate to describe each in turn.

Mount Adamant is the central peak in a group of three: Pioneer Peak (with its satellite, the dagger-like Gothic Spire) lies to the east, while Turret and Austerity soar skyward to the west. On the north side, buttressing these peaks, are four steep hanging glaciers, separated one from another by sheer and apparently inaccessible rock ridges.

The first proposed route would involve the ascent of the "Holey Glacier" (so named not because of its piety, but because of its crevasses), which flows into the Granite Glacier from the northeast slopes of Adamant and the northwest flanks of Pioneer Peak. Much of the climbing would have to be done immediately beneath the Gothic Spire. Leaning séracs, steep slopes and huge schrunds and crevasses appeared to be the chief dangers and obstacles. If once we could reach a spur leading to Adamant's east ridge, the ascent, though roundabout, would probably not be excessively difficult.

Superficially, the second route appeared to offer equal problems with the first. Instead of attacking Adamant from the flank, this method involved a direct approach up the central hanging glacier, which descends to the Granite Glacier from between Adamant's east and west (higher) summits. Sterling Hendricks had proposed this route to us, and we consequently named the glacier after him.

It appeared to be a shorter route than the first, but more dangerous. Much of it was overhung by a huge ice cliff, from which avalanches descended chronically and beneath which the climbers would have to spend considerable time. Otherwise, except for the possibility of big crevasses and steep snow, this route did not seem especially difficult.

The third possibility was to reascend Austerity via the most westerly (Ironman) glacier, climb Turret (as Hendricks' party had done two years earlier) and go on to Adamant. The chief risk consisted in the length of the climb (there would be two peaks to climb back over in order to descend from the summit), and there was also a distinct possibility that Adamant's west wall, which separates it from Turret, could not be scaled.

A fourth opportunity was presented by the rather gentle (I use the word in a relative, not an absolute, sense) Turret Glacier, which flows from between Adamant and Austerity into the Granite Glacier. Unfortunately, the upper parts are exceedingly steep, with a fantastic wall of ice overhanging the northeast portion, and, apparently, extremely difficult rock cliffs for at least a thousand feet above. These cliffs would have to be climbed in order to rejoin the north ridge. Hendricks, who had considered this route in 1948, had termed it "probably impossible," although at the time Alec Fabergé, who accompanied him, had been somewhat partial to it.

A fifth possible route was also to be considered. It involved the ascent of Adamant's north ridge directly from its base. But this route also seemed to offer only remote chances for success, and it did not enter much into consideration at this time. Closer inspection subsequently led us to believe that, with suitable artificial aids, it would prove to be a fine rock climb.

On July 17th the entire party started out at daybreak under clear skies for Adamant, by way of the Holey Glacier. We made good time at first. Slightly over an hour and a half's march out of camp, we roped up on the upper Granite Glacier, which we proceeded to cross. An easy passage through a small icefall brought us to the base of avalanche debris, which had broken off from the ice wall immediately beneath the Gothic Spire. Above the avalanche-fan the slopes steepened sharply. We kicked steps up deep, wet powder snow until we reached the base of our first obstacle, a well-bridged bergschrund, with an awkward and vertical upper lip. While the

first rope, which I was leading, tried to cut steps over one of the easier portions of the schrund, the second rope, consisting of Alec and Norman, reconnoitered a hundred feet or so to the right (west) and found a still easier passage. We abandoned our efforts and followed close behind our luckier companions.

The passage selected by Norman and Alec had one disadvantage. Some 300 feet directly above it loomed two formidable séracs, perched at a dangerous angle. By now the sun had played for over an hour on these pinnacles, and small chunks broke off from them at intervals and avalanched past us. The sensation was uncomfortable. We hurried diagonally upwards out of the way as fast as the deep, wet snow would allow.

As we reached a point level with the top of the séracs, the angle of the slope eased. Hardly had we begun to relax before a new obstacle, more formidable than any yet encountered, rose ahead. A huge gaping bergschrund, fully 40 feet wide in places, stretched across our path. Although it was well bridged in places, its far sides rose vertically at least 50 or 60 feet. It appeared to extend, in the form of an ice cliff, all the way from the Gothic Spire across to the northeast ridge of Adamant.

In a somewhat futile effort to find a passage, the two ropes here separated. Stoutly belayed by David Michael and Betty, I climbed down some 15 or 20 feet into the crevasse and over a narrow bridge. With little enthusiasm I then began to hack with my ice-axe at the least uninviting part of the 50-foot wall beyond. Meanwhile, Alec and Norman moved to the right (west) along the sides of the crevasse, taking advantage of occasional bridges and cutting steps most of the way. At last Norman, who was leading, contoured to the far side of the schrund, to find himself on a 50-degree snow slope, which he now attempted to ascend. Betty, David and I, who had by this time abandoned our hopeless direct assault on the ice cliff, followed behind Norman and Alec, in expectation that they might have better luck than we.

This was not the case. Norman, who had reconnoitered some 30 or 40 feet out onto the slope, reported treacherous conditions. Beneath the snow—which had been softened by the sun—lay glare ice, and the entire area was in imminent danger of avalanching. Nor was there enough rope to reach a safe belaying point above the slope. One alternative only remained: to retreat.

