
C A RUSSELL

One Hundred Years Ago

(with extracts from the *Alpine Journal*)

(Plates 86–89)

Soon after 9 a.m. on Friday, February 19th, accompanied by the guides M. Schocher and Schnitzler, I left Pontresina for the Boval hut, which was reached, via the medial moraine of the Morteratsch Glacier, about 1 p.m.; here, owing to the almost criminal neglect of some late-comers of '96 in omitting to shut the door, a miserable night was spent, literally in the snow.

At 1.45 a.m. by the most brilliant moonlight we proceeded up the glacier, crossing the "Labyrinth", the jagged séracs of which gave no trouble. The summit was attained at 8.12 a.m. and in warm sunshine we enjoyed a glorious and absolutely unclouded view.

The most remarkable part of the whole expedition was the ease with which it was performed, the actual climb, in fact, taking almost less time than in summer.

The third winter ascent of Piz Bernina, described by E L Strutt, was one of a number of fine expeditions completed by members of the Alpine Club during the early months of 1897. Two of the peaks above Grindelwald had been ascended at the beginning of the year: on 12 January O G Jones, with Hans Almer and Peter Jaggi, climbed the Schreckhorn and a week later Almer, with his brother Ulrich, accompanied Godfrey Ellis¹ to the summit of the Wetterhorn. Another party to suffer an unpleasant night after arriving at a refuge filled with snow was that of the Duke of the Abruzzi² who on 6 March with Francesco Gonella and the guides Claudio Perotti and Davide Proment, assisted by Francesco Perotti and Antonio Gilli as porters, made the second ascent of Monte Viso under winter conditions.

An important event in the development of ski mountaineering was the first traverse on ski of the Bernese Oberland. On 19 January the German party of Wilhelm Paulcke and four other members of the Schwarzwald Ski Club – V de Beauclair, Gustav Mönnichs, Dr Reinhold Ehlert and W Lohmüller – reached the Oberaarjoch hut from the Grimselpass. After completing a series of fine runs to the Konkordia hut by way of the

Grünhornlücke on the following day Paulcke and his companions attempted to climb the Jungfrau on 21 January but were defeated by bad weather. The party spent a second very cold night at the Konkordia hut, skied down the Great Aletsch glacier to the Belalp Hotel and on 23 January descended in triumph to the Rhône valley.

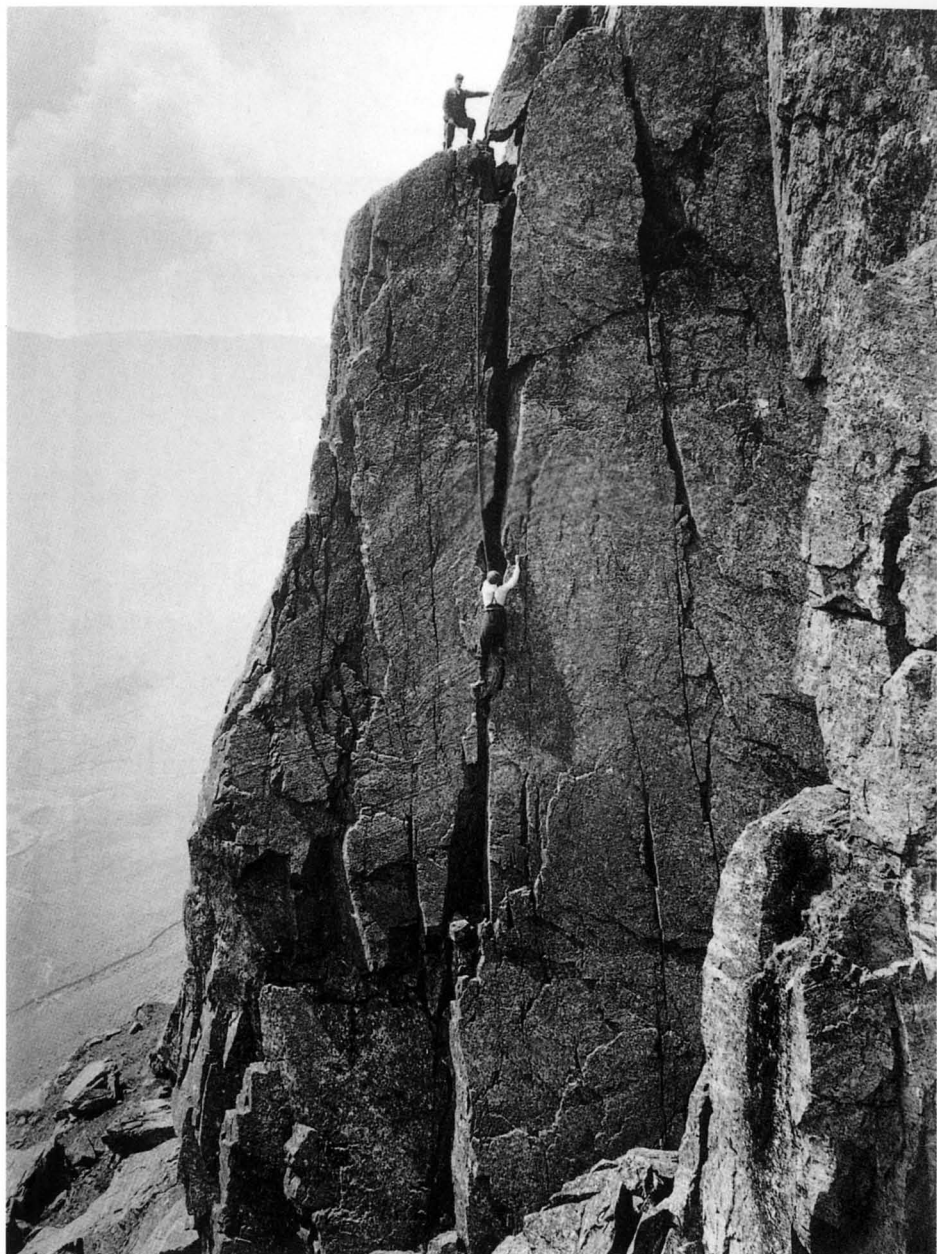
During the early part of the summer, which was memorable in Britain for the celebration on 22 June of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, the sun made a welcome appearance in many Alpine regions and it was hoped that the fine weather would continue during the climbing season. In the event, with the exception of a few days in July and August, conditions were bad and as in the previous year most expeditions were of short duration. The guide Mattias Zurbriggen later wrote³ that

