BUGABOO

By MICHAEL WARD

THE prospect of a summer holiday after a year in Montreal was stimulating. By distance the European Alps were as close as those great ranges that fringe the western seaboard of North America. Of these, Alaska offered most scope for exploration and mountaineering. However, the problem of distance, terrain and time required too much organisation for a short holiday. In addition the best climbing season appears to be in May or June and I could not get away until July. The Coast Range of British Columbia, with Mt. Waddington as its lodestone, seemed a most attractive region. Here, however, the weather is notoriously fickle and solid rain for weeks is always possible. What remains ? The interior ranges of British Columbia ; the Andes—too far, too dear. This left the Tetons and other ranges in the United States. Then I heard about the Bugaboos. This obscure and fascinating word immediately captured my imagination. A range with this name should be worth visiting.

The presence of these outstanding and unusual rock spires in the Purcell range of British Columbia has been known for many years. Tom Longstaff and the Richards had visited them in the 1920's. A number of first ascents had been made by Conrad Kain, a guide attached to the Canadian Pacific Railway. He considered that Bugaboo Spire —climbed in 1916—the hardest climb that he had done. Snowpatch Spire, first climbed in 1940, has I believe much the same reputation amongst North American climbers as has the Spectre among British ones—you have at last got somewhere.

Access to this group is relatively easy, as in 1916 a road was built by a lumber company a long way up the Bugaboo Creek. This road, which runs twenty-seven miles from Spillimachine, takes three hours to drive along in reasonable conditions. At the end of it there is a log cabin and it was here that six of us foregathered after finding our way across Canada. Claude Lavallé and Pierre Garneau had driven the two thousand-odd miles in a Volkswagen at an average of just under one thousand miles a day. John Turner, Dick Morden, his wife and myself had flown to Calgary and finished the journey by train and truck. After a night at the Forestry cabin we started to carry our loads up to a camp site, Boulder Camp, in relays. The weather remained singularly bad and gave every indication of getting worse. On our arrival at Boulder Camp we found over 2 ft. of packed spring snow. As we dumped our



BUGABOO FROM THE NORTH. TAKEN FROM WARREN GLACIER.

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loads a cold wind sprang up and soon it was snowing hard, the temperature well below freezing. For the next three days the weather was bad and we spent this time becoming more depressed; however, it enabled us to bring up a fair quantity of supplies. Because of the wintry weather our food had to be protected from ground squirrels, chipmunks and hedgehogs. We did this by hanging our rucksacks, filled with food, on the trees. In addition to these relatively unferocious animals we saw the tracks of a mountain lion and there were also, we were told later, some bears in the vicinity.

On the fourth day a few glimpses of blue sky tempted Dick, Pierre and me to visit some small rock peaks in the Crescent group. The day after this I woke at about 4.30 a.m. to find the sun shining into my tent. As none of the major peaks were in condition we set off across the Bugaboo glacier to climb Howser Peak. We ascended a relatively easy rock rib which bordered a fine snow slope. After about an hour's scrambling along a pleasant ridge we got to the summit of the mountain and from here had wonderful views of the whole Bugaboo group. The most impressive sight was the upper part of the South face of Howser Spire, as yet unclimbed. We took a great many photographs and on our way back plunged with increasing speed down the snow slope. This day's climbing gave us a good idea of the topography of the region and the mountains of the Bugaboo group were certainly most impressive and steep.

