

CLIMBS IN THE FRESHFIELD AND OTHER GROUPS OF
THE CANADIAN ROCKIES, 1930.

BY J. MONROE THORINGTON.

THE success of a previous season together resulted in a renewal of a partnership between Mr. O. E. Cromwell and the writer for a climbing trip in the Canadian Rockies during the summer of 1930. Cromwell brought out Peter Kaufmann, of Grindelwald, a guide whose father and uncles were known to Canadian climbers twenty years ago. Kaufmann was loaned to me for the time preceding Cromwell's arrival, and we met in Yoho Valley on June 18.

As our programme included climbs in the groups along the North Saskatchewan river, I planned to take Peter to Bow Lake by way of the Waputik snowfield and make ascents from that base while awaiting our companions.

The season began exceptionally late, and great avalanches from Mt. Wapta so filled the valley with drifts that tunnels had to be cut before the camp could be reached by motor. We proceeded to Twin Falls cabin on June 19, finding the last mile of trail so obstructed by snow and fallen timber that a horse could go no further, and we were obliged to carry our loads from this point.

On June 20 we went uptrail and through snow-filled woods to a huge rock near the Habel Glacier. The weather became unfavourable and we cached our baggage, returning to Twin Falls and finally, in pouring rain, to Takakkaw camp. Two days later the intermittent storms were not yet over, snow had softened and we were forced to bring our packs down.

Next morning, June 23, we decided to go to Lake Louise and there met our friend, the guide Edward Feuz. We accepted his invitation to join him and Mr. Kerr, of Vancouver, in an ascent of Mt. Temple on the following day. This proved to be a delightful occasion, motoring to Moraine Lake in the morning and finding the mountain snow-clad and more interesting than usual, with splendid cloud-effects and brilliant lights on the Wenkchemna peaks.

On July 25 Peter and I left Lake Louise station at noon, carrying heavy packs, intending at most to reach a camp on Hector Lake. On the Bow river trail we surprised a martin, creating a great commotion among the feathered tribe by his



Photo, J. M. Thorington.

Mt. Ayesha, E. face, from slopes of Mt. Rhonnda.



Photo, J. M. Thorington.

Mt. Conway, W. face, from Mt. Skene.
(Summit attained by hanging glacier and right-hand
sky line.)

attempts to steal eggs from a robin's nest. We kept on at a fast pace along the upper trail and passed the base of Mt. Hector at 6 o'clock. It began to rain and, as we could see no trace of a camp in the valley below, we determined to keep on and gain shelter. We forded Mosquito Creek, using the rope in the swift water, and followed the muddy trail in the seemingly endless forest to Bow Lake, reaching the cabins as daylight failed. Peter has long since forgiven me, but 25 miles with packs, the day after a high climb, is not easily forgotten.

Rain held us in camp on the following day, and we remained by a roaring fire, while deer came up curiously to inspect us through the windows.

