

CLIMBS IN THE MALIGNE LAKE DISTRICT,  
NORTHERN CANADIAN ROCKIES.

By HOWARD PALMER (VICE-PRESIDENT AMERICAN ALPINE CLUB).

**M**ALIGNE Lake is situated in what may be termed the North-Eastern Canadian Rockies—a segment of that mountain system cut off by the major valleys of the Athabaska and Brazeau rivers. The former, with its tributaries, the Sun Wapta and Poboktan, swings around the area on two sides, N.W. and S.W., while the Brazeau on the third, the S.E. side, collecting the drainage from the easterly slopes of the Poboktan divide, flows towards the N.E. to the North Saskatchewan. The plains form the boundary on the fourth side. Only a narrow strip along the main Athabaska river has been topographically mapped, and very little is known of the remainder.

Like other portions of the eastern Rockies, the region is traversed by long parallel valleys and ranges running S.E. and N.W., with only occasional breaks permitting easy access from one valley to that adjoining. Many of these troughs drain in opposite directions from local divides. In a westerly trough of this mountain area, adjacent to that of the main Athabaska and separated from it by a ridge of low average altitude (*c.* 8500 ft.), lies Maligne Lake, elevation about 5460 ft. It is probably the largest lake in the Rockies, being 14 miles long and about a mile wide. It occurs in the upper basin of the Maligne river, which is perhaps the chief southern tributary of the Athabaska hereabouts, draining as it does an area of about four hundred square miles. It joins the Athabaska a few miles below the town of Jasper, on the Canadian National Railways, emerging in great volume from a subterranean channel near the mouth of a remarkable lateral canyon half a mile long, 180 ft. in depth, and in places only 10 feet wide.

The Maligne river, rising at Maligne Pass (*c.* 6800 ft.), 13 miles S. of the lake, flows into it about five miles from the lower end. Renewing its course there, it dashes on in augmented volume 8 miles farther to Medicine Lake, a fine sheet of water 4 miles long, overlooked by gaunt grey limestone peaks with saw-tooth skylines. Here the river loses itself in the most extraordinary manner, for the lake has no visible outlet,

although, indeed, a dry, stony channel at the N. end evidently takes care of an overflow at rare intervals. This channel soon fills from seepage and the run-off from lateral valleys, but never receives any quantity of water from the Maligne river proper, which flows underground for over nine miles and debouches in the main Athabaska valley, as above stated.

The name was given in the early fur-trading days by travellers through the Athabaska valley, because frequently they were compelled to make a dangerous ford here.<sup>1</sup> Later, in a somewhat off-hand manner, it was extended to include the lake whence the river flows, so that now, by a kind of historical accident, it has become fixed upon what is undoubtedly the most splendid body of water in the Rockies—a sad commentary on the way irresponsible tradition may act.

Apparently the existence of the lake was not generally known at that period, for it does not seem to be mentioned in any of the contemporary narratives or maps. So far as the writer is aware, it occurred first on the map accompanying Sandford Fleming's 'Report on Surveys, etc., for the Canadian Pacific Railway,' published in 1877 at Ottawa. It was visited by Henry A. F. MacLeod, one of the leading surveyors of that period, in 1875.<sup>2</sup>

After MacLeod's exploration, the lake appears to have been lost sight of until 1908, when it was rediscovered by a party under Mrs. Charles Schäffer, who first brought its magnificent

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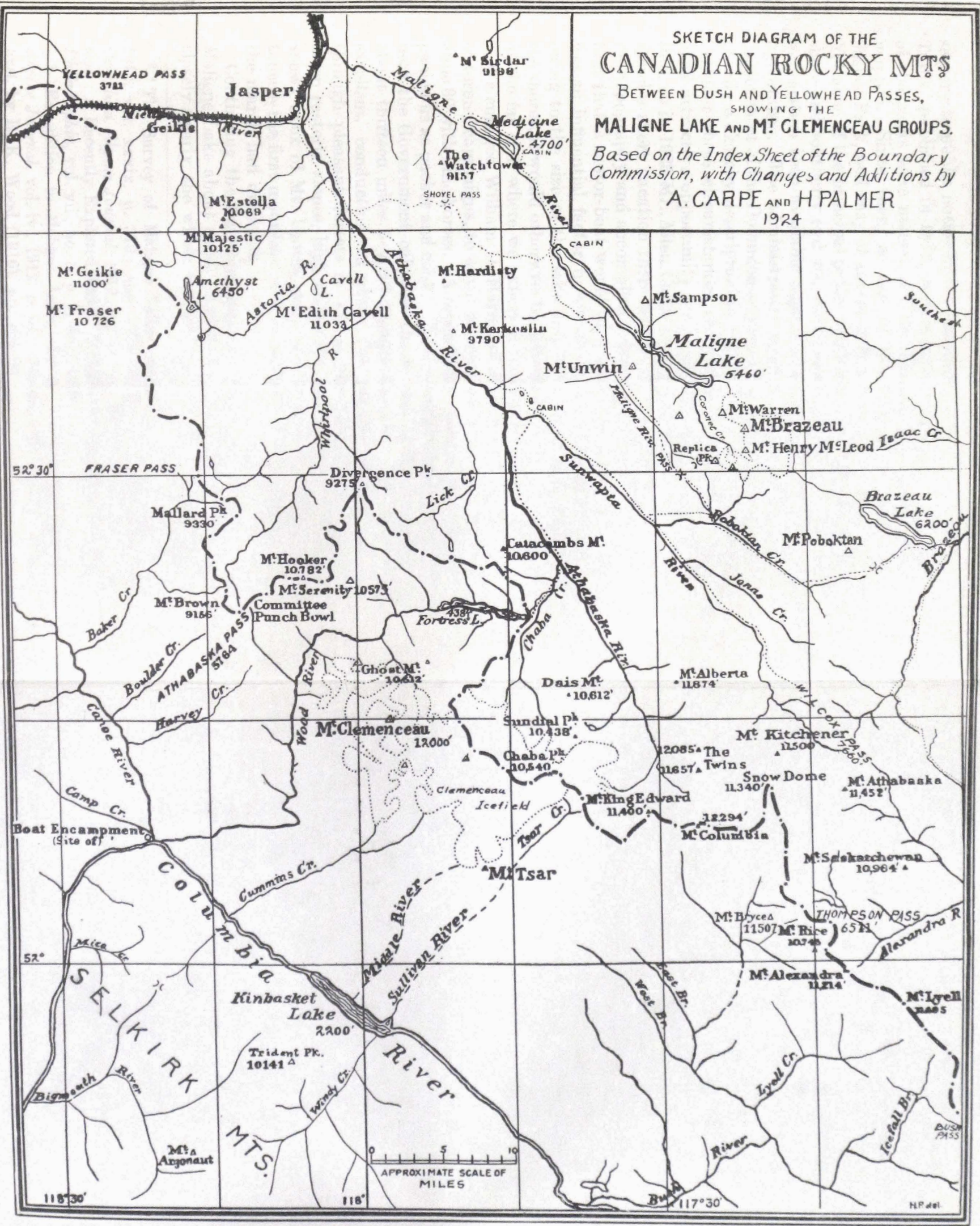
<sup>1</sup> *North-west Passage by Land*, Milton and Cheadle, third edition, 1865, p. 239. Probably the first map to show the Maligne river by name was that accompanying the paper, 'Mountain Passes of British Columbia,' by Alfred Waddington, *Proceedings R.G.S.* vol. xxxviii. p. 118, March 1868.

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 195-6 of this Report. MacLeod alludes to it as 'Sore-foot Lake,' stating that it lay 33 miles from the mouth of the river. 'We explored along the north [east] shore to near the east [south] end, ten miles farther. The shores of the lake are very bold and rough, with land-slides in places, and near the east [south] end there is a glacier reaching within 200 feet of the lake level [probably referring to that descending from the present Mt. Unwin]. The mountains beyond the east [south] end approach each other very closely, leaving only a narrow, steep gorge between them, and they are covered with perpetual snow and glaciers.' He placed the elevation of the lake at 5134 ft.—1388 ft. above Yellowhead Pass. Evidently MacLeod did not go beyond 'the narrows.' He seems to have believed that the lake terminated there, failing to notice its southern extension.

# SKETCH DIAGRAM OF THE CANADIAN ROCKY MTS

BETWEEN BUSH AND YELLOWHEAD PASSES,  
SHOWING THE  
MALIGNE LAKE AND M<sup>t</sup> CLEMENCEAU GROUPS.

Based on the Index Sheet of the Boundary Commission, with Changes and Additions by  
**A. CARPE AND H PALMER**  
1924



To face p. 94

scenery to public notice in her entertaining book 'Old Indian Trails,' published in 1912, and in other writings.<sup>3</sup> A number of the peaks were named and the shore-line of the lake was mapped. Since then, as one of the leading attractions of Jasper Park, and easy of access, it has been visited by many.<sup>4</sup> Yet none of the principal peaks which cluster about its easterly shore and southerly end was ever ascended, nor has adequate information been available regarding their number, height, or importance. The administrative map of Jasper Park and the Jasper sheet of the Dominion sectional map both are admittedly of only a sketchy description in this locality.

Under these circumstances the district seemed to offer a most attractive opportunity for mountaineering and exploration, so in 1923 Mr. Allen Carpe and the writer determined to spend a short vacation there and see if we could not unravel the topography and accomplish a few first ascents. Information that a motor-boat would be at our disposal on the lake was an influential factor in our choice of this objective, for, owing to the size of the lake and to the lack of trails along the shores, it would otherwise be difficult to maintain ourselves at the far end, where we expected to do most of our work.

We engaged William D. Harris, of Jasper, a doughty friend of former campaigns, to outfit us, and set forth from there on June 30 with nine horses. A second man, Walter Grey, accompanied us as packer and cook. That evening found us camped near the Government cabin at the S. end of Medicine Lake, about thirteen miles beyond Maligne Canyon. The trail was excellent, conducting us along the pseudo Maligne creek, through pleasant forests as far as the lake, then along its steep easterly slopes, high above the water. Hereabouts the snowy apex of Mt. Unwin came into view in the remote distance—the first mountain of consequence and distinction that the march had disclosed.

Continuing the following day, we reached the N. shore of Maligne Lake about noon. Again the trail followed the river closely nearly the whole distance, part of the time on steep

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<sup>3</sup> 'The Survey of Maligne Lake,' *Geographical Journal*, April, 1912, vol. xxxix. p. 379; and 'The Finding of Lake Maligne,' *Canadian Alpine Journal*, 1912, vol. iv. pp. 92-97, with map. See also 'A Recently Explored Lake,' *Bulletin Geographical Society of Philadelphia*, vol. vii., no. 3, p. 1, July 1909.