Bugaboo Spire

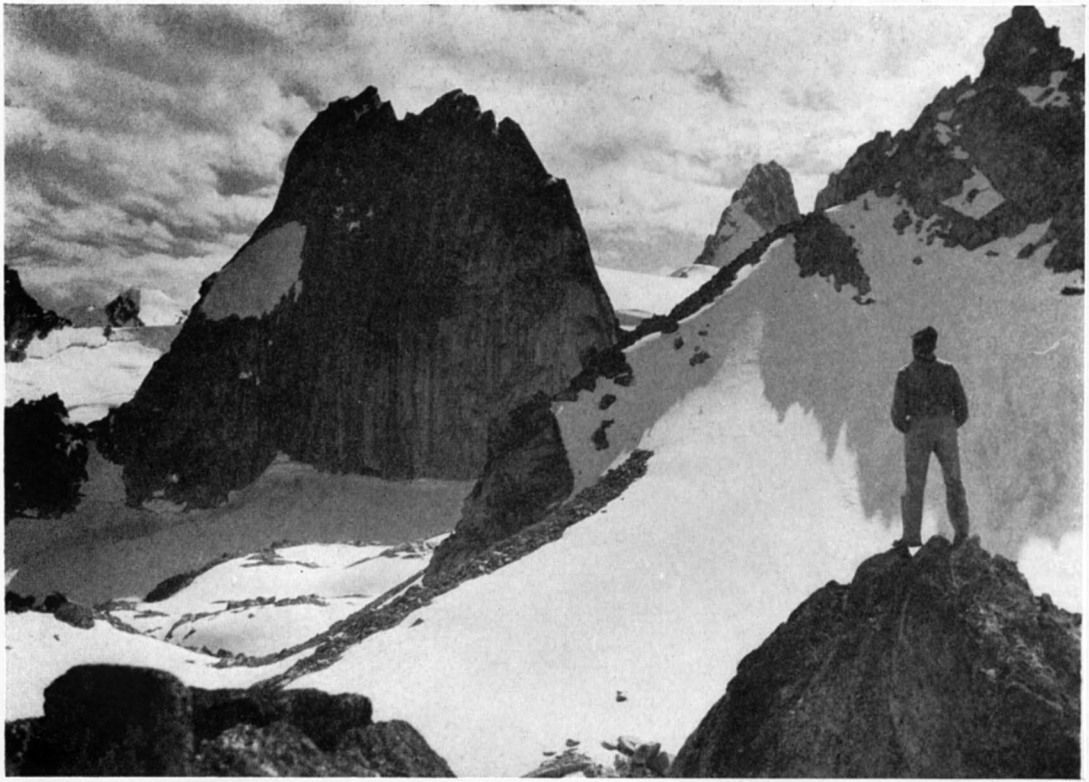
This mountain was first climbed by Conrad Kain in 1916. The route starts from the Bugaboo-Snowpatch Col and follows the Southern arête. At first there is a considerable amount of scrambling but then the ridge steepens to a fairly well-defined gendarme on which there is a chimney pitch, about severe in standard. After this the ridge, now well defined, leads up to a smaller gendarme at about 10,000 ft. The rock here is yellowish in colour, but firm. After climbing the lower part of this gendarme, a step is made around its steep edge and one lands on a sloping ledge. This ledge quickly peters out into the face and one has to reach a corner. These few feet are rather exposed. From the corner a crack with convenient finger jams leads on to the ridge again. Normally this pitch is protected to a certain extent by an expansion bolt, which had been removed. This pitch, Conrad Kain considered was the most difficult that he had climbed. From here to the first of the twin summits of Bugaboo took another 20 minutes. A small cigarette tin placed in the cairn contained the names of a number of climbers including that of Roger Craister. It appears that the Export Manager of Rolls-Royce looks for his customers in unusual places.

The only other route on Bugaboo Spire is the East ridge, first climbed

PURCELL RANGE
BUGABOO, BOBBIE BURNS AND CONRAD GROUPS
VOWELL CREEK
N
SCALE IN MILES
0 1 2 3
CONRAD ICEFIELD
MT. THORINGTON
MT. MALLORY
SHAFT No.1
OSPREY PEAK
BOBBIE BURNS GROUP
CONRAD ICEFIELD
MT. CONRAD
LAKE
WARREN GLACIER
BRENTA
BUGABOO SPIRE
CRESCENT
SPILLAMACHEEN 27 MILES
BUGABOO CREEK
CABIN
BOULDER CAMP
MT. MACARTHY
MACARTHY GLACIER
EAST CREEK
HOWSER SPIRE
PIGEON
SNOW PATCH SPIRE
MARMOLATA
BUGABOO GLACIER
ANNIVERSARY PEAK
HOWSER PEAK
EAST CREEK