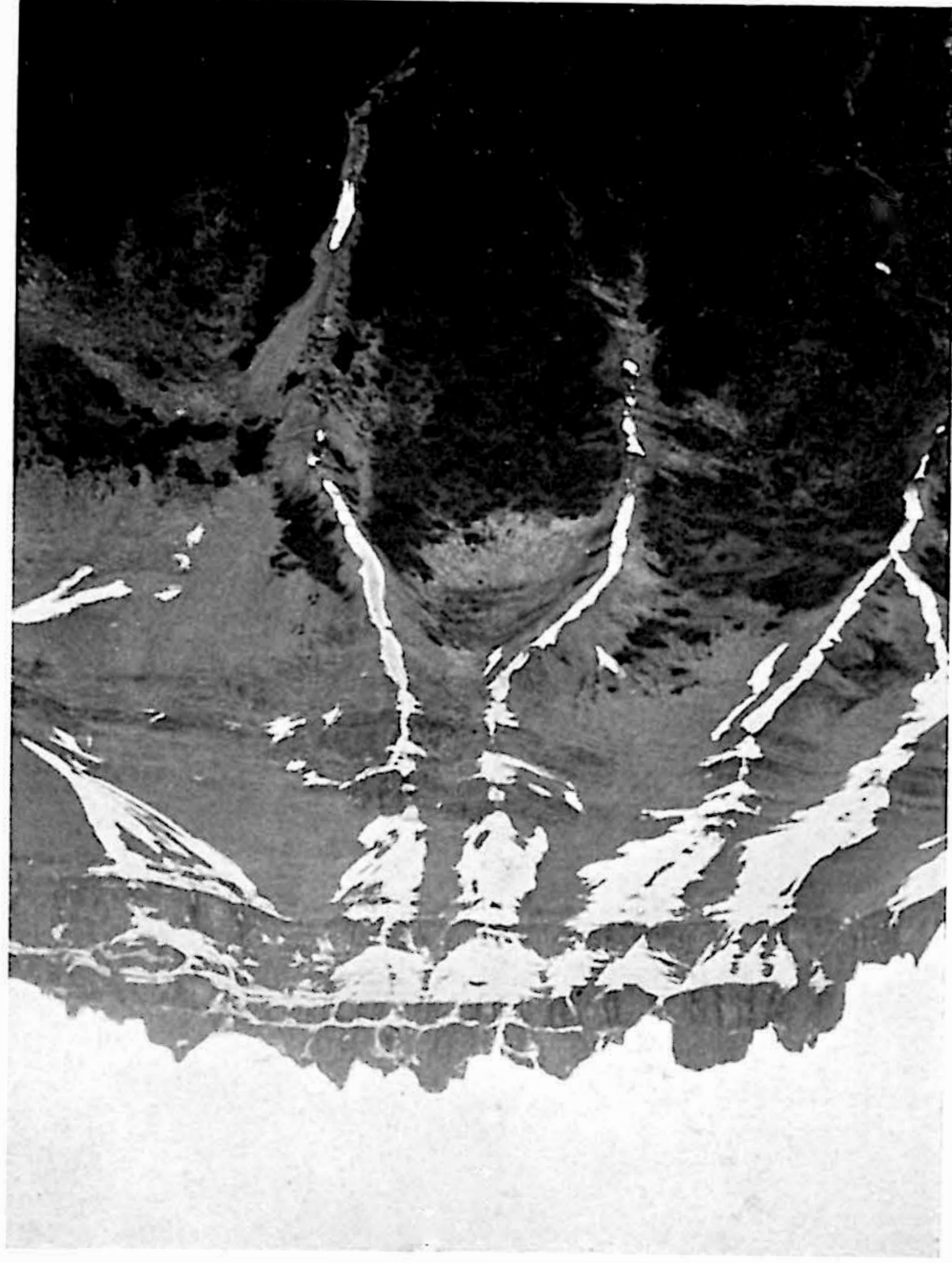
St. Nicholas Peak (9616 ft.), an unclimbed snowy summit above Bow Glacier, claimed our attention on June 27. We rowed across the lake and followed the stream from the delta into its narrow canyon and then into a lateral branch to the S. Up ledges and long snow slopes we reached the top, after cutting steps in its steep eastern wall, in just 4 hrs. from camp, a small blizzard enveloping us as we stepped on to the shaly summit.

For a little mountain St. Nicholas has an enormous precipice, a thousand feet of perpendicular rock falling to the Waputik snowfield on the W. In swirling mists we descended the S. arête and continued to the N. peak of Mt. Olive (10,270 ft.), which we reached after several halts in driving snow-squalls. The route from Yoho valley across the immensity of the Waputik névé could not be thought of under such conditions.

Next day was clear and we enjoyed a pleasant walk to Bow Pass to investigate a possible route to the peaks at the head of the Peyto Glacier. We found them much too far away, but contented ourselves by ascending a thousand feet on the W. buttress of the pass, where a fierce cold wind soon drove us down; though not before we had seen Mt. Murchison and the shining peaks to the N., and the reflections in the long blue lake below us. The summit of the pass was glittering with the streams converging through snow and timber to form the sources of the Mistaya and the Bow.

On June 29 we walked to the ranger's cabin on Mosquito Creek to telephone our whereabouts to Lake Louise. In open parts of the trail we stopped to look at the numberless towers which crown the long ridge of Dolomite Peak (9828 ft.).

Next day we made the first ascent of this striking mountain,



Photo, J. M. Thornton.
Dolomite Peak, W. face (showing tower ascending).



Photo, J. M. Thornton.
St. Nicholas Peak, S. arête.



Photo, J. M. Thornton.
Mt. Low from Freshfield basin.



