

A hiker in silhouette stands on a rocky mountain trail, holding a trekking pole. A horse and a dog are also visible in silhouette. The background shows a vast, hazy mountain range under a bright sky.

**PART TWO**

*The West We Have:  
Making the Mountains  
Our Home*





## *Giving Meaning to Mountains and Making Them Ours*

### **Mountaineering and the Aesthetics of Place**

**MOUNT FAIRVIEW,  
BANFF NATIONAL PARK**  
Ron Hughes reaches the  
summit of this small mountain  
near Lake Louise at the end of  
a spectacular storm.  
*Photograph by R.W. Sandford.*

WE DO NOT KNOW WHEN MOUNTAINS were first invested with supernatural powers. Perhaps the first sacred summits were volcanoes, their thunderous anger reaching with hell-fingers into villages of innocents unsure of how they had offended their gods.

Perhaps the first notions of hell were belched up from these burning summits, the very breath of brimstone carried on the wind with the smoke and glowing ash. Certainly, weather came from the peaks. When clouds boiled over the mountains, it made them look like displeased stone gods punishing evil with fire and flood.

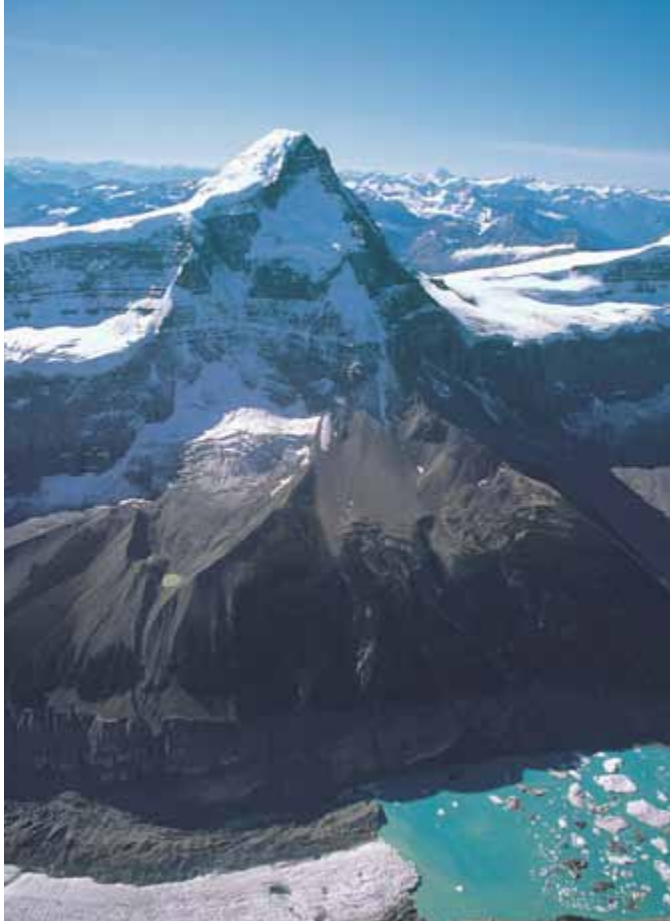
Faith, too, seems to have been born on the summits, those sacred places where the earth reached up to the sky out of which all things seemed to come. With so much riding on the wind and the rain, where else could the peaks be pointing but to heaven, that vague seat from which an absolute power pronounced on the likelihood of crops and the fortunes of men. To such summits the first prophets climbed, seeking peace, wisdom and pronouncements from their gods. Time has swallowed Zarathustra, who wandered in search of truth until on “the mountain of the Holy Communing Ones” he heard “the soul of the earth” lamenting to heaven the devastation of the land below.<sup>1</sup> Was it

he who first made the whole planet sacred, the entire spinning sphere a god? Ours might be an era in which revisiting early ideals could be worthwhile.

In the Bible, God tells Abraham to offer his son up as a sacrifice “upon one of the mountains which I shall tell you.” To the mountain they went but just as he was about to slay his son, God blessed him and his people and they went forth with their faith to rule a sizeable portion of the known world. Abraham, being on the inside of such things, knew the almighty as El Shaddai. Many translate this name to mean “one of the mountain.” From this we can imagine a deity watching over his peaks, rather in the manner of a retired mountaineer fondly recalling earlier climbs.

It was clear that Abraham’s mountain had a lot of power. It was upon this mount that Solomon placed his temple.<sup>2</sup> Later a mosque was built on the site for from this summit Mohammed, the founder of Islam, went to heaven. Mohammed was wise about mountains. He was the first to unequivocally state that the climber had to go to the mountain as it was unlikely to come to him, a comment with a great deal of philosophical merit. In this regard, it could be said that Mohammed was the founder of the expedition, for his philosophies would later send a great number of people into the mountains to ponder the profound wisdom of his seemingly self-evident truths.

All of this summiteering was good for the image of mountains. It was becoming increasingly obvious that gods did dwell at least on some peaks and those who went to visit them shared their power. The prophet Ezekiel really got this idea going. Though it was not clear he had this vision on a mountain, what he described is a phenomenon seen in mountains. Ezekiel saw an enthroned man surrounded by a rainbow and a wheel burning within a wheel. He described what he saw as the Glory of the Lord. In *Earth Wisdom*, Dolores LaChapelle notes that this kind of vision only seemed to appear when the subject was veiled by cloud. She indicates that, though it may be hard to prove, the phenomenon may have been a sun halo. A sun halo, or what is also called a “glory,” is a visual effect produced by unusual conditions of mist and sunlight.<sup>3</sup> This phenomenon is referred to in mountaineering as the Spectre of the Brocken. It was first described by an Englishman who witnessed it on the Brocken, the highest peak in the Harz Mountains, in central Germany.<sup>4</sup> The glory is produced by a backscattering of light similar to how a car’s headlights can be reflected from an animal’s eyes at night. It is a rare natural phenomenon because conditions, such as the angle



#### **MOUNT COLUMBIA AND ITS GLACIER**

A spectacular glacier flows down the shoulders of Mount Columbia. The Columbia Glacier is the headwaters of the Athabasca River, a major tributary of the great Mackenzie River system.

