

Reminiscences of Seven Summers in Canada

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MY FIRST two climbing seasons, 1909 and 1910, in the Rockies, were spent along the main line of the Canadian Pacific Railway. In 1911 I joined Mr. A. O. Wheeler's survey, covering the territory from Jasper to Yellowhead pass and Mt. Robson. From Maligne Lake we returned to Banff via Wilcox pass. The most interesting ascents for me that season were Whitehorn, a first ascent which I made alone, and the first ascent of Resplendent in company with Mr. Harmon, of Banff. I enjoyed the trips through the mountains with packtrain, and was delighted with camp life, although on many occasions the mosquitoes made me long for other mountains where these persistent pests are unknown.

In general, I adapted myself to the New World and its ways, but at times I caught myself meditating. Visions of the Alps and the Dolomites would flash through my mind, linked up with Old World memories—of life in the inns, with music and song. I realized that these were symptoms, universally known as "Heimweh," but fortunately I was well fortified with a prescription for this malady. It read: "Take life as it comes, and make the best of it, and always be your own adviser in small matters." But this did not help me much at the time; there was something missing, and therefore I was not quite happy.

Early in the spring of 1912 I received a letter from a man whose acquaintance I had made in the mountains. An invitation to join an expedition to the Altai. At once I decided to go, for I felt sure I would have a chance for a stiff and sporty climb. In this I discovered what was lacking in the Rockies; it was a climb with thrills and plenty of them.

For several years before I came to Canada I climbed in the Alps, and, in those days, made some of the sportful ascents more than once in a season. My favorites were the aiguilles of Mont Blanc and the mountains of Dauphiné. In the Dolomites I considered the following climbs ideal: the Vajolet Towers, the east face of Rosengarten, the Fünffingerspitze by the Schmitt-kamin, the south face of Marmolata, and the north wall of the Kleine Zinne. I was so infatuated with the Guglia di Brenta that I went many miles out of my way to climb this majestic pinnacle. In the three seasons that I spent in the Rockies I had not made a single climb,

and did not expect to make one, that could be compared with any of these.

After my journey to the Altai Mountains I visited my old stamping-grounds in the Dolomites and the Alps, and made a few difficult climbs, quenched my three-year-old thirst with beer and had a jolly time, living my youth over again. It was beautiful yet strange; it made me feel very lonely—I longed for the solitude that one finds in the Rockies; for the campfire and the carefree life.

In June, 1913, I landed in Canada after a long voyage from England by way of Australia and New Zealand to British Columbia. On my arrival I was told that I would have an opportunity to climb Mt. Robson. This came to pass, and I traversed the mountain in August with A. H. MacCarthy and W. W. Foster. I have ascended Mt. Robson several times since; my verdict is that it is long and offers many problems to the leader. No matter from which side the ascent is made, there are dangerous sections, even under the best conditions. He who hires himself out for such a climb earns his pay, and the amateur who can lead to the summit is in my opinion a full-fledged mountaineer.

In 1914 the most interesting climbs I made were Farnham and the Farnham Tower in the Purcell range. The tower offered rock-work to my liking, and these ascents compared well with climbs in Dauphine. In the summer of 1915 we made additional climbs in the Purcells, but nothing of outstanding interest. This was my third visit to this range, and its mountains and valleys fascinated me.

The season of 1916 turned out to be the best I had had in this land. On July 19, with A. H. MacCarthy, I made the first ascent of Mt. Louis, near Banff, the most interesting rock climb I had made in the Rockies. Next-best was the descent of the east face of Monument Peak, on the north fork of Toby Creek in the Purcells. Several years later I pointed out the route to a prospector, who remarked, "Say, you are either a fool or a doggone liar!"

The summer came to an end with a trip to the Howser and Bugaboo Spires, and it was in this group that we made an ascent which I found as interesting and difficult as any I have encountered in the Alps. None of my subsequent ascents in the Rockies provided such thrills as the Bugaboo Spire. Believing that this may be of interest to mountaineers who prefer rock-climbing, and are looking for new ground and virgin peaks, I will give an account of this adventure.