Photo, J. M. Thornton.
Mt. Forbes from watershed peak N. of Pangman
Peak, Freshfield Group.

although not without misgivings as to the weather. Rowing down the lake for more than a mile we found a way through the trees, where a cow moose stood quietly looking at us, to open meadows and rocky slides leading over a high shoulder toward Dolomite Pass. Having ascertained from Bow Pass that the fourth tower, counting from the N., was the highest, we rounded the head of the valley, crossing streams and slants of heather to a rocky bench that led us, above tree-line, past a frozen lake to a point on the W. slope between the third and fourth towers. A rib was then ascended, its crest being followed to avoid falling stones. A long, narrow snow-couloir formed the route to the depression between the towers. At this point we found that the objective tower could not be climbed directly, but required a steep traverse on its face until a snowy cleft immediately N. of the highest point could be reached. Care was required on the last portion, and the view proved to be commanding, with Bow Valley, Mt. Hector and the Lake Louise peaks forming the S. panorama. To the N.E. the mountains of the Pipestone and Clearwater presented an array of fantastic, rocky shapes contrasting with the glaciation of the main watershed. [Bow Lake to Dolomite Pass, 3 hrs. 30 mins.; to summit, 3 hrs.; summit to Bow Lake, 4 hrs. 30 mins.; total time 11 hrs. 30 mins.]

Arriving at camp we found Cromwell, as well as Messrs. Duncan and Megrew who, on hearing of our similar objectives, had kindly invited us to join them in the packtrain.

Next day Peter went with them on an ascent of Mt. Thompson, and the evening of July 2 found us camped on the North Saskatchewan. The old ford between the Wildfowl Lakes is no longer used, but a new trail leads along the E. shore of the lower lake, close below Mt. Murchison to a fine wooden bridge that now spans the Mistaya canyon.

In the afternoon of July 4 the tents were placed at the camp ground beside the Freshfield tongue, where Cromwell and Megrew good-naturedly assisted me in checking up measurements of the ice begun in 1922 and continued in 1926. We found that in the four years past the tongue had receded 253 ft., while the great boulder above the terminus had descended 426 ft. in the same period.

The morning of July 5 found us at the Niverville meadow, which we crossed on our way to the snow below Pangman Peak. We found this summit out of the question on account of avalanches in the N. couloir, which barred the only approach, so we consoled ourselves by the first ascent of an unnamed

watershed peak immediately to the N. This is the loftiest point (9600 ft.) between Pangman Peak and Bush Pass, and commands a magnificent view of the Freshfield basin. The jagged arête from Dent to Pangman closes the immediate S.; Mt. Forbes rears an unfamiliar face to the N., while in the W. the narrow forested gorge of Bush River drops into the depths of British Columbia and sends a silvery thread of water toward the distant Selkirks. [From Freshfield tongue to Niverville meadow, 2 hrs.; to summit, 3 hrs. 45 mins.]

We descended the sharp E. crest of snow and returned to the Niverville meadow. Our tent was soon put up, but high wind and impending storm caused us to change our plan and retreat to lower levels.

The longest couloir in the world, apparently depending upon how one feels about it, leads upward from the glacier to the col between Mt. Skene (10,100 ft.) and Mt. Strahan. We climbed up its beds of avalanche snow on July 7 and made the first ascent of Mt. Skene over easy slopes. Duncan and Megrew then decided to cross Mt. Strahan to camp, while Cromwell, Peter and I descended into the Conway basin and made the first ascent of Mt. Conway (10,170 ft.).

Sir Martin may well be proud of his peak; it forms the W. boundary of Howse Pass and is a landmark of the N. Saskatchewan. Besides, it proved to be a climb of sustained interest, with a lateral glacier on its W. flank and a S. rock arête with difficult steps. We traversed it, descending the W. ridge to a gully through which we regained our tracks. The day was one of enlightenment, revealing unusual views of the Freshfield tongue, the Conway basin—with the N. wall of Mt. Solitaire, and the icefalls that plunge E. from the watershed to the head of the Blaeberry. [Camp to summit of Mt. Skene, 4 hrs. 30 mins.; to summit of Mt. Conway, 4 hrs. 15 mins.; total time from camp, 15 hrs. 30 mins.]

While we rested in camp on the morning of the following day, Duncan and Megrew, with Latam, guide to the outfit, ascended Mt. Freshfield. In the afternoon, Cromwell, Peter and I again placed a camp on the Niverville meadow—an island of flower and bush and bubbling water, with the contrasted splendour of a sunlit, snowy bowl so huge that its bounding peaks are far away.

