

on the occasion of my last visit the passage from the Glacier de Miage to the right bank of the Glacier du Mont Blanc was exposed to the danger of stone falls. A large quantity of debris had been carried by an avalanche from the grassy banks on to the latter glacier, and between the beginning and the middle of August the snow had melted, leaving the stones lying on the ice, from which position they descended with uncomfortable frequency.

The expeditions above described are only a few of the many which Courmayeur has to offer to the mountain lover. Those who delight in snow and ice work can enjoy it to the full on the ascent of Mont Blanc by the Midi route, by the Brenva ridge, or by the Aiguille de Bionnassay, also on the Grandes Jorasses or on the Rochefort ridge. Then those who delight in rock climbs will find enough to occupy them on the Peuteret ridge, the Aiguille des Glaciers, and some of the expeditions described in this and the preceding paper, while those who desire viewpoints can scarcely hope to find any finer than many of those in a list which includes the Aiguilles de Trélatête, Mont Dolent and the Punta Innominata.

On account therefore of the many excellent expeditions of various kinds which may be made in this district, and above all for the solitude which it offers to the true lover of mountains, the south side of Mont Blanc well deserves to take a higher place in the estimation of mountaineers than it now appears to hold.

I wish to record my warmest thanks to Dr. Claude Wilson for so kindly allowing me to make use of the map which he had prepared to illustrate his paper.

FROM NOON TO MIDNIGHT ON AN ICE SLOPE.*

BY W. SYMMES RICHARDSON.

IN August 1909 I was camping in the Ice River Valley in the Otter Tail Range of the Canadian Rocky Mountains with my friend, Malcolm Goddard, of California. We had with us the Swiss guide, Rudolf Aemmer, and had gone into the valley in the hope of making the first ascent of the North Tower of Mount Goodsir, the last unclimbed peak of the first

* A description of a new Pass over the Otter Tail Range from the Ice River Valley to Haskin Creek, in the Canadian Rocky Mountains.

class near the line of the Canadian Pacific Railway. But, on our arrival, we learned that the mountain had been ascended by two Canadians the day before, and we were thus obliged to be contented with the second ascent, and to console ourselves with the thought that, after all, the peak proved to be far less difficult than had been anticipated. Little did we then realise that our disappointment was to be recompensed by the making of a new pass of great interest and considerable difficulty.

I have always regarded the great passes as quite equal in climbing and scenic interest to the peaks, and have regretted the modern tendency to neglect the grand excursions of this class, which were so much in favour with the early climbers. The accounts of Leslie Stephen, Whymper, A. W. Moore and others have always fascinated me, and I have longed for the opportunity of trying myself out, so to speak, on genuine ice slopes.

Our trip, however, started innocently enough, for we merely planned to make a pass over the range back to the railway near Field in as nearly a direct line as possible, and thus to avoid the monotonous and uninteresting roundabout journey back by the regular trail. We had not the slightest notion of the difficulties before us, and rather looked to a slack day, although certain closely drawn contour lines on the sketch map we possessed suggested a possibility to me which I put vaguely aside in my mental notebook without allusion to the others, easing my conscience with the thought that Canadian maps are in general still inaccurate. Those little black contour lines on the sketch map most certainly gave a tinge of uncertainty and an added zest to our feeling, already stimulated by the sparkling mountain air of a crisp Canadian morning. What bliss it is, this sleeping out under the clear sky in a great wilderness away from haunts of men—a joy the Alps can seldom offer nowadays!