*Photograph by R.W. Sandford.*

of the sun and the quality and concentration of water vapour in the air, must be just right to produce a vivid rainbow halo around a figure moving in the mist. The extent of the glory can be much enhanced when oblique sunlight projects the haloed shadow outward into surrounding clouds. In such conditions, the rainbow figure can appear several kilometres tall as the illusion is projected outward from its source. To witness this is an unnerving experience. Imagine a rainbow taking your shape, radiating outward and projecting your movements hugely into the mist over the surrounding valley. If you didn't know that it was an illusion created by light and water vapour, you might imagine yourself entering a mid-zone between heaven and earth.

Before the very eyes of his

disciples, Jesus was said to have assumed the brightness of the sun and was ablaze in rainbows. It sounds much like the Spectre of the Brocken. To this day, icons of Jesus wear a halo, the glory of the mountain. Throughout his life, Jesus meditated and consulted God on a variety of peaks. He was on yet another mount when he died.

The Buddha was also bathed in the holy light of the mountain. He, too, saw his figure glowing with rainbow light. Buddha referred to four sacred mountains as the cornerstones of his faith. These mountains have mythical association with the four elements of the Buddhist cosmos: earth, air, fire and water. Temples and monasteries were built on the shoulders of these sacred places. Some became famous if only because on occasion even pilgrims could be lit by the rainbow of their belief. Sometimes acolytes would over-react to the presence of the sacred light. Glowing in rainbow mists, they would throw themselves from the peak into the arms of Enlightenment itself.

For the Chinese, Mount Omei, or O-mei Shan, where the Buddha experienced his glory, is the sacred mountain. This mountain, associated with fire, is located in Szechuan province in what is now China. From its substantial summit, the faithful can see the eastern ramparts of the Himalayas, more than 100 kilometres away. On the top of the mountain's 3,000 metre peak is the monastery of the Golden Summit. Behind is the Terrace of the Buddha's Vision. Here, if the conditions are just right, one can look down the nearly vertical 2,000 metre wall and experience the Buddha's glory.

Buddhism is a religion based on the earth's inherent wisdom, revering mountains and the spiritual power they could inspire. In what was even then an increasingly crowded world, Buddhists saw in the peaks holy places where one could go to be alone. Christians, burning with a different faith, turned away from the solitude the peaks. They returned half a millennium later, however, to discover in them the solitude and peace that Buddhists had always known.

Despite prohibiting even occasional forays in the mountains, the Christian church continued to have considerable influence over the perception of wilderness. Even at the beginning of the Age of Enlightenment, the clergy were still performing exorcisms on glaciers. In 1708, Johann Jacob Scheuchzer, a Swiss doctor and mathematician, Fellow of the Royal Society and leading authority on the Alps, was still classifying alpine dragons into scientific orders. As late as the eighteenth century, faithful but fearful travellers would wear blindfolds so they wouldn't have to look upon demonic irregularity of Europe's awful Alps.

Until the eighteenth century, mountain climbing was virtually unheard of in Western civilization. Before the first ascent of Mont Blanc in 1786, the only Europeans to venture much above timberline were chamois hunters, prospectors and smugglers who used the high passes to avoid customs officials.<sup>5</sup> Even the first ascent of Mont Blanc did not initiate a massive urban exodus to the Alps. The climbing fraternity was still very small and the few guides there were had to rely on farming or a trade to support them when there were no foreign clients paying to be taken up local mountains.

Mountaineering entered the popular imagination of Europeans during the first ascent of the Matterhorn in the summer of 1865.<sup>6</sup> After seven bold attempts, a young British engraver named Edward Whymper and his guides had at last made the peak. But on the descent, a rope somehow got cut and much to Whymper's everlasting horror, four of his companions fell to their deaths on the glacier a thousand

metres below. There was a tremendous outcry. The average European was appalled that, in a time when all the energies of society were being marshalled together to make the world safe, young people were squandering their lives falling from the cold stone of the Alps. There was talk of banning mountaineering. The threat of a ban, however, simply made more young people want to try it. With the first ascent of the Meije in Dauphiny by Baron Emmanuel Boileau in 1877, all the great peaks of the Alps had been climbed.<sup>7</sup> It had only taken a dozen years from Whymper's ascent of the Matterhorn for climbers to summit every major European peak by its easiest route.

Climbers then attempted more difficult routes up already climbed peaks. Though the leading alpinists of the time were serious British amateurs, growing interest in the aesthetic rewards of high altitude exploration stimulated the demand for professional mountain guides. The bulk of this guiding activity remained confined to the tourist resorts of the Alps. But it would not be long before mountaineers would be looking for other ranges in which to ply their newly perfected craft.