in 1958 by John Turner. This superb ridge falls in a smooth sweep of rock from the summit of Bugaboo to the Crescent-Bugaboo Col. At first sight it looks like a considerably steeper and smoother version of the North ridge of Piz Badile. Because of its situation, beauty and purity of line it had attracted some previous attempts. These had all tried to follow the true line of the ridge from its lowest point. All these attempts had failed about 30 ft. short of some relatively easy ground. The crux of the climb, needless to say, lies above this point. Claude and I approached this magnificent route early one perfect morning. This year, as the spring snowfalls had been a great deal heavier and later than usual, the climb to the foot of the difficult climbing was not so simple. We had imprudently left our ice-axes behind and so had to ascend a very hard slope of packed snow using two long channel pitons as our anchors in case of emergency. The ridge then steepened dramatically and the hard climbing began. A detached flake of rock lay against the first 120 ft. We climbed the left edge of this flake, chimneying between it and the mountain proper. An awkward portion at 60 ft. was climbed by a rather spectacular layback. At the top of the flake, we belayed and enjoyed lovely views down the Warren glacier and into Vowell Creek. Straight ahead a hemp line flopped about in the breeze, mute evidence of previous abortive attempts. Above and to the left a series of overlapping grooves promised a line of weakness. We descended for 10 ft., made a long step to the left, followed by a delicate step upwards. This landed at the start of the grooves. The climbing for the next 120 ft. was a throwback to Lliwedd. The holds were side holds and upward movements were made by a series of sinuous contortions using pressures and counter-pressures. As on Lliwedd some of the flaky holds were loose and required care. At the end of this pitch there was a very fine stance and block belay. As we were now on the South-east face of the mountain the line of the next pitch lay upwards and to the right. An irregularity on the skyline was our objective. This pitch was the most enjoyable of the climb. It provided, in its 120 ft., climbing of every variety—a crack, a chimney, a layback, a delicate traverse, a step across an open chimney and even a Harrison's movement. These movements followed one another with such bewildering rapidity that one felt more like a gymnast than a rock climber. The difficulty was continuous but nowhere excessive and our position was pleasantly exposed.

This fine pitch landed us on the main line of the ridge and a step around the corner brought us to the foot of the fourth and most difficult pitch. This was a dièdre set to the right of the ridge. Claude climbed this extremely well and appeared to find it easy. For my own part I found this very difficult and I was glad to be second on the rope.