We were off at 5.30, going straight up the valley to its head. At one time our prospect of future climbing honours seemed jeopardised, for Rudolf thought a lateral valley to the right looked promising, and proposed a flank movement; but we would thus inevitably have struck the Otter Tail creek much higher up, and we disliked the thought of a probably long and rough journey through dense and fallen timber—that curse of the Canadian wilderness. Besides, we said, it would be more interesting going over the ice. The head of the valley seemed simple enough, just a scramble over moraine

and good rock on to a smooth tongue of snow-covered ice, leading to the great névé slopes above that sweep down majestically from Mount Vaux. So we continued in a direct line, and at 10.30 A.M. stopped for a second breakfast on the edge of the névé with the day's climbing, or rather going up hill, practically over. For if Webster defines climbing as the act of ascending laboriously and slowly, what word in the English language definitely defines the act of descending, even more laboriously and slowly? As is so frequently the case, we were short of the necessary provisions, having missed the major part of our 'outfit' on our way into the valley, and a very meagre camp breakfast was then followed only by a handful of cold fried bacon, about a tablespoonful of jam and a small piece of bannock, accurately divided between the three of us.

Thus refreshed, we started on over the névé at about 11.30 A.M., heading straight for Mount Hanbury, a pyramidal rocky buttress of Mount Vaux, which we passed close by, and directly under to the left at the top of the pass. It was only an easy half hour's walk, but most glorious. Directly behind and below was the beautiful Ice River Valley, long and straight, with its wooded slopes and winding river. From here one could easily appreciate Outram's enthusiastic description when he first approached this valley from Mount Vaux some years ago. From our camp we had failed to be impressed, finding it inferior to most Canadian Rocky Mountain scenery, which is distinguished in general by its superb massing and composition. North Tower showed superbly from here, and really looked most formidable, and for a moment we thrilled with pride at the thought of our ascent two days before. In the east, the main range of the Continental watershed was distinctly marked by the familiar outlines of Deltaform, Hungabee, Lefroy and Victoria. Temple's snowy summit stood out grandly, but the coal-black cliffs of Biddle were almost completely overshadowed by the greater mass of Hungabee directly behind. It was a perfect day and very clear. We took a farewell look back as we almost imperceptibly surmounted the crest of the Pass and started down over superbly curving snow slopes, which I flippantly remarked would be excellent for a ski—still consistently ignoring a most ominous edge, which the gradually steepening slopes inevitably lead to. Then I turned and remarked to Goddard that I did enjoy a really easy day over a pass with no responsibilities as to one's foothold, and a fine chance to enjoy the scenery; that climb-



W. Symmes Richardson, photo.

THE ICE RIVER VALLEY — SITE OF THE ICE PASS.



W. Symmes Richardson, photo.

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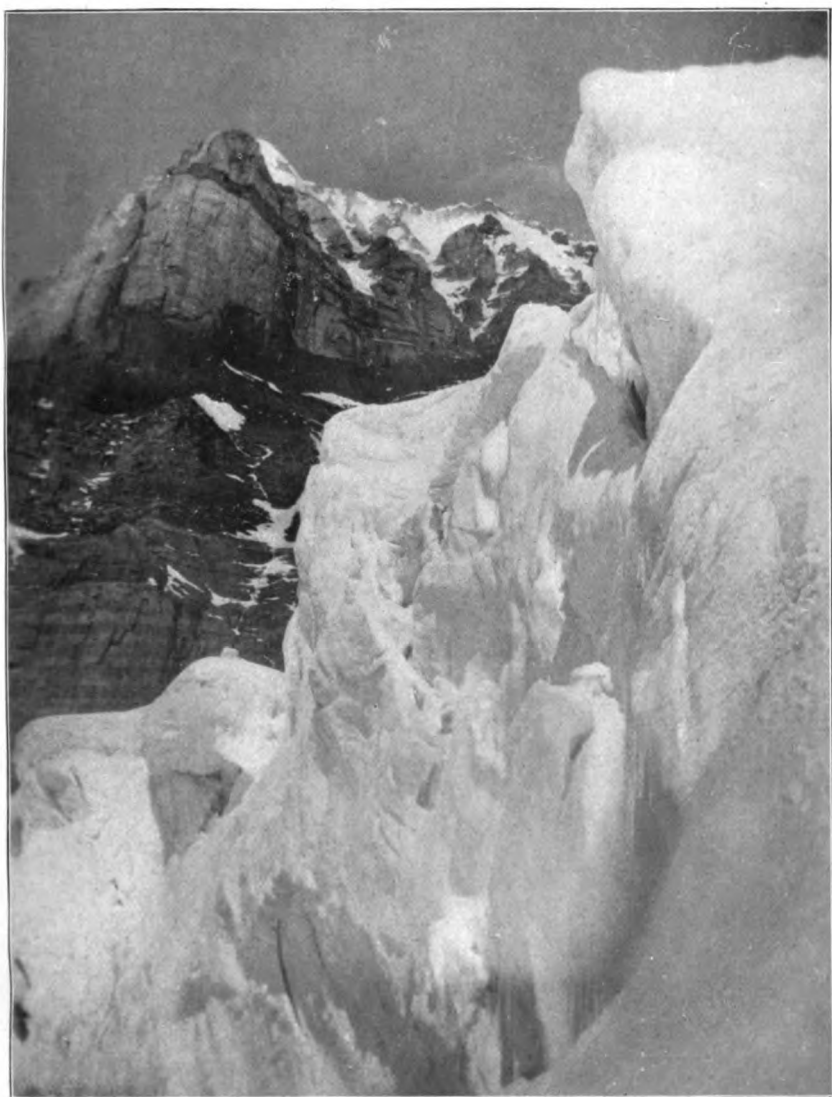
THE ICE PASS (WESTERN SIDE) IS INDICATED BY THE CROSS.