... the weather was exceptionally unpropitious; who does not remember its vagaries during that particular climbing season? It rained unceasingly for weeks together, and rarely did we see a fine day.

In such circumstances it was not surprising that many parties were confined to the lower peaks. In the Maritime Alps on 9 July Louis Maubert accompanied by D Martin reached the summit of the Cime de la Maledie, the fine peak on the frontier ridge near Mont Clapier, by way of the unclimbed SE ridge. On the following day in the Graian Alps E H F Bradby and Claude Wilson with Henri Rey made the first ascent of the SE ridge of Ciarforon, one of the peaks above the Moncorvè glacier and opposite the Vittorio Emanuele II hut. In the Dauphiné on 6 July Eugène Gravelotte with Maximin and Casimir Gaspard reached the E summit of the Meije after making the first ascent of the SE ridge. Later in the month, on 24 July, Gravelotte accompanied by Maximin, Joseph and Devouassoud Gaspard completed, by way of the S face, the first ascent of the Tour Carrée de Roche Méane, now a popular climb above the Adèle Planchard hut.

In the Mont Blanc range two first ascents of note were completed during a brief spell of fine weather: the WNW ridge of Les Courtes on 17 August by Oscar Schuster and A Swaine; and the W, lower summit of Le Cardinal, the highest of the three peaks on the ridge between the Aiguille Verte and the Aiguille du Moine, on the following day by W E Davidson with Christian Klucker and Sepp Innerkofler. Another fine climb, on 26 August, was the first ascent of the Petit Clocher du Portalet, the famous granite pyramid above the Orny glacier, by the guides Maurice Crettez and Emile Revaz who reached the summit by way of the W ridge.

In the Arolla district the steep W ridge of the Dent de Tsalion, which had been attempted by several parties, was climbed on 6 August by Miss Ethel M L Wood with Jean Maître and Pierre Maurys. Another visitor at Arolla was T G Longstaff who, accompanied by his brother Cedric, Tim Ashby and W B Anderson, had arrived to enjoy his first serious climbing



86. Kern Knotts Crack, Great Gable. (*G P Abraham & Sons, Photos. Keswick*) (p236)

season. With Maître, Maurys and Joseph Georges the Longstaff party completed a number of good climbs in the region including, on 18 August, the first ascent of the NNW ridge of Mont Velan.

