
C A RUSSELL

One Hundred Years Ago

(with extracts from *The Alpine Journal*)

As we reached the summit of the pass the cliffs and glaciers of the Lauterbrunnen Jungfrau, backed by the sharp pyramid of the Eiger rose beyond a misty abyss of shadows. Every curve in the swelling snows, every crag and buttress of the Blümlisalp cliffs was lit up by the mellow rays of the mountain moon.

This description of a winter scene above the Tschingel Pass in the Bernese Alps was recorded by Arnold Lunn who left Kandersteg on 2 January 1909 accompanied by Professor F F Roget and three guides engaged as porters to commence his ski traverse of 'the Oberland from end to end'. Staying in huts and other accommodation, Lunn and his companions reached the Lötschental by way of the Petersgrat and continued over the Lötschenlücke in perfect weather. After climbing the Finsteraarhorn on 6 January the party completed the final stage of the traverse, reaching the Grimsel road and arriving at Guttannen late on the following day.

In the same region, also on 2 January, Rudolf Schloss, G Licht and O D Tauern made the first ski ascent¹ of the Ebnefluh. Other expeditions of note completed with the aid of ski included a traverse from Zinal to the Val d'Hérens and Zermatt by W A M Moore and J R Dixon with the guides Louis and Benoît Theytaz and, at Easter, an ascent of the Grossglockner by Max Winkler and Fritz Strobel.

Although conditions in the Alps were cold and unsettled for much of the summer the climbing season was memorable for a number of successful expeditions undertaken during brief spells of fine weather by leading climbers of the day. In the Mont Blanc range on 12 August Hans Pfann and Franz Gassner completed a difficult route on the Italian side of the Grandes Jorasses, reaching Pointe Walker by way of the Pra Sec glacier and the upper section of the south-east, Tronchey ridge. A few days later, on 16 August, H O Jones with Laurent Croux and a porter traversed the Aiguille Blanche de Peuterey, forcing a route from the Frêney glacier up the steep west spur of the north-west summit and descending to the Brenva glacier.

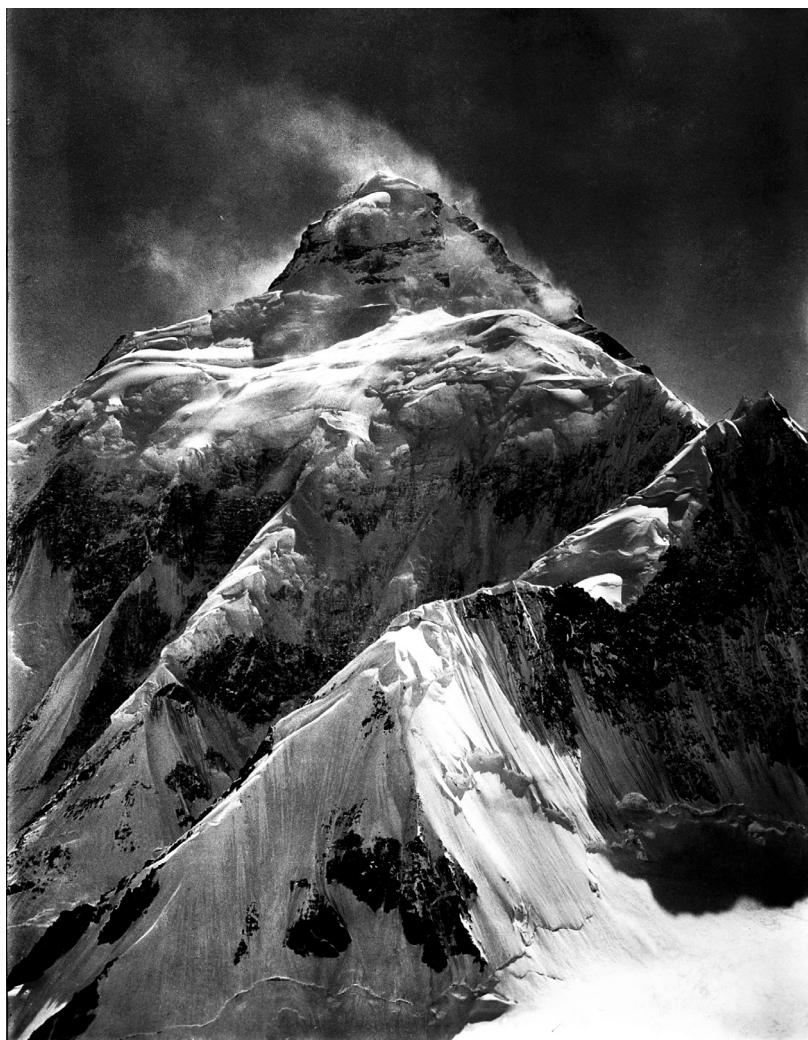
In the Zermatt district on 31 August Geoffrey Winthrop Young and Josef Knubel joined forces with Oliver Perry-Smith to establish a new route on the north-east face of the Weisshorn. Earlier in the month, on 4 August, in the Bernese Alps Young, George Mallory and Donald Robertson made the first complete ascent of the long south-east ridge² of the Nesthorn. In the Bernina Alps on 30 July another long expedition was undertaken by G



179. West face of K2 from the Savoia glacier, June 1909. (*Vittorio Sella*)

L and C G G Stewart who with Ferdinand Summermatter and Alphonse Simond made the first ascent of the south-west, Sella ridge of Piz Roseg.