#### **WAY OUT WEST: CONFRONTING CANADIAN MOUNTAINS**

HUMAN BEINGS HAVE BEEN living and travelling in mountains for a very long time. The first known mountaineer was discovered in a remarkably preserved state on a glacier in the Otztaler Alps on the Austrian-Italian border in 1991. Otzi the Iceman, as he became known, was found at an altitude of 3,210 metres. His body was radiocarbon dated to be about 5,300 years old. His shoes, clothes and tools indicated clearly that he was well used to life at high altitude.<sup>8</sup>

Canada also has an iceman, though from a much later period. In 1999, three schoolteachers on a sheep hunting expedition discovered the headless body of an aboriginal hunter at the foot of a melting glacier at Tatshenshini-Alsek Park in the St. Elias Mountains near the B.C.-Yukon border. This iceman later became known as Kwaday Dan Sinchi, a name that means "Long Ago Person Found" in the language of the Southern Tutchone, who live in the area. It appears that this man was in his late teens or early twenties when he died travelling over the ice. He had a hat made of woven spruce roots and a cloak sewn of the hides of a hundred ground squirrels. By dating the hat and robe, scientists surmise that this young hunter lost his life on the glacier between 1415 and 1545. This evidence suggests that Aboriginal peoples did travel over glaciated mountain passes long before European contact, at least in the

coastal regions of what is now Canada.<sup>9</sup> It would take nearly 200 years of getting used to the continent before Europeans would acquire the knowledge and the confidence to travel willingly in the high mountain reaches of the West.

Much of the early exploration of Canada was done not on foot but by water. Rivers, rough and unpredictable though they could be, were natural highways through unmapped wilderness. The character of the country through which the earliest explorers travelled is surmised largely from descriptions of the water against which they regularly battled. Cascades, cataracts and boiling rapids are common terms in the journals of those who first explored the Canadian West. Mountains, except where they affected the course of a river or where their lower shoulders presented a broad view of possible routes, were not on the agenda of most early explorers. They were obstacles and the success of an expedition was often measured by how quickly explorers and traders could pass by them.

As travellers became more competent in addressing the demands of mountainous terrain, explorers began to stray from the main trade routes to explore regions outside the domain of maps. Like pioneers in any field, these early travellers simply wanted to do more than had been done before. Freed from the outrageous myths that had surrounded the unknown land, and imbued with a growing European sense of adventure, a generation of highly motivated explorers would gradually shift the reputation of the Canadian mountain West from a one of foreboding to one of celebrated awe.

In the spring of 1827 a Scottish botanist named David Douglas completed the first documented ascent of a major peak in North America.<sup>10</sup> Douglas had joined Hudson's Bay Company traders and voyageurs as they paddled up the Columbia River toward Boat Encampment at the top of the Big Bend of the river. Leaving their canoes behind, the expedition made its slow way to Athabasca Pass west of present day Jasper. After exhausting himself in the deep spring snow, he halted below the pass on April 30, 1827. His journals do not explain what compelled him to act as he did – they only indicate that the next day he decided to climb a nearby mountain:

*After breakfast at one o'clock, being as I conceive on the highest part of the route, I became desirous of ascending one of the peaks, and accordingly I set out alone on snowshoes to that on the left hand or west side, being to all appearance the highest. The labour of ascending the lower part, which is covered with pines, is great beyond description, sinking on many occasions to the middle. Half-way up vegetation ceases*

*entirely, not so much as a vestige of moss or lichen on the stones. Here I found it less laborious as I walked on the hard crust. One-third from the summit it becomes a mountain of pure ice, sealed far over by Nature's hand as a momentous work of Nature's God. The height from its base may be about 5500 feet: timber, 2750 feet; a few mosses and lichen, 500 more; 1000 feet of perpetual snow; the remainder, towards the top 1250, as I have said, glacier with a thin covering of snow on it. The ascent took me five hours; descending only one and a quarter. Places where the descent was gradual, I tied my shoes together, making them carry me in turn as a sledge. Sometimes I came down at one spell 500 to 700 feet in the space of one minute and a half. I remained twenty minutes, my thermometer standing at 18°; night closing fast in on me, and no means of fire, I was reluctantly forced to descend. The sensation I felt is beyond what I can give utterance to. Nothing, as far as the eye could perceive, but mountains such as I was on, and many higher, some rugged beyond any description, striking the mind with horror blended with a sense of the wondrous works of the Almighty.<sup>11</sup>*

Though Douglas may have inadvertently become Canada's first mountaineer, his contributions extend far beyond this simple distinction. The altitudes that he calculated for Mounts Hooker and Brown in the Canadian Rockies were of Himalayan proportions. Due to a few passages in his published journal, these mountains would be included on early maps as the highest peaks between Mexico and Alaska.<sup>12</sup> His descriptions, though a source of controversy, brought British climbers seeking Douglas's fabled giants. In the course of that search, the first professional mountain guides would come to Canada. The standard they would set for safety and cool courage would inspire a belief in the guiding tradition. But before that could happen, Canada had to become a country and the Canadian West had to become more accessible.

#### **NATIONHOOD, THE RAILWAY AND THE NATIONAL POLICY**

WHEN CANADA BECAME A NATION in July of 1867, the bulk of Canadians lived in Ontario and Quebec, with a small population in the Maritimes. It became quickly apparent to the newly formed country that the west coast of British North America would be annexed by the Americans if the new government did not hasten to make British Columbia formally a part of Canada. In 1871, Canada promised British Columbia a national railway if it joined its fledgling confederation.

The problems facing the country were hardly over with the driving of the last spike in 1885. The success of the railway was only one part of a larger vision of Canada established by John A. Macdonald and his Conservatives at the time British Columbia had been invited into confederation. Macdonald's "National Policy" had three central elements.

The first was support for eastern manufacturing; support for raising tariffs to bolster Canadian manufacturing had helped Macdonald get elected in 1878. The second element was a strong desire to settle the West so that its natural resources could support eastern manufacturing. The third was construction of a transcontinental, all-Canadian railway that would provide a physical link between East and West.<sup>13</sup> The railway created an agricultural economy on the prairies and a tourism economy in the Rockies and Selkirks. The basis of tourism was the hot springs on Sulphur Mountain in what is now Banff National Park. Spas in the late nineteenth century were very popular among the well-heeled in Europe and eastern North America.