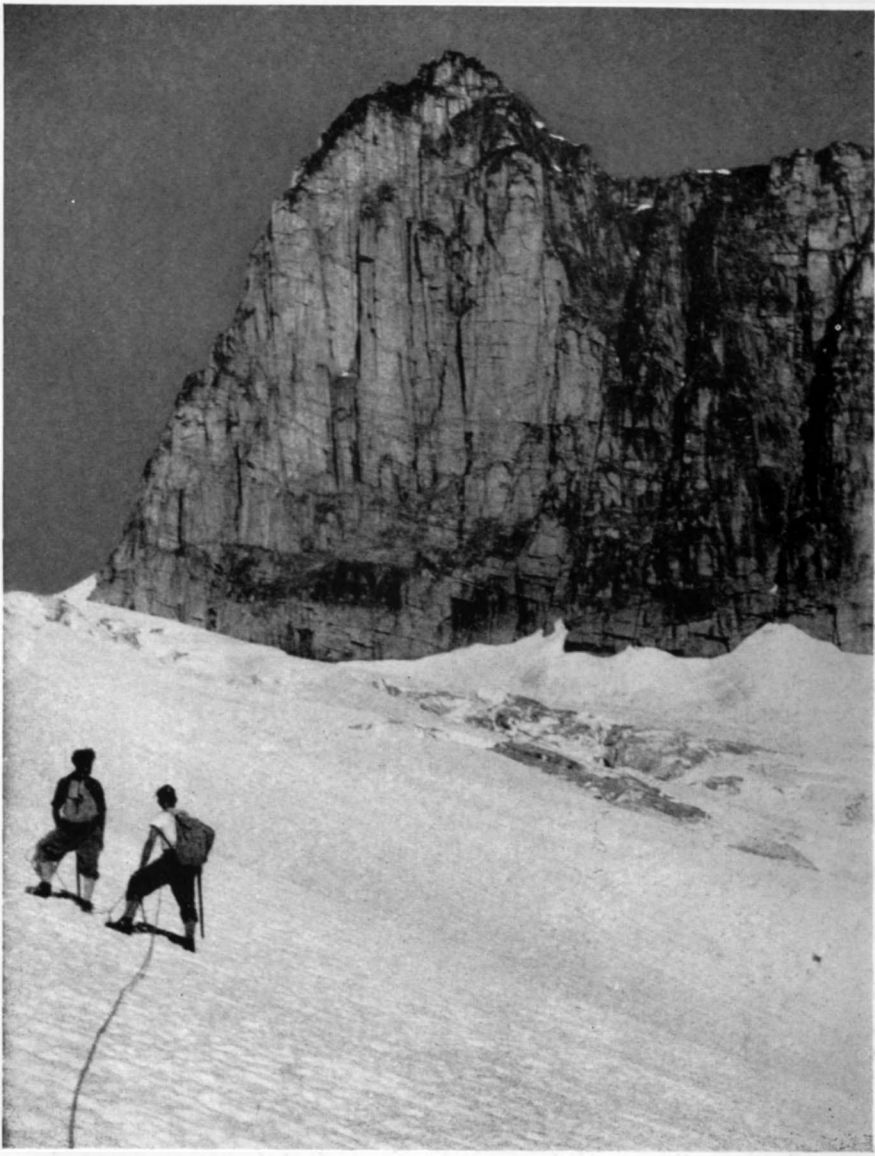


SNOWPATCH SPIRE. PIGEON BEYOND.

According to John we had now climbed the major difficulties. However, the first 30 ft. of the next pitch were well up to the standard of the preceding ones; after this, unfortunately, the general standard dropped. Near the summit a short overhanging rock step appeared to extend Claude greatly. I found an easier route round to the right. Some feet before the summit we abseiled off a gendarme and traversed along the South-east face. After a pleasant hour on the summit we descended to the Bugaboo-Snowpatch Col and ended a most stimulating day's climbing. The East ridge of Bugaboo is one of the finest pure rock ridges that I have climbed.

Snowpatch Spire

This peak was unclimbed until 1940. Conrad Kain is reported to have said that it was beyond his powers, and Fritz Wiessner is said to have climbed as far as the difficult pitch which guards the region of the snowfield which gives the mountain its name. The *voie normale* has a pitch of hard very severe when climbed without artificial aids. Both the other routes are harder and contain many artificial pitches. The West face was first climbed in 1956 and the North-west ridge in 1958. The East face of the mountain is a tremendous sight and no doubt a route will be put up here just to the right of the snowpatch. The normal route starts at the Col between the main mountain and the small outrider and makes its way to the lower left-hand edge of the snowpatch. It then skirts the snow on its left edge, veers right and continues straight up to the summit. John, Dick and myself started on the normal route leading up to the Col at 5 o'clock one fine morning. Claude unfortunately had a cold and decided not to come. After an hour's climbing we reached the start of the difficult rock climbing. The first pitch was a 10 ft. traverse round a rock rib—this was very delicate and was followed by a 120 ft. groove, about severe in standard. This was followed immediately by a similar groove which brought us to the crucial pitch. This consisted of a finger traverse upwards and to the left with wholly inadequate toeholds. A small overhang followed and then a somewhat easier overhang and finally a stance. John led the whole pitch free and found it distinctly difficult. For myself, I used a piton and a sling which were a considerable help. Above this, owing to the late snowfalls, the rocks were very wet and the next few hundred feet to the snowpatch itself were climbed more or less up a stream. Normally the route skirts the snowpatch, however, this year we had to climb on this very unsafe gelatinous snow itself. This we managed to do by belaying on rock at the end of every pitch. Our progress was thus very slow. The upper part of the mountain was very steep and the natural line led to the right, rather against our will. A steep chimney started the difficult climbing again. This was followed by a



South face of the Marmolada.

traverse left over a wet slab. The route then followed a weakness in the rock down which a lot of water was flowing. In its upper part it was possible to traverse left along a rather inadequate ledge. This was followed by a Harrison's movement on to a further narrow ledge along which it was possible to wriggle on one's stomach to a flake. From here an extremely exposed series of movements was made up a 10-ft. wall overlooking the snowpatch. Although this pitch was well protected it was distinctly intimidating; 150 ft. of steep climbing followed and then the top of the mountain was reached fairly suddenly. Our ascent was the nineteenth of the normal route and the twentieth of the mountain proper.

