C A RUSSELL

One Hundred Years Ago

(with extracts from *The Alpine Journal*)

Unkind things have been said about this winter, but the ski-runners will long remember it with affection; for the first time for several years they have not had to bewail an insufficiency of snow.

With favourable snow conditions skiers were out in force at the principal Alpine resorts during the early months of 1910. Experienced ski mountaineers and winter climbers were active in the high mountains where many notable expeditions were completed including, on 21 January, the first ski ascent[1] of the Gross Wannenhorn by Karl Steiner and P Trümpler. On 25 March Alfred von Martin and Hermann Rumpelt made the first winter ascent of the Weissmies and four days later, accompanied by the guide Oscar Supersaxo, the first winter and ski ascent of the Alphubel. Other high peaks were climbed for the first time in winter: the Aiguille d'Argentière on 9 January by M Cottier with Maurice Crettex; the Aiguille des Grands Charmoz by C Sauvage with Joseph Ravanel[2] on 11 January; and the Dent d'Hérens on 16 January by Mario Piacenza with Jean Baptiste Pélissier and G Carrel.

The cold and wet conditions experienced in many Alpine regions during April and May continued without respite throughout the summer months.

> The climbing season of 1910 will long be remembered as one of the worst and most unsatisfactory ever known, both for persistent unsettled weather and for the troublesome condition of rocks and snow.

Although many parties were confined to the lower peaks several expeditions of note were completed during brief spells of fine weather. In the Mont Blanc range on 29 July Marcel Kurz and Steiner made the first ascent of the steep north face of the Aiguille de l'A Neuve, above the Saleina glacier. On 19 August H O Jones with Henri Brocherel and a porter made the first complete traverse of the Rocher du Mont Blanc, the long rock ridge between the Mont Blanc and Dôme glaciers and above the Quintino Sella hut.

In the Pennine Alps on 18 August Geoffrey Winthrop Young and Marcus Heywood with Josef Knubel made the first complete ascent of the west-north-west face of the Dent d'Hérens. On the next day an interesting variation of a famous route on the Matterhorn was followed by Maud Meyer with Christian Jossi junior and Dévouassoud Gaspard who left the hut on the south-west, Italian ridge to continue the ascent to the summit. Finding



149. Hoher Göll, west face. (*S M Russell*)

that the upper section of the ridge was out of condition they traversed the west face some distance below the *Galerie Carrel* to complete the ascent by the north-west, Zmutt Ridge which was reached at a point 'more than an hour from the top.'

In the Bernese Alps on 8 July a traverse across the upper slopes of the Fiescher glacier to the Bergli hut by a large party led by the great guide Alexander Burgener ended in tragedy. Starting from the Eismeer station of the Jungfraujoch railway[3] with the intention of ascending the Jungfrau on the following day, they had reached the rocks below the hut when a massive avalanche swept Burgener and five other members of the party to their deaths. Christian Bohren senior, the guardian of the Konkordia hut, who happened to be at the Bergli and had descended to meet the party also lost his life.

In the Bregaglia district on 8 August Harold Raeburn and W N Ling established a new route on Monte Disgrazia, climbing the rib now known as the *Spigolo Inglese* at the west edge of the north face to reach the north-west ridge.

In the Eastern Alps several outstanding new routes were completed. In the Dolomites on 18 July the summit of Cima Una – the Einserkofel – was reached by Guido and Max Mayer with Angelo Dibona and Luigi Rizzi who forced a direct line up the north face. On 29 July Josef Klammer, Richard Kroher and Max Zeller made the first ascent of the imposing west face of the Hoher Göll above Berchtesgaden.In the Julian Alps on 22

August H Tuma with Joze Komac opened the *Slovene Route*, an early climb on the north wall of Triglav.

During the year many parties were active in other mountain ranges. In Norway on 30 July Carl Rubenson, Ferdinand Schjelderup and Alf Bryn made the first ascent of Stedtind (1381m), the famous rock pyramid in the Tysfjord district. In the Caucasus Walter Fischer, Viktor von Friedrichs, Gustav Kuhfahl and Oscar Schuster travelled to the Kasbek region where they engaged a local hunter named Inaltico Kalagoff and completed a number of climbs including, on 28 July, the first ascent of Suatisi Khokh (4470m). On 8 August Fischer and Schuster scaled Kaltber (4408m) by way of the Kaltber glacier and the east ridge. Other visitors to the range included Oscar Hug and Casimir de Rham who on 2 September climbed Nakra Tau (4277m) and traversed the three summits of Dongusorun (4452m).