The Canadian Pacific Railway's tourism business grew into a full-scale resort operation as its transcontinental passenger traffic increased. Although the federal government and the railway were partners in tourism in the mountain West, the federal government had little money to put into developing the park system and chose to spend what it did have on the hot springs reserve at Banff.<sup>14</sup> As the CPR had a vested interest in developing the parks created around Mount Stephen House, Glacier House, and later at Lake Louise, the company established a trail- and bridge-building program that would result in the creation of facilities appealing to a new breed of mountaineers and tourist-explorers.<sup>15</sup>

A good deal of this new interest in hiking and climbing in the mountains of the Canadian West had been stimulated by a remarkable new book published in England in 1890. *Among the Selkirk Glaciers*, by William Spotswood Green, documented the author's visit to Glacier House with his cousin, Henry Swanzy, in the summer of 1888. As no map existed of the area beyond the tracks, Green and Swanzy decided to create one. The intrepid pair hiked and climbed for six weeks, naming peaks and passes and mapping more than 500 square miles (1,295 square km) of rugged mountain terrain.<sup>16</sup> The widely read book inspired British and American climbers to take the train to Western Canada.

Partly as a result of Green's book, Glacier House became the earliest centre of Canadian mountaineering and tourist-exploration. Tucked neatly into the hemlocks, cedars and aromatic firs on the Illecillewaet River just below Rogers Pass, Glacier House was an ideal location for a mountain resort. The view of the Illecillewaet Glacier from near the hotel was staggering indeed, as were the views of peaks that rose from the surrounding ice stairways that led blue-white to the skyline. In 1891, the prominent American climber Walter Wilcox visited Glacier House

### THE CPR PROMOTES LAKE LOUISE

In 1888 two British adventurers stopped in to see William Cornelius Van Horne at the Canadian Pacific Railway headquarters in Montreal, to recommend that the railway build a chalet at the most beautiful place they had seen in Canada. That place was Lake Louise. Within a decade, the CPR made Lake Louise the most famous tourism attraction in the Rocky Mountains.

*Photograph courtesy of Canadian Pacific Hotels and Resorts.*



and found it filled with tourist-adventurers “who were accustomed to gather every evening around a blazing fire and read selections from Green’s *Among the Selkirk Glaciers* just as our forefathers were wont to read a daily chapter from the Bible.”<sup>17</sup>

### AN ACCIDENT WAITING TO HAPPEN

FOREMOST AMONG THE EARLY tourist-explorers in Canada’s mountain West was a group of eastern climbers who belonged to the Boston-based Appalachian Mountain Club. The club’s energetic president, Charles Fay, pioneered an enthusiasm for mountaineering not just in the United States but in Canada as well. Fay and his wealthy associates saw in the Rockies a personal vision to be fulfilled. Great peaks could be climbed and history made in climbing them. It was a golden age. Ambitious urbanites simply got off the train and walked toward the summits of unclimbed, unnamed peaks and named them for their friends.

Without guides, however, and with so little training, early climbers in the Rockies were accidents waiting to happen. On August 3, 1896, Philip Stanley Abbot fell from the upper cliff bands on Mount Lefroy to the col below. He died before Fay and his companions could summon medical help.<sup>18</sup>

Like the accident on the Matterhorn three decades earlier, Abbot’s death caused a stir. Many North Americans wanted to ban climbing to prevent further accidents. Undeterred by the bad press, the small mountaineering community decided it was time to bring professional



#### **LAKE MCARTHUR**

This stunning body of water located near Lake O'Hara is named for the great Canadian surveyor James Joseph McArthur, who mapped the mountains on either side of the main line of the Canadian Pacific Railway inside what is now the Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks World Heritage Site.

*Photograph by R.W. Sandford.*

mountaineering expertise to the challenging problem of climbing in the Canadian Rockies. If they could avenge the death of Abbot by “conquering” Mount Lefroy, they reasoned, the image of mountaineering as an uplifting and worthwhile enterprise would be redeemed.

Before the fatal accident on Mount Lefroy in 1896, Fay and Abbot had climbed in Switzerland with Professor Harold Baily Dixon. Dixon was an accomplished academic and a respected member of the Alpine Club in Britain. It had been Abbot's vain hope that Dixon accompany the 1896 expedition to the Rockies and Selkirks.

At the insistence of Abbot's father, who was anxious to prove that the mountain on which his son died could be climbed, Dixon agreed to form part of an 1897 attempt on Mount Lefroy. Dixon also invited some influential friends. Among them were George Percival Baker of the Alpine Club, and John Norman Collie who had already made a name for himself in the Alps and in pioneering climbing efforts in the Himalayas. Though competent in their own right, these Englishmen did not come alone. They paid all the expenses of having a professional guide accompany them to the Rockies. That guide was Peter Sarbach of St. Niklaus, Switzerland, with whom both Dixon and Abbot had climbed in the Alps. While his clients made it clear that Sarbach was invited on the expedition to strengthen an already excellent climbing team, Sarbach became the first professional mountain guide to climb in Canada when he arrived at Lake Louise in 1897.<sup>19</sup>

A large international party guided by Sarbach made the first ascent of Mount Lefroy on the anniversary of Philip Abbot's death on August 3, 1897, and went on two days later to make the first ascent of Mount Green, later known as Mount Victoria. On August 11, a large party guided again by Sarbach arrived at the Bow Glacier, which they crossed to access the Wapta Icefield. After making the first ascent of Mount Gordon, the Americans departed for home. Collie, Baker and Sarbach proceeded north in search of a large peak they had seen from the summit of Mount Gordon. Crossing Bow Summit they entered the valley of what Collie called Bear Creek, later known as the Mistaya River. On August 25, Sarbach guided Collie and Baker to the summit of a 3,155 metre peak near the confluence of the Mistaya and the main branch of the North Saskatchewan River. Collie named it Mount Sarbach in honour of their guide. Though persistently bad weather prevented any further summit attempts that year, the value of professional guides had already been established.<sup>20</sup> The Rockies made a deep impression on the climbers. In 1898, Collie returned with Hugh Stutfield and

Herman Woolley to search for the David Douglas giants, Mounts Hooker and Brown, though the myth of Himalayan sized peaks in the Rockies had already been dispelled; the trio discovered the Columbia Icefield.