We descended by a series of uneventful abseils to the snow, which by then was extremely treacherous and which was avalanching. This snow was too unsafe to descend by normal methods and so we abseiled down the whole lot using the rocks on the left-hand edge. We finally reached the foot of the mountain 14 hours after starting out. The normal route on this mountain had a truly epic quality about it.

Marmolada

This mountain is very similar in shape to its namesake in the Dolomites. The South face is between 800 and 900 ft. high and just under the summit is prodigiously steep. Here the rock is light yellow to beige in colour and seamed with round-edged cracks. In length this face is about a mile long. It is probably between 700 and 800 ft. high.

Seen from Howser Peak across the far side of Bugaboo glacier this face was comparatively featureless. There were no particular lines of weakness and in the mid-day sun the general impression was one of impossibility. We climbed up the Bugaboo glacier in the early morning and our mood as we approached this cliff was distinctly gloomy. As we made our way along the foot looking for a suitable line we were impressed by the fact that very few stones had fallen on to the glacier. At least the face was solid. Our plan was to try and make a route up to the summit just to the right of the steepest yellow portion.

Eventually we managed to get on to the cliff where a tongue of snow lay steeply against the rock. The first three pitches seemed to go quite easily. Above the third an overhang barred our way, its roof liberally greased with dripping water. John looked at this for some time and he finally abseiled down and we traversed right into a narrow gully and made our way up this for about 150 ft. Here the gully widened and it appeared as if a route would go up to the left along what we thought was the retaining edge of the steep yellow rocks just under the summit. John started up a dièdre and after 30 ft. an overhang barred the way. This was turned on the right by a difficult step. He then traversed left along the top of the overhang, descended 10 ft., made a long stride



HOWSER SPIRE FROM WARREN GLACIER.

leftwards, thus avoiding yet a further overhang. A steep slab of 30 ft. brought him to a reasonable stance and belay. I followed. The initial dièdre turned out to be extremely difficult and I nearly fell off the first overhang. The rest of the pitch appeared to be merely very difficult indeed. Dick followed with surprising rapidity. We then found ourselves on a ridge which we followed to the top of the mountain. The climbing fell nowhere below very severe and each pitch had a hard portion in it. Just below the top of the face we came into the sun and the climb reserved the pleasantest pitch for the last—an overhanging crack, a long stride leftwards, followed by an indeterminate shuffle. A fine steep wall gave out onto easy ground and after 30 ft. we were on the easy route up the Marmolada. Another thirty minutes brought us to the top of the mountain, ten hours from Boulder Camp. We had spent seven hours on the face itself.

From the top of the Marmolada we had a fine view of Howser Spire, which was still covered in spring snow. The South Tower, which had been ascended once and which was evidently a very fine mixed route, appeared too dangerous because of avalanches. We thought that we might try to climb the mountain by the North ridge in a day or two when the conditions had improved. We then descended the West ridge of the Marmolada in a series of abseils, the last one being free. The snow of the glacier was soft enough to allow us to be able to kick steps with our P.A.'s. We returned fairly quickly to our boots and with great relief put them on.

Howser Spire

Unfortunately we did not manage to climb this, the highest peak of the Bugaboos. This peak contains the best mixed climbing in the region and whilst in Montreal our pipe dreams had led us easily along the traverse of the whole peak, which has yet to be done.

Our attempt on this peak was made by means of the North ridge which is the easiest route and under normal conditions not at all difficult. However, after we had kicked steps for two hours up a snow slope on to the main portion of the ridge we began to realise that conditions were a great deal worse than they appeared. For the last three-quarters of an hour the snow had consisted of a breakable crust, 3 to 6 in. thick with 3 to 4 ft. of unconsolidated powder snow underneath it. The whole slope was laid on a slippery surface of ice. Once on the ridge we made very slow progress, taking over an hour to do 40 ft. Normally a great deal of the ridge proper can be avoided by traversing on snow which under these conditions appeared to be getting worse the higher we went. Finally, after a quick consultation, we decided that it would be foolish to continue and returned to Boulder Camp.

