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THE FIRST ASCENT OF ADAI CHOCH.

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PART III.*

WE spent one more night in our camp at the foot of the Ceja Glacier, and next morning set off on our return to the valley of the Ardon. The ascent of Adai Choch had been completed. Our next object was to explore the northern outskirts of the group, which had been left unvisited by our predecessors. I was anxious to complete, by adding some missing links, the routes along the northern side of the Caucasian chain, parts of which had been traversed by Freshfield in 1868, and Grove in 1874.

The first of these links lay between the Ardon and Uruch valleys. After due consultation of the Russian Staff map (very trustworthy on matters which do not involve heights above the snow-level), I determined to follow a track ascending the side-glen of the Sadon, and thence crossing a ridge to Kamunta in the Congut Valley, the stream of which forms one of the headwaters of the Uruch. From this point there was some difficulty in determining beforehand the best direction to follow among the intervening ridges and gorges in order to reach Styr-Digor, the highest group of hamlets in the Uruch Valley. It was almost impossible to explain this latter part of our route to the inhabitants, or to persuade them to adopt it, for from Kamunta a well-known path descends the Congut to its junction with the Uruch, near Donifars, and then mounts beside the latter river to Styr-Digor. Naturally, this route did not attract us, as it

* See pp. 209 and 314 for previous papers. The heights given are the results of my own observations with Goldschmidt's aneroid, and (those observed in 1885) with an aneroid.

led far from the heights and glaciers of the central chain, and held out but small promise of fine scenery.

About noon on a Sunday we reached the mines of Sadon, which lie in a glen which joins the Ardon beyond Nuschal. It was a church festival; our reception was extremely hospitable, and it was clear all thought of further progress must be given up for the day. We enjoyed, however, a capital opportunity of studying the various types in the crowd of mountain dwellers, and the characteristic Ossete dances which we witnessed here for the first time.

We left Sadon on the morning of July 28, at eight o'clock, after a somewhat disturbed and short night. The soldier who accompanied us had to remain behind to wait for the bread, which was not ready. The day was dull; and under a grey sky our road, which led in a westerly direction through a narrow, stony glen, was very monotonous. In one hour and a half we passed the gorge of the Sgid, the stream from which issues in a clear cascade. Our direction now became more northerly. Several houses with towers, probably to guard the passage, stood on the neighbouring rocky heights. As the ground rose we gained a view backwards of the jagged crest behind which lies the Ceja Valley, and farther away towards the south of the finely-shaped snowy group which rises on the right of the Ardon Valley. After a steep ascent we entered a pastoral upland glen. Above the sides of the valley to our right shot up peaks of dolomitic appearance, which belonged to the northern limestone ridge which runs parallel to the main chain. At noon we were on the pass. It is a scarcely perceptible crest, connecting the group of Kion Choch with a northern spur of the lateral chain, which, detaching itself from the central mass of Adai Choch, forms one of the walls of the gorge of the Ceja. The granites of the central chain are here separated from the jurassic chalks of Kion Choch by a broad band of slates.

The height of the pass is only 5,940 feet. The view was limited, and clouds covered even the snowy ranges of the Ceja Valley, which lay close before us. We left at 1 P.M. Our track followed a long, projecting spur, without descending into the valley, the depths of which were covered with green meadows, and watered by rushing streams. On our left opened glacier-filled recesses leading up to the wall-like chain, the north-western boundary of the Ceja Valley, which has previously been mentioned. The stone huts of Kamunta rising in tiers against the sides of a hillock, in which the

spur we were following terminated, soon came into view. On the opposite hillside other groups of houses were perched. The surrounding slopes were cut up by the deep channels of torrents. Green pastures without a tree, and hardly broken by culture, spread in every direction. The landscape had a peculiar and strange character, and bore little resemblance to our Alpine highlands. After several halts by the way for the purpose of attempting to get such photographs as the clouds would allow, we reached Kamunta at 3.30 P.M. The village lies at 5,340 feet.