<sup>4</sup> 'Expedition to Maligne Lake,' by A. O. Wheeler, *Canadian Alpine Journal*, vol. iv., 1912, p. 64. See also *The Tourist's Northwest*, by R. K. Wood (1916), pp. 495-96.

cut-banks. For the river is turbulent and powerful, there being few, if any, intervals of slack water. A lovely bluish-green colour, it contrasts pleasantly with the pure white foam of the rapids.

The lake—a sheet of emerald green—stretches away in vast spaces to lose itself amongst relentless precipices and sky-flung snowy crests. As seen from here, its glory manifests itself in colours and clouds rather than in the magnificence of impressive forms, for the mountains, except for two snowless peaks on the E. shore, are remote. The shore-lines display a pleasing irregularity, with numerous timbered points, rugged bluffs, and mighty erratic boulders scattered here and there. Towards the N. and W., open rolling hill country, unhappily much marred by fire and dead-fall, swells gently back to the sky-line. The obstructing of the valley by an ancient terminal moraine is the probable cause of the lake.

While photographing, we debated what our next move should be. The power-boat was *not* in working order—a sad blow to our programme, as the way up the lake to the mountains looked interminable. The only other boat was a sheet-iron affair, with clumsy rough-hewn oars and horrible apologies for oar-locks. It seemed that a nasty sea might easily be kicked up, the length of the lake being fully exposed in the direction of the prevailing wind, although the shore showed surprisingly slight indications of wave action. This probably was due to the high stage of the water; yet, on the other hand, it may be that the winds are so variable hereabouts that no one wind blows long enough to set a sea a-running in a given direction before it is reversed by an opposing blast.

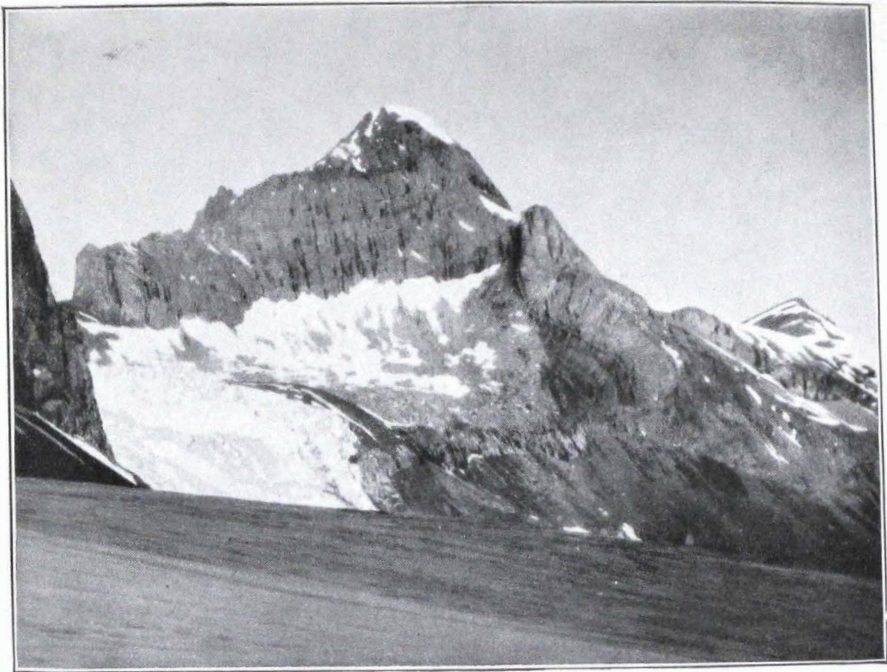
In the end, the lure of the peaks decided us to leave the horses for the time being in the care of Grey, and to try our fortunes in the crazy craft. We set up a mast and loaded the boxes in the bow. It was quite a question whether the boat could sustain the load. When we were all gingerly ensconced in the space remaining, the freeboard showed only a bare 2-in. margin. Have ever mountaineers set forth on conquest bent under more peculiar circumstances? The arts of the navigator and pathfinder had to be made use of before ever that of the climber could come into action. Before we finished this trip we became hearty supporters of the late A. M. Kellas' dictum ('A.J.' xxvii. 125): 'Mountaineering is the most philosophical sport in the world'!



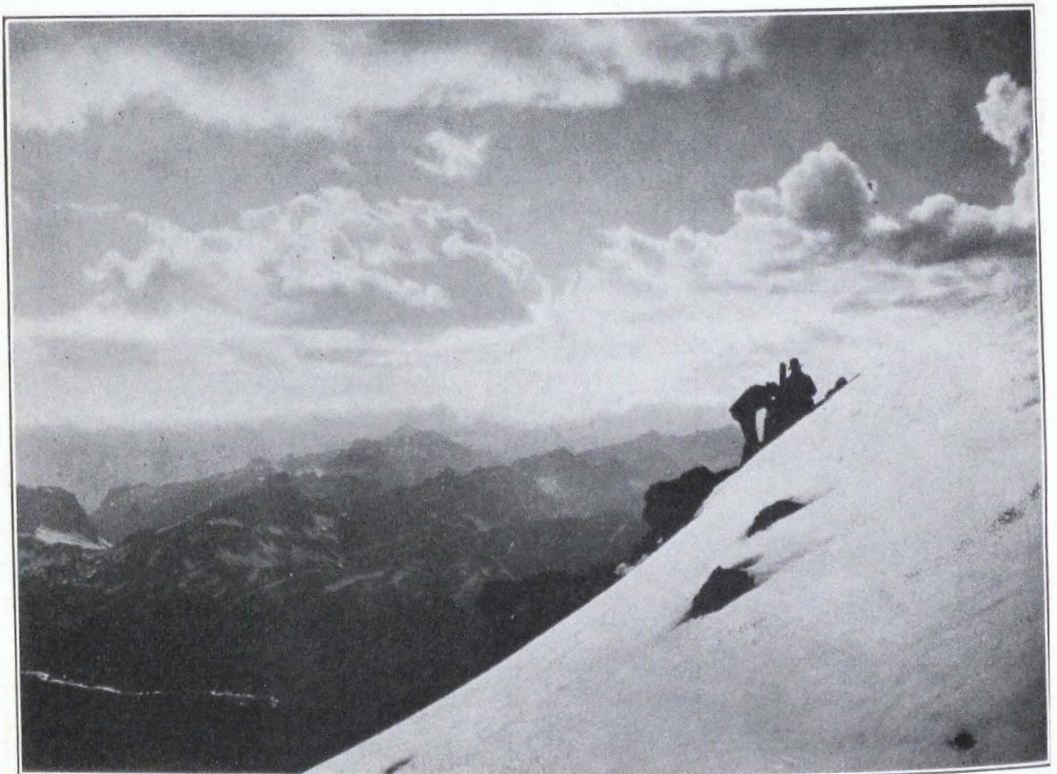
LOOKING N. FROM THE HEAD OF MALIGNE LAKE.  
Mt. Sampson in the distance. Party starting for Coronet Camp.



BASE CAMP IN CORONET VALLEY.



E. FACE OF REPLICA PEAK,  
from Coronet Glacier. Gap at the left.



ON THE SUMMIT OF MT. UNWIN,  
looking north-westerly.

*Photos. A. Carpe.*

Four hours' rowing in relays, with many pauses for repairs to oar-locks, etc., brought our cranky skiff to the extensive gravel delta which makes out from the eastern shore opposite Mts. Unwin and Charlton. Here we landed in order to examine their glacial amphitheatre through the glasses, and see if it held out any prospects for an initial climb. We wished to spy out the lay of the land from some commanding mountain-top at the earliest moment, for we were acting entirely in the dark. Our inspection decided us to proceed up the lake. It was fair to assume that the biggest mountains lay farther back, and these of course were our main concern.

Lengthening shadows soon warned us to select a camp site, and, as we glided through the calm waters of the narrows, we scanned closely the rocky bays and densely forested headlands to locate a level place. Strangely enough, there was not a trace of beach to be seen—only steep, rocky banks everywhere. We landed several times, but all to no purpose. Apparently every square rod hereabouts was occupied by immense rock-falls from the encompassing cliffs, and on this foundation grew a heavy evergreen forest. In the end we were compelled to row back for more than an hour to the gravel delta where we had first disembarked. Here, in gathering darkness, we set up the tent and made ourselves comfortable. We had come about eight miles up the lake. We all voted the sail, improvised from a canvas pack-cover, to be a distinct success, for the question of whether it was helping or hindering progress, or even threatening a capsize, afforded a never-failing topic for lively conversation.

The narrowing of the lake is produced by twin sets of opposing promontories jutting out a quarter of a mile apart and enclosing a broad placid lagoon. The promontories in three cases are deltas formed by lateral streams; the fourth, apparently, is a huge rock-slide from the mountain wall.

Next morning we rowed again through the southern channel and set a straight course through the middle of the upper lake, now mirroring to perfection the frowning upthrust walls of cyclopean masonry which so closely beset it. Here, truly, is a climax of majesty—cliffs piled on cliffs, sometimes chiselled into jutting buttresses suggestive of the tombs of Egypt, again sweeping skywards in noble towers wreathed in snow. Glaciers rested in each lofty nook, although only one, at the extreme S.W. corner, approached the lake. This, however, abutted against an impossible cliff up above and offered