In the Eastern Alps two notable climbs were completed: in the Dolomites the first ascent of the north-east, Dibona edge of the Cima Grande di Lavaredo – the Grosse Zinne – by Emil Stübler with Angelo Dibona in August; and, on 22 September, a new route to the summit of the Dachstein by the guides Georg and Franz Steiner who opened a direct line up the south face.



180. K2 from the north-east, June 1909. (HRH the Duke of the Abruzzi)

Early in the year work was resumed on the construction of the Lötschberg Tunnel under the Bernese Alps between Kandersteg and Goppenstein. Following the collapse of the northern, Kandersteg heading³ and the completion of a fresh survey it was decided to realign part of the route away from the unstable ground below the Gastern valley and to introduce a series of curves – the first major Alpine tunnel to incorporate a curved alignment.⁴

On 25 July celebrations were held to mark the official opening of the first section, from Le Fayet to the Col de Voza, of the *Tramway du Mont Blanc*.

The train takes one hour to accomplish the distance between these two places, and a splendid but limited view can be enjoyed from the summit of the Col.

In September Mont Blanc itself was the scene of considerable activity.

The Janssen Observatory on the summit of Mont Blanc is about to be demolished by workmen, probably during the next few days. It has several times been in danger from snow-drifts, but the storms of last winter were so severe that the building was nearly buried in the snow.

All the valuable scientific instruments in the observatory, which was completed in 1893⁵ under great difficulties, have been removed to the Vallot Observatory, which is at a lower altitude.

During the year many expeditions were undertaken in other mountain ranges. In July Helene Kuntze, another active climber, travelled to the Caucasus where she explored the Laboda and Sugan districts in the central region. Accompanied by the guides Josef Schaller and Rafael Lochmatter and by an interpreter named Julian Abuloff she completed a number of successful climbs including, on 5 August, the first ascent of the south, higher peak (4490m) of Sugan Tau.⁶

On 15 April the Duke of the Abruzzi arrived at Srinagar to commence his expedition to the Karakoram. The Duke, who hoped to attempt the ascent of K2 (8611m) and 'to contribute to the solution of the problem as to the greatest height to which man may attain in mountain climbing', was accompanied on this occasion by Marchese Federico Negrotto, his aide-de-camp, as topographer, Vittorio Sella as photographer and Filippo De Filippi as physician and naturalist. Three guides – Joseph Petigax and the brothers Alexis and Henri Brocherel – and four porters,⁷ all from Courmayeur travelled with the party which was completed by Erminio Botta, Sella's assistant. At Srinagar the Duke was assisted by Sir Francis Young-husband, then British Resident in Kashmir, who arranged for A C Baines, an experienced traveller in the region, to join the expedition as transport and supply officer.

On 25 May an advanced base was established at 5030m below the south face of K2. After heights of more than 6000m had been reached during unsuccessful attempts on the south-east, Abruzzi spur and the north-west ridge the party moved round the peak to examine the north-east ridge. Although this ridge was ruled out as impracticable the Duke with Petigax and a porter was able, on 25 June, to reach a height of some 6600m on the south ridge of Skyang Kangri (7544m) from the head of the Godwin-Austen glacier.

Having completed the reconnaissance of K2 the party established a base below the north face of the north-east summit of Chogolisa (7654m)⁸ and

placed a light camp on the Kaberi saddle at 6335m. On 18 July in dense mist and dangerous snow conditions the Duke with Petigax, Henri Brocherel and a porter ascended the south-east ridge to a height of 7500m – the greatest climbing altitude attained at that time.

Another visitor to this region was Tom Longstaff who spent four months exploring a large area of the eastern and southern Karakoram. Accompanied initially by Morris Slingsby and Dr Arthur Neve, Longstaff located and crossed the Saltoro Pass (5547m) in June to find a great unknown glacier – the upper reach of the Siachen glacier – flowing to the south-east; he also discovered and named the Teram Kangri group of peaks across the glacier to the north. Later in the year with the assistance of D G Oliver, British Joint Commissioner in Ladakh, Longstaff approached the Siachen glacier from the south. On 18 September, after ascending the ice for 16km he was able to estimate the total length of the glacier – some 72km – and to ascertain its true location.

This outstanding piece of exploration enabled Longstaff to confirm the correct position of the main, northern axis of the Karakoram and to add the Teram Kangri peaks and the approximate area of the Siachen glacier to the existent map.