We passed the night here, and early next morning were preparing for our start. A long chain lay before our eyes, divided into two sections by a finely shaped peak, from which spurs branched out. On its east the gorge of the Dargon-kom-don, on its west, that of the Skaty-kom-don lead up to the ice-fields of Adai Choch. A snowy gap lay at the head of the former on the eastern flank of the summit last mentioned. Burgener was positive that this would form a pass to the left-hand tributary of the Ceja Glacier. On the farther side we had seen no difficulty in reaching this saddle, and on this side also it now appeared to be fairly easy of access. Far at the back of the Skaty-kom rose steep, ice-clad cliffs, over which Adai Choch itself was visible.*

As usual in the Caucasus, it was impossible to make an early start. I will not again describe the inevitable struggle, the arrangement of the packhorses, and the collecting of the horsemen. Enough to say it was 9.30 A.M. before we were off. In order to descend from the village into the lower valley, we had to climb the barrier which separated us from the Skaty-kom glen. The Caucasian sun shone hotly on the steep slopes which lay fully exposed to its rays, and made the climb (which we had to make on foot) sufficiently exhausting. When after two hours we had crested the barrier, a fine view of the narrow, treeless glen opened before us. The background of the eastern branch was alone visible. This is filled by a broad, little crevassed glacier, crowned by a finely-shaped snow peak. The other branch more to the S.W. was hidden from us by a projecting ridge.

Having crossed the stream, not without some difficulty,

* To the head of the Skaty-kom, a very fine pass, only to be attempted from the southern side, may be forced from Glola in the Rion Valley. It may also be possible to reach the Skaty-kom from the eastern *névé* of the Karagam Glacier.—D.W.F.

we made a long halt, for although our start from Kamunta had been so late, we had had nothing to eat since 6 A.M. Then following a westerly direction through a dull ravine we climbed stony grass slopes. In three hours (at 4.30 P.M.) we reached the pass, about 7,154 feet. After a short halt we descended by a broken path, still covered in places by winter snow. In front, apparently at an enormous height, glaciers were visible, pouring their long streams down towards the Uruch, which shone a silver band in the distance.

The mountain sides began to assume a less barren character, and the meadows were bright with alpine flowers. Rye fields were visible on the sunny side of the valley even above the upper limit of the woods; a clear stream, broken into many cascades, fell over steep cliffs. Lower down wooded spurs stretched out towards the depths of the valley, and glaciers appeared at the head of all the ravines. After a steep descent the bottom of the valley and the stream came into view. At 7 P.M., close to the village of Gular, which spreads itself out on a meadow terrace, we pitched our tent. Zenaga was in sight lower in the valley.

The landscape which lay before us in the clear light of morning, showed us, by the richness of its composition and the magnificence of its details, that we were again close to the central Caucasian chain. For the last two days our wanderings had been through glens hemmed in by comparatively insignificant spurs, and the scenery had been for the most part monotonous and wanting in remarkable features. We had now reached the neighbourhood of the Karagam Glacier, whose mighty flood, issuing from among a noble array of peaks, and stretching far down into the valley, came to an end at our feet among grassy hillocks and dark pine forests.

Up its gigantic ice-fall, and over its wide-spreading snow-fields, now eighteen years ago, Freshfield, Moore, and Tucker, led by Francois Dévouassoud, forced their way to the Rion over the central chain. On the farther side of a projecting hill-side,* along whose base the Karagam torrent hurries on its way to join the Uruch, the valley of the latter river was visible; there we fell in with the high level route of our

* The Karagam glacier does not flow from a gigantic névé surrounding immediately Adai Choch. The snowfields of the group are divided by its northern spurs, and the ridge west of the Skaty-kom Valley forms the boundary of the basin of the Karagam.

predecessors which leads along the northern flank of the chain from Styr Digor to the valleys of the Tcherek, Urban, Tchegem and Baksan, and the village of Urusbieh.

The ascent of Adai Choch had aroused my interest in the group, and when in 1885 I found myself able to pay a second visit to the Caucasus, I made the valley of the Ardon my first object. Unfortunately, owing to the lateness of the date at which my plans became fixed, I was unaccompanied by any mountaineers.