ing, after all, was a bit of a fag and most frequently a genuine strain. This innocent remark of careless exuberance and happy relaxation was flung back at me with derisive ring for several hours to follow as we clung insecurely in cold hand and foot holds on a nearly vertical ice wall. But I anticipate. The immediate splendour was too great to pass lightly by, for whatever the day (or night) might subsequently bring forth, we then enjoyed as magnificent a bit of mountain scenic composition as it had been my privilege to see. Framed between massive vertical cliffs, possibly a third of a mile apart, we looked straight north to the Freshfield Group, with its peaks and glaciers glistening in the sunlight, and to the Emerald Range in front and to the right. The centre of the picture was formed by the gently curving wooded slopes and the wide valley floor of the Kicking Horse at its junction with Baker Creek; the river winding like a silver thread through the dark green mass. A clear blue sky of the North, with rapidly moving wind-swept cumulus clouds, cast marvellous shadows over this tapestry verdure. And the foreground of our picture was a great ever-steepening snow slope suddenly and mysteriously disappearing and seeming to overhang that marvellous and distant valley floor. Towards the edge, a few crevasses gave a suggestive detailed interest to the picture. I imagine that the thoughts of all three of us were singularly in harmony (although we said nothing), as we ceased our picture-gazing and turned toward the unknown. For, were we not starting down where man had never stood nor looked before?

Down we plunged quickly, and soon were well into the crevasses, which yawned on every side. It was the usual puzzle—a wandering in and out, in no way difficult at first. Then we came to the edge and obtained our first comprehensive and distinct view. The rocky cliffs at the sides of the pass were impossible, and our alternative was either to turn back or to go down an ice cascade for several thousands of feet. Probably it was rash to do so. I am sure it was now, but we did not hesitate. First came a schrund, which we jumped on to a narrow edge, distinctly reminding me of a certain picture of M. Reynaud, in Whymper's 'Scrambles,' which has always both fascinated and frightened me since the age of fourteen. This was followed by ice work which we thought relatively easy, but which was quite as complicated as the séracs of the Col du Géant. Then another 'Whymper schrund,' a little wider than number one, after leaping which Rudolf remarked with Teutonic calmness 'We can never get back now.' For