In the Bernese Oberland Julien Gallet and his wife, accompanied by Josef Kalbermatten and Christian Kaufmann, ascended two new routes: the W ridge of the Dreieckhorn – the ridge which rises from the Aletschjoch – on 22 July and, four days later, the NNE ridge of the Gletscherhorn. Gallet and his guides also completed other new routes including, on 27 July, the N ridge of the Mittaghorn. Another climb of note was the first ascent, on 11 August, of the NW ridge of the Wetterhorn by J P Farrar with Daniel Maquignaz and Johann Köderbacher.

To the east in the Bregaglia group two outstanding new routes were completed: the WSW ridge of Piz Badile on 14 June by Anton von Rydzewski with Klucker and Mansueto Barbaria and the N face of Piz Cengalo, following a line now known as the *Original Route*, on 29 June by Prince Scipione Borghese with Martin Schocher and Christian Schnitzler. In the Dolomites the Rev A G S Raynor and J S Phillimore continued their exploration of the region by completing a number of difficult new climbs; on 14 August accompanied by Antonio Dimai, Giuseppe Colli and Arcangelo Dibona they succeeded in forcing a route up the NE face of Monte Pelmo. Another notable achievement, on 11 August, was the first ascent of the NNE face of Cima Dodici – the Zwölferkofel – by the brothers A and E Witzenmann with G and A Siorpaes and O Dimai.

Many notable expeditions were undertaken in other ranges during the year. In Norway Geoffrey Hastings, Howard Priestman and Hermann Woolley visited the Lofoten Islands where on 5 August, after making the second recorded ascent of Store Troltdind (1045m), the party had the usual conflict with mosquitoes.

... When we got desperate, a great slaughter began, which continued at intervals through the weird stillness of the summer night, until the enemy withdrew, as usual, at 3 A.M. Next morning the tent was strewn with the corpses of the slain, but whilst we counted the enemies' losses we had a painful consciousness that there were many stains of gore which had not originally been the property of the mosquitoes.

Despite this problem and a considerable amount of bad weather several fine climbs were completed including, on 15 August, the first ascent of Store Svartsundtind (1054m). After Priestman's departure Hastings and Woolley moved to the mainland where on 30 August Hastings made the first ascent of Jiekkevarre (1833m), the highest peak on the Lyngen Peninsula.

In the Caucasus the Hungarian explorer Maurice de Déchy made his fifth visit to the region, travelling through several districts at the eastern

end of the range. Accompanied by the guides Heinrich Moser and Georg Klöss he crossed a number of passes and completed several climbs, including, on 23 July, the first recorded ascent of Machkos-Mta (3809m). Many fine photographs were taken and the expedition, which was favoured in the main with good weather, ended with an ascent of Kazbek (5047m) on 2 August.

In the far north Sir Martin Conway undertook the second of his expeditions to Spitsbergen, the largest island in the Svalbard archipelago. Conway, who arrived at Advent Point on the W coast on 9 July with the principal aim of investigating the area to the north of Ice Fjord (Isfjorden), was accompanied on this occasion by E J Garwood and two Norwegian seamen.

On 18 July, after ascending the Nordenskiöld glacier and experimenting with ski above a camp at a height of some 900m Conway obtained extensive views of the surrounding region before the illness of one of the men forced a retreat. A few days later the party moved up the W coast to establish a base at the head of King's Fjord (Kongsfjorden) and on 26 July Garwood accompanied by Edvard Nielsen, one of the Norwegians, climbed a neighbouring peak which was named Mount Nielsen (878m, now Nielsenfjellet). In the course of several difficult journeys across the surrounding glaciers a number of other peaks was ascended including the Diadem (1280m, now Diademet) which was climbed by Conway, Garwood and Nielsen on 5 August during a ski expedition of some 30km.

Before leaving the island Conway and Garwood reached the narrow crest of Hornsundtind or Mount Hedgehog (1431m) on 18 August only to find that the highest point lay some distance to the north. During the climb Garwood, whose party had attempted the same route a year earlier, was delighted on reaching the bivouac site to recover undamaged his compass which had been forgotten at the time.

The expedition was a considerable success and Conway, who surveyed a large area of the interior to the north of Ice Fjord, was able to demonstrate that so far as could be ascertained there is no true ice-sheet on the western side of the island as had been supposed.