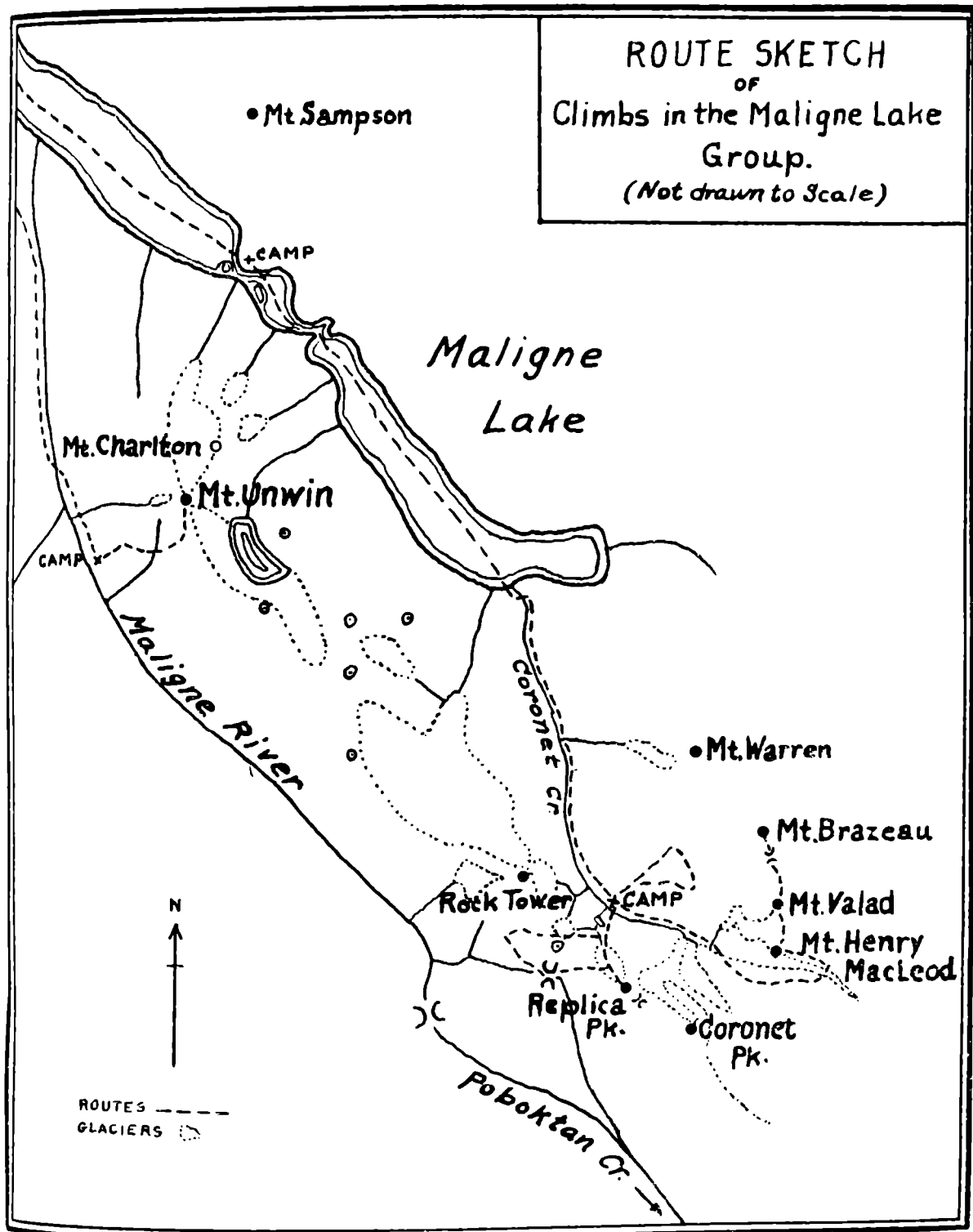
no inducements to the explorer. Mts. Unwin and Charlton are most repellent from this side. We studied, with a constantly increasing sense of helplessness, every detail of the gorgeous ensemble. Nature had calculated her defences well, leaving few loopholes for the climber. We were consoled by the fact that the peaks were mostly of the 9000-ft. class, and we were seeking bigger game. Mt. Brazeau lurked somewhere in the vicinity ; at him it was our hope to take a fling.

About noon, after coming some five miles, we landed on the gravel fan in front of a sizeable valley opening towards the S. A gleaming dome of pure snow (now Mt. Henry MacLeod), which we had admired from the lower end of the lake, dominated it in the distance, and this, taken with other more or less obscure promptings of our topographical intuition, induced us to select the valley as our destination. To the E. of our delta, the lake extended for another mile, bending around the cliffs of 'The Thumb.' It led to a second, even greater, valley that penetrated the mountains in a south-easterly direction and offered strong inducements for examination. This, however, we resolved to postpone for later attention.

### *Coronet Valley.*

We tied the boat securely to an uprooted tree, lunched, and then got out a hundred pounds of provisions and equipment. The remainder we cached in fibre boxes in the boat. Stowing the duffel into the three pack-sacks, we shouldered them and set out up the stream. Before long we had to cross by making the ticklish traverse of an inclined tree-trunk, 10 ft. above the rushing water. The way then led along open gravel bars, sloping clayey cut-banks, and the mossy edges of small canyons. We advanced rapidly despite the impediments of unaccustomed packs. At only one place, for about half a mile, were we forced into the tangled mazes of a young fir forest in order to surmount a steep spur of the eastern mountain wall. Beyond this the going became easier, with heathery aisles opening through the trees, and in three hours from the lake we gained the pleasant meadows of the upper valley, elevation 6400 ft. The distance was about four miles.

Our amazement and delight over the magnificence of the spot were unbounded. We had blundered into a perfectly ideal headquarters for a guideless party : on the N.E. stood a continuous range of five alluring peaks, cliff-girt for the most



part, but one crowned with a splendid hanging glacier ; to the E. a *névé* and two more ice tongues filled an imposing gateway—the southerly portal of which flaunted delicately moulded twin summits (now Coronet peak, c. 10,100 ft.) draped with an astonishing ice curtain ; towards the S. and W. massive walls rose steeply close at hand, while at our backs a soaring conical rock tower<sup>5</sup> lorded it over the whole valley. We hurriedly unpacked the tent and got it set up just in time to avoid a shower—the characteristic welcome of the Rockies to all invaders of their inviolate wilds. Clouds gathered on the heights, and soon the storm gloom threw an uncanny cast over the rosy tints of twilight.

Thankful were we for our brief glimpse of the surroundings, as it kept up our courage during the next three and a half days when we were pelted with rain and battered by chilly blasts of fog-laden wind from every quarter. We seemed to live, move, and have our being only in smoke and mist. The mountains had vanished. We ate frugally and slept prodigiously. Two meals a day and seventeen hours of sleep seemed to be the proper reaction to our environment—the one to husband our scanty provisions, the other to speed the time. We made one round trip to the boat (in less than six hours) to replenish the larder and to procure a tent fly, without which life would have been miserable indeed. In the end we succeeded in constructing a cosy and comfortable camp.

### *Replica Peak.*

On the 6th it cleared at noon, and we climbed to the green alps along the base of Mt. Warren, 1200 ft. above camp. Fine views of the valley enabled us to perfect a plan of campaign. Five o'clock the next morning found us under way for the peak, which we later named 'Replica.' We scrambled up a bank of cliffs, circled around a tiny lake, and then, on the first snow-slope of the season, bent ourselves doggedly to the task of limbering up sluggish muscles and lungs. It seemed endless, but in less than three hours the top was won, altitude about 9150 ft., according to the aneroids.

We had hoped to continue to the neighbouring mountain,

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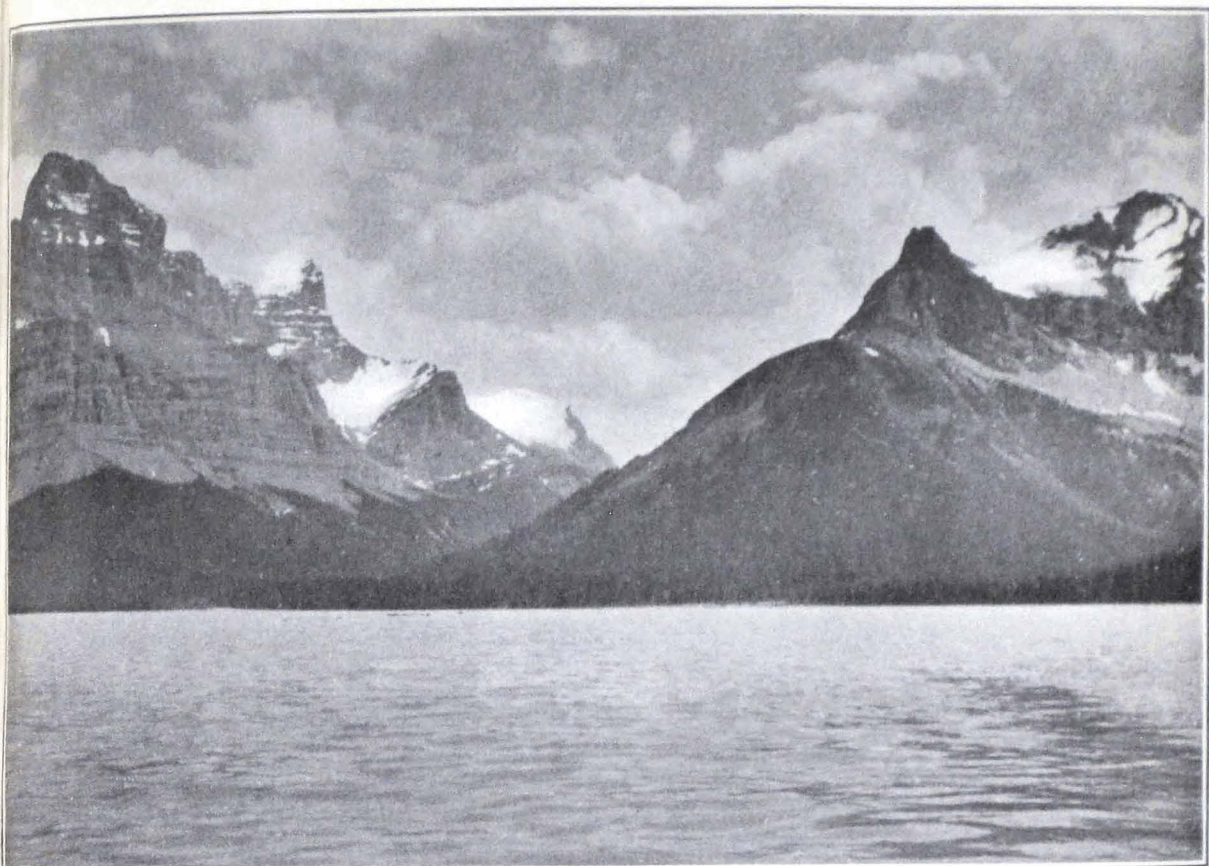
<sup>5</sup> The first ascent of this mountain (c. 10,250 ft.) was accomplished a few weeks later by Mr. Douglas Sutherland, of Chicago, with a party of three. The climb was made directly from the valley of the Maligne river on the opposite side of the peak.

later named 'Coronet Peak,' but our summit broke down on this side in ragged cliffs for 1500 ft. into a gap, which would force a long descent and a wearisome detour were the plan to be carried out. For the present we were content to absorb as much of the panorama as the gathering clouds would permit. The entire sweep was absolutely new to us all. To the S. lay a valley tributary to Poboktan creek, up which the view was clear for perhaps fifteen miles. To the E. practically all of the Coronet snowfield was exposed and we saw a means of access to the crest-line of the precipitous range that walled the northerly side of our valley, now wrapped in heavy clouds and forming the limit of vision in that quarter. Westerly, as far as the Sun Wapta, stretched an open upland country of minor peaks; beyond in the distance stood Alberta, the Twins, and the monarchs of the continental divide, vanishing in perspective towards the S.