In the Punjab Himalaya in September Dr Arthur Neve, the Rev Marcus Wigram and a local man named Ahmdhu reached the summit[4] of Peak D41 (5945m), one of the peaks on the west ridge of Nun (7135m). In Garhwal C F Meade accompanied by the guides Pierre Blanc and Alexis Brocherel explored the western approaches to Kamet (7756m), reaching the saddle at the head of the Khaiam glacier before being forced to retreat.

In the Southern Alps of New Zealand on 7 January the Australian climber Freda Du Faur and L M Earle with Peter Graham made the first complete ascent of the long west ridge of Mount Malte Brun (3176m). A few days earlier Earle and Bernard Head with Jack Clarke and Alex Graham had continued their successful expeditions[5] by making the second ascent[6] of Mount Sefton (3159m), reaching the summit by way of the Copland Valley and the west ridge.

In the Canadian Rockies Tom Longstaff and his sister Katharine attended the annual camp of the Alpine Club of Canada, held on this occasion in Consolation Valley near Moraine Lake to the south of the Canadian Pacific Railway. On 4 July with the guide Rudolf Aemmer, Longstaff completed a notable new route by making the first ascent of the north-west face of Mount Assiniboine (3618m). Another visitor to this region was J E C Eaton who on 28 July with Bruce Otto and the guide Heinrich Burgener made the first ascent of Mount Pilkington (3285m) in the Freshfield group, one of the high peaks near the Continental Divide.

Further north on 3 April William Taylor and Pete Andersen, members of a party[7] from Fairbanks, reached the north, lower summit (5935m) of Mount McKinley or Denali (6194m) where they hoisted a flag on a large flagpole[8] – a remarkable exploit for the period.

At home leading climbers of the day were active in all the principal regions. In Wales J M Archer Thomson established two new routes of note: *Chasm Route* on Glyder Fach with H O Jones and L Noon at Easter; and, in September, with Jones and K J P Orton *The Gambit Climb* on Clogwyn y Ddisgl, one of the cliffs above the Llanberis Pass. In Scotland on 18 September Harold Raeburn, accompanied on this occasion by S M Cumming, F Greig and D H Menzies, returned to Buachaille Etive Mor to make the first ascent of *Crowberry Gully* under summer conditions.[9]

A welcome event was the publication of *Climbing in the Ogwen District* by Archer Thomson, the second of a series of guides issued by the Climbers' Club. The guide was an immediate success and received a favourable review in the *Alpine Journal.*

> Each climb is described in sufficient detail to enable any one visiting the mountain for the first time to find it, gauge its difficulties, and see how they are to be overcome, and identification is further assisted by photographs and diagrams.

Other books published during the year included *Twenty Years in the Himalaya* by C G Bruce and *The Call of the Snowy Hispar* by Dr William Hunter Workman and his wife Fanny Bullock Workman.

At the end of the year a notable expedition was undertaken by Marcel Kurz and Rudolf Staub who completed the first recorded ski circuit of Piz Bernina. Starting from the Bernina Hospice on 29 December they crossed the Palü, Fellaria, Scerscen, Sella and Roseg glaciers and descended Val Roseg in darkness to reach Pontresina the same evening.

* * *

In the following weeks further expeditions of note were undertaken with the aid of ski. On 14 January 1911 Kurz and Professor F F Roget accompanied by Maurice and Jules Crettex, Louis Theytaz and Léonce Murisier completed a section of the high-level route – the Haute Route – reaching Zermatt from Bourg St Pierre. Staying at the Valsorey, Chanrion and Bertol huts the party crossed a number of passes including the Col du Sonadon and on 13 January made the first winter ascent of the Dent Blanche.[10] On 8 January Staub, Karl Steiner and Guido Miescher completed the first ski ascent of the Gran Zebru - the Königspitze - in the course of a circuit of the Ortler group. Other peaks climbed for the first time in winter included the Tour Noir, ascended by Jean de Rufz with Joseph and Camille Ravanel on 24 January and Mont Dolent, scaled on 12 March by G Couchepin, O Dehms, J Sautier and R Schanze with Maurice Crettex. On 31 January C F Meade accompanied by Josef Pollinger and Josef Lochmatter reached the summit of the Matterhorn, encountering a violent southerly gale and intense cold during the descent.