We had learned one thing: Adamant could not be climbed this year from the northeast. We had made a good try, having reached an altitude of about 9600-9700 feet, with considerable effort and not a little risk. We dropped back to the base of the slopes, at about 9000 feet, where we picked a safe spot to lunch.

Somewhat refreshed, we made another abortive attempt that afternoon, on the near-by Gothic Spire. Again we struggled up steep snow slopes, this time under clouded skies and among snow flurries on the cold north walls of Pioneer Peak. Once more, with victory in our grasp, we were blocked by a big schrund. Weary and completely frustrated, we trudged back to camp. It had been a hard day, spent chiefly among some of the most fantastic ice and snow formations I had ever seen.

Next morning, the 18th, leaving Betty behind this time, we four renewed the attack, but from another direction. At first we planned to attempt the route up the Hendricks Glacier between Adamant's two summits, but another look at the threatening ice cliffs which overhung the area made us change our minds. Instead, we headed toward Austerity, hoping that perhaps, if time permitted, we might cross over Turret to Adamant.

Once again, although we reached the top of Austerity, we were stopped short of our ultimate goal. The ascent of the bergschrund and walls between Austerity and Ironman consumed much step-cutting effort and time over dangerous snow slopes. We reached the summit of Austerity at too late an hour and in weather too threatening to proceed further. We returned by way of Hendricks' exposed and fascinating 1948 route down over Ironman. We reached camp barely in time to avoid an evening electrical storm.

Still, the Austerity climb had been instructive. From its summit, as we looked longingly at Adamant, we had observed what appeared to be a feasible, if intricate, route up the Turret Glacier, thence over a schrund, up cliffs, and then zigzagging northward along somewhat diagonal gullies in Adamant's northwest walls to the north ridge, perhaps 500 feet below the top. Two years ago, Alec, standing on Austerity, had suggested this very route to Sterling Hendricks, but at that time the latter had rejected it—perhaps because different conditions then prevailed. When we first examined this approach, we reached much the same conclusion as had Hend-

ricks, yet a feeling of despair and frustration stimulated us at least to give it a try at the first opportunity.

After a day's rest in stormy weather, all five of us again set out at dawn on the 20th for Adamant. Despite extreme cold, high winds, fresh snow and billowing clouds, a sense of urgency drove us forward. This was to be Norman's and Betty's last day, for the former was due back in South Slovan on the 22nd, and Betty—who was not climbing as much as usual this year—had agreed to accompany him on the rather arduous and dangerous trip back to the highway.

We had hoped the weather might improve as we proceeded, but it seemed to do the opposite. The wind battered our parkas as we trudged slowly up the Turret Glacier. A breakable crust over deep powder—an abominable snow condition—cut our progress to a snail's pace. We wound our way around big crevasses and over narrow snow bridges. It took six hours to cover the 3500-odd feet of climbing between camp and the upper portions of the Turret Glacier at about 9500 feet.

Here, at last, it was necessary to cut into the shadows toward Adamant's northwest face, since the upper portions of the Turret Glacier, consisting mostly of a gigantic ice cliff, could not be scaled. Above us a poorly-bridged schrund blocked the passage to a steep snow slope which, in turn, led toward the first snow-cluttered rock chimney in Adamant's northwest wall. Our enthusiasm waned as we faced the problems ahead. The wind still howled, and snow dust whipped around us. Billowing clouds sailed across the summits of Adamant and Austerity, both of which were hidden in mist. There would be ice on the rocks, and we knew not what other troubles we might encounter. Alec considered further progress unwise, though Betty and Norman—for obvious reasons—still wished to push onward.

In order to satisfy everyone, and also to render the advance less cumbersome, we now decided to split the party. David graciously offered to accompany Alec to the Gothics Névé, some distance away, to see whether some of the lower peaks in that area might be in a less hostile mood. Meanwhile, Betty, Norman and I pressed our assault on Adamant.

With Norman in the lead, we moved cautiously and one by one over the treacherous schrund, thence up steep icy slopes to the

foot of the chimney. Here we drove a four-foot wooden stake into an ice crack for belaying and, ultimately, rappelling purposes. Norman next led around a chockstone and over icy rocks on the exposed face to the next stopping point.

We proceeded in this fashion for some time, until at last, about 80 feet above the foot of the chimney, we emerged on a large and steep snow patch, which divided a small portion of the face. Earlier observation of the area from the top of Austerity had taught us that we must climb to the head of this snow patch and then over dubious rocks in order to attain a long diagonal couloir leading northward to a point on the ridge.

Norman, who was still in the lead, kicked steps to the top of the snow, where he encountered difficulties. The rocks were covered with a veneer of ice, and his position was awkward. The belay spot, though good, was some distance below; the wind still howled; our fingers and toes were numb—and we decided, wisely we believe, to retreat. We made three rappels back to our starting point at the schrund. As we slogged back to camp, we speculated that it might be possible to overcome the icy northwest wall of Adamant with crampons (which we had not taken that morning) and a larger supply of ironware.

