C A RUSSELL

One Hundred Years Ago

(with extracts from the *Alpine Journal*)

(*Plates 74–78*)

> The 'Ski' race which took place on the slopes above Clavadel was probably the first of its kind in Switzerland. The competitors were judiciously handicapped, and the result was a capital race. The Ladies' race also proved highly exciting. Mrs Maclaren, though only on skis for the second time went splendidly without falling until she got past the road, but being obliged to unfasten her skis they fled on their own account and went over a precipice to the bottom of the Sertig valley whence they were recovered by Dr A Conan Doyle and Dr Wynne.
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> The impetus given to the sport is chiefly due to Dr Conan Doyle, who has recently made several expeditions on skis.

Although the exceptionally cold weather which prevailed in many parts of the Alps during the opening weeks of 1895 did not deter the enthusiastic groups of skiers at Davos and other resorts very little winter climbing of note was recorded, even the most determined parties being confined to the lower peaks. In the Bernese Oberland the severe winter was followed by a spring 'so beautiful and warm that the vast mass of snow has very quickly melted away.' During the second half of April several climbers were able to benefit from this welcome change and a number of lengthy but successful expeditions, including ascents of the Wetterhorn and Jungfrau, was completed by guided parties.

After a short unsettled period conditions steadily improved and the mountaineering season coincided with one of the longest spells of perfect weather on record.

> The summer of 1895 will be remembered as one of the dryest and hottest ever experienced in the Alps. From the middle of August to the beginning of October we believe there was not one day on which no climbing could take place, and this was certainly the case during the whole of September. On one day, when the weather was particularly good, as many as 23 tourists

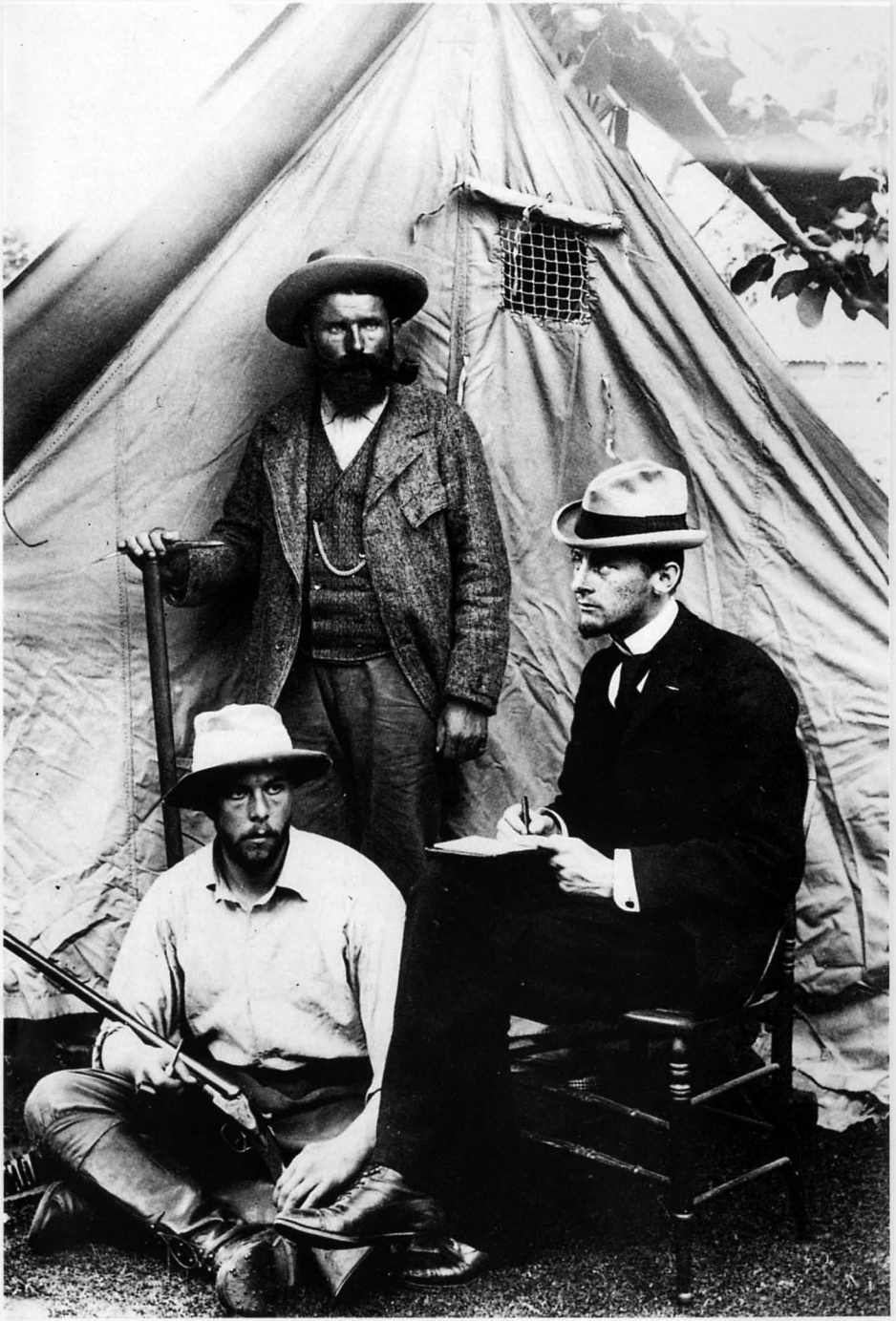
> were at the top of the Matterhorn, amongst them being two English ladies. Towards the end of the season the rock peaks became extremely dangerous on account of falling stones, while the so called snow mountains presented everywhere slopes of hardest ice.