Around Mt. Conrad

Adjacent to the Bugaboos there is another small group of mountains named after Bobbie Burns. For some time Dick had been muttering about visiting a place with the improbable name of Shaft No. 7. This involved a walk of 10 miles across the Warren glacier and the Conrad icefield. From this bivouac site it was possible to climb Mt. Conrad, the second highest mountain in the area, and to do some mild exploration.

Dick Morden, Joan, his wife, and myself set out with four days' food and appropriate cooking equipment early in the morning. We had lunch beside a brilliant emerald green glacier lake which lay in the upper reaches of the Warren glacier. On the surface of the lake there were miniature ice floes and the whole scene was very arctic. Further on we left the Warren glacier and found ourselves in the upper part of a glacier which flows into East Creek, the river that runs along the south side of Howser Spire. Our original intention had been to carry a camp into East Creek and have a look at the South face. However, for various reasons we decided that this was not feasible. A steep ascent brought us on to the Conrad icefield and after walking across this we found our camp site on the far side. This consisted of a gigantic boulder shaped rather like the Matterhorn in miniature. Underneath this there was room for three or four people to sleep, a convenient trickle of water ran in between the sleeping berths. Our first chore was to undam this stream in order to make it less liable to overflow. The night was perfect and we slept outside. Next morning we set off for Mt. Conrad. This mountain was first climbed by Conrad Kain with Professor and Mrs. I. A. Richards. They completed this ascent from the snout of the Bugaboo glacier, taking twelve hours. On the descent they bivouacked in Vowell Creek and next day returned to their camp in Bugaboo Creek.

We made our ascent over the easy snow-covered North ridge and did not have to rope at all. At 10,000 ft. we found exactly the same snow conditions which had prevailed at a similar level on Howser Peak. I must admit, we were rather cheered with this discovery as ever since our retreat we had been admonishing ourselves as being, in the American jargon, ' chicken '. On the top a cold wind was blowing and we descended a little to get out of it. We spent some time trying to identify the immense number of peaks laid out before us. The maps of the interior ranges of British Columbia are inaccurate and we had been working on one composed of two or three fairly accurate surveys made some years before. These had been altered by Dick Morden, who had climbed in this district before. To the north the Carbonate Group stood out boldly and to the west a fine rock peak caught our attention. We could not identify it. On our way back to camp we

climbed a further small rock peak which provided good views of East Creek.

Next day the weather was still fine although it showed signs of breaking up. We set out to climb a fine shapely peak to the north of Shaft No. 7. This was, as far as we knew, unclimbed. To get at it we had to traverse around the side of Osprey Peak which lay just to the north of our camp site. After the traverse we found ourselves in a small niche at the foot of the South ridge of the unclimbed peak. The first 150 ft. or so were on solid rock. Then, however, everything became excessively rotten—one tottering pinnacle after another groaned and crumbled under our feet. Rarely have I climbed such decrepit and malevolent rock. At last we reached the summit. This was a fine viewpoint. Vowell Creek lay below us—a fine valley with extensive stretches of meadow. That night the weather, which had looked threatening broke, lightning flashed on Howser Spire though not with the same ferocity and brilliance that we had been led to expect from Dick's accounts of electric storms in this region. According to him each mountain in the Bugaboos represented a potential lightning conductor. The next day we returned to Boulder Camp. As the Alpine Club of Canada was holding its Annual Camp in the region a regular lorry service was commuting down to Spillimachine. I managed to get a lift on one of these and also a further lift from Spillimachine to Banff. At Banff I joined my wife and in a few days we were in New York.

[The South face of Marmolada was the first ascent, the East ridge of Bugaboo the second ascent. For the benefit of senior readers, P.A.s are a type of rock-climbing footwear designed by Pierre Allain.—EDITOR.]