

C A RUSSELL

One Hundred Years Ago

As the First World War continued into another year the opportunities for mountaineering in the Alps in 1917 were again severely restricted.

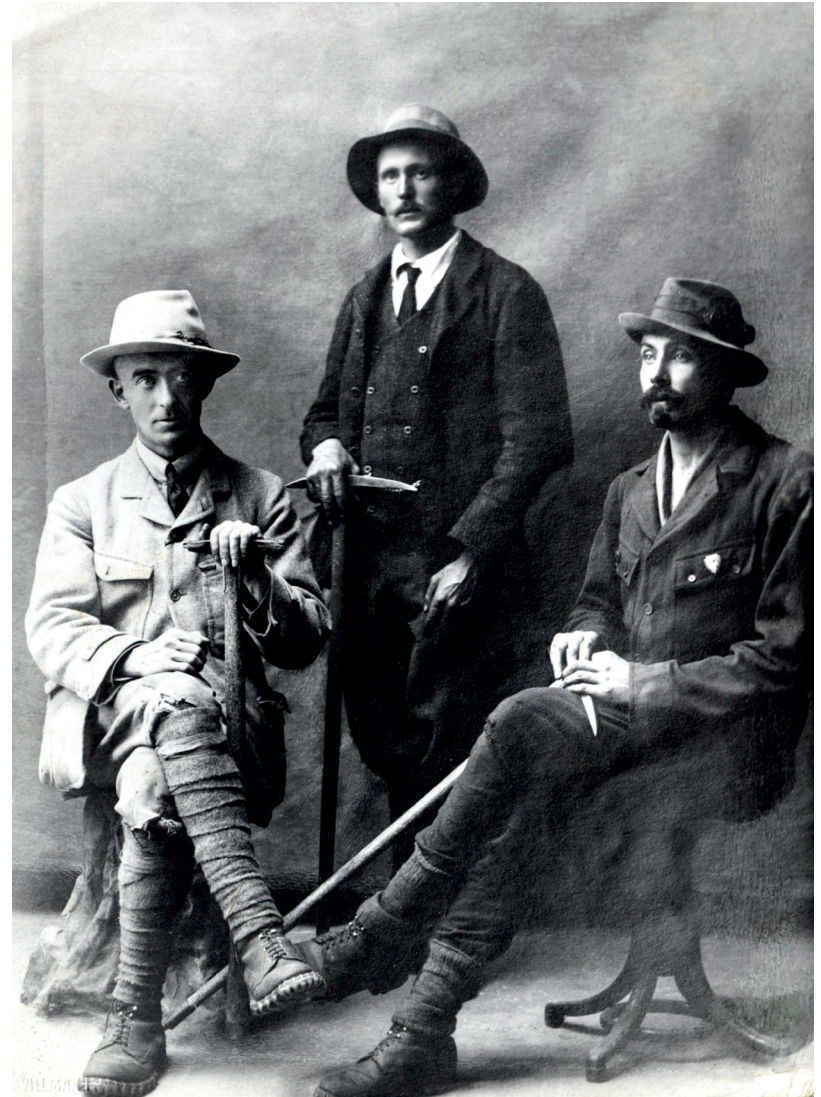
Although few climbers were active in the principal regions during the early months of the year several expeditions of note were undertaken. In the Bernese Alps in February Hans Morgenthaler and Bernhard Lauterburg made the first ski ascents of the Schinhorn, Nesthorn and Lötschentaler Breithorn, completing their tour with a winter ascent of the Aletschhorn. Other peaks ascended for the first time with the aid of ski included the Aiguille du Midi and the Tour Ronde, both climbed by Aldo Bonacossa and his companions. Several months later in the Pennine Alps in June Arnold Lunn, accompanied by Josef Knubel, completed the first ski ascent of the Dom, making 'the first ski track up the highest snowslope in Switzerland.'

After a cold and unsettled period during the spring and early summer favourable conditions prevailed for much of the climbing season. In July Lauterburg returned to the Bernese Alps accompanied on this occasion by Fritz Egger to open a serious new route on the Agassizhorn. Starting from the Finsteraarjoch they climbed directly to the summit by way of the steep north-east rib – a remarkable achievement for the period.