### **THE ARRIVAL OF THE RAILWAY GUIDES**

A CAMPAIGN TO ENCOURAGE the railway to consider full-time professional guides in Canada had been launched even before the arrival of Sarbach and the Collie party in 1897. Dr. Joshua Stallard was a close friend of the Vaux family of Philadelphia. George and William Vaux had spent several summers studying glaciers in Rogers Pass with their family starting in 1890. In 1896, Stallard had joined the Vauxes at Lake Louise and had met Charles Fay and Philip Abbot just before they departed on their fatal attempt on Mount Lefroy. In September of 1896, Stallard wrote a letter to the CPR passenger traffic manager responsible for the Rockies, extolling the virtues of Swiss mountain guides, based on climbing experiences in the Alps dating from 1852. Stallard went on to suggest that the fatal accident on Mount Lefroy might not have happened had the Fay-Abbot party been properly and professionally guided.<sup>21</sup>

Passenger Traffic Manager David McNicoll passed Stallard's correspondence on to T.G. Shaughnessy, then vice president of the railway, with a letter outlining his support for Stallard's idea. "As you and I know," McNicoll wrote, "I have all along been of the opinion that we must provide increased accommodations and facilities in the mountains if we expect people to visit them and stay among them, and I understand a little has been done at Louise, but I think a great deal more needs to be done. The same applies to the different points of interest in the neighbourhood of Glacier Station."<sup>22</sup>

In March of 1897, Shaughnessy wrote to Archer Baker, Canadian Pacific's European Traffic Agent in London, to find out how the railway might engage professional guides for service in the Canadian West.

Senior railway officials like McNicoll and Shaughnessy clearly saw the value of professional guides and were anxious to import them to Canada. The writings of William Spotswood Green plus the photography and glacial research of George and William Vaux had already done a great deal to advertise the natural attractions of the Glacier area to potential tourist-adventurers.<sup>23</sup> No one wanted any more climbing deaths. The great engine of the railway's administration was bent on bringing mountain guides west.

In the autumn of 1898, the Canadian Pacific Railway used the Thomas Cook Company to help locate Swiss guides interested in coming to Canada for a season. Contracts were signed with three perfect specimens from Interlaken. Christian Häsler and Edouard Feuz (the closest approximation in English is “Foits”) would be sent to Glacier House and Charles Clarke would be sent briefly to Banff to promote mountaineering at the Banff Springs Hotel.<sup>24</sup>

The arrival of Swiss guides at Glacier House caused a sensation. First, there was their unusual appearance. Here were men in tweed jackets, waistcoats, and ties, wearing nailed boots and knickers with long wool socks. Climbing ropes hung from their shoulders and they held ice axes. Though most visitors didn't know what to make of them, climbers were impressed. “No pair of twin brothers,” wrote Charles Fay, “were more nearly duplicates in raiment, no two guides ever more supplemented one the other in excellencies.”<sup>25</sup> Fay got to know the two Swiss guides immediately. With Fay and Herschel Parker as clients Feuz and Häsler made their first ascent in Canada on August 13, 1899. Fay wrote a full account of this famous ascent for the hotel register at Glacier House, which concluded with his assessment of the value of professional mountain guides on new and dangerous terrain:

*The ascent of a peak so remote, should properly take three days; one to reach a suitable camping place at the base, one for the ascent, and a third for the return to the Hotel. Our party took but one and one half days, and made a correspondingly forced march.*<sup>26</sup>

On August 20, 1899, George Vaux Jr. visited and commented just as positively on the benefit that professional guides would bring to the Glacier House experience. The presence of guides was making his research into the movement of the Illecillewaet Glacier safer and more productive:

*During the year which has intervened since I last wrote in this minute book, Glacier has lost none of its charms.*

*The most valuable improvement has been the bringing here of the two Swiss guides. Thoroughly safe, and competent in every particular, there is thus afforded to the general visitor the opportunity to get a true insight into the attractions which mountaineering affords. The visit to the Illecillewaet Glacier may now be supplemented by a trip into the ice itself under the guidance of Feuz or Häsler, which cannot fail to delight with its beauty and novelty. Entire confidence may be reposed in the guides, the chief requirement being an implicit obedience of their directions.*<sup>27</sup>

Guides were making the summits accessible to people who could not make it on their own. It did not take long for word to get out that the great peaks of the mountain West could be climbed *if* you went with a guide.

The decision to experiment with guides at Glacier House at Rogers Pass in 1899 completely changed the rules of membership in the climbing community. Until this time, climbing had been the almost exclusive domain of those who held membership in an alpine or mountaineering club. As there were only a few of these in North America, and none in Canada, it was difficult to acquire the skills and experience necessary to become a competent climber. With resident professional mountain guides available at reasonable cost, it became possible to learn to climb without terrifying or fatal results. With the opening of the 1899 season, anyone who was reasonably fit could step off the train at Glacier House and receive a safe and relatively inexpensive introduction to mountaineering in one of the most stunning alpine settings in the world. One needed no equipment, no membership – only a sense of adventure and determination.

