

for treason at the Old Bailey in late November 1945, pleading guilty to eight counts of high treason and sentenced to death by hanging. He did this in order to spare his family any more embarrassment, but the papers at Cambridge show how Amery and his younger son Julian tried every way they could to save his life. Despite a psychiatric report by an eminent practitioner, Dr Edward Glover, that he was definitely abnormal with a psychopathic disorder and schizoid tendencies, and the intervention of the South African Field Marshall General Jan Smuts, an AC member, who pleaded directly for clemency with the UK Prime Minister Clement Atlee, it was to no avail. Albert Pierrepoint, the public hangman, described John Amery in his autobiography as the bravest man he had to execute. However, germane to this tragedy, considered by Ronald Harwood as significant to John Amery's story, is that his father had concealed his part-Jewish ancestry. His mother, Elizabeth Leitner, was actually from a family of well-known Jewish scholars.

Leo Amery lost his seat in Parliament in the Labour landslide victory in the General Election of 1945, and refused the offer of a peerage. He was however made a Companion of Honour.

Leo kept active in climbing circles almost to the end of his life, ignoring the advice of his old Canadian friend, Wheeler, who, quoting Whympster, advised him in a letter that, 'a man does not climb mountains after his 60th year'. He continued to visit Switzerland, particularly the Valais, climbing lower peaks and finally just walking in the mountains. He died in September 1955. I believe that we were lucky that such a man, burdened with all the problems posed by the war, austerity and family tragedy, and hard decision making in smoke-filled rooms at Westminster and Downing Street, gave up so much of his valuable time to support the sport he loved. Like all politicians he had his critics. Stanley Baldwin observed, 'if he had been two inches taller, and his speeches half as long he might have been PM,' and Field Marshall Alexander, who became Governor General of Canada, stated that 'Amery always got hold of the right stick on an issue, but usually by the wrong end'. However, the huge number of letters from when he was Alpine Club President reveal a very kind, considerate and humane person, who managed to keep friends with everyone from Colonel Strutt, to Arnold Lunn, Graham Brown and Winston Churchill, no mean feat of diplomacy for any AC President.

Concluding his valedictory address to the Club in 1947, Leo reflected:

'Farewell, yet still remain those shining ranges. Above the vale on high, where we're still free, despite all other changes, to climb the golden peaks of memory.'

TED NORRISH

Mount Robson – 1961



The team at Jasper after the Robson climb: l-r Olaf Soot, Ted Norrish, Willie Pfisterer, Bill Roberts and Michael Keen. (Chris McCartney)

The hardest successful climb of my life was without doubt an ascent of Mount Robson (3954m) in the Canadian Rockies in July 1961. It was my Oxford University climbing friend and companion on Saraghrar in 1958, Bill Roberts, who suggested this trip to me and I did not need much persuasion. A small but diverse team was gathered: Mike Keen, a geologist from University College, and two fine mountaineers from the American Alpine Club – Olaf Soot, a Latvian American from New York, and Cleve McCartney, a dentist from Denver.

Robson is certainly one of the great mountains of the world, perhaps not in height, but certainly in steepness, difficulty and unique character. The first known attempt on the peak was in 1907 by Arthur Wheeler, founding president of the Alpine Club of Canada, with Arthur Coleman, his brother Quincy and Alpine Club founder member George Kinney. Kinney developed something of an obsession with Mount Robson and came, at least,

very close to the summit at his twelfth attempt in 1909 with non-climber Donald 'Curly' Phillips as second. They reached the summit ridge in storm and white-out and controversy still abounds as to whether they actually topped out.

Robson was unequivocally climbed on 13 July 1913 by William Foster and Albert MacCarthy with their Austrian guide Conrad Kain, who proclaimed as they reached the summit: 'Gentlemen, that's so far as I can take you.' Perhaps because of exhaustion the party failed to give a description of their climb. Kain went on to achieve 60 first ascents in the Rockies, detailed in his famous autobiography, *Where The Clouds Can Go*.