After breakfasting and securing photographs, we started down the westerly arête with somewhat vague ideas as to the best thing to do next. The weather must be given a chance to show its hand. Having arrived at the foot of the arête, we continued westerly across a pass (8000 ft.) and then followed grassy slopes for several miles to the upper valley of the Maligne river, where we lunched near the southerly base of the rock tower mentioned above. This is a most deceptive mountain, in plan like a flat-iron, with the point towards Coronet creek and a broad back sloping down to the Maligne river in the easiest way imaginable. Finding ourselves cut off from the peak by a basin, and the time being early afternoon, it was out of the question for us, so we turned our steps back towards camp. We went completely around a small mountain with a glacier on its N. face, rejoining our morning's route near the little lake, the circuit being about seven miles. Camp was reached at 5 p.m. This trip gave us an excellent idea of the geography on both sides of what may be called the Unwin range, which extends from that peak at the N. to Coronet peak on the S.E. in a continuous semicircle. Mt. Unwin, 10,550 ft., is its loftiest summit.

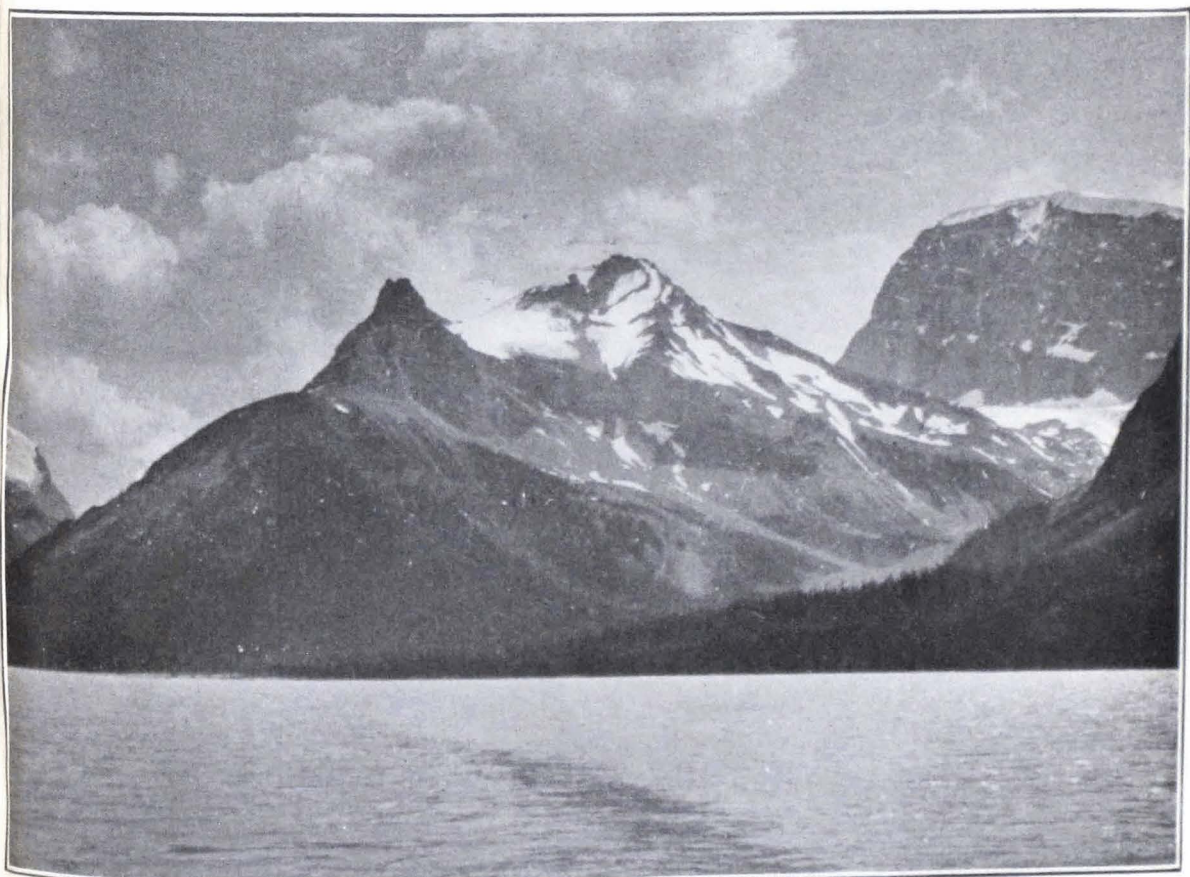
#### *Mt. Brazeau and Mt. Henry MacLeod.*

Rain fell copiously during the next thirty-six hours, but the morning of July 9 dawned auspiciously, so we set forth to seek Mt. Brazeau. We had seen everything to the W. and S., so it could only stand somewhere to the E. and N.; the quest



*Photo H. Palmer.*

OPENING OF CORONET VALLEY, Mts. Warren and Henry MacLeod at the left.



*Photo, H. Palmer.*

ROCK TOWER (right) AS SEEN FROM MALIGNÉ LAKE.

Mt. Warren.

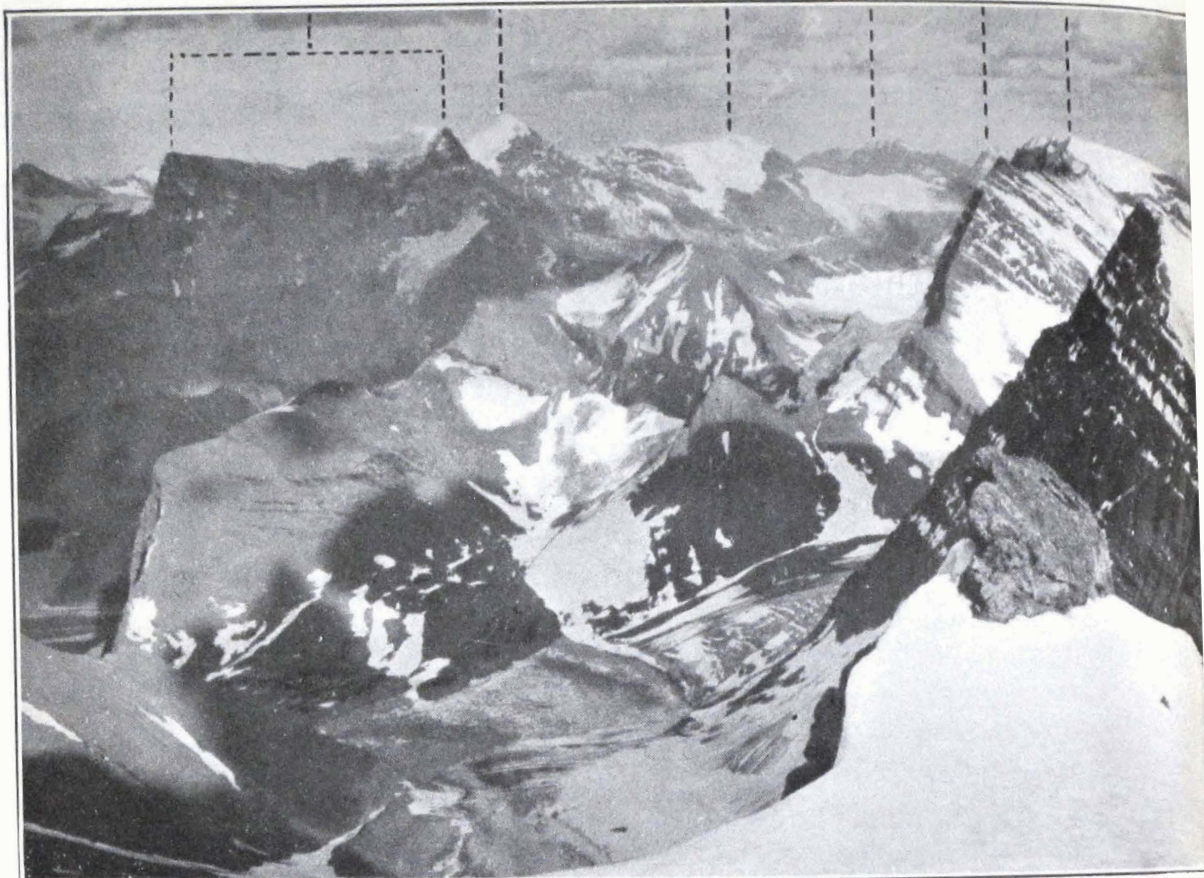
Mt. Brazeau.

Mt. Henry  
MacLeod.

Mt.  
Poboktan.

Coronet  
Pk.

Rock  
Tower.



*Photo, H. Palmer.*

MALIGNE LAKE MOUNTAINS,  
from summit of Mt. Unwin, looking S.E.



*Photo, H. Palmer.*

MT. HENRY MACLEOD AND CORONET GLACIER.

was becoming interesting. We got under way at 6 o'clock, heading directly up our valley. In an hour we reached the two glaciers (elevation of the tongues, 6650 ft. and 7100 ft. respectively). They ended in acres of stony moraine, and obviously were in a condition of retreat. Easy going favoured us over the higher one, the snow being still in fair condition, although the temperature was above freezing. Roping up, we followed the base of the cliffs for about a mile over constantly rising *névé*, and then turned directly up a steep couloir filled with sliding stones—many, luckily, frozen fast. Rock walls above afforded protection from chance missiles, welcome indeed now that a strong wind had arisen.

The couloir ended in the ridge, and as we poked our heads over the top we were thrilled to behold a shining snowfield, dappled with cloud shadows, extending for miles in every direction. It was a moment of breathless triumph, for, although no sure marks of identification were recognisable, it could scarcely be other than the Brazeau *névé*. To the left huge domes of snow mounted above us, concealing much of the panorama, so we hurried thither to secure a better outlook and a place to breakfast in, sheltered from the wind. Soon the greatest dome of all was disclosed, its sunlit crest just brushed by trailing wisps of vapour. We plodded towards it through a foot of new snow. At one o'clock we stood upon the bare rock of its broad summit (now Mt. Henry MacLeod, 10,600 ft.). Dense mists buried all the higher parts of the range, and we could see nothing of what lay beyond. But the weather was undoubtedly improving, so we composed ourselves to await developments, two of the party ingloriously stretching out on the warm flat stones for slumber. Meanwhile a record was prepared and deposited in a brass box.

About an hour later a shout from our ever-alert companion aroused us. Turning in his direction, an amazing apparition met our gaze. A mile and a half away, over the top of an intervening eminence (Mt. Valad, 10,500 ft.), a splendid new peak cleft the clouds like an incandescent blade. Brilliant with fresh snow, its shapely crown reared itself over impregnable precipices on E. and W., whilst in our direction a snowy curtain swept down more deliberately to a col rather lower than ourselves. Our quarry at last—Mt. Brazeau; there could not be a doubt about it. Its height and position at the head of the wide snowfield, which in turn bore proper relation to the major valley extending to the S.E., permitted

of no alternative. What a singular *dénouement*! We had camped at its base for a week and had studied it attentively time and again without ever suspecting its identity. A peculiarly foreshortened sculpture had deceived us utterly with respect to its true height.

