

Triennial Report 1969-71 North America

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The last three years in North America have seen significant new mountaineering activity in all the major climbing areas, and also extensions into new regions, such as some of the lesser-known areas of the Canadian Rockies and the Coastal Ranges. Perhaps the outstanding development has been the consolidation of achievements in Yosemite, with many new climbs being done, and ascents of some of the better known routes on El Capitan becoming almost everyday events. Although Yosemite has by no means yielded all its riches, its widespread exploitation has resulted in the investigation of the potential of adjacent, but less accessible, areas in the Sierra Nevada such as Hetch Hetchy, which present similar climbing problems. Also, climbing on the Squamish Chief north of Vancouver seems to have come of age, and perhaps its easy accessibility and well-tried routes will tempt climbers to look for possible new wall climbs in this area also. Besides being a home for local Canadian climbers, the Chief has also become a favourite spot for many climbers from south of the border, in spite of the substantial travelling involved. The developments of interests and techniques which have led to the establishment of big wall climbing are now being followed at a much later stage by advances in the scope of ice-climbing in North America. Following particularly the pioneering efforts of Yvon Chouinard, there has been an exploration of new techniques and equipment, and some significant adaptations of established European practices.

Some notes about the principal climbs which have been made in North America in the period 1969-71 have been kindly provided by Chris Jones, and are reproduced below, with a few minor amplifications.

No reviews of North American mountaineering during the years 1969-71 would be complete without reference to the accident on Dhaulagiri that took the lives of five of America's most active mountaineers; their absence has resulted in noticeably leaner years, particularly in Alaska. None the less, interest in Alaskan climbing is increasing, with a strong group of resident Alaskan climbers making their mark. McKinley and St Elias, the giants of the area, continue as the most sought after summits, with the East ridge of McKinley being the most noteworthy new addition. In 1970, the Japanese climber Naomi Uemura made the first solo ascent of Mount McKinley, via the West Buttress. The Kitchatna spires now have parties in the area almost every year, and are gaining a reputation as the Alaskan Patagonia. Royal Robbins, Charlie Raymond and Joe Fitschen made three first ascents in 1969, discovering, as others had before them, that the simplest route is a tough problem in the Kitchatna. Other parties, following the example of the West face of Huntington, are attempting the great Alpine walls, notably on Hunter and the Moose's Tooth, but on these two so far without success.

The Coastal Range of Canada is notable for difficulty of access, poor weather and some stunning peaks. The incredible Devil's Thumb received a second ascent by Dick Culbert, Fred Douglas and Paul Starr, using a new route. The Mount Waddington area has seen plenty of activity, with much new ground yet to be covered.

The Interior Ranges of British Columbia, although principally known for the superb granite spires of the Bugaboos, have recently been shown to contain groups such as the Adamants, Gold Range and Battle Range which contain equally good climbing, almost wholly untouched. The Bugaboos are now well developed and most of the harder routes have been repeated. The ascent of the 3000-ft West face of North Howser by Chris Jones, Tony Qamar and Galen Rowell was both the first Grade VI in the Interior and the solution of a long-recognised problem on what is probably the highest wall in the range. Later in 1971, Roy Kligfield and party put up the first big wall climb in the Valhallas, on the face of Dag.

The Canadian Rockies have recently yielded some significant mixed climbs. On Columbia, after Robson the highest peak in the range, Chris Jones and Graham Thompson climbed the 5000-ft North face/ridge, and the same party, this time with Jeff Lowe, also picked off another prize on the North face of Kitchener. Brian Greenwood, long-time master of Canadian climbing, added the face on the Tower of Babel to his long list of major climbs. During 1970, George and Jeff Lowe finished the route on Temple's North face, almost completed the previous year by Hank Abrons, Dennis Eberl and Dave Roberts. A group of Calgary climbers have been active and are responsible for many new climbs and repeats of recent hard routes. In particular, Bill Davidson and Jim White climbed the face on Gibraltar Rock, taking nine days for the 2000-ft route.

Vancouver climbers have been equally active on the Squamish Chief, a Canadian Yosemite with rain, perhaps the most interesting new route being the Black Dike, climbed by Al Givler and Mead Hargis. Here yesterday's problem is today's regular route, but of course, this is observable world-wide.