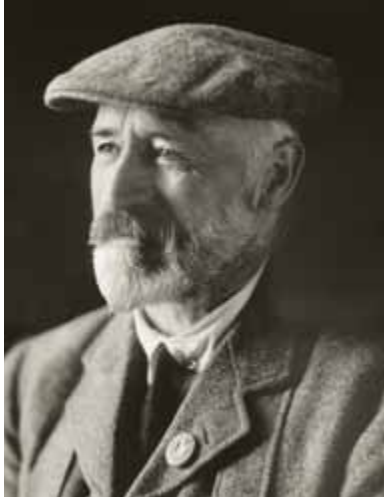
#### **FAMOUS CLIMBERS AND FAMOUS GUIDES**

THE START OF THE TWENTIETH century brought more Swiss guides to the Canadian Alps. Karl Schlunegger, Friedrich Michel and Jacob Müller signed contracts with the railway and made their way to the western mountains in the summer of 1900.<sup>28</sup>

In 1900, Edward Whymper crossed Canada by train and had been much taken by the scenery and nature of the Canadian peaks. The following winter, Whymper proposed to the CPR that he would favour the landscape attractions of the railway and its hotels in newspaper articles and public presentations in England and in Europe, in exchange for an all-expense-paid visit to the Rockies in 1901. As Whymper was the most famous mountaineer in the world, the railway took quick notice of his offer and placed its considerable resources at his command for the entire climbing season of 1901.

To ensure a successful 1901 climbing season, Whymper brought four Swiss guides with him: Christian Klucker, James Pollinger, Joseph Bossonney and Hans Kaufmann (the only one with previous experience in the Rockies).<sup>29</sup>

The railway, having footed the bill for this expensive expedition, was anxious to see Whymper make the first ascent of Mount Assiniboine, the mountain widely known as the Matterhorn of the Rockies. Privately,



**ARTHUR OLIVER  
WHEELER**

A.O. Wheeler is a legend in the Rocky Mountains. He wrote the first book by a Canadian on the mountains of the West. He was the co-founder of the Alpine Club of Canada. He mapped the boundary between Alberta and British Columbia. And he was a tireless promoter of mountain adventure everywhere mountains could be found in Canada.

*Photograph courtesy of the Wheeler family.*

Whympner had no interest in the great stone spike rising out of the Great Divide south of Banff. At 62, he was the first to suggest that his really difficult climbs were already in the past and that a younger man would have to put a stone-man on the dangerous summit of a mountain like Assiniboine.<sup>30</sup>

Though he had with him some of the most competent guides in the world, Whympner confined most of his climbing to easy peaks in and around the Yoho Valley. Four major first ascents were recorded, up Mount Habel (now known as Mount Des Poilus), Mount Collie, Trolltinder Mountain and Isolated Peak. When Whympner was forced to return briefly to Field to find another horse wrangler, he met a British vicar named James Outram and invited him to join

the party. When Whympner concluded his 1901 climbing season after the trip to the Yoho Valley, outfitter Bill Peyto informed Whympner that a bold American attempt on Mount Assiniboine guided by Edouard Feuz and Friedrich Michel had very nearly succeeded. Peyto suggested that he could get Whympner to the mountain in time to capture the peak before another American attempt could be mounted. Whympner wasn't interested, but James Outram was. Outram hired Christian Häsler and Christian Bohren as guides and headed for the peak. On August 3, 1901 they made the first ascent of Mount Assiniboine, one of the classic mountaineering peaks in the world.<sup>31</sup> It should also be noted that Christian Bohren's granddaughter, Loni von Rotz of Canmore, made a centennial ascent of Mount Assiniboine in 2001 to honour her connection to her family heritage.

**SWEET ELIZABETH AND THE BIRTH OF THE ALPINE CLUB OF CANADA**

ONE OF THE FIRST CANADIANS to be exposed to the burgeoning Canadian alpine aesthetic the Swiss guides inspired was a young surveyor named Arthur Oliver Wheeler, who established an early reputation for cartographic genius with a survey of the Rogers Pass area in British Columbia beginning in 1901. Wheeler was a tireless champion of a uniquely Canadian sense of the alpine.

Despite the fact that Canada was a world centre for mountaineering by the turn of the twentieth century, Wheeler found it very difficult to create interest in an alpine association in this country. Though many clubs all over the world had been formed in the tradition of the Alpine

Club created in England in 1857, Canadians didn't seem interested in forming an organization of their own.

After several attempts at creating a Canadian organization, Wheeler was ready to accept Charles Fay's offer to establish a wing of the American Alpine Club in Canada, but only as a last resort. He refused to give up until he had explored every avenue of possible Canadian interest. For three years after the AAC offer, he wrote letters to major Canadian newspapers trying to garner support for a wholly Canadian organization. Ultimately it was a letter from Wheeler to the *Winnipeg Free Press* that hit the nationalistic nerve and brought the notion of a Canadian Alpine Club to life. That letter prompted an article in the paper by a staff writer, who claimed that it would be downright un-Canadian to subject local mountaineers to the dictates of a foreign alpine institution. The article went on to give Wheeler a tongue-lashing for his lack of patriotism and imperialistic zeal. The author of that article was Elizabeth Parker.<sup>32</sup>

Parker lambasted Wheeler's idea of affiliation with an American club, which prompted the astute Wheeler to ask for press space and editorial support to promote a separate organization, which became the Alpine Club of Canada. Supported by the newspaper, Parker then set out on a tireless campaign of articles about the club and its objectives. She organized the club's founding meeting in Winnipeg in March of 1906, at which Wheeler was elected president and Parker the organization's first secretary. At last a Canadian mountaineering organization existed to incorporate an appreciation of mountains into the evolving culture of this huge new land.<sup>33</sup>

## THE ACTION MOVES BACK TO THE ROCKIES

RIDING THE CREST OF GROWING interest in mountaineering in Europe and the United States, the railway advertised these spectacular parks as fifty Switzerlands in one, and promoted the role guides played in enjoyable and safe mountain travel.<sup>34</sup>

In 1911, the Canadian Pacific Railway built a "Swiss Village" at Golden, B.C. to house the guides and their families in a location central both to the Rockies and the Selkirks.<sup>35</sup> Soon a second generation of Swiss guides was working at Canadian Pacific's mountain resort hotels. These *bergführers* rightly became as famous as the men and women they led on hundreds of first ascents all over the Canadian West. Edward Feuz made more than one hundred first ascents of mountains taller than

3,050 metres, taking with him many of the most famous climbers of his time.<sup>36</sup> Clients would come from all over the world to climb with him.

