



Small, Remote, but Utterly Wild

Hamber Provincial Park

PRIOR TO ITS DESIGNATION as a provincial park – and later with its inclusion as part of the Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks World Heritage Site – Hamber was largely considered coterminous with both Jasper and Mount Robson. Many early travellers would be surprised to see it possess separate designation, as its history is inseparable from that of its neighbouring reserves. Hamber is part of what was historically considered “the great north,” a wilderness that extended – and still extends – unbroken from Lake Louise to the main line of the Canadian National Railway through Yellowhead Pass. That it exists at all is something of a miracle and an important lesson to those who might take the protected status of our national and provincial parks and World Heritage Sites for granted.

Hamber Provincial Park was named to honour the late Eric W. Hamber, the distinguished Lieutenant-Governor of B.C. from 1936 to 1941. In addition to stunning peaks and deeply cut valleys, its main feature is ten-kilometre-long Fortress Lake. When the original Hamber Park was created in 1941, it encompassed some 1,009,112 hectares. Within this protected area were amazing features like Mount Sir Sandford, the highest peak in the Selkirk Range; the Cummins Lakes and the stunning waterfalls that connect them; and giant Mount Clemenceau

and the immense ice that flows from its shoulders. Unfortunately, commercial logging interests wanted the valuable West Slope timber and pressed hard for twenty years to have parts of the park removed from protected status. In response to the logging lobby and to pressures linked to hydro-electric interests associated with the Columbia River Treaty with the United States, the B.C. government reduced the size of Hamber in 1961 and 1962 to its current area of 24,518 hectares, a loss of almost 98 percent of its original area. The Hamber example makes it very clear that because a park or special place is protected by legislation today does not mean it will continue to have that status in the future. Protection of special places in Canada occurs at the whim of political leaders and at the pleasure of the people.

Today Hamber Provincial Park is a small, remote but still very special wilderness area with limited facilities. Even though a fly-in fishing camp is allowed to operate in the summer, the park only sees four to five hundred visitors annually. Over the past few years, British Columbia Parks has been rehabilitating impacts of the past use at Fortress Lake. Their website will tell you that there is now a rustic campground and toilet at the east end of the lake and an air-accessed commercial fishing camp on Chisel Creek Fan, midway down the lake's south shore. Though several traditional campsites are identifiable along the north shore, there are no other developed facilities. An old trail to access these sites is in the process of being re-opened from the east end. At present, the easiest access to lakeshore features is by renting a boat from the fishing camp. As no other trails exist, Washout Creek, which enters the lake midway along the north shore of the lake, provides the only open access to big alpine scenery.

From this description it doesn't sound like much. Nothing could be more deceiving. Fortress Lake is one of the most spectacular places in the Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks World Heritage Site. It also shares a remarkable history with its West Slope sister, Mount Robson Provincial Park, and with adjacent Jasper National Park, which demonstrates the almost artificial or at least arbitrary nature of these separate boundaries and jurisdictions. The shared history of these remarkable landscapes revolves around a remarkable early traveller whose story tells us a great deal about place. That person is Arthur Philemon Coleman.

Though the early years of Canadian confederation seemed filled with figures whose full lives and legendary accomplishments make them appear larger than life today, few can rival the extraordinary career of A.P. Coleman. There appears to be no field in which Coleman had an



**MAP OF HAMBER
PROVINCIAL PARK**
Courtesy of Ali Buckingham,
Parks Canada.

interest in which he did not excel. Coleman was one of the world's leading geologists, a fine lecturer, a prolific and respected writer, an accomplished artist, and an ardent explorer and mountaineer.

Coleman authored five books and nearly two hundred papers and reports, though his best and most revealing writing is contained within *The Canadian Rockies: New & Old Trails*, which was published in New York by Charles Scribner's Sons and in London by T. Fisher Unwin in 1911 and by Henry Frowde in Toronto in 1912. It is in this book that we glimpse those elements of character and intellect that over his long life established Coleman as one of Canada's most important but under-appreciated explorers and geologists and one of the

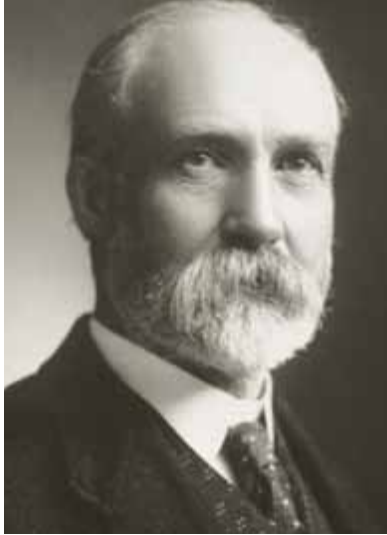
country's most beloved scientists.