In the last days of July I found myself again on the Ceja Glacier. I took a number of measurements and observations of the ice, and set up signals, the distances of which from the end of the glacier were accurately fixed, with the object of obtaining materials for a determination of the advance or retreat of the ice. I had also taken the angles of the peaks at the head of the Ceja basin, and was now anxious to obtain corresponding views and observations of the eastern and southern slopes of the Adai Choch group, together with photographic illustrations of its southern precipices.

I took the road to the Mamisson Pass. Above St. Nicolai (3,930 feet), the Ardon Valley narrows, and the noble Kassara gorge, in which the Ardon breaks through the granite of the central chain, commences. This defile far exceeds in picturesque beauty and variety the much-praised scenery of the Dariel. The road ascends through it to the wide basin of Sarmag, and then turns up the long thickly-inhabited pastoral valley of the Mamisson, the western source of the Ardon. The Mamisson Pass itself, on the watershed of the Caucasus, attains a height of 9,390 (Russian Staff Map, or 9,327 feet according to my own observations). It is a grassy ridge, running nearly north and south at right angles to the general direction of the chain. Wind and weather drove us quickly from the crest. We could see nothing even of our immediate surroundings. It was not until we had descended to the highest reach of the valley on the Mingrelian side and looked down upon the lower levels, that there burst on us wanderers from the sterner north the beauty of luxuriant forest, of new kinds of foliage which soon met us by the roadside, the charm of the south, all that is associated with the name of the Rion.

On a terrace which falls steeply towards the Tchamtchachi Tchai, which, rising from the glaciers of Adai Choch, form the eastern source of the Rion, we pitched our tent close to the

hamlet of Gurschevi (6,332 feet). Here Freshfield and his companions spent a day or two in 1868. Some of the older inhabitants remembered the visitors, who carried with them a movable house like ours, and bore in their hands similar weapons of offence—tent and ice-axes.

Next morning we started early to climb the hill behind the village. We at first mounted the glen of the Tchamzela, which is closed at its head by a small glacier, and then turned up the hillsides on our left. Soon in the early and indistinct light of dawn, the outlines of peaks of the main chain began to show over the nearer ridges; up the pathless slopes I hurried, dreading lest the sun should raise the mists and permit 'basest clouds' to conceal the 'mountain tops' which were now flattered by his 'sovereign eye.'

The rising of morning mists is as common and vexatious in the Caucasus as on the Italian side of the Alps. It is a necessary evil wherever the sea or low-lying plains extend to within a short distance of a great chain without the intervention of lofty lower ridges. When I gained a height which commanded a clear view over all the neighbouring crests, I was overcome by surprise and admiration. There rose before my eyes, from the sources of the Ingur and the Zenes-Squali, through Tau Burdschula to Adai Choch, an array of giants, the mighty peaks of the Caucasus. Tau Tetunuld, with the ridges stretching northwards from it towards Dychtau and Koschtantau, was in sight, and I fancied I could recognise the twin peaks of Uschba and the massive form of the distant Dongussorun. What fixed my attention most, however, was the neighbouring group over which Adai Choch reigned supreme, a magnificent wall of cliffs and icefalls crowned by a number of the sharpest pinnacles. Mr. Freshfield, who recognised the admirable position of this ridge and climbed up to it, has faithfully represented in the sketch issued with my last paper this part of the panorama. I have also retained the graphic title which he gave to the drawing, 'From the white Rhododendron Hill above Gurschevi.' The point I reached was 8,080 feet, or about 1,800 feet above the village of Gurschevi.

The relations of the principal peaks were of special interest to me. The noble pyramid of Adai Choch dominated the group. Next to it on the west came the double peak of Freshfield. It is a massive mountain, and besides three principal crests has several minor summits. It is connected with Adai Choch by a long ridge which is here seen much fore-shortened. From lower down the Rion Valley the gap

between the two peaks shows as a formidable but tempting pass. It would lead to the Skaty-kom Valley. The relative heights and positions of this peak and Adai Choch became clearer on the following day, when I climbed a height to the S.E. of the Mamisson Pass, and 500 feet higher (9,850 feet). The panorama was the same as from the Rhododendron Hill behind Gurschevi, only wider, the lower spurs were more sunk, and the eye plunged more directly into the ravines; and if the view thus lost something in picturesque detail it gained in clearness and completeness. Here the double peak is seen lying back to the N. and loses considerably in apparent height, leaving to Adai Choch the uncontested supremacy of the group.