a moment it seemed easier, when a smooth and vertical ice wall crossing the entire width of the pass brought us to a full stop. All around us and above were tottering séracs placed at every conceivable angle, exceedingly fantastic and always steep. Fortunately, we were in shade from the afternoon sun, and the day was cool, or it would have been most unsafe. We peered over the wall. Below, things looked better, that is, as far as we could see, which was to the next edge. I might state here that we ultimately found that the wall was divided into three great terraces with nearly vertical cliffs between. Rudolf acted with great rapidity and decision. He went straight to a narrow cleft which broke the wall in two, forming a sort of chimney, and there unroped. Doubling the rope over a knob of ice, we lowered ourselves down in turn for about fifty feet to where we were able to cut possible foot and hand holes, although it was still quite steep for another fifty feet or so. After that we got on to a sort of plateau, where the going was easier, and we could see a second plateau below, still far from the valley floor, where we hoped our troubles would end, but which, in reality, was only about half the way down. We then bore to the right towards the rock, and were able to pass between the cliffs and the ice for a short distance, but we were soon forced to double back and zig-zag toward the crevasses and séracs, which seemed to grow more and more intricate, cutting steps all the time. At four o'clock we found ourselves on the edge of the most formidable ice wall I have ever beheld intimately. It started so nearly vertical that one is justified in speaking of it as such without exaggeration, and for fully 600 feet it was never less than 45 degrees, and for two-thirds of the way certainly between 60 and 70 degrees. We cut down in zig-zags, Rudolf leading, of course. I came next, and had the delightful responsibility of steadying Rudolf and taking care of the last man's rope when he moved forward. For three continuous hours it was most precarious work, and a slip on anyone's part would probably have proved fatal to all of us. Occasionally, a sort of niche in the ice would afford a better anchorage and offer a haven of safety by comparison. The turns were most difficult, and I felt myself exceedingly awkward at times, as it was so steep that I could not stand upright in my steps with my back to the wall and find room for my ruck-sack without being thrown forward. But the view was certainly splendid and we had ample opportunity to enjoy it.

At 7.30 we were again on a comparatively easy plateau



W. Symmes Richardson, photo.

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A PORTION OF THE SERACS OF THE ICE PASS.

where we could walk without cutting steps, but a few minutes brought us to another edge so steep and crevassed that we were forced to try a flank movement. This we knew positively was the last cliff, but it was already dark and we had to get out the lantern. We turned to the right and Rudolf began some picturesque step cutting, with the lantern held between his teeth, crossing a fairly wide and exceedingly deep crevasse to a sort of spine that led steeply downward in the dark. This was the most picturesque moment of the entire trip to me. I sat with my feet braced on one side of a crevasse and my back on the other and listened to the ice chips rattling down in the dark to unknown depths. For $4\frac{1}{2}$ hrs. more it was continually steep and there was no respite, as we worked slowly downward, groping for hand and foot holds, the lantern affording little help except to Rudolf. It was very dark, the sky being covered, and there were not even any stars to guide us. I could hear him groaning at times, and began to fear that he might become completely exhausted. I knew that neither one of us was sufficiently skilled in step-cutting to make any practical progress under such conditions. Fortunately, the night was fairly warm, although our hands and feet were cold enough from standing in the steps. At last, at 12.15 A.M., we came to moraine and knew that our troubles were over. An hour later we found a fairly level place and ate some cheese and crackers; it was fifteen hours since we had tasted food. At 2.30 A.M. we were really on the flat, found some dry wood, made a fire and slept intermittently until about 4.30 A.M. Then we divided a can of sardines, and started down the wooded valley of Haskin Creek. It soon began to rain. Fortunately, we struck an old prospector's trail, which helped us through the timber and brought us to Ottetail Bridge at 8 A.M., and to Field at about noon, $30\frac{1}{2}$ hrs. from our camp in the Ice River Valley. We had made our Pass, if a way over is always to be considered a pass, even though it proved to be an injudicious one, for Rudolf says it will never be done again, and is quite impossible in the reverse direction, which latter statement I question, as anything is possible on ice with plenty of time and not too much sun. It ought to be named Aemmer Pass, in honour of Rudolf, for he guided most skillfully and fearlessly, and did much more physical work than I like to think of one man doing in the twelve hours from noon to midnight.