The magnificent weather experienced during the season provided exceptional climbing opportunities and many expeditions of note were recorded. In the Dauphiné two high cols were traversed, for the first time on each occasion, by Auguste Reynier and Claude Verne with Maximin and Casimir Gaspard and Joseph Turc: the Coup de Sabre below the W ridge of the Pic Sans Nom on 17 July and, on 20 July, the Brèche Joseph Turc – 'a narrow gap through which one man only can pass at a time, the crest itself being as sharp as the edge of a knife' – between the Pic Central and the E summit of the Meije. On 27 August, with Maximin Gaspard and Turc, Reynier completed the first traverse of the Brèche Maximin Gaspard, between the E summit of the Meije and the Pavé.

To the south in the Maritime Alps the first recorded ascent of the Cime de la Maledie, on the frontier ridge near Mont Clapier, was made on 23 July by a party which included Louis Maubert and the guide Jean Plent. In the Graian Alps the pinnacled S ridge of Mont Herbetet, which had been attempted by several strong parties, was finally climbed on 20 September by F W Oliver with Albert and Benedict Supersaxo.

In the Mont Blanc range on 14 July E Vassaux and L Wanner with Joseph Quinodoz and J Metrailler reached the summit of the Aiguille d'Argentière from the Col du Chardonnet by way of the unclimbed NW ridge. Later in the season, on 28 August, Evan Mackenzie, with Laurent Croux and César Ollier, made the first ascent of the SE ridge of Punta Innominata, between the Brouillard and Frêney glaciers. A few days before the Innominata ascent, on 24 August, a tragic event occurred after A C Roberts had climbed the Aiguille du Géant with Emile Rey, the great guide of Courmayeur. During the descent over broken ground at the base of the final peak Rey, who was unroped, fell to his death on the glacier below.