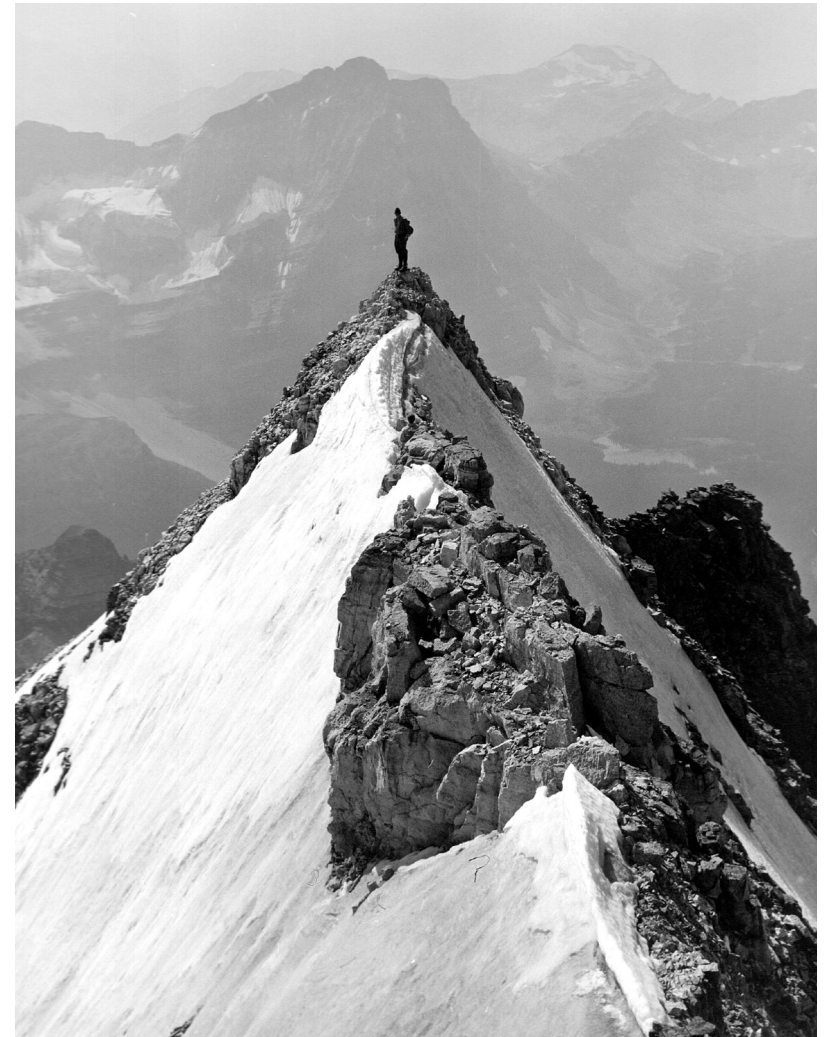
We travelled to New York on the liner *Statendam*, about a week's voyage from Southampton. At dawn I came on deck to see the great city from the Hudson River for the first time. A most spectacular sight – I had never seen skyscrapers before! Our American friends collected us from the dock in their huge car and drove us, along with their two wives, out to the Rockies, finally arriving in Banff after long days on the road. Here we stayed for two nights at the house of that great Canadian lady mountaineer, Phyllis Munday.

Phyl's husband Don, author of the book *The Unknown Mountain*, recounts that he and his wife were the first to sight Mount Waddington, (4019m), the highest peak of the Coastal Range, which they described as 'Mystery Mountain'. Together with their good friend and guide, the very same Conrad Kain, they made several first ascents in this range and were most deservedly honoured when the Canadian Geographic Board named the highest of their first ascents Mount Munday (3356m).

Phyl Munday was a very brave and strong lady. In Don's book there is a picture of her carrying a sixty pound pack across a single log bridge above a raging river and on one occasion she fought off a grizzly bear with her bare hands and saved her husband's life. Eventually the Mundays and Conrad Kain made an early ascent of Robson in 1924, Phyl being the first woman to climb the mountain.

Phyl gave us all the information we needed, but warned us that Robson was a serious mountain that we could not attempt without a reliable guide, so she introduced us to Willie Pfisterer, an Austrian guide who was about ten years older than me. Willie advised us that Robson could only be attempted in one out of every five or six years, as conditions allowed. So we were all delighted when Willie informed us the mountain was climbable that year.