But now the question presented was whether we ought to attempt to climb it in the short portion of the day remaining. A hasty calculation showed that we could not possibly get back to camp before dark, and there was not a decent place for bivouacking in the interval. Yet we were morally certain that conditions of larder and weather would not allow us to repeat what we had already done. It must be now or never, and we finally resolved upon the 'now.'

Gathering up our belongings and tying on the rope, we put ourselves in motion at twenty past two. Right away a most extraordinary situation confronted us. Various ridges and crests of snow had formed as drifts on the broad top of the mountain, and these had to be tried one after another in order to hit upon the principal arête of the massif which we proposed to follow. Just as we commenced this task the wind interposed a sheet of vapour between us and the sun, completely obliterating all shadows on the spotless snowy surface by diffusing the light. The effect was uncanny, not to say dangerous, for one could not tell whether one would place one's foot on solid snow or would walk over a snowy precipice. Every indication of slope or cornice was wiped out completely. Did one detect the beginning of a descent by poking with the ice-axe, the eye was powerless to distinguish whether it dropped five or five hundred feet. We could only shuffle along gingerly at a snail's pace, and had not kind fate taken pity on our helplessness almost at once, the whole project must have been abandoned. In the nick of time, just as the leader was about to step over the edge of the icy declivity that dropped down a thousand feet to the Brazeau *névé*, the sun pierced the mist for an instant, giving a clear view. With a gasp of relief we turned sharply to the left and started along the proper course.

At one place only, before reaching the col at the base of Brazeau peak, did difficulty present itself. An overhanging 50-ft. cliff, on the way down from Mt. Valad, interrupted the snow arête and forced us into a delicate descending traverse on the icy slant above the main snowfield.

At 4.15 we rested in the saddle, and scanned the great slope leading up to the main peak, some thirteen hundred feet above.

We could see clear to the top. Off to the right snow had been sliding, but a direct route straight up the face appeared entirely safe. Beneath this line the saddle was broad, and, even if the snow did slip with the party, no harm would be done. There was no glacier present. The saddle and mountain face were rock slopes submerged in new snow.

We started up a few moments later. All went well. The snow was soft, but not deep, and it showed no tendency to slide. Occasional horizontal drifts across the face gave rise to awkward moments. They steepened the slope and offered powdery deep snow in which axes could obtain no hold at the critical instant of passing over the crest of the drift.

Particularly trying was it to surmount the ledge at the bottom of the final cone, where the slope of the latter intersected the incline leading down to the col. We had foolishly left the rope at that place, hypnotised by the apparent ease of the gradient flowing down smoothly in its immaculate drapery of snow. Now we bitterly regretted it, yet it was too late to return. A sloping piece of wet rock had to be overcome by springing up gently on to the bent knee, employing just enough momentum to land one there and no more, for holds were lacking and only balance could sustain one. We were much favoured by the cloudy weather. A hot sun, and these southerly exposed snowy slants would have been in a semi-liquid condition.

After this, we pressed the attack doggedly against the more permanent snows of the ultimate crest. Carpe relieved the writer at the head of the line. We were all somewhat fagged by the heaviness of the going, so that after a time even he yielded to Harris, who pluckily volunteered to break trail. And it should be remarked here that Harris, although without any pretensions to being a mountaineer, displayed the steadiness and stamina of a veteran from first to last on this climb. It is a pleasure to acknowledge his contribution to its success. Like all final slopes, this one seemed to keep on for ever. The step-packing had to be slowly and solidly done, so that it was ten past six when the angle suddenly flattened out and the top was won. It had taken about an hour and a half from the saddle.

With a keen feeling of joy we looked at the three barometers and discovered that our elevation was certainly over 11,000 ft. Later this was worked out to be close to 11,250 ft. We had 'scalped' one of the principal peaks of the Rockies E. of the main axial range. Our first impulse was to compare

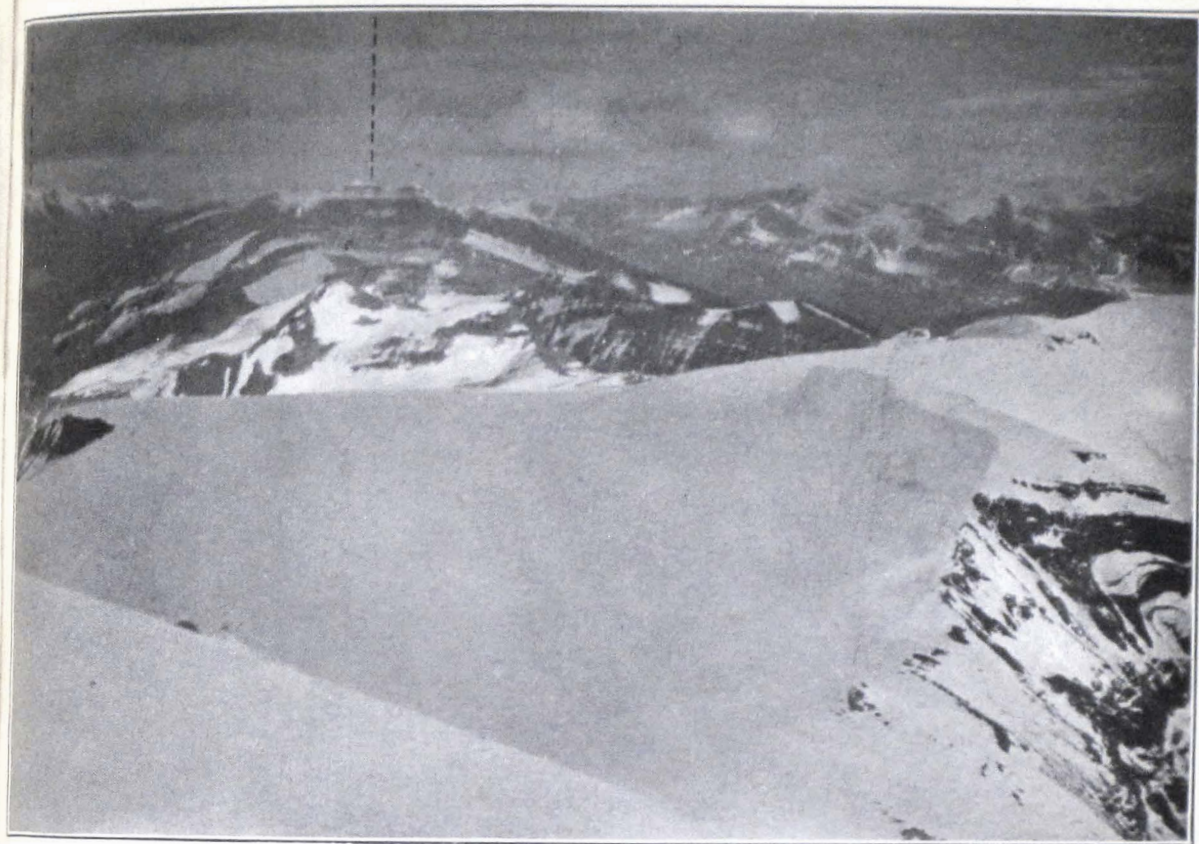
ourselves with Mt. Warren, obviously our only rival hereabouts. We looked right past the top of it to Maligne Lake far beyond. Next, an exclamation directed our attention to a silvery patch in the distance to the S.—Brazeau Lake. We had not been high enough to see it before. This clinched beyond cavil the identity of our peak.

The summit was a dome of snow, with cornices towards N. and E. Lacking a rope, we left them severely alone and paid the penalty in not being able to look over in those directions. No materials for a cairn were available, so photographs alone must testify to the fact of our presence. A perfect tumult of jagged snowy peaks surrounded us. The number to the E. of Brazeau valley was a surprising revelation, this domain being quite unknown. Several probably surpass 10,500 ft. in elevation, and frequent glaciers lie hidden amongst their recesses. Robson, Geikie, Cavell, Fryatt, Serenity, Bras Croche, Clemenceau, Tsar, Alberta, Forbes—all stood forth prominently. In a crevice of an outcropping rock just below the summit we left a tin match-safe containing a printed record blank of the American Alpine Club.

There was just time for a sweep with the glasses, hasty snaps with the cameras, and sights through the prismatic compass and level—fifteen minutes in all—and we were off at 6.25. It was no time of day to be lingering in such a place. Fortunate were we that the clouds had lifted and let enough sunlight through for photographic records. The temperature was 28° F.

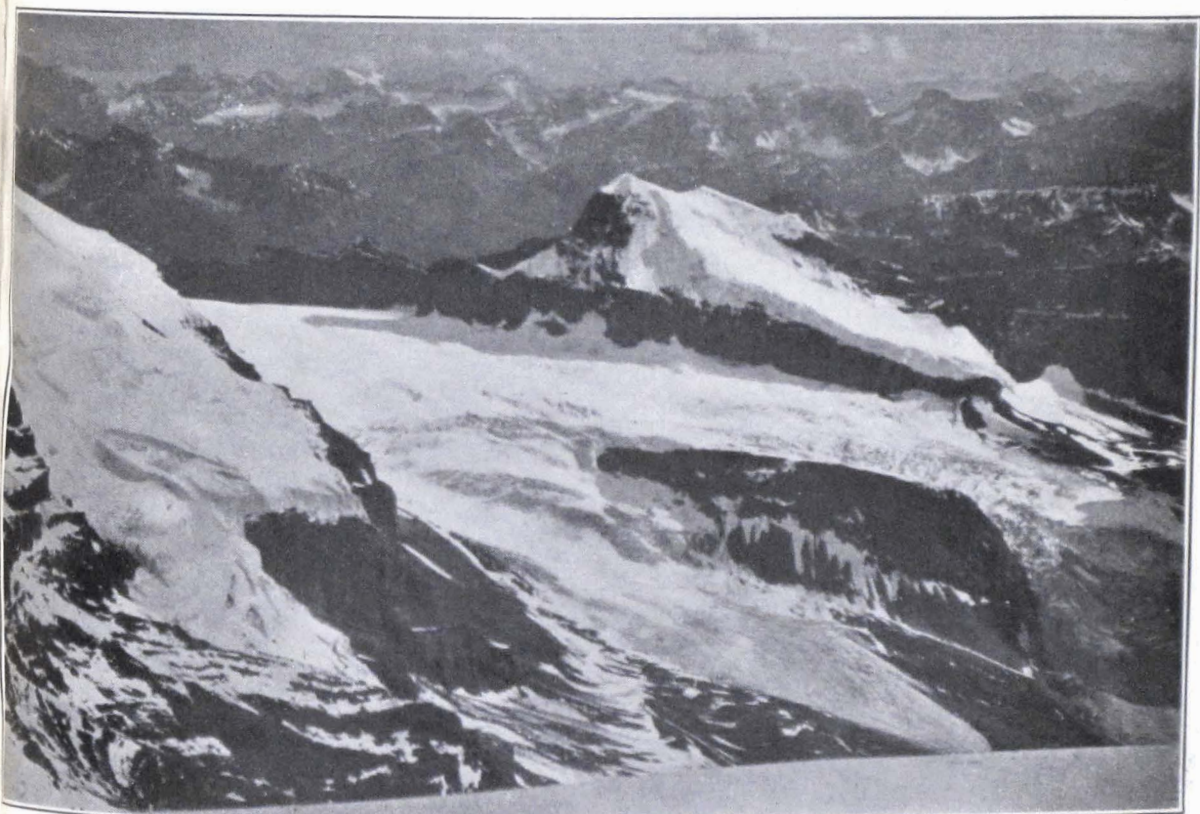
It took us an hour to accomplish the tricky descent to the saddle, and then came the wearying tramp up the snowy slants of Mts. Valad and Henry MacLeod. Two hours and ten minutes were consumed in this. As we passed along we cast many a longing glance down the cliffs, perchance to discover a short-cut directly to the camp in plain view in the valley at our feet, but nothing sufficiently favourable to tempt us appeared. The light lasted well. At 9.30, on the top of MacLeod, dusk was just falling.

