
C A RUSSELL

One Hundred Years Ago

(with extracts from the *Alpine Journal*)

Heavy snowstorms, accompanied by a cold, strong wind, have been prevailing for the last few days. At the winter resorts skating has been arrested by the snow. The St Bernard Pass lies under a yard and a half of snow.

In the Grisons uplands avalanches have devastated the country. Two Alpine villages in the same district have been cut off by the masses of snow.

The severe snowfalls experienced in many Alpine regions during the early months of 1904 did not deter Gustav Hasler who undertook two expeditions of note in the Bernese Alps. Accompanied by Christian Jossi junior Hasler left Mürren on 5 January and on the following day made the first winter ascent of the Gspaltenhorn. Later in the month, with Fritz and Adolf Amatter, Hasler completed the first ski ascent¹ of the Aletschhorn.

A notable expedition in the history of ski mountaineering was undertaken by the German climber Hugo Mylius who on 25 February, accompanied by the guides Alexander Tännler, Kaspar Maurer and Heinrich Zurflüh, made the first ski ascent of Mont Blanc. After passing a very cold night at the Grands Mulets hut the party continued the ascent in difficult snow conditions.

Cabane Vallot was reached at one p.m. and there the skis were left off. Up to this point the ascent was made on skis, but the snow being very soft, the skis sank deeply into it, which was extremely fatiguing.

From this point the real difficulties began. Steps had to be cut in the ice, the air was very rarified and a strong cold wind was blowing. The temperature was 40 degrees below zero Fahrenheit.

The top was reached only at five p.m., very late for this time of year. The sun was setting, and the view magnificent – a sea of clouds, with the highest mountain peaks emerging from it like islands in the sea. The cold was too intense for them to remain long to enjoy the view; so, after leaving his card at the Observatory Hut,² Mr Mylius left the top at 5.15 p.m. and was at the Cabane Vallot by 6.30 p.m. No time was lost in getting on the skis, but the Grands Mulets was not reached until 8.30 p.m., as, owing to the darkness and danger of crevasses, it was necessary to travel carefully and slowly.

The next morning the descent to Chamonix on skis was done in two hours, a distance which in the ascent had taken between nine and ten hours.

In Central Switzerland at Easter a successful traverse on ski was completed by Albert Weber and a companion. Starting at the Susten Pass they crossed the Steinlimi and the Triftlimi to reach the Rhône glacier and the Furka Pass before continuing to Andermatt.

After a very wet spring conditions improved and the weather was fine in most regions for much of the climbing season.

Never before have mountaineers enjoyed such perfect weather conditions. It has been possible to plan a difficult ascent a week ahead, with full confidence that nothing is to be feared from that most treacherous and dangerous enemy, the weather; and from many points come records of climbs which have never been attempted before.

In the Maritime Alps on 10 June a successful expedition was completed by Victor de Cessole and the guide Jean Plent who established the first route on the south-west face of the Cime de la Maledie, the imposing peak on the frontier ridge near Mont Clapier.

In the Mont Blanc range on 31 May Emile Fontaine with Joseph Ravel³ and Edouard Charlet made the first ascent of the Dent du Crocodile. As in the previous year Fontaine and Ravel, accompanied by Léon Tournier completed a number of new routes, making the first ascent, on 23 June, of the west-south-west ridge of Mont Dolent and on the following day reaching the summit of the unclimbed Pointe du Domino above the Col du Dolent. Continuing his exploration in the region with Tournier and Jean Ravel Fontaine then completed the first ascent of two other peaks: the Aiguille Chenavier on the south-east ridge of Les Courtes on 11 July; and, on 1 August, the Aiguille du Jardin on the east, Jardin ridge of the Aiguille Verte.

Several unclimbed peaks in the range were ascended by other parties taking advantage of the fine weather: Pointe Young on the west ridge of the Grandes Jorasses on 18 June by V J E Ryan with Franz and Josef Lochmatter; the Aiguille de la République on the north-east ridge of the Aiguille des Grands Charmoz, climbed with the aid of ropes on 29 July by H E Beaujard with Joseph and Louis Simond and Alfred Tournier; and the Aiguille Savoie, on the ridge between the Aiguille de Talèfre and the Aiguille de Triolet, by Albert Brun accompanied by Jean Ravel and Léon Tournier. Two notable expeditions were undertaken by strong parties climbing without guides: on 29 July E H F Bradby, J H Wicks and Claude Wilson made the ninth, and second guideless ascent of the Brenva ridge route on Mont Blanc; and on 17 August Ludwig Distel and Hans Pfann reached the west peak of Les Droites and continued to the east peak, completing the first traverse of the west, summit ridge.

