

Climb an Eponymous Mountain

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In some parts of the world colonized by Europeans where the native names for mountains either did not exist or were only with difficulty communicable, the first explorers allocated names for peaks in a fashion often arbitrary and uninspiring. The patrons of expeditions, great men of the moment, national heroes, rulers and so forth had their names spread all over the map by enthusiastic but unimaginative travellers. The principal area to suffer was North America, though the practice spread also to New Zealand, Australia, South America and the Polar regions. The highest mountain in the world carries, of course, a personal name — that of Sir George Everest, at one time in charge of the Survey of India; his name was bestowed on the newly measured Peak XV by his successor. It is the only eponymous mountain in the Himalaya, though K2 nearly became Godwin-Austen (or, as Keay tells us, it might have been Waugh, Albert or Montgomerie).

Taking into account the speed with which the colonization of the United States of America took place and the comparative lack of contact with the indigenous population, it is not surprising to find the mountains of the eastern States widely tagged with personal names. Presidents and statesmen have their peaks — Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Clay, Monroe, Madison and others. Mount Mitchell in the Blue Ridge mountains, the highest point in the eastern States, is named for Elisha Mitchell, professor of mathematics at the University of North Carolina, who was the first to climb it. He is buried on the summit and there is a commemorative pillar. Mount Marcy in the Adirondack Mountains is named for William L. Marcy, senator and statesman; Mount Oglethorpe for a hero of the War of Independence, who was founder of the State of Georgia.

As explorers moved westwards, they created personally named peaks all along the trail — the prominent Long's Peak and Pike's Peak took their names from expedition leaders; there followed others in wild profusion — Lincoln, Evans, Sherman, Elbert, Powell . . . presidents, governors, explorers, soldiers. It has to be admitted that they also came up with some local names and some highly imaginative new ones — Uncompahgre, Eolus, Redcloud, Lizard Head, Maroon Bell, Snowmass, etc. A large number of these inventions had to be made and the overall pattern is not too repellent. The process continued on westward with Gannet, Fremont, Whitney, Hood, Baker, Rainier, Adams and many others, again leavened with imaginative names in most cases more appropriate to their subjects.

Canada presents a similar picture, but here the exploration of the Rocky Mountains fell more to mountaineers and resulted in a rash of naming peaks for members of the fraternity; thankfully no one actually named a mountain for himself. Enshrined there for all time are mountaineers Forbes, Bryce, Woolley, Freshfield, Mummery, Ball, Bonney, Stutfield. Then come world figures like Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin (the only Mount Stalin left in the world and there used to be several — the others were all changed after his death and rapid fall

from grace), Lloyd George, Eisenhower. Finally we find mountains named for purely local heroes like the collection in the Cariboo Mountains — Sir Wilfrid Laurier, Sir John Abbot, Sir Mackenzie Boswell, Sir John Thomas. Both Canada and the USA have Matterhorns, all undistinguished in comparison with their eponymous Swiss original.

Alaska and the Yukon continue the theme. The highest, Mount McKinley, is named for the US President in office in the year of its firm location. Its local name, Denali, is increasingly coming back into use, but has not yet superseded the other. La Perouse, Dagelet, Malaspina, Vancouver, were in exploring parties, Tatum and Carpe are named for mountaineers. There are two mountains named for John F. Kennedy, one formerly the east peak of Mount Hubbard, the other the east peak of Mount Blackburn.

New Zealand presents a similar mixture of the not quite sublime and the some way towards ridiculous — Mannering, Harper, Teichmann, Haast after local mountaineers; Cook, La Perouse, Torres, Tasman, Dampier after early explorers and a whole host of others of obscure origins, but no doubt with some relevance to the local scene. Some native names have been retained; for the highest, Mount Cook, the local name Aorangi is well known and may perhaps one day take over.

The highest peak in Australia is Mount Kosciusko, named for a great Polish/American patriot by Count Strzelecki who claimed the first ascent in 1840. This was disputed by Dr. Lhotsky, who claimed to have reached the summit even earlier (1834) and wished to call it Mount King William IV. The Count seems to have won the contest, though many Australians must wonder at the choice of the name.

In older established communities these oddities of nomenclature seem never to have arisen, except in a few isolated cases. There was no question of exploration by outsiders and the mapping authorities went to great pains to find agreed local names for their eminences to embellish their work. Errors did creep in from time to time, as in the case of the hill on Dartmoor originally 'Cosdon'. In the local accent this would sound like "Kaaz'n", which to the surveyor seemed to call for a spelling 'Cawsand', and this is how it appears on the map even today.

Lesser mountain features have attracted many a personal name usually in commemoration of the first ascender. In the first big expansion phase of British rock climbing just before the turn of the century that famous rock climber, our member Owen Glynn Jones, had his name appended to some half a dozen routes in the mountains of the Lake District. The practice came to be frowned upon and later generations of leaders missed having everlasting memorials on our rock faces.

Similarly in more recent times it has become customary for the names of mountaineers to be tagged on to routes in the Alps — double barrelled in the case of a party of two, eg Cecchinell-Nominé, Bonatti-Zapelli, Boivin-Gabarron, and so on. Larger parties occasionally produce a real mouthful, eg Boivin-Diaffra-Vionnet-Fausset. Even so, these are undoubtedly to be preferred to the names of politicians and others in power in their home countries at the time of the climb.