We rattled and coasted down the couloir in an avalanche of stones. After this came a wallowing to our waists in the snow of the upper glacier. Sometimes we did not advance 15 ft. in five minutes. Conditions were atrocious, and the pangs of thirst now beset us. Water had been lacking all day. It was 11 o'clock, and camp almost three miles away. Such contretemps fall to the lot of every party sooner or later. Perhaps it were better to pass them over in silence. Yet in



Photo, H. Palmer.

FROM SUMMIT OF MT. BRAZEAU,  
looking S. towards Wilcox Pass.



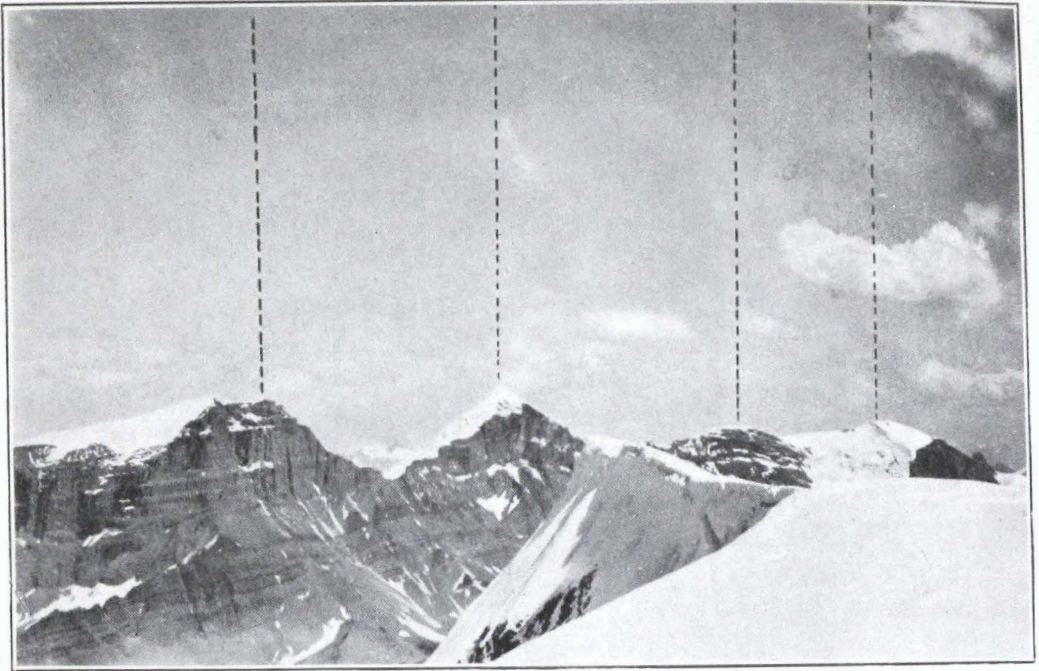
Photo, H. Palmer.

FROM SUMMIT OF MT. BRAZEAU.  
Coronet Pk. and Glacier in foreground. Looking S.W.

Mt. Warren.

Mt. Brazeau.

Mt. Valad. Mt. Henry MacLeod.



*Photo, D. Sutherland.*

FROM SUMMIT OF ROCK TOWER.



*Photo, H. Palmer.*

STORM CLOUD ON THE ROCK TOWER.

truth they are a portion of the discipline of the peaks, and shadows as well as high lights play their part.

We staggered on in the waning light. Running water on a glacial slant at last revived us. Soon we struck the tracks of the morning in the snow. We could lope along, making time at last. Finally they ended on the flat terrace of the dry glacier, and we were lost, for everything looked strange in the gloom. There was nothing for it but to plod ahead, feeling our way and keeping to the right in order to gain the moraine above the dangerous final slope of the icy forefoot. In this we eventually succeeded without mishap, although it was an eerie experience; also the ensuing purgatory of the ground moraine. We stumbled, tumbled, and grumbled—with frequent rests. Thus, after two hours in abysmal darkness, we finally regained our starting-point at 1.50 in the morning, 19 hours and 50 minutes having elapsed. We built a fire, boiled some tea, and slept the sleep of the just, well content to have accomplished our object.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Mt. Brazeau was first made known by Professor A. P. Coleman, who visited it in 1902 (*Geographical Journal*, vol. xxi. p. 502), journeying thither from the S. His party attempted the ascent from the E. by way of the Brazeau *névé*, but were forced to desist when some distance from the peak by reason of dangerous snow conditions. They reached an elevation of 10,550 ft. From the description and from observations on the spot it seems doubtful whether the party actually set foot on the peak. As far as we could see, the entire ridge which we traversed on the way to Mt. Brazeau was defended by a steep icy escarpment on the E. Had the party surmounted this serious obstacle, it seems unlikely that it would have been left unmentioned in the account of their climb. See also *The Canadian Rockies*, by A. P. Coleman (Unwin, 1911), pp. 229–30. Both accounts are illustrated by capital wash drawings of Mt. Brazeau as seen from the E., and by a map. They contain practically the only information about the group available prior to our visit. The journey was undoubtedly a notable piece of pioneering, considering its early date, the nature of the obstacles overcome, and the valuable geographical results obtained.

It is of interest to note that on the map accompanying D. G. F. MacDonald's *British Columbia* (London, 1862) a 'Mt. McGillivray' is shown very close to the position of the present Mt. Brazeau and in proper relation to a lake corresponding in size and location to Brazeau Lake, although the name is wanting. There can scarcely be a doubt as to the identity of the two peaks. The map is by John Arrowsmith, published June 1, 1862. 'Mt. Gillivray' appears also on the map accompanying the third edition of Milton and

The total distance traversed we estimated at about twelve miles.

The next day passed lazily, with occasional showers, and on July 11, our provisions being completely exhausted, we broke camp and returned to the boat. The same afternoon, after constructing a better sail that could be raised or lowered instantly, we voyaged back down the lake, arriving at the main camp in the evening to the accompaniment of a theatrical thunder squall. Our man Grey was delighted to welcome us back, having passed a lonely and cheerless time during our absence. Equally glad were we, and his good-nature was tested to the limit to supply the endless fried ham, potatoes, and hot bread necessary to satisfy appetites of truly shocking proportions.

#### *Mt. Unwin.*

It rained in the night, but indications next day were encouraging, so we resolved to set the pack train in motion and investigate the chances for an assault on Mt. Unwin from the valley of the upper Maligne river. A trail crew had been improving the way during our absence, so that a day's travel might suffice to bring us to a suitable spot. Further, it would be restful, after our strenuous experiences, to enjoy the scenery from the back of a horse. So we fared forth at the comfortable hour of 9.30.

The travelling proved excellent indeed. We lost sight of the lake immediately, winding in a gradual ascent along the westerly slopes of the valley through an open upland country. After reaching an altitude of about six hundred feet above the lake, the trail worked down again along the valley of a small stream tributary to the river. Green meadowlands, boggy in places, marked our approach to the Maligne. From here striking views of Mt. Maligne and its attendant snow-field on the eastern side of the lake were vouchsafed us. Truly delightful did it prove a little later to jog along the verdant banks of the river as it traced attractive meanders with its clear blue stream. Mt. Unwin came ever nearer, but

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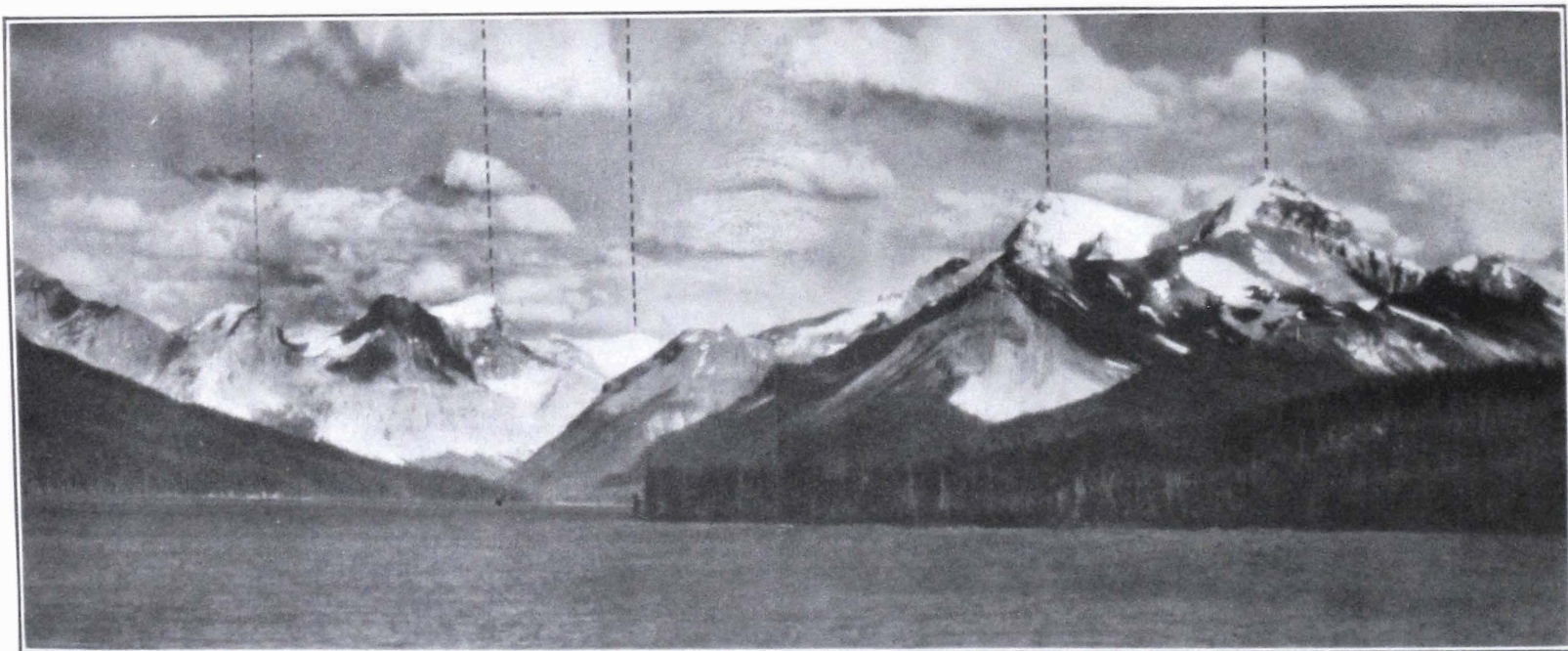
Cheadle's *Northwest Passage by Land*, published in London, 1865. The mountain appears to be named for Duncan McGillivray, who in 1800 crossed from Brazeau Lake to the Athabaska, possibly by way of Poboktan Pass. (See *Thompson's Journal*, by J. B. Tirrell, published by the Champlain Society, page lxxxii.)