The rain and low temperatures experienced during the spring and early summer were followed by an 'extraordinary spell of unbroken fine weather' which continued for much of the climbing season. Many parties were able to take advantage of the favourable conditions and successful expeditions were undertaken in all the principal regions. In the Mont Blanc range H O Jones and Geoffrey Winthrop Young with Josef Knubel completed an outstanding series of climbs. On 9 August they joined forces with Karl Blodig[11] to open a classic route on Mont Blanc by ascending Picco Luigi Amedeo and the south-west, Brouillard ridge from the Col Emile Rey.[12]



150. Lötschberg Tunnel, 31 March 1911. Chief engineers Rothpletz (*wearing cap*) and Moreau meet after the breakthrough. (*Gesellschaft für Ingenieurbaukunst, Zürich*)

Two days later Jones and Young with Knubel and Laurent Croux made the first descent of the north-east, Hirondelles Ridge of the Grandes Jorasses – a ridge which at that time was still unclimbed. On 14 August, after a brief rest in Courmayeur, Jones, Young and Knubel reclimbed the peak from the Col des Grandes Jorasses to make the first complete ascent of the west ridge.

A few days later, on 19 August, the same party with the addition of Ralph Todhunter and the guide Henri Brocherel made the first ascent of another classic route – the east, Mer de Glace face of the Aiguille du Grépon. Young wrote later[13] that for him this day formed 'the close of the most perfect season of our alpine lives'.

Other notable new climbs in the Mont Blanc range included the first ascent of the long north-west, Tricot ridge of the Aiguille de Bionnassay by the mixed party of Eleonore Hasenclever, Helene Wirthl, Max Helff, Günter von Saar and Richard Weitzenböck on 27 July and, in August, the first complete ascent of the south-south-west, Cosmiques ridge of the Aiguille du Midi by the brothers George and Max Finch.

As the magnificent weather continued classic routes were established in other Alpine regions. In the Pennine Alps on 7 July Dietrich von Bethmann-Hollweg with Oscar and Othmar Supersaxo made the first ascent of the steep north-north-east face of the Lenzspitze, following a line up the east side of the face. Later in the season, on 9 September, Mario Piacenza with Jean Joseph Carrel and Joseph Gaspard completed the first ascent of the south-east, Furggen ridge of the Matterhorn, forcing an indirect route round the difficult upper step. In the Bernese Alps on 30 July Albert Weber with Hans Schlunegger senior reached the summit of the Jungfrau from the Jungfraujoch after making the first ascent of the north-east ridge.

In the Eastern Alps on 11 August Richard Gerin and Otto Pitschmann opened a new route on the Grossglockner by climbing the north-east ridge, between the Pallavicini couloir and the north face. In the Dolomites notable new routes included the east face of the Campanile Basso – the Guglia di Brenta – by Paul Preuss, solo, on 28 July and the exposed south-west edge of the Torre Delago, one of the Vajolet Towers, on 9 August by Irma Glaser with Tita Piaz and F Jori.

Elsewhere in the Alps further progress in connection with a major engineering project was reported on 31 March.

> The Lötschberg Tunnel was pierced early this morning. The two boring parties met at 3.50am ...
>
> On January 14 the two parties of workmen, one boring from Kandersteg on the north, the other from Goppenstein on the south, first heard the detonations of explosives through the thousand odd yards of mountain dividing them, but progress was slow owing to the hardness of the rock. Blasting was continued on both sides to the last, communication between the two galleries being kept up by telephone overland.

In July Walter Fischer and Oscar Schuster returned to the Kasbek region in the Caucasus, accompanied on this occasion by the artist Ernst Platz. Assisted by a local man named Michael Gabulow they undertook a number of expeditions including the first ascent of Tsmiakom Khokh (4177m), climbed by Fischer and Schuster on 3 August.

Early in June Dr and Mrs Workman left Srinagar to commence the seventh of their mountain journeys. Accompanied by Count Cesare Calciati as topographer, an assistant named Dante Ferrari, the guide Cyprien Savoye and three porters[14] from Courmayeur, the Workmans spent several weeks exploring the Kondus and other glaciers to the south and east of the Masherbrum and Chogolisa groups. In the middle of August the party crossed to the Siachen glacier where they carried out further exploration and ascended a peak of some 6400m from which 'a very extended view over the Siachen and its tributaries was obtained.'

To the east Dr Alexander Kellas accompanied by local men spent three months in Sikkim where he continued his extensive exploration and made the first ascent of several high peaks including Sentinel Peak (6470m) on 21 May, Pauhunri (7125m) on 16 June and Chomiomo (6835m) on 12 July. He also reached a point less than 50m below the Nepal Gap (6300m) on the north ridge of Kangchenjunga (8586m) before being forced to retreat. Kellas then travelled to Garhwal where he examined the approaches to Kamet (7756m), climbing a peak of some 6150m near the Khaiam saddle on 22 August before leaving for home.