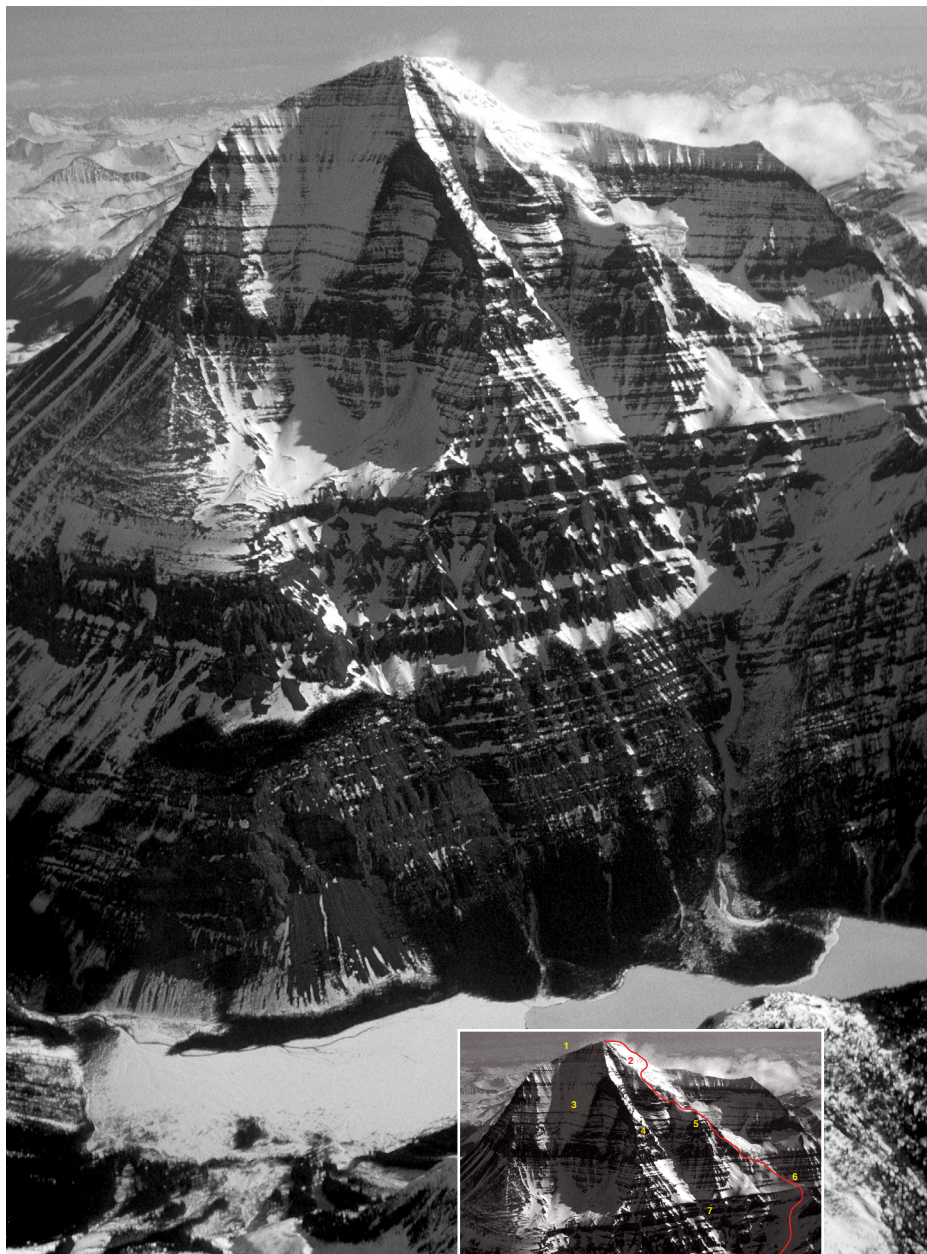
Before our attempt on Robson we decided to warm up on two other fine peaks: Mount Assiniboine (3618m) and Mount Victoria (3464m). Assiniboine, 'the Matterhorn of the Rockies', is a steep mountain with a fine sharp, rocky summit. The peak was first climbed on 1 September 1901 by the Rev. James Outram and two Swiss guides, Christian Bohren and Christian Hasler, part of a group brought to the Rockies by Edward Whympfer. Outram's party discovered that Assiniboine has a steep double summit. Not content with this first ascent, Outram decided to traverse the moun-



Cleve McCartney on the summit of Mount Victoria. (Norrish Coll.)