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO



101. Aiguille de la République. (*André Roch*)



102. Finsteraarhorn with (*centre*) the north-east face. (*W F Donkin*)



103. Olstind (*right*), Moskenesøy, Lofoten Islands. (*H P Spilsbury*)

In the Bernese Alps on 2 July the guideless party of Paul Montandon, Albert Weber and Robert von Wyss made the first ascent of the north, highest summit of the Klein Lauteraarhorn. On 20 June Gustav Hasler and Christian Jossi senior opened a new route on the Mönch, reaching the summit by way of the north-east face. On 16 July Hasler, accompanied on this occasion by Fritz Amatter, completed another notable expedition: the first ascent of the north-east face of the Finsteraarhorn. After climbing the prominent rib in the centre of the face and finding two ropes left by a previous party⁴ Hasler and his companion followed a difficult traverse line to pass a grey rock tower and reach the summit. The ascent of this remote and dangerous face was an outstanding achievement for the period.

In the Bernina Alps on 7 July Mrs Roberts Thomson with Christian Klucker and Christian Zippert made the first ascent of the north face of Piz Tschierva, following a direct line in the centre of the face to the summit. Later in the month, on 25 July, V von Leyden accompanied by Martin Schocher and Anton Rauch forced a similar route up the north face of Crast' Agüzza.

In the Eastern Alps, where many fine rock routes were established by guideless parties, a notable expedition was completed on 31 July by Karl Greenitz and Roderich Kaltenbrunner who made the first ascent of the south-east face of the Schartenspitze, a peak in the Dachstein group.

On 9 July ceremonies were held to mark the completion of the Albula Railway, the extension of the Rhaetian Railway from Thusis to the Engadine.

The same glorious weather that greeted the celebration at Samedan this time last year, when the Albula line was opened as far as Celerina, attended the function on Saturday last that signalled the completion of the final section to St Moritz.

Arrived at Samedan a flag-and-garland bedecked engine took the place of that which had brought the train so far. At St Moritz the station was gaily decorated with flags and flowers, and as the train steamed slowly and with becoming dignity into view cheers of greeting were raised to the accompaniment of the 'Engadine' march, played lustily by the village band.

During the year several expeditions of note were undertaken in other mountain regions. In Norway J N Collie continued his exploration in the Lofoten Islands, accompanied on this occasion by E C C Baly, Joseph Collier, W C, W E and A M Slingsby and Hermann Woolley. After climbing Rulten (1062m) and other peaks on the island of Austvågøy Collie and his companions made the first ascent of Olstind (680m), a conspicuous peak on the island of Moskenesøy.

On the arrival of the party at Reine, this fine peak had been pointed out by Herr Harald Sverdrup, who said that on several occasions its summit



104. Sir Leslie Stephen, former president of the AC and editor of the Alpine Journal, who died 100 years ago (born 1832). Seen here with his wife, Julia Stephen, at Grindelwald.

had been proved to be inaccessible. This strong recommendation naturally made the party wish to try the ascent.

On 17 August the whole party with the exception of Collier reached the summit of Olstind after several hours of difficult climbing.

Before leaving the region the party visited the Tysfjord district on the mainland to investigate the approaches to Stedtind (1381m), the famous rock pyramid which at that time was still unclimbed. W E Slingsby, accompanied by Collie and A M Slingsby, reached and climbed the first difficult step on the south-east ridge in the face of a bitter wind before being forced to retreat.

On 2 September T S Muir and J H Wigner completed a traverse of the Vatnajökull, the extensive ice field in the south-east region of Iceland. Starting on 12 August from a point at the north-east edge of the glacier they followed a line to the south-west, a distance of some 130km across the ice.

At the end of July Dr Andreas Fischer, accompanied by Christian Jossi junior, arrived in the Caucasus where he joined forces with the Russian climber Alexander von Meck and Jani Bezurtanoff, a local guide, to visit the western end of the range. During the following month the party explored a large area and climbed several peaks including Belalakaya (3852m), ascended by Fischer and Jossi on 11 August. Two weeks later Fischer and Jossi were able to complete another notable expedition. Starting at the Buruntash Pass they climbed the steep northern slopes of Elbruz during a night of intense cold before reaching the west, higher summit (5633m) early on 26 August and descending the Azau glacier on the southern side of the peak. The successful completion of this exposed route – the first direct traverse of the peak from north to south – in two days without shelter was a remarkable achievement.

Before leaving the Caucasus Fischer travelled along the chain to explore the Kistinka group, to the east of the Terek river. Accompanied by Bezurtanoff and a porter he completed a number of climbs including, on 4 September, the first recorded ascent of Kuru-Tau (4071m).

In the Punjab Himalaya in August Dr Arthur Neve and the Rev C E Barton returned to the Suru district to continue their exploration of the approaches to the Nun Kun group. On this occasion Neve and two porters climbed to a height of some 5850m on Peak D41 (5945m), one of the peaks on the west ridge of Nun (7135m).