During such a long period of settled weather it was not surprising that many fine ridges were climbed in the Pennine Alps. At the head of the Arolla valley on 15 August W W Naismith, with Quinodoz, made the first ascent of the NNE ridge of Mont Collon. In the following month, on 6 September, a new route was completed by Gerald Arbuthnot and L C F Oppenheim who reached the N, higher summit of the neighbouring Mitre de l'Evêque by way of the E ridge, accompanied by Jean Maître and Joseph Georges. In the Zermatt district on 2 September E A Broome with Josef M Biner and Ambros Imboden made the first complete ascent[1] of the Schaligrat, the SW ridge of the Weisshorn. Between 16 August and 4 September several members of the Alpine Club including O G Jones with Elias Furrer and W E Davidson with Christian Klucker and Daniel Maquignaz



74. E A FitzGerald (R), C L Barrow and Mattias Zurbriggen near the Hermitage, 1895. (*Kinsey Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, NZ*) (p236)

followed the Domgrat, the high ridge connecting the Dom and the Täschhorn.

On 29 August a route of great historical interest was repeated when Davidson, during an ascent of the Matterhorn with Klucker and Maquignaz, made the third recorded traverse of the Galerie Carrel, the famous ledge high on the W face which had been crossed during the first ascent of the peak from the Italian side. Later in the year Davidson recalled[2] how, some 50 minutes after leaving the SW, Italian ridge, the party arrived

> ... at a place whence a ribbon of snow stretched, pretty continuously, along a band of rock, running towards the Z'Mutt arête. At this spot we found the cork of a wine tin. About 30 minutes after we had started on the Z'Mutt face and just beyond the hardest bit of the climb – as we made it – we came across an iron piton driven into the rock and shortly afterwards we found two more similar iron-spikes.

In a further comment Davidson, who had made a rising traverse to reach the ledge at a point some way across the face, added[3]

> I understand that Mummery, who had surveyed the 'Galerie' from near the 'fault' in the ledge close to the Z'Mutt arête, told Farrar[4] that it was so easy that one could stroll across it with an old umbrella! If he had tried he would, I fear, with unexpected precipitation, have arrived at a very different conclusion.

In the Bernese Oberland on 2 August C A Macdonald, with Christian Jossi and Peter Bernet, forced a route up the NW face of the Ebnefluh. Further east, in the Dolomites, a remarkable achievement was the first ascent of the Torre Delago, one of the Vajolet Towers, by Hermann Delago, solo, on 22 September. Other notable climbs were the first ascent of Punta dell' Ideale in the Brenta group by Carlo Garbari with Nino Pooli on 18 August and the ascent of the unclimbed NW face of the Civetta on 24 August by the Rev A G S Raynor and J S Phillimore with Antonio Dimai and Giovanni Siorpaes. Later in the year, on 4 December, Garbari and his party completed the first ascent under winter conditions of Cimone della Pala.

In the Caucasus exploration was continued by C T Dent and Hermann Woolley, who arrived in the central region in July, accompanied by Kaspar Maurer and Simon Moor. Although snow conditions were unfavourable they crossed a number of passes and on 2 August made the first ascent of Tsiteli (4277m). Another visitor to the range was W R Rickmers who in October, accompanied by Amilius Hacker, made several attempts to ascend the S, higher peak of Ushba (4710m), reaching a height of some 4100m on each occasion.

During the year two expeditions of note were undertaken in more distant ranges. In New Zealand E A FitzGerald, accompanied by C L Barrow and the guide Mattias Zurbriggen, arrived at the Hermitage Hotel on 4 January with the principal aim of reaching unclimbed summits in the Southern Alps. As the first ascent of Mount Cook (3764m) had been completed shortly before his arrival[5] FitzGerald turned his attention to other peaks in the region.