From both points of view I took photographs and the bearings of the peaks. There could be no doubt of the identity of Adai Choch with the sharp pyramid. The peak rises in the south-western corner of the névé of the Ceja Glacier and falls abruptly to the south. To the east the main chain declines to a considerably lower summit, and, a little farther E., to the point where the shale or slate ridge, which is for a short space the watershed of the Caucasus, abuts against the granite. The latter bends somewhat to the N. and forms the southern boundary of the Ceja Valley dividing it from that of the Mamisson.

West of Adai Choch on the main chain stands Freshfield's double peak. Its northern slopes, however, do not fall into the basin of the Ceja Glacier. In the hollows on the southern face of this peak and Adai Choch lie many secondary glaciers separated from one another by the spurs of Adai Choch. Only one, that descending from the gap between the two peaks into the glen that opens near Glola, attains any considerable dimensions.

For the loftiest summit of the group, Adai Choch itself, we have adopted the name given by the Russian staff. To the Double Peak it is impossible as yet to give a name. It may be called after the glacier, the stream, or the valley which it dominates. The nomenclature of Caucasian peaks is still in its infancy and full of confusions, and the attainment of any accurate information from the natives is so difficult that names have in many cases to be selected without any certainty of their having the strongest claim on the ground of local use. Great peaks have frequently as many names as they have sides. It is rare that the same name is used on all sides. Thus the name of Adai Choch is itself unknown on its northern flank in the Ceja Valley, though for this there is

the excellent reason that owing to its position the summit is hardly visible to the inhabitants. Below the last ascent on the Ardon side to the Mamisson Pass a cirque of rocky peaks opens, with secondary glaciers streaming from their S.E. flanks. This comparatively unimportant crest, the continuation of the watershed E. of Adai Choch and the separating range between the Ardon and Ceja Valleys, was called by my Ossetes Adai Choch. These men could give no distinctive name for the great peak climbed by me and triangulated by the Russian staff when I pointed it out to them from the Rhododendron Hill and the heights above the Mamisson Pass. Clearly the Russian engineers got the only name they could for the whole snowy crest and proceeded to apply it to the highest point they measured, a legitimate and sensible process which has been repeated very frequently in the growth of mountain nomenclature.

Half an hour only from the terminal moraine of the glacier of Adai Choch, which lies nearest to the pass, and at the foot of the last southern zigzags, stands a stone house—a small barrack constructed many years ago for the engineers employed in making the still unfinished car-road. One of these officers assured Mr. Freshfield he had spent three months on a glacier, so much impressed were they by the unusual proximity in which they found themselves to that—to Russian eyes—unusual phenomenon. It is now used as a hospice, and the people living in it called the glacier and peak above it Chamchachi. Radde calls the mountain Tuilsas Mta, perhaps following the name given to the stream in the Russian staff map. Abich calls the glacier the Tschamtschaki Dzweri. On the other hand the people of Gurschevi call the mountain group Adai Choch.

Few groups of the Central Caucasus lie so conveniently for explorers as this. The Mamisson road, a carriage road as far as St. Nicolai at the mouth of the Ceja Valley, winds round two sides of it. The upper portion is a good horsepath, which slight repairs would make passable for wheels, thus opening for travellers a second road into Transcaucasia, leading through gorge and glacier scenery of the highest order. St. Nicolai is an excellent headquarters for excursions among the peaks of the Ceja Valley. On both sides of the Mamisson Pass, at no great distance from the top, are solid stone refuges—here called Kasarma. That on the Ardon side has fallen into disrepair, and we were unable to lodge in it. It is, however, likely to be restored before long, or a new one built. It stands at a height of 7,450 feet.