The Thumb.

Mt. Henry MacLeod.  
Mt. Warren.

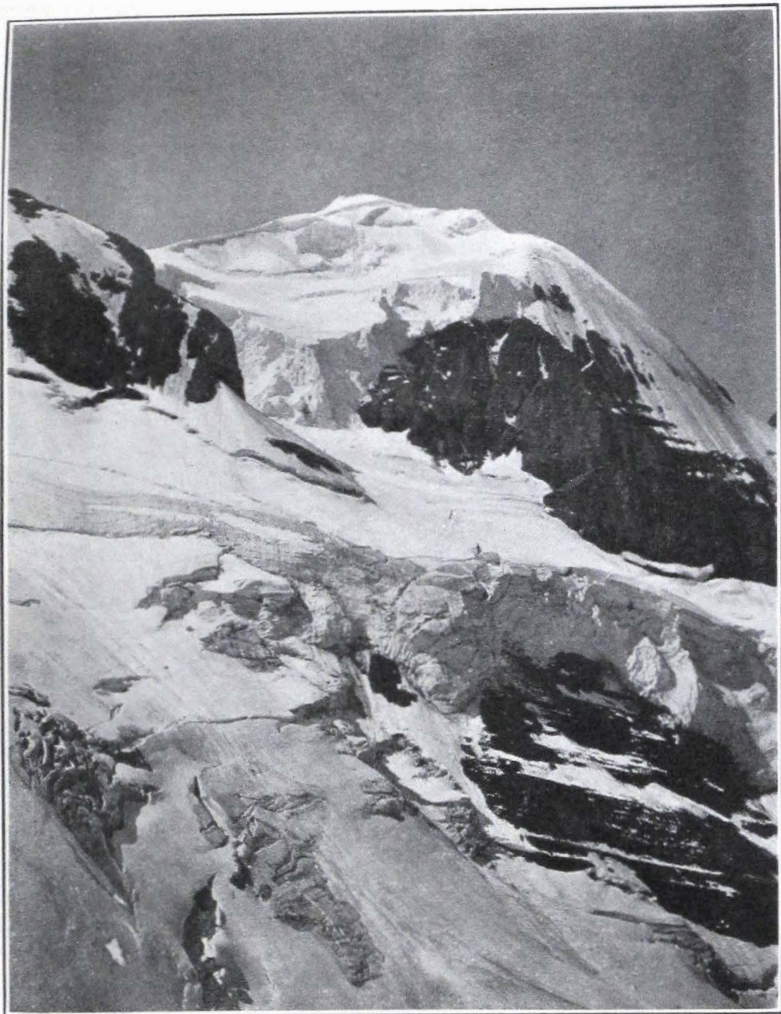
Mt. Charlton.

Mt. Unwin.



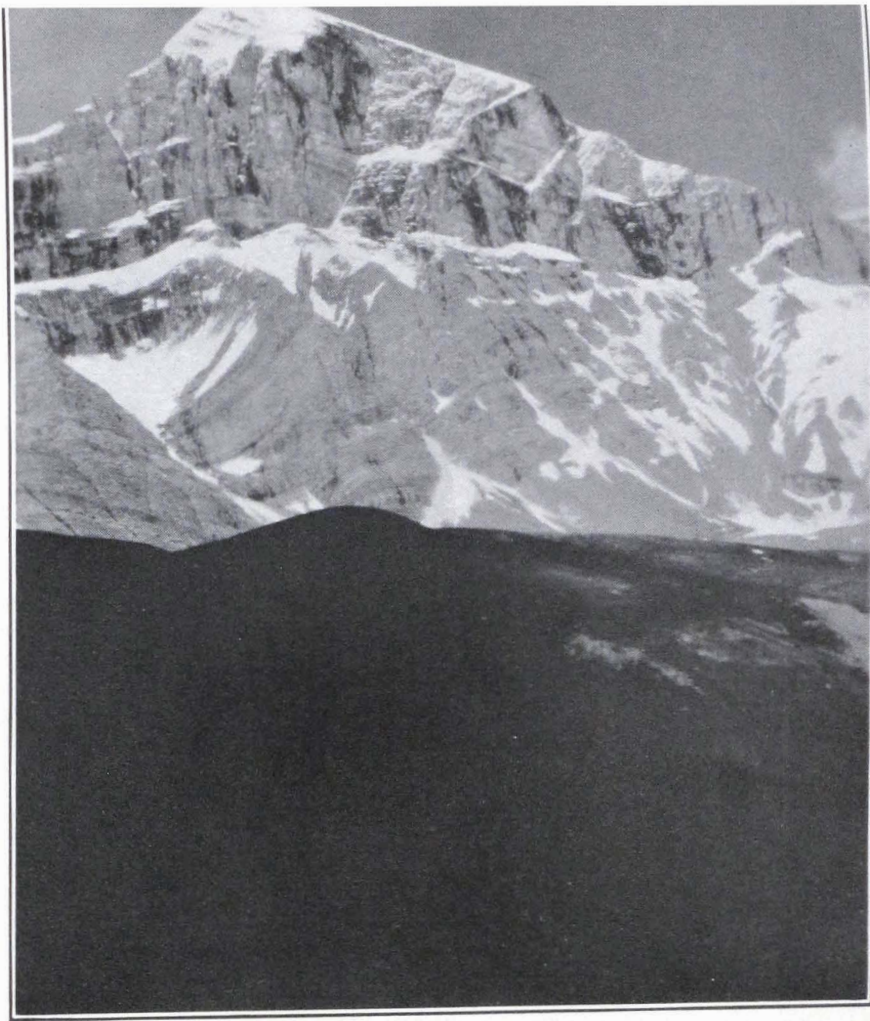
*Photo, H. Palmer.*

LOOKING S. FROM THE FOOT OF MALIGNE LAKE.



*Photo, D. Sutherland.*

MT. UNWIN. N. face.



*Photo, H. Palmer.*

MT. BRAZEAU, from S.W.

at length retired behind an intervening ridge without disclosing the least suitable access.

Finally, after fording the river, we came to the end of the cleared way, and thereafter for a couple of hours were left to the doubtful mercies of an old Indian trail through virgin forest. A pack-horse here got into trouble by attempting to squeeze himself and his burden through too narrow an interval between two trees. Great was the disturbance caused. In the midst of it he incontinently sat down on the box containing our cameras and delicate instruments, which we confidently expected would emerge in a state of ruin. Luckily, however, we found later that no damage had been done.

At 2 o'clock we came upon horse-feed in a swampy opening near the river, and decided to camp. It was situated near the end of the westerly spur of Mt. Unwin, around which the Maligne valley bends to a more southerly course. Our mountain was still invisible, but a steep grass-covered slide here swung up through the lower cliffs, offering a promising lead, free from the hindrance of the forest which clothed all the neighbouring slopes. In the afternoon we walked up the valley past the spur until we could see the whole top of the mountain. Encouraging indeed was it to discover that the horizontal belt of black massive strata, which produced obstructive cliffs towards the N. and W., turned itself up on edge towards the S. and lost much of its forbidding aspect.

On July 13 Carpe, Harris and myself got under way at 5.30 A.M., the weather being cold and clear. An earlier start was impracticable on account of our situation on the dark side of the mountain. At the top of the slide we traversed to the right, across steep grass slopes amongst big pine trees, and in about an hour and a half came out at the lip of a hanging valley leading directly up to Mt. Unwin. Carpeted with rich greenery, and watered by a rushing brook, it was a pretty place. We crossed the stream, ascended a steep talus pile along the bottom of a projecting crag, and finally gained the crest of an arête connecting it with Mt. Unwin. Along the arête, exactly in our line of march, led the finest goat-trail I ever saw. Untold generations of *Oreamnos montanus* must have trodden it. The grass was worn away entirely, and even the softer rocks which it crossed were perceptibly smoothed off. Evidently it constituted a trunk route to lofty grazing-grounds.

Our rugged arête joined the main mass of the mountain

without interruption, so we took advantage of the goat-trail until it began to swing across the face of the peak to a col on the southerly ridge. There, silhouetted against the bright sky-line, a herd of a dozen goats reposed, watching with grave unconcern. As we approached, and they began to hear the falling rocks which we dislodged, their composure turned into consternation. Springing to their feet, they retired in haste to the higher fastnesses of the peak. Later, we encountered some of them close at hand, making off with terrified jumps across ugly-looking slabs.

Once on the peak itself, we ascended a snow patch and headed for the narrow opening of a couloir which conducted us through the lowest cliff-belt. Above, this opened out into a ravine, the easterly side of which presented a rocky step-formation, loaded with sliding stones. Here extreme care was required owing to the excessive rottenness of the rock. The whole surface of the mountain was loose. Did one secure a handhold, which was itself firmly attached, he would discover upon pulling slightly that a chunk of the dolomitic rock as big as a cask would start threateningly.

Aloft, across the gully at our backs, on another ridge, tottered a crazy undercut tower, and occasionally we cast a glance thither to measure our upward progress. At one point we were amazed, upon looking around, to see a huge uptilted snowfield, intensely brilliant in the waxing sunlight, rearing its crest above the range across the Maligne valley. The effect was almost Himalayan in grandeur. A little calculation convinced us that it was none other than Mt. Catacombs beyond the Athabaska, a most alluring and utterly unknown group, 10,700 ft. high.

