

ACCIDENTS 1960

CANADA

British Columbia, Mount Waddington—A Canadian party consisting of Derrick Boddy, John Owen, Elfrida Pigou and Joan Stirling disappeared between July 30 and August 1, while attempting an ascent of Mount Waddington, and are presumed to have been killed by an avalanche. The following is an attempt to reconstruct the accident on the basis of available information.

The party flew from Campbell River to Ghost Lake on July 23 by B. C. Airlines, and arranged to be picked up on August 13.

On July 28 and 30, an American party of 17 persons was flown to Ghost Lake, also by B. C. Airlines, and also arranged to be picked up on August 13. Nine of these people climbed around Nabob Pass while the remaining eight climbed Mount Waddington.

On Friday, July 29, Kurtz and Jackson, members of the American party, descended to Tiedemann Glacier and went up it to Rainy Knob, at the junction of Tiedemann and Bravo Glaciers, about 6,000 feet elevation. Here they met the four members of the Canadian party, who had seen them coming and prepared some tea for them. It was noticed that Elfrida's hand was bandaged and seemed to be painful. This was apparently the result of an injury she had sustained during a practice rock climb shortly before leaving Vancouver. John Owen said that they intended to cross Lower Bravo Glacier and go up on the rock ridge to the left. The ACC party moved the last of their gear up to the top of Rainy Knob while Kurtz and Jackson remained at the base of Rainy Knob.

On Saturday morning, July 30, Kurtz and Jackson received their air-drop and the rest of their party landed at Ghost Lake. While picking up the air-dropped supplies, Kurtz and Jackson observed the four members of the ACC party moving up Lower Bravo Glacier. Then two of them were seen to return to Rainy Knob, then go up again, presumably with more supplies.

On Sunday, July 31, Kurtz and Jackson looked for the Canadian party, especially on and above the rock ridge, but did not see them. Meanwhile, the remaining six members of the Seattle party were moving up from Nabob Pass to Rainy Knob.

On Monday, August 1, the eight Seattle climbers went over Rainy Knob and up Bravo Glacier, generally following the ACC party's steps, which were almost knee-deep. Slightly more than half way across the width of the glacier and at an elevation of about 8,200 feet these tracks ended at the edge of a mass of avalanche debris extending under the face of an ice cliff for about 200 feet. As they crossed the debris they saw a sleeping bag on the edge of a crevasse below the avalanche area. The time was now about 4:00 p.m. and the day was warm. The Americans considered it unwise to remain in the area longer than absolutely necessary, due to danger from further avalanches, and went on.

Beyond the debris and toward the rock ridge they saw tracks and ice axe marks of two people going towards the ridge, returning and ending again at the debris.

They camped on the ridge and on August 2, continued up the ridge and on to Bravo Col. They found no tracks in that area but expressed the opinion that if there had been any tracks, they would have seen them. They continued upward and climbed the mountain.

Returning over Bravo Col on August 6, they arranged to reach the scene of the avalanche early in the morning, and spent about 15 minutes examining the site. The area swept by the avalanche was about 200 feet in each direction and sloped at an angle of about 15 degrees. The upper edge was bounded by the ice cliff from which the avalanche had fallen and the lower edge was formed by a crevasse 10 to 15 feet wide. The whole area was littered with large pieces of ice from the avalanche but most of the debris appeared to have been swept right across the area and fallen into the crevasse.

Jacques and Magnusson looked into the crevasse and saw some unidentifiable dark objects lying on the debris about 40 feet below the surface. A plastic bottle, and metal pot holder and two sections of aluminum tent pole, joined together, were found among the surface debris near the upper lip of the crevasse. They later described Lower Bravo Glacier as very active, noting that the crevasse mentioned had opened noticeably since their ascent, leaving the ice debris standing free within the crevasse. The weather throughout this period, and since the American party's arrival at Ghost Lake, had been clear and warm.

After the search they proceeded down the glacier but found no further sign of the Canadian party.