In the United States the Cascades of Washington, which stretch up into British Columbia, continue to be the major Alpine climbing area. Fred Beckey, the perennial pioneer, continues to search out new ground, while Alex Bertulis, Mead Hargis and Mark Weigelt among others have made good new climbs.

Some of the finest climbing in the U.S. is to be found in the Tetons and Wind Rivers of Wyoming. Recent highlights have included the North face of the Enclosure on Grand Teton and routes on the faces of Bollinger and Warrior in the Wind Rivers.

In Colorado the Diamond on Long's Peak received a solo ascent by Bill Forrest, while climbing elsewhere in Rocky Mountain National Park may be



88 *Zion National Park.* Photo: U. S. Information Services

encouraged by the publication of a new guide. Climbing in the Boulder area is increasing remarkably, yet the gap left in U.S. climbing by Layton Kor's retirement is still evident. His efforts over the years stand as a landmark.

The unique sandstone country of the south-west has a slowly growing number of devotees, but the regrettable climbing ban recently enforced by the Navajo tribe on some of the best areas is a sad and sombre precedent. Highlights of recent years have been the Secret Passage route on Shiprock and the routes on the Mystery Towers by Harvey Carter and Bill Forrest. Zion National Park in Utah, a sandstone version of Yosemite, has given fine routes on surprisingly good rock, most notably on Angel's Landing. The potential is enormous.

Yosemite, as always, has been the touchstone. In the spring of 1969 the big routes on El Capitan were rarely climbed, although the Nose had a few ascents each year. By the fall of 1971 ascents of El Cap routes were almost commonplace. This remarkable change—the virtual elimination of the big wall bogey—is possibly the most significant development in Yosemite climbing. On Half Dome two long-standing problems were overcome. Warren Harding and Galen Rowell finally triumphed over the South face after numerous bold

attempts spread over five years, where poor weather had been the deciding factor. On the North face, Royal Robbins added the third route to his two existing ones, climbing *Tis-sa-ack* in nine days with Don Peterson. Scott Davis and Chuck Kroger quietly climbed the *Heart Route* on El Capitan with a minimum of bolts and fuss, taking nine days in the spring of 1970. In October of that year the story quickly spread that Warren Harding, the grand old man of Yosemite, was on the Wall of the Morning Light. Despite poor weather, low rations and huge blank sections Harding and Dean Caldwell finished on top on their twenty-seventh day. Although the climbing merits of the route are still a hot topic for debate, the feat of living on a vertical wall for twenty-seven days is beyond question remarkable, and most significant.

After many attempts, Jim Bridwell and Kim Schmits succeeded on El Cap's *Aquarian*, an intricate route with much hard climbing. Later in 1971 Rick Sylvester and Claude Wreford-Brown completed the *Son of Heart Route* in nine days. The latter climber, from London, is thought to be the first non-American to have taken part in an El Cap grade VI first ascent.

Solo climbers Tom Bauman on the Nose, and Peter Haan on the Salathé may be establishing a trend. Royal Robbins, long time soloer, made a solo first ascent on the West face of Sentinel Rock. Free climbing standards are being advanced by a number of specialists: Barry Bates, Jim Bridwell, Mead Hargis and Mark Klemens. Long overshadowed by the aura of Yosemite, the 300-mile long Sierra Nevada, of which Yosemite is a part, is being combed for new routes. Principal among the seekers are Fred Beckey, Chris Jones, Chuck Kroger and Galen Rowell. Fine climbs of up to 3000 ft have been discovered, notably on Lone Pine Peak, Hetch Hetchy, Tehipite Dome and on Angel's Wings.

Winter climbing is only slowly becoming established, perhaps because there remains so much new ground to be covered in summer. Mount Waddington was climbed in 1969 by a party including Dick Culbert and five others, and Mount Rainier's Willis Wall in 1970 by John Wickwire and Alex Bertulis by a new route. The most successful winter climber to date is George Lowe, who in 1971 with cousins Jeff, Greg and Dave Lowe climbed all but a few rope-lengths of the West face of Grand Teton in three hard days. Mitch Michaud climbed the highest peaks in all fifty states within a calendar year. This performance reduced to its proper size some previous arguments as to who had been the first to climb the highest peaks in the original forty-eight states, a debate which revolved round some recent reassignments of the highest peaks in some cases.