The high profile and enormous success of the Canadian Pacific Hotel mountain guiding program did not go unnoticed by CPR's chief rival, the Canadian National Railway. In 1924, Canadian National began importing Swiss mountain guides to Jasper Park Lodge. Even though some climbers were arguing that they would have preferred to avoid the cost of professional guides on first-ascent expeditions, almost all of the early first-ascent parties on major peaks always included at least one guide.<sup>37</sup>

The central focus of the guiding tradition has always been safety. Though there was one particularly close call in the Death Trap at Lake Louise, over the more than fifty years during which CPR offered guiding services in the Canadian Alps, there wasn't a single mountaineering fatality in the thousands of climbs that Swiss guides led.

#### **GRUMPY ARTHUR AND THE GREAT SURVEY**

WHILE THE NORTH AMERICAN mountaineering community remained obsessed with the first ascents of unnamed peaks throughout the West, the Dominion Land Survey was already well into the planning stages of a much larger project. Its ambition was to map the entire Alberta-British Columbia boundary from the 49th parallel northward to the 60th degree of latitude at the southern boundary of the Northwest Territories. The Boundary Survey, as it was called, was the most ambitious program of mountain exploration ever undertaken in this country.

A.O. Wheeler was one of the principals involved in the Great Survey. As one of the founders of the Alpine Club of Canada, Wheeler knew as much about the mountains of Canada as anyone. Between 1913 and 1924, the survey mapped the spine of the Great Divide from Akamina Pass at the American border to the 120th meridian. During the survey, hundreds of mountains were climbed, and thousands more described and placed on maps. These maps remain the foundation of what we know about our mountains today. The next step after the creation of accurate and reliable maps would be the construction of refuges in popular places to ensure the safety of climbers and a growing number of hikers attracted to the glories of the western mountains.

## ALPINE HUTS

IT WAS AROUND CONCERNS for safety that the first alpine huts were constructed in what are now the Mountain Parks. Abbot Hut was the first. In 1921, Edward Feuz proposed that access to classic climbs on Mount Lefroy and Mount Victoria would be made a great deal easier and safer if a shelter were built on the narrow saddle named for Philip Abbot that separated the two peaks.

Feuz argued that if you could “just get some cement up to the pass and a good stone mason and a few building materials, you could build yourself a hut which would make the place almost as civilized as Switzerland.”<sup>38</sup>

Feuz and fellow guide Rudolf Aemmer drew up the plans and showed them first to national parks officials and then to the railway. There were no takers. It looked like too much work and risk for too little benefit. Feuz, however, was not one for giving up. Finally, he found a supporter in Basil Gardom, Superintendent of Construction and Repairs for CPR’s western hotels.<sup>39</sup>

Gardom translated the Feuz-Aemmer drawings into blueprints calling for a stone building 35 feet long, 19 feet wide and 18 feet high.<sup>40</sup> To Gardom’s associates, the plan was absurd. Building a beautiful guide’s cottage on the shore of Lake Louise was one thing. This they had already agreed to do. But the guides were going to construct a house on the 2,962 metre knife-edge of Abbot Pass. That was another matter.

Abbot Hut was difficult to build. The only route to the pass from Lake Louise was up the Lower Victoria Glacier and through the Death Trap to the summit of the col, a section on the Mount Victoria side overhung by ice that collapsed on to the route at unpredictable intervals. Above this the way was safer, but very steep.

Construction began in the summer of 1922. The only way materials could be transported was by horse. It took cool wranglers to lead the heavily laden packhorses through the crevasses to the Death Trap. Guides carried everything in a sled that had been rigged to a winch, to haul the materials the final steep distance to the col.

Even though the rock for the building was to be quarried on-site, there were still two tons of materials to be ferried to the pass. Everything – cement, lime, bolts, windows, timbers, a stove, tools, beds, mattresses, bedding, cutlery, along with sufficient food to sustain the workers – had to be carried up the Death Trap on the guide’s backs. Trip after trip after trip, guides carried up to 75 pounds (34 kg) per load up the steep defile.<sup>41</sup>



#### **ABBOT HUT**

As more and more guests requested the services of mountain guides at Lake Louise, it became apparent that a high hut would make climbs of Mount Lefroy and Mount Victoria less of an endurance contest. Michael Vincent is pictured here at Abbot Hut.

*Photograph by R.W. Sandford.*

Twenty members of the Appalachian Mountain Club journeyed all the way from Boston to remember Philip Stanley Abbot at the official opening of the hut in 1923. Edward Feuz's remarks at the opening were brief: "Down in the valley, a house, a big house, is just a big house. But up here, in the ice and snow, with all those beautiful peaks everywhere, this simple hut is home."<sup>42</sup>

Feuz proudly maintained throughout his whole life that the stone hut on Abbot Pass was the only true alpine hut in Canada. Feuz had achieved his goal. Abbot Hut made climbing possible and safe at Lake Louise.