Arthur Philemon Coleman was born at Lachute, Quebec on April 4, 1852. He was the son of the Reverend Francis Coleman, a Methodist minister and Emmeline Maria Adams, who was a descendent of John Quincy Adams, the sixth president of the United States.

After deciding on a career in geology, Coleman advanced upon the subject with characteristic enthusiasm. By 1880, he had earned his Master's degree from Victoria College and had decided to take a Doctorate at the University of Breslau in Germany. While studying in Germany, Coleman undertook a broad range of fieldwork. He explored the Giant Mountains on the border of Lower Silesia and undertook geological expeditions in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Italy and Scandinavia. It was during these joyful explorations that Coleman developed a love of mountains, which led to a lifelong interest in alpinism.

After Coleman read his thesis dissertation on the "Melaphyres of Lower Silesia" in 1881, he was awarded a Doctorate of Philosophy and returned to Canada.¹ In 1882, at the age of thirty, Dr. Arthur Philemon Coleman was appointed Professor of Natural History in his Alma Mater, where he remained until Victoria College was relocated to nearby Toronto, where it became one of the Federated Colleges at the University of Toronto.

Even as a young professor, Coleman did not waste time establishing a reputation as a fine lecturer. It was often remarked that he seemed



**ARTHUR PHILEMON
COLEMAN**

Though virtually unknown outside of mountaineering circles, A.P. Coleman explored a great deal of what is now the Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks World Heritage Site. Born in Lachute, Quebec in 1852, Coleman later became a professor of geology at the University of Toronto. An expert in glaciation, Coleman helped bring Canada into the modern world of geological thought. Coleman was also a founding member of the Alpine Club of Canada.

Photograph Courtesy of the Alpine Club of Canada.

to be transformed when he stood up before his students, who would often remember his teaching and his enthusiasm for the rest of their lives. But like many academics, teaching was only one element of Coleman's university life. It was research that inspired Coleman most. That research required time in the field. With a secure position, Dr. Coleman could at last focus his energies on expanding the field of geology in Canada. His student days were over. He had a regular job, a stable income and holidays in the summer. There was an entire country waiting to be explored – and finally with the arrival of the railway in the mountain West there was a means for exploring it.

In the years during which Coleman was a student in Germany, Canada was undergoing substantial change.

The notion of a transcontinental railway had transformed the idea of nationhood. With the line finally reaching the prairies in 1882, it appeared that the Articles of Confederation, which had induced British Columbia to join Canada in 1871, were about to be fulfilled. In the summer of 1883, the tracks reached the Rockies. Coleman couldn't wait for the line to be complete. The fabled mountains of the west were calling to him. As soon as classes were over in the spring of 1884, Coleman boarded a Canadian Pacific passenger train bound for the west. It is with the account of this journey that his famous book *The Canadian Rockies: New & Old Trails* begins.

COLEMAN'S FIRST VISIT TO THE MOUNTAIN WEST, 1884

IN THE SPRING OF 1884, the rails ended west of Laggan siding, near the summit of Kicking Horse Pass. (Today Laggan is the hamlet of Lake Louise.) After a brief visit to Lake Louise, which had received its first non-Native visitor in the person of Tom Wilson only two years before, Coleman was joined by Messrs. Grier and Severin, whom he had hired at Morley. Soon their pack train was heading west into British Columbia. After reaching the Columbia River, Coleman spent three weeks exploring rugged, unnamed valleys in what is now part of western Yoho National Park before completing a big loop through the remote North Fork of the Spillimacheen River back to the Columbia.