In contrast to the previous day, the 21st dawned perfect. Betty and Norman unfortunately now had to leave the region, departing at daybreak to reach the highway that evening. David and Alec were still weary, having wandered over much of the Gothics Névé the previous afternoon, though they had climbed no summits. Alec rather insistently wished to remain in camp; but David, after I had made the suggestion, manifested keen interest in accompanying me on still another attack on Adamant. Fully equipped with crampons, rappel rope and hardware, we two set out at sunrise.

We made excellent time. A cold clear night had frozen our previous day's steps solidly. They formed a veritable staircase up which we marched to the foot of the rocks. Since I knew the way beyond this point, I assumed the lead when we reached the schrund; and, with surprising ease, we hastened one after another to the foot of the snow patch. We had covered in three hours what it had taken us more than six to scale the previous day.

At the snow patch we paused to tie on our crampons, which we used with much satisfaction and effect from here until we reached

the north ridge. Still, despite this additional aid, I understood why Norman had stopped among the rocks immediately above the snow. A rather delicate pitch, somewhat extended, over icy rocks, lay immediately ahead. The place was steep and exposed. Even with a fine belay—some distance below—from David, I felt none too secure. I had to struggle upwards uncertainly for 40 to 50 feet over ice-coated rocks, until I found a place to drive a piton. Finally, I managed to pound one in solidly just below a few last crucial feet of tenuous balance climbing which led to the less treacherous gully.

From here the work became easier. We continued to move cautiously, one at a time, diagonally upwards and northwards, over icy rocks and crusted patches of snow. After more than two hours we finally emerged in the sunlight on the north ridge, just beneath the point where it is slightly intersected by the top of the great ice cliff overhanging the Hendricks Glacier.

Beyond this spot a rock cliff still blocked the way. Viewed face on, from where we stood, it first looked impossible. Closer inspection revealed a welcome chimney, which turned out to be little more than a hard scramble, in the course of which we drove another piton for safety. Above the chimney, it merely became a question of following steep but easy slopes, sometimes on rock, more frequently on snow, being cautious on the icy spots and probing for well-hidden crevasses. We now alternated the lead frequently and made rapid progress. At one o'clock, after a seven-hour climb, we stood on Adamant's summit.

We spent a full hour on top, basking in the sun and searching vainly for Palmer's records in a rock ruin which might once have been a cairn. It was perfect weather, without a cloud or breath of air in the sky, cool and sparkling, one of those unusual crystal-clear days when even the farthest mountain stands sharply against the horizon. The stillness was broken only by the distant murmur of torrents and the rare muffled roar of an avalanche. Mount Robson glistened splendidly in the north; and, far to the south, we could even discern the familiar outline of Mount Butters in the Battle Range, where I had been three years before. Beneath our feet loomed the somber Blackfriars, and, behind them, Mount Sir Sandford. Our one regret, as we contemplated the scene, was that Norman Brewster, who had worked so hard to pioneer the route

and been so keen to reach the summit, could not share our success.

We returned to camp as we had come, rappelling five times on the way over the difficult places. When we reached Fairy Meadow at suppertime, Alec hastened towards us, full of inquiry, and offering welcome fruit juice. For a time we sat, weary but triumphant, on the heather. It was a day we should never forget.

It had taken more than ordinary perseverance to find a route up the north side of Adamant. In our efforts we had learned one thing: that Adamant can probably be climbed from the north by more than one method, but that surely there is no easy way. As for ourselves, we had the unusual satisfaction of having at last overcome an obstacle which on more than one occasion had seemed insuperable. The route we had finally selected was intricate, extremely hard to find—it winds around the Turret Glacier and all over the northwest face of the mountain—and at times difficult, both from the rock climber's and from the snow technician's points of view. In fact (and this is perhaps the chief cause for our sense of achievement), we had more than once, even on the final route, been uncertain of success. But from the mountaineering standpoint we had found a way which is reliable and safe. This is more than we can say for any other route we attempted or contemplated.

The ascents of Adamant and Austerity, and the abortive attempt on the Gothic Spire, by no means completed our sojourn in the Northern Selkirks. In the following days we made first ascents of easy Mount Sir William (*ca.* 10,000 ft., north of Mounts Colossal and Yellow) and deceptive Mount Edfalls (*ca.* 10,500 ft.)—where we mistook a difficult false summit for the real one, which turned out to be simple. Later, in the Gothics Névé area, we made first ascents of Mount Sir Benjamin (*ca.* 9,700 ft., east of Gibraltar and Fria) and of the Gargoyle (10,250 ft., the extreme easterly peak of the Gothics, even east of what is known as the East Peak, which we climbed two years ago). Finally, at the end of our journey, we bivouacked at our old campsite on Azimuth Mountain, whence we climbed Mount Belvedere. We had hoped to attempt the lower Blackfriar as a finale to our pilgrimage, but time and the weather would not permit it. On July 27th we returned to Fairy Meadow where, a few days earlier and much to our delight, Gerry Cunningham's party had met us. Bidding them now goodbye, we trudged back down among the mosquitoes and devil's club to the highway.