Finding that the Hotel was officially closed the party was obliged to set up tents nearby, Jack Clarke, one of the climbers who had reached the summit of Mount Cook, being engaged to act as porter and to look after the camp. Although their plans were frequently disrupted by bad weather and other difficulties including the unwelcome attentions of a cow which consumed considerable quantities of soap and flour FitzGerald and Zurbriggen, who both made extensive use of crampons, were able to make first ascents of several fine peaks: Mount Sealy (2639m) on 24 January with Barrow and Clarke; Mount Tasman (3500m) by way of the unclimbed Silberhorn (3309m) and the S ridge on 5 February with Clarke; Mount Haidinger (3068m), also with Clarke, on 8 February; and Mount Sefton (3159m) on 14 February. The ascent of the E ridge of Mount Sefton was a fine achievement and FitzGerald later recalled their narrow escape during the climb.

> Never have I in all my experience seen rocks in such a fearfully rotten condition as these, and Zurbriggen also agreed that in all his travels he had never seen anything to equal them. The slightest touch would at times dislodge tons. We had to go up a most fearfully steep arête to reach the summit, near which there occurred what was very nearly being a fatal accident, a large rock falling down, throwing me completely over, and cutting two strands of the rope that held me. Zurbriggen was very badly placed at this moment, and was all but torn from his foothold. Had we fallen here we should have come straight down 7,000 ft. to the Mueller Glacier.

FitzGerald and Zurbriggen also succeeded in crossing a pass in the Main Divide – FitzGerald's Pass – to reach the W coast before returning to their camp, accompanied by A P Harper the surveyor and mountain explorer, by way of the Fox and Franz Josef glaciers and Graham Saddle.

FitzGerald later described[6] how after departing for Christchurch with F F Tuckett, who had been visiting the range, he enjoyed a final glimpse of the mountains in the evening sun.

> The whole chain of great snowy peaks stood forth clearly against the crimson west, and was again mirrored in the placid lake at our feet. So peaceful was this evening scene, that, as I gazed, I



75. Weisshorn, with (L) the Schaligrat. (*C A Russell*) (p234)



76. Wastwater Hotel, Easter 1895. (*Abraham Collection, F and RCC*) (p238)

> could scarcely realise that these white, glittering peaks had been the theatre of so much hardship, so much privation, and so much peril during the last few months. I felt amply rewarded, however, for the long marches and hazardous climbs, for the cold, the wet, and the general discomfort of my sojourn, by the closer knowledge that I had obtained of these majestic heights; these seemingly impregnable fastnesses of ice and rock; by the sights which had been unfurled before my eyes of the wonderful contrasting zones of glacier and vegetation on the west coast, unparalleled by all that I have yet seen or heard described in the extraordinary proximity in which one climatic region is brought to another.

On 14 March Zurbriggen, who had remained behind to strike camp, succeeded in making the second ascent of Mount Cook. Accompanied by Jack Adamson of the Hermitage to a height of some 3150m Zurbriggen continued the climb alone, reaching the summit by way of the NE ridge, now known as Zurbriggen's Ridge.

On 20 June A F Mummery, accompanied by J N Collie and Geoffrey Hastings but without guides, sailed for Bombay in the hope of realising one of his great ambitions – the ascent of Nanga Parbat (8125m) in the Punjab Himalaya.

After a camp had been established near Tarshing in the Rupal valley below the precipitous S face of the mountain it soon became apparent that any attempt to force a route up this face would have little prospect of success. The party therefore decided to cross the Mazeno Pass (5377m) and on 22 July camped in the Diamirai valley where Mummery identified a possible route up the NW, Diamirai face. Returning to the Rupal valley after an exhausting journey over the Mazeno Pass Mummery and his companions were 'revived and comforted by many bottles of Bass' and by the Hon C G Bruce who at Mummery's invitation had joined the party with two men from his regiment, the 5th Gurkha Rifles.

On 5 August, after helping to establish a base camp beside the Diamirai glacier, Bruce left to return to his regiment. Although the weather then deteriorated small camps were established up the lower part of the route and a snow peak of some 5800m was ascended on 11 August. Addressing the Alpine Club in the following year Collie recalled how during the climb

> Mummery never felt the least fatigue. He led the whole way – sometimes in deep powdery snow; sometimes he had to cut steps for nearly an hour at a time. The pace was quite as fast as he ever went in the Alps, and we had climbed nearly 7,000ft. Certainly that day the rarified air had not the slightest effect on him.