After a brief visit with his brother Lucius, who ranched near Morley, Coleman went home to begin another academic year at the University of Toronto. Throughout the long winter he couldn't stop thinking about



FORTRESS LAKE

One of the largest natural bodies of water in the mountain West, Fortress Lake is the signature natural feature of Hamber Provincial Park. Unfortunately, few get to see this enormous lake because of its remoteness. Float plane charters take visitors to a tourist fishing camp open in summer, but for the most part Fortress Lake is as wild as it was when it was first visited by Arthur Philemon Coleman in 1892. *Photograph by R.W. Sandford.*

the mountain West. He began to read about the mountains of the west and even bought a camera in preparation for his next expedition. When classes ended in the spring of 1885, Coleman was ready to return to the Columbia River to explore the Selkirk Ranges.

COLEMAN'S SECOND VISIT TO THE MOUNTAIN WEST, 1885

BY THE TIME THE academic year came to a close in the spring of 1885, the Canadian Pacific Railway had crossed the Rockies and was reaching up into the Rogers Pass area of the Selkirks. It was possible to take the train as far west as Donald, British Columbia, a town that had sprouted up, entirely complete, in less than one year. At the end of track, Coleman once again hired his own pack train, an expensive proposition even for those days, and headed west toward the glacier-clad summits of the Selkirks.

As Coleman reports, the excursion to the goldfields was not particularly successful. Rain and delays of all kinds cut down on the actual time Coleman could commit to geological study. Coleman did conclude, however, that his visit to the placer mining operations in the Mount Sir Sandford area was interesting from a “geological as well as human side.” The scientist in Coleman was fascinated by how gold could have appeared in these remote British Columbia valleys. From a human perspective,

however, Coleman was appalled by what happened to these valleys once they were discovered by gold-crazed prospectors. Their invasions, Coleman wrote, were “like a bad dream.” Slowly, after the departure of the miners, the bushes grew over the shacks and the creeks returned to their former channels. Only then did peace return to these valleys.

Coleman did not return to the West for three years. During this time, it is clear that he read a great deal about early exploration in the Rockies and had become anxious to put his own name on a corner of the blank map of the mountain West. It is also apparent that Coleman, like Norman Collie after him, had been tantalized by the rumour of Himalayan-sized peaks in the area of Athabasca Pass. The problem was that, though many competent explorers and surveyors had gone looking, no one could find these mountains.

IN SEARCH OF THE DAVID DOUGLAS GIANTS: A. P. COLEMAN’S THIRD EXPEDITION TO THE MOUNTAIN WEST, 1888

AS HAS ALREADY BEEN NOTED, the legend of Himalayan-sized giants at the summit of Athabasca Pass owes its existence to David Douglas. Enthusiastic and able, the young Scottish botanist had been sent by Sir William Hooker and the Royal Horticultural Society to collect plant specimens on the Pacific Coast of North America in 1824. Intending to spend only one year on the coast, the small and frail redhead developed rheumatism during the winter. Though he was certain he was going to die amid the dripping forests, he survived and, revived by the luxuriant plant life, resolved to spend two further years in Canada and make his way across the entire continent with one of the spring fur brigades.

In the spring of 1827, Douglas joined Hudson’s Bay Company traders and voyageurs as they paddled their fur-laden canoes up the Columbia toward Boat Encampment at the top of the Big Bend of the river. Leaving their canoes behind, the expedition made its slow way toward Athabasca Pass, the summit spine of the continent’s rivers. After exhausting himself floundering in the deep spring snow, he halted below the pass on April 30, 1827. By ten the next morning a circling raven would have found him resting at Committee’s Punch Bowl, a small pool that marked the divide between the Pacific and Atlantic watersheds at the summit of the pass. His journals do not explain what compulsions led to his next actions; they only indicate the course he took in the next few hours that would become the foundation of mountaineering history in Canada for the next seventy-five years. We join Douglas as he reflects on the

experiences as they were portrayed in *Botanical Magazine* published in England after his death:

Being well rested by 1 o'clock, I set out with the view of ascending what seemed to be the highest peak on the N. Its height does not appear to be less than 16,000 to 17,000 ft. above the level of the sea. After passing the lower ridge I came to about 1,200 feet of by far the most difficult and fatiguing walking I have ever experienced, and the utmost care was required to tread safely over the crust of snow.... The view from the summit is of too awful a cast to afford pleasure. Nothing can be seen in every direction, as far as the eye can reach, except mountains towering above each other, rugged beyond description.²

Mounts Hooker and Brown were impossibly high mountains. Perhaps only Douglas's poor eyesight made it possible for him not to see that other higher mountains existed in the main ranges that surrounded Athabasca Pass. It was a great story, though, and even if it wasn't true it would later bring some important climbers and explorers to the Rockies to look for the fabled Mounts Hooker and Brown. Arthur Philemon Coleman would now join this select company.