The morning of July 9 was cold and clear. At daylight we put out the breakfast fire and carried the packs to the glacier. Then, through the séracs, we made our way E. At sunrise we had rounded the base of Mt. Nanga Parbat and reached



Photo, J. M. Thorington.

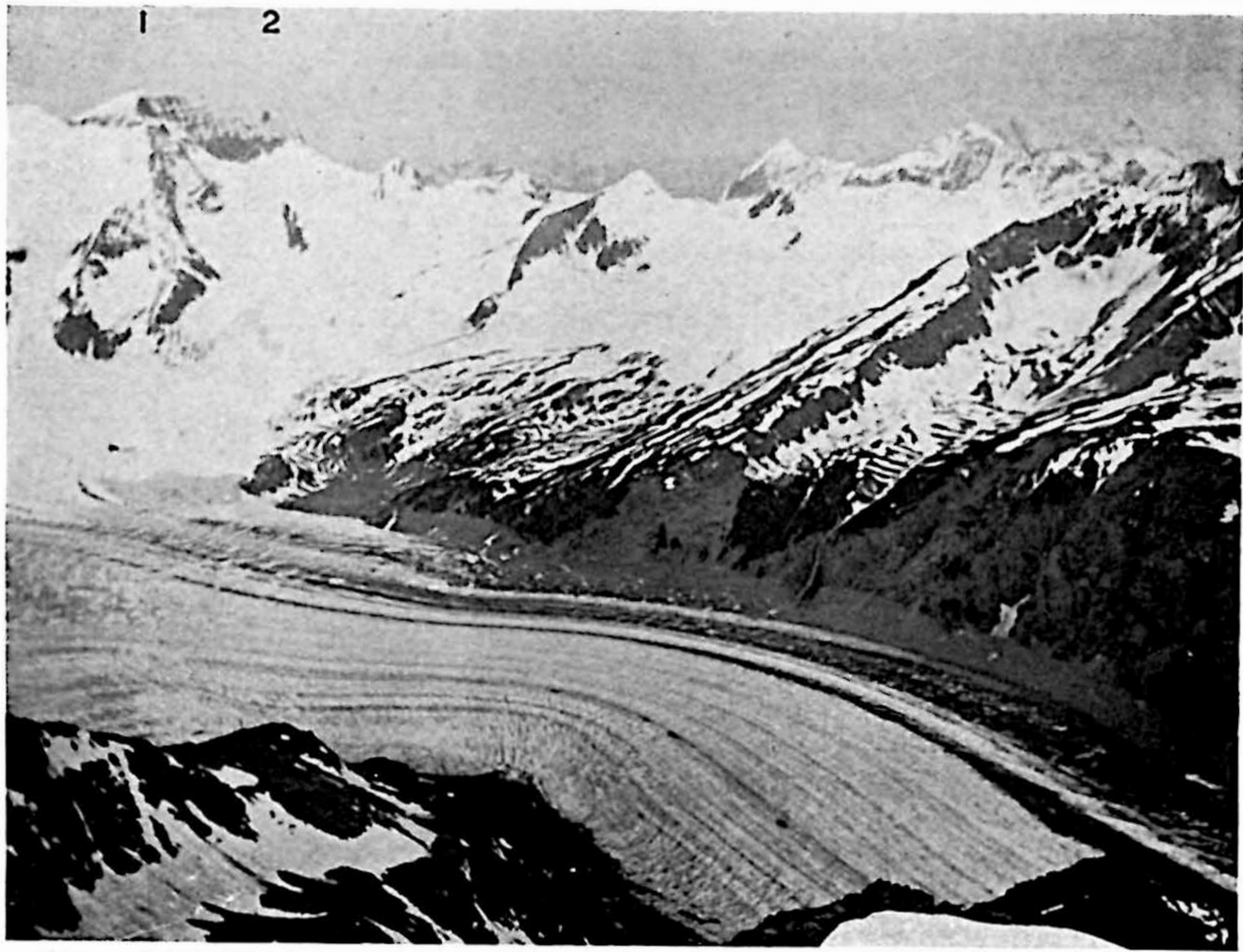
Mt. Barlow from Freshfield basin.

MT. DENT

1

PANGMAN PEAK

2



Photo, J. M. Thorington.