On returning to Nabob Pass they checked through the ACC party's cache and removed valuables and items of identification which were later turned over to the RCMP at Campbell River together with the articles recovered from the scene of the avalanche. The remaining items in the cache (food and clothing) were stowed in 5-gallon cans and placed on a large flat rock about 20 feet from the water at the north east side of the largest lake in Nabob Pass, and covered with a tarp left by the ACC party. The tarp is white on top, fawn underneath.

Fickeisen took photographs of the avalanche area, and Harry Brown of B. C. Airlines took photographs of Tiedemann Glacier on July 28 or 30 which may show the scene as it was prior to the avalanche.

Meanwhile, a third party had arrived at Ghost Lake on August 5, intending to climb Mount Waddington. This party, however, did not meet the Seattle party and was probably unaware of the accident until contacted by the RCMP, on August 19, when they indicated they had not seen the Canadian party.

On Monday, August 15, the RCMP aircraft was unservicable and for several days thereafter the weather was unsuitable. On Friday morning, August 19, Fips Broda and Ian Kay, with Const. Joe Luster and S/Sgt. Jack Austin of the RCMP, flew over the scene in an RCMP "Beaver." The weather was clear above about 10,000 feet but there were clouds in the valleys, including one almost directly over the accident site, which made it difficult to approach it for a close examination. Fresh snow had fallen in the area and no tracks or other signs of life could be seen. The debris of at least two ice avalanches was seen in the vicinity, and due to

the clouds it was difficult to pinpoint with certainty the exact scene of the accident.

After circling the area several times the aircraft flew down Tiedemann Glacier to Nabob Pass. Some footprints were seen on the glacier a short distance west of Nabob Pass. The aircraft then flew across Nabob Pass at a low altitude to see if there was anybody there. On the second crossing, two tents and four people were seen. Those on the aircraft were unable to identify the people but were satisfied that they were not the members of the ACC party. Presumably, they were the American party, Mohling et al., referred to above. The aircraft dropped a note to them saying if they had not seen any sign of the Canadian party, to signal by waving their arms. They were seen to recover the note and later wave their arms as requested. The aircraft then returned to Vancouver via Homathko River and Bute Inlet.

From the air reconnaissance and from the statements of the Seattle party, Broda and Kay reached the following conclusions:

- (a) There was no evidence to indicate that anyone might have survived the avalanche.
- (b) The lapse of time since the accident and the subsequent snowfall made it very uncertain whether the exact scene of the accident could be located, further evidence found, or bodies recovered.
- (c) The danger from further avalanches in the area would make a ground examination hazardous.

It was, therefore, their opinion that the sending of a party to carry out an investigation on the ground could not be justified, and RCMP were so advised.

Source: I. B. Kay, Chairman, Mountain Rescue Group.

Analysis: From the available information, it may be inferred that the party reached the spot where the accident occurred some time during the afternoon of July 30. Due to the softness of the snow or for some other reason they decided to camp there rather than continue across the glacier to the rock ridge. Two of the party then went back to Rainy Knob for the remaining supplies while the other two, without packs, went ahead to examine the route to, and possibly up, the rock ridge. Both pairs of climbers returned to the campsite and were there when the avalanche occurred, which was probably that afternoon or evening, but possibly the following morning. The avalanche was caused by the collapse of an ice cliff not more than 200 feet horizontally above the camp and probably swept all the climbers together with most of their equipment and supplies into a large crevasse.

British Columbia, Southern Selkirks, Avalanche Peak—On July 9, Alan Stroh (34), Sandra Antins (20), David Williams (25), Timothy Weakley (27), Charles Carpenter (30), and Russell Burditt (23), set out to climb Avalanche Crest. This party was part of 9 who had arrived at Glacier the night before. Seventeen more, including the leaders of the whole group, had been detained at Lake Louise. Though most of them had little experience, they undertook a climb in perfect weather, slightly on the cool side. Snow was soft in the hot sun. Most of them needed practice