By the time that Coleman read the story of the Athabasca Pass giants, there was already a lot of doubt about the veracity of Douglas's 1827 claim. Supported by the university's excellent library, Coleman had begun to ask some pressing questions about Douglas's story. In examining Douglas's own account, Coleman was dismayed that the great botanist had made no scientific observations to support his estimated height of Mount Brown at between 16,000 and 17,000 feet (4,877 and 5,182 m). Coleman conceded that it was possible that Douglas had calculated the heights of Hooker and Brown based on a faulty survey by Lieutenant Aermilius Simpson undertaken from Jasper House in the winter of 1825–26, which placed the altitude of Athabasca Pass at 11,000 feet (3,353 m). But even if this had been so, how could the presence of these giants have eluded later visitors to the pass? How, for example, could an artist of the stature of Paul Kane fail to notice and paint these huge peaks during his visit to the pass in 1847? Why was it that none of the highly competent surveyors in the employ of Sir Sandford Fleming's later railway survey ever mentioned high peaks in the Athabasca Pass area? The mystery of Mount Brown gave Coleman a reason for returning to the Rockies.

**BY HORSE TO ATHABASCA PASS: A.P. COLEMAN'S FOURTH
EXPEDITION TO THE MOUNTAIN WEST, 1892**

ADMITTING THAT HIS 1888 attempt to reach Athabasca Pass by canoe from the west was a fiasco, Coleman grew more and more eager to come to close quarters with the Douglas giants. Though not fond of horses, Coleman realized his only hope of reaching Athabasca Pass and solving the mystery of Douglas's giants lay in a horse expedition that would approach the pass from the east. "If the camel is the 'ship of the desert,'" he concluded, "the cayuse should be the 'canoe of the mountains.'"³

Coleman's 1892 horse trip to Athabasca Pass was an ambitious and well-planned expedition. As he, his brother and three friends would be travelling extensively through the Native hunting grounds, Coleman also hired two Stonies, Mark Two-Young-Men and Jimmy Jacob, as guides.

Departing on the evening of July 6th, 1892, the large expedition set out from Morley for Athabasca Pass by way of the Ghost and Red Deer rivers to Mountain Park. Throughout this part of the journey, Coleman continued to remark on the sedimentary geology that was exposed on each peak they passed. They then followed the Clearwater and White Rabbit valleys to the upper reaches of the North Saskatchewan River. Ten days after departing, they arrived at the Kootenay Plains. Long a meeting place of Native peoples, the Kootenay Plains remain a place where there is grass for horses, clear water and good hunting. It is the kind of place that deserves to be added to the Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks World Heritage Site. Certainly, Coleman was impressed:

The Kootenay Plains were once in a small way the high-road of nations, and full of picturesque life, when the Kootenay tribe from southern British Columbia came across Howse Pass at one of the head streams of the Saskatchewan to hunt the buffalo and trade horses with the Stonies. That traffic ended many years ago, and Howse Pass is now seldom crossed by white men and never by the Indians; but the plains are still lively once a year when the Stonies come north from Morley before scattering into their special hunting grounds.⁴

As Jacob had little experience beyond these sacred plains, the expedition now had to rely on Two-Young-Men to guide them north to the Brazeau River by way of the Cataract River. On August 1, more than three weeks after setting out, the party camped near the forks of the Brazeau where Coleman and a fellow professor from the University of Toronto, L.B. Stewart, made the first ascent of a small and as yet unnamed mountain, their third ascent on the expedition. Though the

**HIGH MOUNTAINS,
BIG ICE**

The upper alpine expanses of Hamber Park are as little known today as they were in Arthur Coleman's time. By saving and protecting even the smallest pieces and re-connecting them, the Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks World Heritage Site has done more than re-integrate a vast temperate mountain ecosystem: just as importantly, empty spaces on the map of the West indicate where it is still possible to know what it was like to be a Canadian a century ago.