The Howser and Bugaboo Spires are reached in two days from Spillimacheen in the Columbia valley. The group shows up prominently from Sir Donald and from peaks at the heads of Toby and Horsethief Creeks. On a clear day it is visible from the higher summits of the Rockies. I had been twice in this section, but it was not until August, 1916, when we walked around the spires in search of the highest of the group, that I had a chance to examine the pinnacles at close quarters.

These peaks are as yet unnamed on maps, although Longstaff refers to them as "The Nunataks," and MacCarthy designates them from south to north as "1, 2 and 3." The well-known guide, Edward Feuz, Jr., suggested "Aiguilles" for this group, as the spires resemble the aiguilles of Chamonix even more than Mt. Assiniboine duplicates the Matterhorn. Spire No. 2,¹ with sheer cliffs on all sides, is the most picturesque of all and rises some 2,000 ft. above the glacier. After carefully searching with powerful binoculars I came to the conclusion that this pinnacle will prove very hard to conquer. Since then I have had the opportunity to study the peak from different angles, and have not changed my opinion. I feel inclined to prophesy that this pinnacle will be the most difficult ascent in the Canadian Alps.

As our time was limited, we chose Spire No. 3² for our climb in this section, as it was not so forbidding. On August 29 we left camp at 4.30 A.M., the party consisting of Mr. and Mrs. A. H. MacCarthy, Mr. J. Vincent and the writer. The real climb, beginning at the saddle between No. 2 and No. 3, offered interesting but not difficult rock in the first thousand feet. Before reaching the main ridge we encountered two chimneys, about thirty feet high, and several smooth slabs which required both care and technique.

On the ridge we halted and studied the route to the summit, which was in sight. Before us rose a most formidable gendarme, whose base spanned the width of the ridge. Its western wall ran up in prolongations of cliffs that rose from the glacier far below, and its upper edge lifted sharply like a horn to the point where it joined the high, smooth east wall. The western side was blocked by unsurmountable cliffs. The face of the gendarme looked anything but inviting and the only chance was to skirt around on the east

¹ The "Snowpatch" peak of the following paper.—Ed.

² "Bugaboo Spire" of the following article.—Ed.

side. Before reaching the base of this barrier we encountered several hard bits; in fact, on peaks of the Rockies, where the stone formation is rotten, such places would be termed difficult and dangerous; but when every hold is solid, difficulties are welcome and met with a smile.

A broken section led down for about forty feet to a ledge, three or four feet wide, and ended in a 2,000-ft. drop. The wall above this was split in several places, but the breaks were far apart. We returned to the gendarme and after a short rest I tackled the perpendicular fifteen-foot wall. Several diagonal cracks offered firm handholds, but were not large enough for the toes; the old proverb, "Half a loaf is better than none," comes often to the climber's mind. Near the top I was stuck for a few minutes, the edge being smooth and without holds of any kind. I applied the vacuum grip and pulled myself up and over.

A few feet higher up was a dent that resembled a saucer, from which I studied the surroundings and looked for a way out. It was a tight corner; to my right the wall I had come up, and to the left a holdless slab beyond a short crack, crowned with a slight overhang. Above me a straight wall, ten or twelve feet, led to a slab, after which nothing was visible except space filled with mist through which a streak of blue ice appeared.

The only possible way out was to the left. There was not room for two on this edge, nor was there a projecting rock or crack for anchorage, so I had to depend entirely on myself. I managed to wriggle over the holdless slab, and when I next tried to get into the crack I was stopped. Convinced that I had started wrong, and as there was no chance to change my position, I crawled back to the edge and began again. To my surprise I found myself in exactly the same position as before; but I grew bolder and stood up, balanced on the toes of my left foot and made great efforts to get into the crack, but could not find a hold.