At length our ridge merged with the main S. arête of the mountain, and we could see over into the basin occupied by Maligne Lake; two great tiers of cliff wall this side of the range, the upper on which we stood, being set back considerably from the crest of the lower. On the inward sloping step or shelf thus formed rested several sizeable glaciers, completely concealed from Maligne Lake. Two, impinging at a right angle, terminated in a handsomely coloured lake where icebergs drifted to and fro in the breezes—the combined ice-fronts forming a marvellously regular semicircle.

Through a jagged gap in the lower cliffs we saw a bit of Maligne Lake itself and the gravel delta where we had launched the boat only two days before. The spot seemed almost at our feet, yet to reach our coign of vantage we had meanwhile

travelled far—13 exciting miles up the lake in the rickety canoe, and about the same back again with the horses.

Mt. Unwin was no exception to the prevailing steepness on this side of the range. Only by the remotest chance could a traverse be made to the attractive snowy saddle connecting with the lesser eminence of Mt. Charlton, a gunshot away. A wide, desperate-looking couloir, filled with dangerous snow and guarded by repellent ridges, barred this access. On the other side the rock-slope dropped away sharply into the ravine. We could only advance on the ridge itself, so to this we turned with one accord.

A bulging buttress of the upturned black rock constituted the immediate obstacle here. Fortunately, a slanting groove broke its surface, leading from the arête out across the opposing face. Well anchored by the rope, I wormed along this into an ice-paved niche, where I cut a score of ice-steps straight up, my companions gradually advancing to give the necessary rope. At the bottom, the ice-slope ended on the brink of a cliff.

A chock-stone, with the proportions of a hogshead, soon blocked the way. It projected from a fissure in the right-hand wall and appeared to be largely supported by the very ice in which we had been hacking our footholds. The situation was distinctly awkward, especially since the best way out seemed to lie directly over the stone as a kind of bridge. After testing it as well as I could, and telling the others to be ready for any eventuality (they were standing somewhat to one side), I cautiously embraced the boulder. It had good handholds and would serve well, provided it remained fast. Happily, it did not even tremble, and I think it was one of the firmest stones we encountered that day, although this is but a doubtful compliment! Safe footing lay just beyond, and in a few moments we were all back on the crest of the arête, with the troublesome buttress beneath us. But it was a narrow squeeze.

We now made a slight digression to a snow-patch for water and a bite of food. Another and a much bigger gable loomed overhead, warning us to summon every resource to our aid. From where we stood, no lead at all could be made out, the rock apparently plunging straight down on all sides. And presently, when we had passed a mean little gendarme and stood face to face with the cliff, matters did indeed look doubtful, for the sharp ridge of snow that we were following impinged directly against the smooth wall of massive black limestone. It was early afternoon and the sun shone warmly.

Melting was at its height. Fragments of rock thrown into the snow below us instantly started slides. The snow in itself lacked holding power, even were its icy foundation disregarded.

We retreated around the gendarme and walked out on a projecting crag in an unsuccessful endeavour to see around the corner of the tower ; then back again to our first position. A smooth, outward-sloping ledge, covered with wet scree and soggy ice, slanted down along the base of the cliff facing us, but it had no holds and apparently led nowhere. Yet it offered the only hope and must be tried. Fortunately, the rope was long, and good anchorage offered near the gendarme. The ice and stones were dutifully cleared from the entire ledge, and an insecure station was at length attained whence a look could be had around the corner. The disclosure was depressing. Downward-sloping smooth rocks, coated with ice and buried in several feet of fluid snow, stretched for fifty yards along the foot of the sheer turret—a possible route, yes ; but, under the conditions, as truly a nasty place as one would want to attempt. Only the heaviest work, clearing away the deep snow so as to cut ‘soup-plates’ in the ice, combined with the utmost caution every moment, could make it go. And there would be danger, too, from the fact that the whole party would be extended on the traverse with only dubious holds.

But the sharp white summit rose alluringly near—an easy prize once this manifestly final defence were taken, so we accepted the challenge and set to work. Generally speaking, the passage was a traverse along the top of a snow-ice slope where it abutted against an irregular cliff. In places the latter bulged out waist-high, placing the step-cutter at serious disadvantage. At other points rugosities in the rock afforded welcome assistance, although no belays for the rope were discovered. Painfully slow was the work and obstinate the ice ; a fierce wind buffeted us continually. Once or twice it seemed beyond our powers, but the nearness of the summit was an unfailing spur to renewed efforts. After two hours of it, at 4.15 we scrambled up the last pitch of soft snow, and Unwin was ours, ten and three-quarters hours from camp. The average of three aneroids up and down indicated a climb of 4700 ft., and we have assigned it a height of 10,550 ft. above sea-level.

The whole world of the Rockies spread out around us—a perennially inspiring panorama. The N. and W. were especially clear, although elsewhere occurred scattered

showers. Over Maligne Lake to the E. hung a particularly sombre storm-cloud, gloom filling the depths of the valleys. We seemed to be able to look into the very streets of Jasper—Pyramid Mt., The Ramparts, and Cavell stood almost as next-door neighbours, although actually from twenty to thirty miles away. Even Robson, 75 miles distant, appeared near.

Set off by itself, and surrounded by deep valleys (even the Athabaska and Sun Wapta valleys gave the impression of being at the foot of the mountain), Mt. Unwin commands a most unusual panorama. In effect it much resembles that from Sir Donald. The head of the Chaba and the whole of Chisel creek were displayed. One could look quite across the Rockies into the Selkirks. Thrilled indeed was the writer to realise the dream of a decade by seeing the N. face of the Adamant group full 60 miles away, with Mt. Sir Sandford towering impressively to the left. But it would be tiresome to catalogue all that we recognized. The sweep was about the same as from Mt. Brazeau—everything from Mt. Poboktan, 10,700 ft. (19 miles), Mt. Forbes (48 miles), Wilcox Pass (30 miles) to Mt. Clemenceau (30 miles) and Mt. Robson.

We built a 4-ft. cairn and crowned it with a slender pinnacle for the benefit of the Park trail crew, whose white tent gleamed in the greensward of Maligne river at our feet. Then, depositing our record in a tin box, we roped up and started down at 5.30—not exactly a conventional hour, but we were not the choosers. The same route was followed all the way. Naturally we made better progress, but continual care was required until the two buttresses lay behind us. Unroping then, each took his own way down the sliding stones and ledges of the ravine. We paused often to drink in the glories of the sunset light on the congeries of mountains to the S.W., and near the goat-trail stopped for a few more photographs. After this we made all possible haste, for we did not relish the descent of the 1500-ft. grass slope above camp in the dark. We got there just in time, and the light did not entirely fail us until we reached the tangled woods at the bottom. Half an hour of blind groping here brought us out on the meadow and to camp at 10.30 P.M. A huge bonfire and good things to eat without limit were waiting, for our man had heard our triumphant greeting from the top of the slide.

In conclusion, it may be said that Mt. Unwin is an awkward rather than a difficult peak. By good fortune we stumbled

on what is probably the best way to attack it ; *i.e.* from the S.W. and S. The route is all rock, and therefore will be in the most favourable condition after dry warm weather, or late in the season. Probably all the snow and ice which we encountered on the upper slopes would disappear during the summer, thereby removing the chief difficulty. It is likely that another route can be worked out from the lake up the northerly glaciers to the saddle, but a careful watch should be kept against ice-falls from the hanging glaciers, which appear to be active. An attempt was made in 1922 via the N.E. ridge of Mt. Charlton, but the party was turned back at the foot of the final ridge by reason of the excessive rottenness of the rock. All other possible approaches to the two peaks appear to be cut off by repellent cliff belts.

On the day following the climb we made our way back to the N. end of the lake. The next took us to the foot of Medicine Lake, where a drenching rainstorm caught us and compelled a camp in the disreputable cabin there. July 16 saw us back at Jasper, where the party broke up, Mr. Carpe catching the evening train back to New York. We had been out seventeen days, of which eight were devoted to travelling. Of the nine others, only three offered decent climbing weather, so we considered ourselves remarkably favoured that they occurred exactly when they did, for they just enabled us to accomplish our chief objects without any margin to spare.<sup>7</sup>

#### *Climbing Possibilities of the Maligne Lake District.*

It is not too much to predict that the Maligne Lake district will be popular in the future. The scenery has not been overpraised, and the wagon-road, now under construction, will

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<sup>7</sup> During our climbing we made observations for a map by photographic methods. Completion of this has been delayed, so the accompanying sketch-diagram has been prepared to show the general locality of our ascents. We found that Maligne Lake was actually situated about six miles W. and six miles N. of its position on the maps, and that Brazeau Lake should be moved several miles N.E. From the direction of Maligne Lake, Mt. Brazeau lies directly behind Mt. Warren, which is high enough to mask it. This explains why its position has always been a mystery from the N., whence practically all visitors come. The elevations given in the text are preliminary figures based on the above map data and the readings of three aneroids.

place the lake within a few hours' journey from Jasper by automobile.

The group E. of the lake dominated by Mt. Maligne can be reached from the narrows and will repay exploration. A number of interesting glaciers and snowfields were noticed here. Mt. Sampson (10,000 ft.), rising directly from the shore of the lake, will afford a good rock-climb.

At the far end of the lake, the valley leading to the E. should give access to a part of the Brazeau icefield, which seems to be divided into a northerly and a southerly section by a high ridge extending easterly from Mt. Brazeau. Estimating by the eye, one would say that the latter possesses an area of about twelve square miles, and the former about six. The larger drains to the Brazeau river; the other appeared to drain to Maligne Lake through the valley just mentioned, although of this we could not be positive. This valley would very likely give access to Mt. Warren (c. 10,850 ft.), and possibly also to Mt. Brazeau, if a route could be worked out up the steep and broken glacier which covers this face of the mountain. We strongly suspect that the Coronet snowfield connects with that of Mt. Brazeau, and if this is the case the combined area would be increased by several square miles. S. and E. of Coronet peak a branch of the Poboktan, leading to the pass mentioned by Coleman, severs the Brazeau-Coronet uplift from the spurs of Mt. Poboktan to the S., and gives the Maligne Lake mountains a distinct unit character as a separate group.

The Unwin range had best be approached from the valley of the Maligne river. The peaks all have accessible slopes on this side. To the W. of Replica peak a second pass connects the Maligne river with a branch of the Poboktan, which might afford a good route to the latter as well as a favourable point for attacking Coronet peak.

As regards the possibility of a direct ascent of Mt. Brazeau from Coronet valley, the indications are good. Several narrow couloirs penetrate the cliff belt, and had our time permitted we would have explored them. A direct ascent would cut at least four miles from the route we followed.