Among this galaxy of topographical personalities there is only one instance of an individual making the first ascent of a mountain already named for him. The opportunity for so doing is not often presented, since personal names are usually only allocated posthumously. The man in question was the Conservative politician and statesman, Leopold S. Amery, a prominent mountaineer and one-time President of the Alpine Club. Early in 1928, the Canadian Department of the Interior decided to name a 3222m mountain situated at the junction of the Alexander and North Saskatchewan rivers in Alberta, Mount Amery in honour of the Secretary of State for the Dominions. On 20 August 1929 Amery made the first ascent of his mountain with Bryn Meredith and Eduard Feuz:

'We breakfasted and discussed whether we should go back and bring up bivouac kit for an attempt next day, or start at once in spite of the fact that it was snowing hard above and the weather looking anything but pleasant. We came to no decision, but began drifting up the long slope of guarding screes. An hour later we roped where our ridge and the one next to the north of it almost touched, making a cleft which opened into an amphitheatre which further up opened out into another even more impressive one. We traversed by shale bands into this lower amphitheatre and then back again to our ridge and so, by short steps of abrupt rock and zigzagging on shale ledges, made good progress till, about 12.30pm, we found ourselves up against the second and most formidable cliff band below the summit. On our own ridge the cliff cut us off abruptly. There seemed no feasible way out to the right, while to the left the cliff extended in a semicircle round the amphitheatre, black and forbidding, festooned with immense drip icicles and coated with vast sheets of glaze. Happily, just in the angle where our ridge joined, enough snow had lodged on the drip ice to make a feasible chimney of 70–80ft, which proved the key to the whole situation. More shale and another steep ice chimney with a traverse out to the left by good rock brought us to a broad shale slope forming the summit ridge (about 10,000ft). A raging blizzard hid everything from view and more than once nearly blew us off our feet. But there was no point in turning back, so we turned left up to where the shale joined the snow, and so on to the sharply defined but easy rock ridge leading to the final summit (about 2.45pm). On a fine day Mount Amery must offer a magnificent panorama of the main ridge which, from Forbes to Athabasca, curves round it. But a few hundred yards in occasional glimpses through driving snow was all we got, and five minutes at the top to build our cairn was more than enough.'

Years before (1902) Amery had been involved in the first ascent of a small peak on the Drakensberg and much later (though still long before his death) this was named Mount Amery for him.

In 1965 Robert Kennedy joined in the first ascent of one of the mountains in the Yukon named for his brother, the President.

It seems appropriate that a mountaineer, particularly an English speaking one who has considerably greater opportunities, should seek to ascend his eponymous peak, if indeed he has one, wherever it may be. Climbers with names like Everest or McKinley have an almost impossible task in prospect; on the other hand Pary will find his mountain in Anglesey is a mere 137m. Names

which are colours are easily fulfilled: White for example has Mont Blanc, the Aiguille Blanche de Peuterey, the Weisshorn, the White Mountains of New Hampshire and Maine; Green has the Aiguille Verte, the Gross Grünhorn, the Green Mountains of Vermont; Red has many mountains but seldom serves as a surname; Black has the Aiguille Noire de Peuterey, various Schwarzhorns, the Black Mountains of Wales, the Black Hills of South Dakota and so on.

Mountaineers to whom this may appeal as an objective should look themselves up in a big gazetteer like the Columbia-Lippincott, for a selection of possibilities. Maybe their peaks will be half the world away and thus inaccessible even if not presenting a particularly arduous mountaineering problem. Translation of one's name into other languages is permissible, for example, Steel could consider a right to Mount Stalin, of which there were at one time plenty of examples, but now only one.

Taking a few names at random from the AC Members List we can see how the process works out. Messrs Adams, Anderson, Baker, Fisher, Gilbert, Grant, Hamilton, Hunter, Jackson, Morgan, Russell, Thompson, Ward, Warren, Wilson and Wood will find their eponymous peak in the USA, while Messrs Gilbert, Hunter and Russell find a second in Alaska, Hamilton a second in New Zealand and Gilbert even a third in Canada. Messrs Cook, Jackson and Ward will find theirs in New Zealand, Cook another in Alaska. This is merely an exercise fleetingly carried out; the potential when armed with a big gazetteer would seem to be enormous.

As another example, I seem to remember hearing that a member of this Club, correspondingly named, motored to Skye and made an ascent of Sgurr Alasdair on his birthday.

A small degree of deviation from exact spelling may also have to be accepted as will be seen from what follows. My own name in its present spelling will never be found on map or gazetteer. There are no famous, nor I hope infamous, holders of the name, though I do recollect a minor commander on the field diagram of one of the battles of the American Civil War. If spelling variations can be accepted, such as 'Piat' or 'Piet', the scope might possibly be enlarged, though again on the face of it there would not seem much cause for optimism. 'Piet' looks a bit like Afrikaans and there could be a minor hill in South Africa thus named. I had more or less given up hope, when a casual perusal of Ball's *Central Alps* revealed that there was in fact a Piz Piot at the head of the Averstal in the Grisons.

It is very minor as Alpine summits go, a mere 3053m, but on the main watershed with streams on one side flowing to the Adriatic and on the other to the Rhine. The name is derived from the Romansch 'piatt', which means flat, not an exciting name for a mountain. The text of *Bündner-Alpen* Vol 3 and the *Carte Nationale de la Suisse* do not indicate any insuperable difficulties, so that the ascent will, I hope, be reported in due course in these pages, if not by the writer, at least by the next generation of the family.

(Ted died shortly after writing this article. He never did climb his eponymous mountain. *Editor*)