On 19 and 20 August Mummery, accompanied by one of the Gurkhas, succeeded in climbing the ribs in the centre of the face to a height of more than 6000m – an outstanding exploit, far in advance of its time – before the illness of his companion forced a retreat. It was then decided that Collie and Hastings, taking a lower route, would move the base camp to the Rakhiot valley to enable the party to examine the N, Rakhiot face and that Mummery would attempt a direct crossing over a col at approximately 6200m. On 24 August Mummery and the two Gurkhas set out for the col but were never seen again.

In the Canadian Rockies exploration of the Lake Louise region was continued by P S Abbot, C E Fay and C S Thompson. Although forced by bad weather to abandon an attempt to climb Mount Lefroy (3423m) they succeeded, on 30 July, in making the first recorded ascent of Mount Hector (3394m).

At home several notable routes were followed for the first time. In Wales J M Archer Thomson and Harold Hughes made their celebrated ascent of Twll Du or the Devil's Kitchen, the cleft in the central cliff of Clogwyn y Geifr above Llyn Idwal. In March, taking advantage of the intense cold during the winter, they succeeded in cutting holds up the frozen waterfall with a hatchet borrowed from Ogwen Cottage. Later in the year they completed a number of new routes on Glyder Fawr including *Grey Rib*, led by Archer Thomson, and *Twisting Gully*, climbed by Hughes with H Edwards and J R Smith. In the Lake District on 14 April two fine routes were established on Dow Crag: *Intermediate Gully*, by a party which included Edward and John Hopkinson; and *Hopkinson's Crack*, led by Charles Hopkinson with O J Koecher. In Scotland Collie explored the NE face of Ben Nevis where on 12 April with Naismith, Gilbert Thomson and M W Travers he made the first ascent of Castle Ridge.

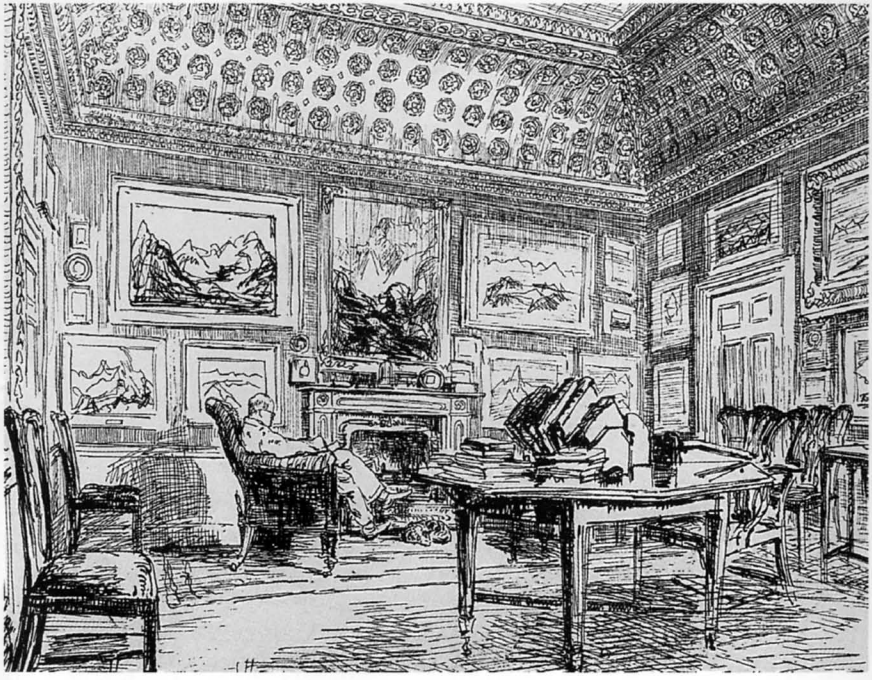
In the autumn considerable interest was aroused by the publication of the second volume, dealing with Wales and Ireland, of *Climbing in the British Isles*, the famous guidebook edited by W P Haskett Smith. Other books published during the year included Mummery's classic *My Climbs in the Alps and Caucasus*, which appeared shortly before he left for the Himalaya, and *The Alps from End to End*, the account by Sir Martin Conway[7] of his journey through the Alps in the previous season.