Photograph by R.W. Sandford.



peak was insignificant in height compared with the much taller mountains along the Great Divide, Coleman observed that he could see “a spotless dome of snow twenty or twenty-five miles away.” This, he surmised, upon reflection later in his life, was probably the Dome shown on Norman Collie’s map as the central point of the Columbia Icefield. The inference here is important. What Coleman is telling us is that he likely saw the Columbia Icefield a full six years before it was formally discovered by Norman Collie and Hermann Woolley in 1898. Coleman and

Louis Stewart saw deep glacial ice on the Snow Dome. Unfortunately, from their vantage the icefield proper was invisible. Had they been able to see the upper basin, the Columbia Icefield may have been discovered by Canadians.

Crossing a barren pass north of the Brazeau, the expedition followed a creek flowing northwest toward a wide river valley they had viewed from the summit a few days before. Coleman decided to call the pass and the creek Poboktan, which is the Stoney name for owl. The next day they followed Poboktan Creek to its confluence with a major river that flowed through a wide, unknown valley upon which they decided to bestow the existing Stoney name, Sunwapta. *Sunwapta* is a Stoney word meaning “turbulent water.” They were unsure where to go next. They weren’t sure how to reach the Whirlpool River and the trail to Athabasca Pass. As they were also running short on time, Coleman decided that he, his brother and L.B. Stewart should make a run for Athabasca Pass on foot. Following the Sunwapta past its junction with the Athabasca, they discovered another large river that they thought must have been the Whirlpool. Drawn by a “fine, cathedral-shaped mountain” across the valley, they followed this river, which he later called the Chaba, after the Stoney name for beaver, to the cathedral-shaped peak which he called Fortress Mountain. Attempting Fortress Mountain, they rounded a corner of the great buttress and “suddenly there opened out below us the most marvellous lake imaginable,” stretching some eight to ten miles (twelve to sixteen kilometres) to the west. As Coleman described it, their hearts stood still at the sight, for they thought they had found the Committee’s Punch Bowl and the summit of Athabasca Pass. He thought the snow-covered peak behind the glacier to the south must have been Mount Hooker. That night, however, examination of their map proved them wrong. The lake was too big and the descriptions and locations of the mountains and of the Committee’s Punch Bowl suggested they were still a long way from Athabasca Pass. In fact, they were in the area that is now Hamber Provincial Park.

The next day they visited the north shore of the lake and, after following Chisel Creek to its source, climbed a minor nearby peak in order to accurately fix their position.⁵ Though they were surrounded by fine peaks, none came even close to the supposed height of Mount Brown. Only a great white pyramid “beyond the glacier to the south” came even close to 12,000 feet (3,658 m). At camp that night they reckoned the lake they were on could not be the Committee’s Punch Bowl so they named it Fortress Lake.

On August 23, 1892, Arthur and Lucius Coleman set out with Louis Stewart to attempt “Pyramid Mountain” but were defeated first by crevasses, then by impossible cliff bands and finally by the weather. Though they didn’t make it above 10,000 feet (3,048 m), the historical significance of this first attempt should not be underestimated. Coleman’s White Pyramid is, in fact Mount Clemenceau, which, at 3,658 metres, is the fourth-highest summit in the Canadian Rockies and one of the most spectacular natural features in the Hamber area. That Coleman and his party reached the mountain and attempted to climb it in 1892 is a remarkable act of early exploration and mountaineering pluck.

Two days later, the Coleman brothers and Stewart climbed what they called Misty Mountain, a 10,050 foot peak that provided unforgettable views of the Pyramid and of the entire Fortress Lake area.

It seems most regrettable that Coleman’s original names did not remain on the mountains of the Fortress Lake area. In a fit of what now appears to be almost hysterical self-congratulation at the end of World War I, Misty Mountain became one of a number of peaks along the Great Divide that were renamed by the Alberta-British Columbia Boundary Commission after political and military figures who were prominent during the Great War. Coleman’s White Pyramid was renamed in 1919 for French Premier Georges Clemenceau. Coleman’s Misty Mountain was also renamed in 1919. It is now called Mount Brouiliard, a name derived from the French word for mist. It appears that the Boundary Commission didn’t think the name Misty was sexy enough.