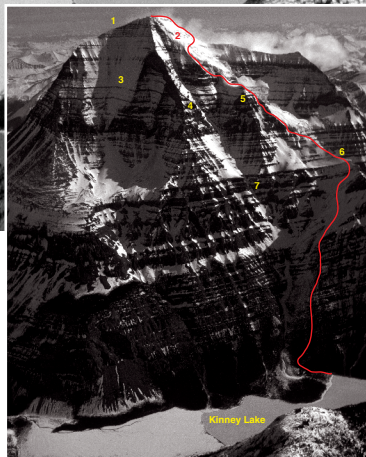
tain, descending by the steep North face and North-east Ridge – a very fine achievement considering Assiniboine had previously repulsed several strong parties.

We found Assiniboine quite easy in the event – an exciting steep scramble, but we did not attempt to traverse the mountain. That night we bivouacked beside a small, beautiful green lake. In the middle of the night a huge moose jumped over me as I lay in my sleeping bag – quite a shock! It was grizzlies that Bill and I were always a little wary of, although we didn't mention this to our American friends, and were extremely glad never to have encountered one.



Mount Robson, and (inset) the line of the SSW Ridge:

1. Emperor Ridge, 2. The Roof,
3. West Bowl, 4. Wishbone Arête,
5. Little Robson, 6. hut, 7. Great Couloir. (Gregory Horne)



Further up the mountain highway lies Lake Louise from where we had sight of our second objective, Mount Victoria (3464m), which rises grandly above the Plain of The Six Glaciers. Victoria was first climbed in 1897 by that fine British mountaineer, Professor J. Norman Collie, and American climber Charles Fay along with two guides. In Collie's account he writes that a typical rocky scramble on loose rock leads to a superb summit ridge. We enjoyed our climb enormously; it must be one of the best Alpine routes in the Rockies, with memorable views from its sharp snow summit.

We drove on to the Jasper, about 100 miles north of Banff, picked up Willie Pfisterer and continued on some 60 miles to the foot of Mount Robson.

There are two main approaches to Robson: from Berg Lake in the north and the South-South-west Ridge from Kinney Lake to the south, the route that Willie had chosen for us. From our camp beside the lake at 1000m, the mountain looked extremely steep and formidable. We set off early next morning and were soon faced with a 700 metre struggle, cutting our way up steep cliffs through dense undergrowth.

At length, after a further exhausting thousand metres of boulders and scree, we pitched our two small tents on a narrow rocky ledge, at about 3000m. That night we could hear Canadian National trains hooting as they sped beside the river – a very eerie sound in the darkness.

We set out at dawn as two ropes. The first section of about 350m was steep and difficult, followed by a 200m traverse along the very narrow Black Ledges, exposed to sérac fall. Willie cut steps for us on the 50 degree ice that followed; but despite the steepness and the exposure, I was able to hold my nerve and my fitness gave me confidence.

After six hours' climbing we reached a narrow band of overhanging rock and ice which Willie called 'the mushroom' and then, to our great relief, there was just a 200m walk to the summit.

There followed a much more testing descent. We abseiled endlessly, off small piles of ice and snow, for over a thousand metres; there was no rock to secure our belays. Willie carefully explained this unique method, describing it as 'hasties'. We had to reach our camp before dark – benightment might have proved fatal.

Two days later back in Jasper, we thanked Willie for the experience of a lifetime but he would accept little payment – he had enjoyed the mountain, he said, and our enjoyment was sufficient reward.

From Jasper I decided to hitch-hike back through Canada to Montreal, and from there to work my passage by ship to Scotland. The crossing was delayed by rough weather and I was late back for the autumn term at King Henry VIII School where I was teaching. I apologised profusely to the Head and Mr Walker, being the fine gentleman that he was, said that it had been, in the end, well worthwhile for the experience of climbing Mount Robson.

His Deputy was less understanding and docked me a week's pay!