In the autumn of the previous year E A FitzGerald had sailed for South America with the aim of making the first ascent of Aconcagua (6959m), the highest peak in the western hemisphere. A surveyor, Alan de Trafford, the geologist Stuart Vines and Philip Gosse, a naturalist had accepted invitations to join the party which was completed by Mattias Zurbriggen, four porters – Josef and Ludwig Pollinger, Josef Lochmatter and Nicola Lanti – and Fritz Weibel as cook. Although by the turn of the year a high camp had been established at 5700m attempts to climb the peak had been defeated by the effect of the altitude and intense cold and on 1 January⁴ a further attempt was abandoned in the face of a wind which had risen 'almost to hurricane force.'

After resting for a week at a lower camp in the Horcones valley FitzGerald, Zurbriggen and the porters returned to the high camp with fresh provi-



87. Mount St Elias from the Malaspina glacier. (*Vittorio Sella, 1897*)
(p235)

sions. Further attempts were made and on 12 January Zurbriggen, climbing alone, reached the ridge between the N and S summits. On 14 January FitzGerald started again with Zurbriggen, Josef Pollinger and Lanti but to his great disappointment was unable to continue after reaching a height of some 6450m. With FitzGerald's agreement Zurbriggen then continued the climb alone and completed the first ascent of the N, higher summit later in the day.

On 17 January, after FitzGerald and Zurbriggen had descended, members of a German party led by Emil Conrad and his brother Robert, who had arranged to attempt the peak from the north, passed the high camp and spoke with Pollinger and Lanti. This party bivouacked at 6300m and on the following day had reached 6500m before bad weather forced a retreat.

After descending to the valley Zurbriggen went to Mendoza for treatment to an injured shoulder, accompanied by Gosse who later recalled the occasion.

... On the evening of our arrival there, both of us, dressed in the ragged clothes we had worn for several months, repaired to the largest and smartest café in the town. Zurbriggen was immediately surrounded by a crowd of admirers who wished to drink his health and that of the expedition.

From time to time, during the evening, I noticed that the hero would retire with one or other of his admirers to a quiet corner of the room, and that on each occasion Zurbriggen would take something out of his pocket which he gave to his new-made friend, and that the latter appeared to hand something to the guide in return.

As Zurbriggen and I were proceeding back to our hotel I ventured to inquire the explanation of these mysterious transactions.

The explanation was this: During the evening the enterprising guide had sold at least a dozen 'actual summits' of Aconcagua. He disposed of several more before we left Mendoza and afterwards did a brisk trade in them in Chile.

If ever these tops of Aconcagua come to be examined by a geologist, the result may well puzzle and baffle him, for most of them were – I regret to say – gathered by the wayside.

On 13 February FitzGerald set out from the high camp with Vines and Lanti but on reaching a height of some 6100m was, again, unable to continue. Vines, who arrived at the N summit with Lanti shortly before sunset to complete the second ascent, later described⁵ how during the subsequent descent he raised his goggles and looked around.

The sun, a great ball of blood-red fire in a cloudless sky, was dipping into the waters of the Pacific. Rapidly it sank, and disappeared

from view. Yet, as if still struggling for supremacy with the fast-approaching night, an after-glow of surpassing beauty spread over land and sea in a series of magnificent changes of colour.

Two months later another notable climb was completed when, on 12 April, Vines and Zurbriggen made the first ascent of Tupungato (6550m).

On 23 June the Duke of the Abruzzi, Lt Umberto Cagni his ADC, Dr Filippo De Filippi, Francesco Gonella and Vittorio Sella landed at the mouth of the Osar stream in Yakutat Bay to attempt the ascent of Mount St Elias (5489m), the great mountain on the international boundary near the Pacific coast of Alaska. The party was completed by Erminio Botta who had travelled with Sella in the Caucasus, by the guides Lorenzo Croux, Antonio Maquignaz, Andrea Pellissier and Giuseppe Petigax and by a number of American porters.

After 'a ceaseless struggle with the most ferocious mosquitoes' the peak was approached by way of the Malaspina, Seward, Agassiz and Newton glaciers and on 30 July the climbing party established a high camp on Russell Col,⁶ the depression between Mount St Elias and Mount Newton (4209m). On the following day in perfect weather the party made the first ascent of Mount St Elias, reaching the summit by way of the NE ridge.

Suddenly Petigax and Maquignaz stop and stand aside, and the Prince is the first to set foot on the summit of St. Elias. ... It was now a quarter to twelve. In another moment the Italian flag fluttered on an ice axe, and we crowded round our chief to join with all our might in his cheer for Italy and the King.