For 50 years, until Neil Colgan Hut was constructed above Moraine Lake in 1983, Abbot Hut had the distinction of being the highest permanent building in Canada. It was turned over to Parks Canada in the mid 1960s. In 1985, through the efforts of Peter Fuhrmann, Parks Canada turned the operation and maintenance of Abbot Hut over to the Alpine Club of Canada, whose volunteers have restored the building to its original simple elegance.<sup>43</sup>

From these humble origins has arisen a most remarkable backcountry hut and lodge tradition. In his guidebook to huts and lodges in the Rockies and Columbia Mountains, Jim Scott lists 124 different places



#### **HANS SCHWARZ**

Mountain guide Hans Schwarz is a living legend in Jasper. Considered one of the most competent mountaineers of his time, Schwarz climbed Mount Robson twelve times. He also pioneered dozens of new routes and taught two generations of young climbers how to travel safely in his footsteps.

*Photograph by R.W. Sandford.*

where hikers, skiers and mountaineers can find often quite comfortable shelter in the mountainous backcountry of the Canadian West.<sup>44</sup>

#### **GUIDES AND THE BIRTH OF SKIING**

WHILE MOST SWISS GUIDES returned home for the winter, a few were hired by the railway to stay on to maintain the empty hotels. Whenever they could they skied, an activity utterly alien to locals who argued that the snowshoe was the only civilized vehicle through the deep powder of the long Canadian winter.

Through the influence of the Swiss guides, skiing became a popular winter pastime. In 1917, an informal group of young Banff skiers created the Banff Ski Club.

They began skiing on a logging road on Mount Norquay, and later built a small cabin near Norquay Pass. The great success of this first small ski area prompted other explorations for the right combinations of slope and snow, and soon Sunshine and Lake Louise were included in the expanding adventure of skiing in the Rockies. As interest in the sport grew so did the demand for mechanization that would reduce the time spent climbing as opposed to real skiing. A hundred years after the arrival of the first professional mountain guide in Canada, downhill and cross-country skiing have become national pastimes attracting more than a million people to the Rockies each winter.<sup>45</sup>

#### **THE BIRTH OF MOUNTAIN RESCUE**

THOUGH THE GREAT DEPRESSION and World War II devastated mountain national park tourism, the guiding program at Lake Louise operated until the end of the 1954 climbing season. Faced with changes in travel patterns and visitor interests, the rundown mountain hotels no longer attracted mountaineers. By this time, however, the Swiss guides had already made a formative impact on Western Canadian culture.

Walter Perren and Edmund Petrig were the last Swiss guides hired by the Canadian Pacific Railway hotels. In 1950, Perren came to Canada at the invitation of the CPR to work with Edmund Petrig as a guide at Chateau Lake Louise.<sup>46</sup> Legend has it that as soon as Perren stepped off the train in Lake Louise he “stretched his legs” with a climb of the needles between Mount White and Mount Niblock. When, five years

later, the CPR phased out the Swiss guides, Perren planned to return to Zermatt with his Canadian wife and three young sons. The departure of this valuable climbing resource from Canada was prevented when the National Parks Service invited Perren to organize mountain travel and rescue training for park wardens. By 1956, Perren was responsible for the development of warden service mountaineering training and for the testing of aspiring mountain guides. Perren later became Chief Warden of Mountaineering Services, a position that eventually evolved into the role of alpine specialist for the national parks. After Perren's death, mountaineering legends Peter Fuhrmann and Willi Pfisterer filled the position and Canada's elite national park mountain rescue program was born.<sup>47</sup>

### **THE CREATION OF THE ASSOCIATION OF CANADIAN MOUNTAIN GUIDES**

WITH THE DECLINE OF PROFESSIONAL guiding at the railway hotels it became necessary to reassess the accreditation processes for the granting of guiding licenses. Until Perren reorganized the system, licenses had been granted by the national parks service on the basis of a one-page questionnaire. Perren immediately expanded the requirement to include a four-day comprehensive exam consisting of one day of rock climbing, a two-day mixed climb and a day of oral and written examinations.

In the late 1950s, Perren proposed the creation of a mountain guides association that under the combined auspices of the Alpine Club of Canada and Parks Canada would undertake responsibilities for guide training and certification. The Association of Canadian Mountain Guides was formally created on May 23, 1963.<sup>48</sup>

Many candidates for guiding licenses seriously underestimated the standards for obtaining an ACMG guide certificate. High initial failure rates stimulated heated debate about the applicability of European standards to Canadian climbing. As a result of this debate, a more rigorous program was introduced in 1968 that included apprenticeship and accreditation of assistant guides, and a code of guiding ethics. In 1972, the ACMG was welcomed into the International Federation of Mountain Guides Associations. Today, success rates in ACMG courses are rising and more Canadian-born guides than ever are employed in the Canadian mountains, where they guide hikers, rock-climbers, ice-climbers, mountaineers, ski-tourers and heli-skiers from all over the world. The ACMG currently boasts a membership of more than six hundred guides,

many of whom are fully accredited combined summer and winter mountain guides.<sup>49</sup> The association maintains its historical ties to Parks Canada and the Alpine Club of Canada, but mountain guiding is now an industry in its own right, centred within the Mountain Parks and in surrounding heli-skiing resorts.

Canada has come a long way in the development of its own mountain culture since the arrival of the first Swiss guides more than a century ago. While railway and government surveyors, horse packers, guides and outfitters had an influence on our attitudes about our mountains, their contributions differed from those of the Swiss guides. While they did climb, early surveyors and mapmakers were not usually as focused on aesthetics as they were on the hard science of data collection. While horse guides did explore miles of mountain terrain and did a great deal to position early climbers for first ascents, they seldom climbed themselves.

Through their quiet but formative influence, Swiss guides taught Canadians the real value of the overwhelming heritage of peaks that nature left for them to climb and enjoy. They also helped bring into existence a local mountain culture worthy of and utterly respectful of place. As a result of the Swiss influence, Canadians were able to show visitors from all over the world how to appreciate to their mountains. It was not just where we lived that mattered, but how we lived in association with the landscapes around us that made the culture of the mountain west unique.