The position of the refuge on the Rion side has been already described; it stands at 8,290 feet. From here a difficult pass might be forced to the Ceja Glacier. Starting from St. Nicolai, provisions might be sent up to the Ceja Glacier while the mountaineers of the party went round to the Mamisson to attempt the pass from the southern side. Another interesting and useful pass would be that from the Ceja Glacier to Kamunta, previously pointed out. In the case of travellers making for the Úruch and the western flanks of group it would spare them the tedious circuit by Sadon and the dull pass to Kamunta. The route from Kamunta to Zenaga is more interesting. Hence also the head of the Skaty-kom Valley might be made an object for explorations. The heights above Gurschevi and the Mamisson are unusually happily placed for views.

Perhaps the time is not so far distant when tourists driving over this noble pass in their carriages* will make short excursions to enjoy panoramas the details of which will be set out in maps and plates. For the present, however, the traveller who penetrates to these remote mountain fastnesses must attack alone and unaided their peaks, passes, and glaciers. The character of the still uncivilised population will increase the difficulties, but, at the same time, enhance the interest of his journey. The men who have proved their courage and their energy in the conquest of the Alps will hardly flinch before the difficulties inseparable from the exploration of more remote ranges. Slowly then, but surely, will fall one after the other the giants of the Caucasus, the bright snowhorn of Burdschula (Freshfield's Tau Burdisula, above the Karagam Glacier), Tau Tetunuld, the Caucasian Jungfrau; the granite glacier-clad pyramid of Koschtantau, the second peak of the Caucasus; the gigantic obelisk of Dychtau; the noble mass of Dongussorun (Freshfield's Tungzorun), the Dent Blanche of the Caucasus; Uschba, its double-crested Matterhorn, and many others which raise their heads above the clouds along the crest of the great chain. New passes will be opened over the mountain wall, and the mountaineers, as they pursue their untrodden paths through the icy wildernesses, will laugh—or if the snow is soft, perhaps groan—once more over the exploded superstition that 'the Caucasus has but few and

* M. de Déchy I think underestimates the badness of the Mamisson track between the pass and Koutais in this hopeful prognostication.—D.W.F.

small glaciers.' All the names that now ring as strangely in our ears as those of the Alps may have to men of the sixteenth century, will become household words, and will carry with them associations of grandeur and beauty, such as are brought before us by the words Jungfrau and Val Anzasca, Örtler, and Primiero; and, at the same time, science will be promoted, and with the advance in the knowledge of the Caucasian chain, materials for its complete description and for comparisons with other ranges will be accumulated.

Such were the thoughts that passed through my mind, as after the completion of my photographic work and measurements on the heights above the Mamisson Pass I took my ease in the warm sunshine and endeavoured to stamp in my recollection the noble mountain landscape which lay in glittering clearness before my eyes. I was unwilling to leave behind the dark cliffs, the sparkling snow-slopes and mountain platforms, the sharp ridges that led up to the central peak, on whose proud summit I had been the first to set foot. I rehearsed in memory the details of the ascent, and flattered myself by hoping it might hereafter be reckoned among the small beginnings of the time of which I was dreaming—when the Caucasus will be added to the playgrounds of Europe.

HILL-CLIMBING IN SCOTLAND.

BY C. D. CUNNINGHAM.

NEAR the foot of those grand crags on which Edinburgh Castle stands is a notice, that 'children or others found climbing on the rocks will be handed over to the police.'

All Scotchmen are proud of the rugged features of their country. They are never tired of dilating upon the beauties of their 'bonnie hills,' as they are pleased to style these bleak eminences, or describing the peculiar sensations which arise from putting 'one's foot upon one's native heath.' And, indeed, anyone who has been on the moors on 'the twelfth,' or driven with the laird for miles to visit a lonely glen or grim cairn, the scene of some act of bravery or devotion to the king or the clan, well understands how much there is to make the Highlandman love the hill scenery around him. But were it possible to take the opinion of that kilted gathering who assemble every year in the north to 'put' stones or dance reels, we should find they considered people