The descent was completed without serious incident and after a total of 40 days spent on snow the party returned safely to the coast at Yakutat Bay. The undertaking – the first of the major expeditions led by the Duke of the Abruzzi – was well planned and equipped and was an outstanding achievement for the period.

In the Canadian Rockies exploration was continued throughout the summer and several new routes were recorded. In the Lake Louise region on 3 August the first ascent of Mount Lefroy (3423m) was completed by three parties: H B Dixon, C E Fay and the Swiss guide Peter Sarbach; Arthur Michael, C L Noyes and J R Vanderlip; and J N Collie, H C Parker and C S Thompson. After arriving at Abbot Pass the climbers succeeded in forcing a route up the steep W face to reach the summit ridge. Two days later, after returning to the Pass, Collie, Fay and Michael, accompanied by Sarbach, completed the first ascent of the S, higher summit of Mount Victoria (3464m) by way of the SE ridge.

In Britain further exploration was undertaken by determined parties in all the principal regions. In Wales two new routes of note – *Slanting Gully* by A P and G D Abraham at Easter and *Craig yr Aderyn* led by J M Archer



88. The Duke of the Abruzzi (centre) and other members of his party on the summit of Mount St Elias, 31 July 1897. (*Vittorio Sella, 1897*) (p235)



89. Descending the Seward glacier, August 1897. (*Vittorio Sella, 1897*) (p235)

Thomson at Whitsun – were established on Lliwedd, and in Cwm Idwal on 23 August the first route on the Idwal Slabs, the *Ordinary Route*, was followed by Dr T K Rose and C C B Moss. In the Lake District on 28 April a famous climb was completed when O G Jones, accompanied by H C Bowen, made the first unaided ascent of *Kern Knotts Crack* on Great Gable. In Scotland the NE face of Ben Nevis was reconnoitred by Hastings who on 26 April with W P Haskett Smith made the first ascent under winter conditions of *Gardyloo Gully*.

An important development on the home front was a proposal for the formation of a new climbing club. The idea, which had originated during informal gatherings at climbing centres such as the Pen y Gwryd Hotel in Wales, was discussed by a number of leading climbers at a dinner in London on 19 May and after further discussion a resolution 'That a Climbing Club should be formed' was passed on 6 December on the occasion of a second London dinner.

An event which aroused considerable interest was the publication of *Rock-Climbing in the English Lake District*, written by Jones and illustrated with photographs taken by the Abraham brothers. The book,⁷ in which Jones classified climbs into four grades of difficulty, was soon in demand and was reviewed in the *Alpine Journal* where it was described as

... a beautifully printed and splendidly illustrated work, which, being well arranged and for the most part clearly and readably written, gives an accurate and vivid picture of what rock-climbing in the Lake District is really like.

Other books published during the year included *The First Crossing of Spitsbergen*, the account by Conway of his first expedition to the island in the previous summer.

In conclusion it seems appropriate to quote the following extract from a report which appeared at the end of the year.

The time has long passed when the Alpine Club was stigmatised as "a combination of suicidal monomaniacs," when its pastime was called "a climbing of greasy poles," and when each accident in the Alps was made the text for a denunciation of the folly of mountaineering. The Club, which has now attained its fortieth year of existence, is exceeding flourishing. It has been the parent of similar institutions not only in half a dozen European countries, but even in New Zealand. It has conquered nearly all the mountains of Switzerland and Tyrol, and has extended its operations to the Caucasus, the Andes, the Himalayas, and indeed to most of the great mountain chains of the world.

Operations which have continued to this day.

REFERENCES

- 1 Honorary Librarian of the Alpine Club 1910-19.
- 2 H R H Prince Luigi Amedeo of Savoia-Aosta, Duke of the Abruzzi.
- 3 Mattias Zurbriggen, *From the Alps to the Andes*. London, T Fisher Unwin, 1899.
- 4 For further details of the expedition before this date see *AJ101*, 231-232, 1996.
- 5 E A FitzGerald, *The Highest Andes*. London, Methuen & Co, 1899.
- 6 3750m. Named after the geologist Professor Israel C Russell, the leader of expeditions to the region in 1890 and 1891, who ascended the NE ridge of Mount St Elias to a height of 4420m on 24 August 1891.
- 7 Owen Glynne Jones, *Rock-Climbing in the English Lake District*. London, Longmans, Green, & Co, 1897.