At Chamonix J Monroe Thorington, serving with the American Ambulance Corps, was able to arrange a guided ascent of Mont Blanc during a brief leave of absence. The Col du Dôme and the summit were reached by way of the Grands Mulets, where the party enjoyed four litres of wine which had survived a traverse through the icefall of the Bossons glacier.

An exceptionally fine spell in September enabled Henry Montagnier, an American member of the Alpine Club resident in Switzerland, to undertake an enjoyable and rewarding ascent of Monte Rosa. Accompanied by the guides Siegfried Burgener and Julius Zumtaugwald he climbed the Nordend before descending to the Silbersattel and reaching the summit ridge above the Grenzsattel. The party then traversed the ridge to the Dufourspitze where they remained for nearly an hour 'in our shirtsleeves – a lighted match hardly flickered.'

In August ceremonies were held to mark the inauguration of the Solvay hut which had been erected two years earlier at a height of some 4000m on the north-east, Hörnli ridge of the Matterhorn. The inauguration had been delayed on account of bad weather and also in the hope that Ernest Solvay, the Belgian industrialist who had donated the funds for construction, would be able to attend. For the occasion three guided parties climbed to the hut and continued to the summit before descending to join a banquet at the Mont Cervin hotel in Zermatt. As M Solvay was unable to travel



Geoffrey Winthrop Young (right) with H O Jones and Josef Knubel in 1911.

(Alpine Club Photo Library)

from German-occupied Belgium the Swiss Alpine Club forwarded a letter of thanks for his generous contribution.

During the year some climbing was reported in other mountain regions not directly affected by the conflict. In South Africa members of the Mountain Club continued their exploration of Table Mountain (1087m). In April W T Cobern and C W Campbell added to their list of successful ascents with *Cobblestone Face* and *Sheerness Face*, two very severe routes for the period.

To the east in the Drakensberg range D W Bassett-Smith and R G Kingdon made the first recorded ascent of Cathedral Peak (3004m).

In the Southern Alps of New Zealand Samuel Turner, who had already completed the traverse of all three peaks of Mount Cook (3724m), was determined to make a solo ascent of the mountain. Although his attempts to reach the High Peak were defeated by bad weather he succeeded on his own in making the first ascents of the two Anzac peaks (2528m and 2513m) above the Grand Plateau.

In the Canadian Rockies V A Fynn completed a number of notable expeditions in the Lake Louise district. In August, climbing alone, he made the first ascent of the north ridge of Mount Aberdeen (3151m) and with a companion the first complete traverse of Mount Whyte (2983m). After climbing Mounts Lefroy (3423m) and Victoria (3464m) from Abbot Pass with the guide Rudolph Aemmer in single long day Fynn rounded off a successful campaign by climbing Mount Louis (2682m), the imposing rock tower near Banff, with Edward Feuz junior.

In January considerable interest was aroused by the publication in the *Geographical Journal* of a paper by Alexander Kellas entitled 'A Consideration of the Possibility of Ascending the Loftier Himalaya'. The paper was reviewed in the *Alpine Journal* where it was considered to be 'a most valuable contribution to our knowledge of the effects of high altitudes on the human body.' Another work of great interest was *Two Summers in the Ice-Wilds of Eastern Karakoram*, the account by Dr William Hunter Workman and his wife Fanny Bullock Workman of their final two expeditions culminating in the exploration of the Siachen glacier and an ascent to Indira Col (5776m).

During the year Captain Farrar, who had succeeded Lord Justice Pickford as president of the Alpine Club, paid tribute to members killed or wounded on active service including Geoffrey Winthrop Young, one of the outstanding mountaineers of the day. While in command of an ambulance unit on the Italian front Young was severely wounded in his left leg which was subsequently amputated above the knee. This account is concluded with the final verse of Young's famous poem *I have not lost the magic of long days* – a poignant reminder of the tragedy of war and an indomitable spirit in the face of adversity.

*What if I live no more those kingly days?
 their night sleeps with me still.
 I dream my feet upon the starry ways;
 my heart rests in the hill.
 I may not grudge the little left undone;
 I hold the heights, I keep the dreams I won.*