In Bolivia Henry Hoek continued⁵ his exploration as a member of a geological expedition. Travelling with G Steinmann and Baron von Bistram Hoek reached the Cordillera de Quimsa Cruz where on 12 January he climbed Cerro Chancapiña (5375m), a rock pyramid at the northern end of the range. Two months later, on 3 March, Hoek made the first recorded ascent of Cerro Tacora (5988m), a volcanic peak in northern Chile near the border with Peru.

Another visitor to this region was the American Miss Annie Smith Peck who arrived in La Paz at the end of July. On 15 August, accompanied by an Austrian named Viktor Sintich and several porters, she reached a height of some 5800m on Illampu (6362m), the north peak of the Sorata group. Miss Peck then travelled to Peru where with a number of local men she made two determined but unsuccessful attempts to climb the north peak (6655m) of Huascarán.

In the Canadian Rockies several notable expeditions were completed by Miss Gertrude Benham who arrived at the beginning of the climbing season. With Christian Kaufmann she made the first ascent of two of the Ten Peaks near Moraine Lake: Mount Fay (3234m) on 20 July and Mount Allen (3310m) two days later. On 4 August, accompanied by Christian and Hans Kaufmann, Miss Benham became the first lady to reach the summit of Mount Assiniboine (3618m). Other peaks ascended for the first time included Mount Ball (3311m), climbed on 5 June by J W D Patterson and the two Kaufmann brothers by way of the north-west ridge.

Early in the summer Edward Whymper returned to the Canadian Rockies to undertake his third expedition on behalf of the Canadian Pacific Railway Company. During his stay Whymper carried out further exploration in the region and took a large number of photographs.

Later in the season Miss Benham visited the Selkirk range where she completed further successful expeditions. Accompanied by Eduard Feuz senior she traversed Fleming Peak (3164m) and Grant Peak (3117m) in the Hermit group, making the first ascent of each peak, and climbed several other mountains including Mount Sir Donald (3297m).

In Britain new climbs were completed in all the principal regions. In Wales in September J M Archer Thomson and Oscar Eckenstein made the first ascent of *Route II* on the east buttress of Lliwedd. In the Lake District in August G F and A J Woodhouse explored Dow Crag where they completed a number of new routes including the *Ordinary Route* on 'C' Buttress. In Scotland on 4 August J W Burns, W A Morrison, W C Newbigging and A E Robertson opened the *South-west Ridge* route on the Douglas Boulder, below the Tower Ridge of Ben Nevis.

Two months later it was reported that 'the only high-level observatory in the United Kingdom has been allowed to expire for want of funds'. The Observatory on the summit of Ben Nevis, where meteorological reports had been prepared from regular hourly readings, was closed on 1 October. Much valuable research was conducted at the Observatory, where climbers and other visitors had received welcome hospitality for many years.⁶

An event which aroused considerable interest was the publication of *Ski-Running*,⁷ a comprehensive manual illustrated with numerous photographs and diagrams. The work was edited by E C Richardson, one of the authors, who was confident that 'by the publication of this the first English book



105. The Ben Nevis Observatory (1883-1904)

about ski, at least something has been done towards bringing the noblest of all winter sports to the attention of our fellow countrymen.⁷

On 22 February the death occurred of Sir Leslie Stephen, the distinguished critic and writer and the author of *The Playground of Europe*,⁸ a classic work in mountain literature. Stephen, a former President of the Alpine Club, took part in many notable expeditions including the first ascent of the Schreckhorn.⁹

In recollection of Stephen, one of the outstanding climbers of his day, this account is concluded with an extract from the notice by James Bryce which appeared in the *Alpine Journal*.

Since John Ball left us in 1889 Leslie Stephen had been the recognised head of the Alpine confraternity in England. He owed this honour not only to his seniority – for he was one of the oldest members of the Club – but still more to his achievements as a mountaineer, to his literary fame, and to the dignity and elevation of his character, which won for him the respect and affection of all our members.

REFERENCES

- 1 A ski ascent is defined by Sir Arnold Lunn as 'an expedition on which ski were used until the foot of the final rock or ice ridges'.
- 2 The Observatory which then stood on the summit of Mont Blanc had been completed in September 1893. For further details see *AJ* 98, 225-226, 1993.
- 3 The famous guide Ravelin, *le Rouge*.
- 4 On 31 July 1902 Miss Gertrude Bell with Heinrich and Ulrich Führer had reached a point high on the face before being forced to retreat in bad weather.
- 5 See also *AJ* 108, 220, 2003.
- 6 The Observatory had been formally opened on 17 October 1883.
- 7 D M M Crichton Somerville, W R Rickmers and E C Richardson, *Ski-Running*. London, Horace Cox, 1904.
- 8 Leslie Stephen, *The Playground of Europe*. London, Longmans, Green, and Co, 1871.
- 9 With the guides Christian and Peter Michel and Christian Kaufmann on 14 August 1861.