Further east Dr Alexander Kellas returned to Sikkim where on 14 September, accompanied by two local men, he made the first ascent of Langpo Peak (6950m). Kellas also made unsuccessful attempts to climb other peaks including Pauhunri (7125m) and to reach the Nepal Gap (6300m) on the north ridge of Kangchenjunga (8586m).

In the Southern Alps of New Zealand on 4 March L M Earle with Alex⁹ and Peter Graham and Jack Clarke followed a new line, now known as *Earle's Route*, to the High Peak of Mount Cook (3764m)¹⁰ by way of the north-west ridge above the Sheila glacier. Later in the year, on 1 December, Earle and Bernard Head with Clarke and Alex Graham made the first ascent of Mount Hamilton (2997m) in the Malte Brun range.

In the Canadian Rockies notable expeditions included the ascent of the unclimbed North Tower (3525m) of Mount Goodsir¹¹ on 16 August by J P Forde and P D McTavish with Eduard Feuz senior and, in September, the first complete traverse of the long summit ridge of Mount Victoria (3464m) by G W Culver with Eduard Feuz junior and Rudolf Aemmer. To the west in the Selkirk range the guideless party of F K Butters, E W D Holway and Howard Palmer completed a number of new routes including, on 23 July, the first ascent of Augustine Peak (3283m), the highest point in the Bishop's group.

In Britain increasing numbers of climbers were active in all the principal regions. In Wales two new routes of note were completed: *Central Arête* on Glyder Fawr at Whitsun by Guy Barlow and H B Buckle; and, on 23 September, *Paradise Climb* on the East Buttress of Lliwedd by H O Jones and R F Backwell. In the Lake District on 7 April Fred Botterill and John Hazard made the first ascent of *Abbey Buttress* on the Napes, Great Gable. Several months later, on 26 September, an attempt to climb the neighbour-



181. Siachen glacier and Teram Kangri peaks, 15 June 1909. (*Tom Longstaff*)

ing Eagle's Nest Ridge ended in tragedy when T J Rennison, leading Botterill, Oliver Thorneycroft and Fred Aldous, slipped and fell to his death. In Scotland on 12 April Harold Raeburn, climbing with W A Brigg and H S Tucker, completed the ascent¹² of a famous route – *Crowberry Gully* on Buachaille Etive Mor.

An event which aroused considerable interest was the publication of *The Climbs on Lliwedd* by J M Archer Thomson and A W Andrews, the first of a series of guides issued by the Climbers' Club. The guide was soon in demand and received a favourable review in the *Alpine Journal*.

On the whole the authors have succeeded in avoiding the merely sensational, while laying due emphasis on the extreme difficulty of many climbs which they describe.

A welcome development at the end of the year was the formation on 8 December of the Association of British Members of the Swiss Alpine Club.

This Association has been formed, with the full approval and recognition of the authorities of the S.A.C., to bring together those members of the S.A.C. who live in Great Britain.

The first President of the Association was Clinton Dent, an honorary member of the Swiss Alpine Club and a former President of the Alpine Club.

On 9 January the death occurred of Count Henri Russell-Killough, a

pioneer of Pyrenean exploration and an early member of the Alpine Club. An ardent traveller in his youth, the Count is remembered for his association with the Vignemale (3298m) where he constructed a series of grottoes and spent long periods alone, on many occasions watching the sunset fade 'or in grave meditation stalking slowly to and fro across the moonlit snows'.

In conclusion it seems appropriate to recall in Longstaff's own words¹³ his great achievement in the Karakoram.

We had stolen some 500 square miles, from the Yarkand river system of Chinese Turkestan, and joined it to the waters of the Indus and the Kingdom of Kashmir.

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 ridge had been descended by John, Charles and Edward Hopkinson, Cecil Slingsby, G T Lowe and a porter on 4 September 1895.
3. See *AJ113*, 270, 2008.
4. As a result of the realignment away from the original straight line the total length of the tunnel increased by 800m to 14.605km.
5. See *AJ97*, 238, 1992-93 and *AJ98*, 225-226, 1993.
6. The first ascent of the north peak (4467m) had been made by Vittorio Sella and Emilio Gallo on 22 August 1896.
7. The porters were Ernest Bareux, Emile Brocherel, Laurent Petigax and Albert Savoie.
8. The Bride Peak. Named by Sir Martin Conway during his expedition to the Karakoram in 1892.
9. Alex Graham was known to everyone as Alec.
10. For details of a recent alteration to this height see *AJ99*, 221, 1994.
11. The first ascent of the South Tower (3562m) had been made by C E Fay and H C Parker with Christian Häsler and Christian Kaufmann on 16 July 1903.
12. Considered by some authorities to be the first ascent under winter conditions. Raeburn had completed the route with E B Green on 10 April 1898 when 'the quantity of snow was exceptionally small for the time of year'.
13. Tom Longstaff, *This My Voyage*. London, John Murray, 1950.