An important event in the history of the Alpine Club was the move from the Club's first permanent home in London at 8 St Martin's Place, Trafalgar Square to new premises at 23 Savile Row. Addressing the Club on 2 April the President, D W Freshfield, acknowledged that the old rooms were no longer adequate and explained that

> ... Our lease was near its end, but we had ground for hope that the Geographical Society might make itself a centre for kindred bodies, and might erect new premises, with rooms and a hall available for our purposes. That hope was unfulfilled. ...



77. 22 (Ground Floor) and 23 Savile Row.
(*H Felton, RCHME. Crown Copyright*) (p238)



78. The Reading-room, 23 Savile Row.
(*Hanslip Fletcher, Alpine Club Library Collection*) (p238)

> The Committee was generally requested and expected to take action. The problem before it – to find, in a first-rate situation, a suitable hall at a moderate rent – seemed to me, I confess, even so lately as six weeks ago, a very difficult one. But everything comes to those who can wait. The exact premises we wanted suddenly came into the market.

On 7 May the Club met for the first time at the new premises, where an exhibition of paintings was held later in the year.

> A charming little exhibition opens today in the new club-house of the Alpine Club, 23 Savile Row. The house itself really deserves a notice. It is such a delightful old rambling place, with circular staircase, pleasant rooms, and a good gallery, or rather lecture-room, in which the pictures are hung. ... It is a house that figured a good deal in the doings of society in the days of Horace Walpole. It stands at the far corner of the street, set across the narrow straight line of the row. When it was built last century, it was the tea house or garden retreat of Lord Burlington, who had it decorated after the style of his mansion at the other end of the grounds.

The premises in Savile Row were to be the Club's home for more than 40 years.[8]

This account is concluded with a recollection of Mummery, taken from the notice which appeared in the *Alpine Journal* later in the year.

> Face to face with the giant Nanga Parbat Mr. Mummery wagered and lost. If the wager were blameworthy the result should not influence the apportionment of blame. Had he won, would the Alpine Club have censured? Assuredly not. The Himalayas have their victim – one worthy of their pre-eminence among the high places of the earth – but he too has his monument. So long as English rule abides in India, so long will those who from Gulmerg, in fair Kashmir, behold in the far north the glittering dome and spires of Nanga Parbat relate, as they wonder at its beauty, 'There Mummery was killed – the great climber!'

REFERENCES

1 A route up the SE face and the upper section of the ridge had been completed by W E Davidson, J W Hartley and H Seymour Hoare with Peter Rubi, Johann Jaun and Alois Pollinger on 6 September 1877.

2 W E Davidson to Edward Whymper, letter, 24 December 1895 (Edward Whymper, *Scrambles Amongst the Alps*, 6th Edition. London, John Murray, 1936. Appendix D).

3 Davidson to Whymper, letter, 10 February 1896 (ibid.).

4 Captain J P Farrar, President of the Alpine Club 1917-19.

5 The summit – now some ten metres lower (*AJ99*, 221, 1994) – had been reached by J M Clarke, T C Fyfe and George Graham on 25 December 1894.

6 E A FitzGerald, *Climbs in the New Zealand Alps.* London, T Fisher Unwin, 1896.

7 Shortly before the book was published Conway received a knighthood in recognition of his work in the Karakoram three years earlier.

8 Until the end of 1936. The building was demolished in 1937.