151. Author-Explorer-Mountaineer
Edward Whymper's grave at Chamonix. (*J M Russell*)

During the summer Dr Ernest Neve continued his exploration of the Kolahoi group in Kashmir. On 21 June he made the first ascent of the south peak (5110m) accompanied by Kenneth Mason, an army officer seconded to the Survey of India, and two Gurkhas.

Later in the year Theodor Herzog, a German botanist, and the Swiss climber Carl Seelig spent several weeks exploring the Cordillera Quimsa Cruz in Bolivia. During their travels they undertook a number of climbs, making the first recorded ascent of Inmaculado (5312m) and reaching a point some 15m below the summit of Jachacunocollo (5820m), the highest peak in the range.

In Britain, where the coronation of King George V took place on 22 June, climbing continued apace and many new routes were recorded. In Wales during August Guy Barlow and E W Steeple accompanied by H E Bowron, A H Doughty and A G Woodhead completed *Grooved Arête*, a popular route on the east face of Tryfan. On the Isle of Skye a classic expedition was established on 10 June when A C McLaren and Leslie Shadbolt made the first traverse of the main Cuillin Ridge from Glen Brittle to Sligachan.

On 16 September at Chamonix the death occurred of Edward Whymper whose name will always be associated with the early climbing history and first ascent of the Matterhorn. Although in later life Whymper presented a formidable and austere figure he is also remembered for many acts of kindness and, as Sir Arnold Lunn observed,[15] 'it is impossible to deny him the unmistakable imprint of greatness.'

This account, the last in the present series, is concluded with the extract from Whymper's famous book *Scrambles Amongst the Alps* which was quoted in the first account in the series. Now, as then, for the mountaineer the following lines from *Scrambles* require no alteration.

> If I could blot out every reminiscence, or erase every memory, still I should say that my scrambles amongst the Alps have repaid me, for they have given me two of the best things a man can possess - health and friends.
>
> The recollections of past pleasures cannot be effaced. Even now as I write they crowd up before me. First comes an endless series of pictures, magnificent in form, effect, and colour. I see the great peaks, with clouded tops, seeming to mount up for ever and ever; I hear the music of the distant herds, the peasant's *jodel*, and the solemn church-bells; and I scent the fragrant breath of the pines: and after these have passed away, another train of thoughts succeeds – of those who have been upright, brave, and true; of kind hearts and bold deeds; and of courtesies received at stranger hands, trifles in themselves, but expressive of that good will towards men which is the essence of charity.

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 famous guide Ravanel, *le Rouge*.
3. At that time the upper section of the railway to the Jungfraujoch was still under construction.
4. The small cairn on the summit found by Neve and his companions had been built by members of Dr and Mrs Workman's party to mark the first ascent of the peak on 14 August 1906.
5. Earle had established a new route on Mount Cook (3764m) - see *AJ 114*, 240, 2009 - and Head, accompanied by Clarke and Alex Graham, had made the first ascent of Mount Aspiring (3036m) in the Haast range on 23 November 1909.
6. The first ascent had been completed by E A FitzGerald with Mattias Zurbriggen on 14 February 1895.
7. The other members were Thomas Lloyd and Charles McGonagell.
8. The flagpole was a seasoned spruce sapling 'full 14ft long'.
9. Raeburn had completed the route under winter conditions on two previous occasions; see *AJ 114*, 241-242, 2009.
10. The peak had been climbed by O G Jones with Antoine Bovier, Pierre Gaspoz and a porter on 25 April 1893; see *AJ 98*, 223, 1993.
11. On reaching the summit of Picco Luigi Amedeo Blodig realised his ambition to become the first climber to ascend all the summits in the Alps of 4000m or over recognised at that time, narrowly beating the engineer Hans Pfann, who achieved the feat on the same peak two days later, and Dr Ernst Pühn who climbed the peak on 18 August.
12. The brothers G B and G F Gugliermina and Joseph Brocherel, who on 20 July 1901 completed the first ascent of the Brouillard ridge, had reached the summit of Picco Luigi Amedeo from the Mont Blanc glacier by way of the north-west face.
13. Geoffrey Winthrop Young, *On High Hills*. London, Methuen & Co Ltd, 1927.
14. The porters were Siméon Quaizier, Cesar Chenoz and Emile Gléry.
15. Arnold Lunn, *A Century of Mountaineering*. London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1957.