

FIRST ASCENT OF MT. WHITEHORN
(August 12th, 1911)

BY CONRAD KAIN
(Translated by P. A. W. Wallace.)

On the 12th of August I got off in good time, and went to the fly camp where I found Mr. Wheeler and Mr. Kinney at timber line, half an hour from the main camp. We waited there till ten o'clock and had to return on account of fog. I could stand it no longer, being among beautiful mountains without climbing one. I left camp at half-past one to climb Mt. Whitehorn. I went so fast that it would not have been possible to take anyone with me. I crossed the glacier to a moraine and followed the rocks, which led me directly to the pass. From there, I had to descend three hundred feet. After a very dangerous threading of the numerous crevasses, I reached the southwest ridge. Rain and thunder! I thought of turning back, but decided to go on, for I knew that it was my only opportunity to climb the mountain. I followed the ridge right to the summit without much difficulty. The climb reminded me very strongly of the scramble on Mt. Stephen. It was impossible for me to build a stone-man on the highest point; the peak is snow covered. At the first rocks I made a little stone-man, and wrote a few words on a paper:
"Conrad Kain, Fuhrer von Wien, Bei Sturm, 11-8-1911"
—and afterwards I found that it was the 10th of August, my twenty-eighth birthday.

I folded the paper and put it in my match-holder, which I received as a present from Mr. Hollister. On one side of the match-holder it reads:

"With compliments from the Continental Oil Co for 1903"; on the other side, scratched in with a penknife:

"N. Hollister."

I wrapped this in a handkerchief and put it in the stone-man. For greater precaution I laid a few stones together underneath an overhanging rock that protected this second stone-man from avalanches; because I knew that people would not believe that I had reached the summit.

The route of return was the same, but more dangerous. Before I came to the pass, the sun sank behind the mountains. I should have liked to see the sun two hours longer.

I thought that I could yet cross the glacier by daylight. To my astonishment, I found that the snow-bridge, which had brought me on the rocks, was broken. I had hard work to get on the glacier. I was quite helpless in the rain. I wanted to stay on the glacier overnight, but I could not stand it longer than ten minutes, and the cold warned me that I must go on, whatever happened. My one bit of good fortune was the lightning, which showed me the way. Step by step, I had to feel with the axe to find whether I were on the edge of a crevasse. Very often the axe fell right through and, more than once, I thought: "This is the last step." I tried again to stay overnight on the glacier, but in five minutes I would have been frozen stiff from head to foot. I felt indescribably glad when I found rocks under foot; I yodeled with delight.

The way from the rocks was already familiar to me, and no longer dangerous, but still very uncomfortable through the windfalls. At daybreak, I came into camp, in pouring rain. I found my supper by the fire, and ate it for breakfast. I laid aside all my wet clothing and, without a sound, went into the tent and to bed without disturbing anyone. I slept for a short time. Mr. Kinney felt in my bed to see if I was there. Without saying a word, he clapped me on the shoulder and I pointed in the direction of Whitehorn.

I had absolutely no pleasure in that climb. The time was too short and the dangers were too great. Two days later I went over the glacier and saw my tracks, and I think there was only one chance in a hundred of anyone coming through safe. I was appalled when I saw the dangerous crevasses. It was one of the craziest and most foolhardy undertakings that I ever made in the mountains, and all my life I shall remember the ascent of Whitehorn. As I found no stone-man or any other sign of man, I believe that it was the first ascent.

NOTE.—Two days after Conrad gave the above extracts from his notebook (August, 1913), Walter Schaufelberger's party returned from Whitehorn, bringing the Continental Oil Co.'s matchbox and the paper with Conrad's signature. It was found twenty or thirty feet below the summit.—P.A.W.W.