The endurance required in balancing one's whole weight on the toes should be cultivated. Again I returned to the starting point. Searching my memory for something which resembled this bugaboo, I found the picture. Many years ago, in Tyrol, I battled with just such an obstacle as I now had before me. I recollected that I had then overcome it with the aid of an ice-axe; fortunately we had one in the party. My plan was to place the axe in a position to take the weight of the left foot, the only one I could make use of,

and at the same time lift myself a few inches higher. This I thought would enable me to put my arm into the crack, which appeared just wide enough so that I could use the elbow on one wall and the palm on the other.

All went well according to this plan. Once in the crack the axe was not only useless but proved a real nuisance. I found myself in such a position that I could not dispose of the axe in any other way except by letting it drop. This I would not do, so there was nothing to do but go back once more and make other arrangements. Finally I succeeded in pulling myself up the crack and across the overhang. To my great relief a slanting crack about two inches wide led me to a safe place. I was now only seventy feet above the others, but it had taken me an hour and a half to overcome this stretch.

To illustrate how difficulties appear when a rope is present and the second climber knows that it will be properly handled by the man ahead, I quote from Mr. MacCarthy's account (*C.A.J.*, viii, p. 17) of this part of the climb: "We then bent on two spare ropes and with the aid of a double rope went up, one at a time, fully realizing, as we passed over the top stretch and up the broken course above, that the real climb on a mountain is the one made by the guide." The portion between the gendarme and the summit afforded interesting climbing. The barometer registered 10,250 ft. on the first peak, and, as we were not certain of the highest point, we started for the second a few hundred yards away. We encountered a break-off some twenty feet high, over which we roped-off, leaving the rope for the return trip. About half-way we were forced to the edge of the east wall, the only safe method being to straddle this section. Then we met with several smooth knobs, which would have been of no consequence on a safe place; but on the edge of such a sheer wall we hugged them tight. A short, irregular chimney landed us on top, the barometer reading exactly the same as on the first summit.

The view was grand, especially of the nearest spires. No. 2 fascinated me more than any other peak in sight, though I didn't see a possible chance for a route. I made up my mind that some day I would make an assault on this dignified-looking needle. In descent, as a rule, I never worry how I am going to get off a peak; but on this occasion I did. I was not sure if I could descend the gendarme without taking too much risk. While coming up I heard

Mr. McCarthy whisper to the others that he felt confident I would not descend over such a place if any other possible place could be found. I concealed my fear carefully.

It was in the early days of my career as a guide that I learned that the leader on any climb must hold the confidence of the party. This is not always so simple. Having thirty climbing seasons to look back on, I could write columns on this subject. To mention a few of the points a guide should bear in mind will not be amiss. First, he should never show fear. Second, he should be courteous to all, and always give special attention to the weakest member in the party. Third, he should be witty, and able to make up a white lie if necessary, on short notice, and tell it in a convincing manner. Fourth, he should know when and how to show authority; and when the situation demands it should be able to give a good scolding to whomsoever deserves it.

When we arrived at the gendarme we made a halt and looked over all sides. I decided that the safest way would be to rope-off on the east wall, behind the gendarme to the lodge mentioned in the ascent. Fortunately we had three ropes along, two of eighty feet and one of a hundred and twenty feet. Having tied the two shorter ropes securely together, I threw the end down to measure the height. Luck was with us as it just reached the ledge, about six feet from where it ended in sheer wall.

Roping off is a thrilling adventure, but not dangerous if properly carried out. The most unpleasant thing that can happen is when the rope itself gets stuck. I took all precautions to avoid such trouble, and having found a projecting rock I tied my coat in the center of the rope to prevent it from getting pinched. Half-way down a small ledge offered a chance for a rest, but this and the narrow, sloping ledge below were not places to linger and enjoy the view. So everyone made the eighty feet down without a stop and all were glad to reach a safer place.

The rest of the descent was made without any difficulties, and so ended the most interesting climb I had in my seven seasons of Canadian mountaineering. Without hesitation I say that the ascent of Bugaboo Spire offers as many thrills and difficulties as any of the aiguilles in the Alps which I have climbed. I also feel confident that mountaineers who make a trip to this group of the Purcells will not be disappointed.