This period has seen the continuation of a number of scientific research projects connected with mountain regions. Thus, the high-altitude research station established in 1967 on Mount Logan and sponsored by the Arctic Institute of North America, was the scene of further investigations in 1969. These were largely concerned with problems of high altitude physiology, although projects connected with glaciology, climatology and geology were also carried out. The station is at 17,500 ft on the Logan Plateau (equivalent to a

pressure altitude of 19,000 ft in the Himalaya), and some members of the expedition, which was headed by Joseph Labelle, remained fifty-seven days at this, or higher, altitudes. Of considerable interest was an investigation of the adverse effects of high altitude on the eyes, which occasionally leads to temporary blindness in Himalayan climbers. Some equipment was available which enabled photographs of the interior of the eye to be taken and allowed rapid diagnosis of retinal haemorrhages. It was found that this complaint occurred even in those who had undergone an extensive period of acclimatisation. Some guinea-pigs for this research programme, in the form of 'volunteers' from the Canadian Air Force, were flown in and developed various symptoms of high-altitude illness, including cerebral oedema. It was found, however, that these symptoms were much reduced in subjects who had been treated with preventive medicine in the form of 'Diamox'. An unexpected hazard during this project was the occurrence of choking air pollution at the station due to extensive forest fires in the Yukon.

The Institute of Arctic Biology was involved in 1968-9 in weather observations on the West buttress of Mount McKinley. These involved measurements of temperature, wind effects, precipitation and cloud cover.

The current world-wide concern with problems of conservation and man's unthinking depredations of his environment has found frequent expression in the context of the mountain and wilderness areas of North America. The rapid increase in public use of these areas is subjecting them to severe pressures, and threatening their very existence in some instances. In the case of the newly established North Cascades National Park, this has resulted in the adoption of new principles for running the park which run counter to the main principle upon which the national parks were established, i.e. immediate and simple access for the public. The widespread use of 'snow mobiles' is causing problems in some areas, and there are big potential difficulties looming ahead in Alaska as a result of the recent enormous oil finds there, and the wish of the oil companies to exploit these in the most economic manner possible. The lack of interest in the Hetch Hetchy area mentioned earlier has been, to some extent, due to the valley having been written off, in climbing terms, after it was flooded to provide a water supply for the San Francisco area. Whatever one's feelings about this exploitation of the valley are, the resulting lack of access roads and development has, to some extent, enabled what remains of the area to retain its wild and unspoiled character. The over population of the better-known climbing areas such as Yosemite, the Tetons and the Bugaboos, has been well-expressed by Chris Jones in an article entitled 'The End of the Mountains' which appeared in the 1970 *American Alpine Journal* and also in the 1971 *Canadian Alpine Journal*. Overcrowding is becoming a problem in the mountains as well as in towns.

A number of books about climbing in North America have appeared in the interval under review. Thus, the 1970 *Canadian Alpine Journal* mentioned five books that had either been published or were in preparation, relating to climbing and hiking in the Coastal Ranges of British Columbia, including a second edition of a *Climber's Guide to the Coastal Ranges of B.C.*, from

the Alpine Club of Canada, and a *Climber's Guide to the Squamish Chief*, by Glenn Woodsworth (Varsity Outdoor Club, University of B.C.). This number of books is remarkable, in view of the fact that a dozen years or so ago there were virtually no readily available climbing or hiking guides to these regions. Also, adjacent areas have been covered by Fred Beckey's new edition of his *Climber's Guide to the Cascade Range*, and his book entitled *Challenge of the North Cascades* which constitutes yet more evidence of the astonishing activity of this man over the last thirty-five years. In common with a number of other journals, the *Canadian Alpine Journal* has recently undergone a considerable change of format, bringing it into the forefront of current trends. The 1971 version is perhaps preferable to the first new journal, which appeared in 1970.



89 Punta Gugliermi—South face. This and next two photos:
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