Freshfield Glacier from Mt. Skene.

the col between Mts. Barlow and Helmer, to find ourselves cut off from the latter peak by a sheer rock wall. We therefore turned our attention to Mt. Barlow, walking along the rim of watershed between the Freshfield basin and Blaeberry River.

Mt. Barlow (10,320 ft.), previously unascended, raises two snow-domes the W. and lower of which we skirted over the S. slopes, pausing now and then to admire the icy wall of Mt. Mummery just opposite. From the intervening saddle a few minutes placed us on the highest point. Even when compared with the greatest Swiss belvederes, Mt. Barlow is outstanding. Isolated, and above other summits at the S.E. angle of the Freshfield névé, one looks to the N.W. to the groups of the Lyell and Columbia icefields, their E. side outflanked by the bend in the watershed. E. the view stretches across Howse Pass and the Waputik peaks to the Pipestone and Clearwater. Far to the S., just W. of the Lake Louise and Ottertail mountains, one realizes that the Columbia valley—the Rocky Mountain trench—is in sight, with the hazy ridges of the Purcells. Then the eye is caught by the curve of the Blaeberry, turning from its source on Howse Pass through the forests below the Mummery Glacier, and carrying its gorge toward the Selkirks. The Waitabit valley, N. of Mt. Mummery, frames a well-known part of this range to which the fang of Sir Donald and the crest of Rogers form an entrance.

It was shortly after nine o'clock when we left the top and walked down the N. slope, following the watershed toward Mt. Low (10,075 ft.), and, in little more than an hour, stood on its untrodden crest. The snow was softening and it seemed expedient to return at once. A point was found where a steep but direct descent could be made to the main snowfield, and in the early afternoon we carried our packs to the lower camp. [Niverville meadow to Mt. Barlow, 5 hrs.; to summit of Mt. Low, 1 hr. 10 mins.; to Freshfield tongue, 5 hrs. 30 mins.]

On July 10 we took the packtrain to Glacier Lake, arriving in a drenching rain, and placed camp about a mile below the ice. Next afternoon Cromwell and Peter, Duncan and Megrew made a bivouac above the Mons Glacier. Clear weather favoured them when, on July 12, Mt. Forbes was ascended, Cromwell and Peter making a new route by the N. arête, while the others followed the W. crest.

Latam and I examined the glacier, checking measurements

begun in 1926, finding that the ice had retreated 250 ft. since that time.

As Cromwell, Peter and I had made an appointment with Conrad Kain in the Purcells, we were now under the necessity of returning, and accordingly, on July 13, with one packer and six horses, left the main outfit, reaching Bow Lake two days later.

Settled warm weather had removed much of the fresh snow encountered earlier in the season. The morning of July 15 found us above the Bow Glacier, crossing the high S. shoulder of Mt. Rhondda, with Mt. Ayesha (10,036 ft.), an unclimbed peak of the Waputik névé as our objective. A steep couloir brought us quickly to the snowfield, and rucksacks were left at the beginning of the climb. A curious, wind-blown ridge of snow formed an advantageous route to the S. shoulder of our mountain, at which point the summit cap forced us to traverse its E. snow to a treacherous rocky gully, affording some 300 ft. of climbing direct to the summit. The view was of considerable interest as the peak rises above the Blaeberry, opposite Mt. Mummery and the Freshfield Group. [Bow Lake to summit, 8 hrs. 20 mins.; descent to Twin Falls, 5 hrs. 20 mins.]

Descent was made by the W. shoulder and a S. couloir to regain our tracks at the shoulder. A sapphire lake fills the W. cup between Mts. Ayesha and Collie, which Howard Palmer and I had seen from above Amiskwi Pass eight years before, when we followed the Howse Pass route on our first visit to the Freshfield group.

Again on the snowfield we shouldered our sacks and rounded the E. base of Mt. Collie, drifting cloud-shadows protecting us from the full light of the sun. A line of tracks, straight as a navigator's course, showed us where a grizzly bear, coming from Blaeberry, had found a way to the head of the Peyto Glacier. A rising plateau between Yoho Peak and Mt. Habel brought us face to face with peaks of the upper Yoho—the spring snow had vanished from the meadows above Twin Falls; flowers were everywhere.

A little later we ate our supper at the cabin, taking, in the cool of evening, the trail to Takakkaw.