On the descent of Misty Mountain, Coleman described “beds of snow red with *protococcus nivalis*, and saw black glacier fleas all alive in the sunshine.”⁶ This is the first popular reference to “pink snow,” the snow algae that grows in late-lying drifts along the Great Divide. It is also the first reference in popular mountain literature in Canada to other creatures that live out their life cycles in the sub-nivean environments of Canada’s western mountains.

By August 26, Coleman realized that he was out of time and that the second expedition in search of Mount Brown would end without the party having seen either of David Douglas’s legendary Athabasca Pass giants. Upon his return to Toronto, Coleman had become philosophical about the accomplishments of the 1892 expedition. Though they were disappointed in their main objective, they were successful in covering five hundred miles (805 km) of unmapped trails in the Rockies. They had discovered and named rivers, lakes and passes, and climbed a dozen unnamed and unclimbed peaks. By proving that Fortress Lake



CHISEL CREEK

Heavy precipitation on the west side of the Great Divide stimulates the growth of dense vegetation, making it difficult and time-consuming to access the spectacular upper reaches of Hamber Park. As there are few trails in the park, the easiest access to high places is by way of the streams that flow from the big glaciers at the head of each of the major valleys.

Photograph by R.W. Sandford.

drained into the Columbia River, Coleman had single-handedly moved the boundary between Alberta and British Columbia to the west and discovered a new pass over the Great Divide that was lower than Athabasca, Bow or even Howse Pass. “Best of all,” Coleman concluded, “we had passed a

glorious two months battling with Nature in one of her wilder moods.”⁷ Even as the train took Coleman slowly east to another busy academic year, he was making plans to return to the Rockies. “Three times lucky,” he must have thought. On his third try he was sure to reach Athabasca Pass.

SOLVING THE MYSTERY OF THE ATHABASCA PASS GIANTS:

A.P. COLEMAN’S FIFTH EXPEDITION TO THE MOUNTAIN WEST, 1893

COLEMAN INCORPORATED some innovations into his 1893 expedition, which was composed of himself, his brother Lucius, Louis Stewart and a young rancher named Frank Sibbald from Morley. The smaller party would also take a folding canvas boat so they would not have to make rafts to cross the booming Saskatchewan and Athabasca rivers.

When the party left Morley on July 8, they departed at the same time as Chief Jonas of the Stoneys, who was also heading north and west into the mountains. At camp one night, Jonas drew a map on a large piece of wax paper that had previously served as a wrapping for a ham. The map illustrated the passes Jonas had explored between Morley and the Sunwapta River. He also offered First Nations names for many of the rivers that appeared on Louis Stewart’s map of the previous summer’s explorations.

With the Jonas map in hand, they took a new and shorter way to the Brazeau by way of the Hahaseegeewapta, or the Cataract River. At the

head of the Cataract River, the expedition stopped at an exquisite lake that Coleman compared in beauty to Lake Louise. On the return trip Coleman named it Pinto Lake, after a troublesome packhorse that he lost on the expedition. After reaching the headwaters of the Brazeau, they climbed yet another small peak to survey the surrounding country. From this unnamed peak five miles (eight kilometres) northeast of Wilcox Pass they peered once again into the Columbia Icefield. But they saw only the tip of the Snow Dome and were once again unable to define the icefield's huge névé. It would still be another five years before that névé would be defined and the icefield proper realized as one of the great natural features of the Canadian West. From the summit they did, however, discover the pass Jonas had intended they take. Crossing the pass the next day, they named it and the creek that flowed down it after Jonas. This time Coleman's name stuck and you can still find Jonas Pass and Jonas Creek on maps of Jasper National Park today.

After reaching the Sunwapta, Coleman and company decided to give the horses a rest and took a day off to explore the valley. Coleman claims, at this point, to have climbed a 10,000 foot peak just to the east of the headwaters of the Sunwapta River. It seems likely that the unnamed mountain they described climbing in the Sunwapta areas "just to the east of its headwaters" was Sunwapta Peak. This appears to be confirmed also by the red line Coleman placed on his map to illustrate the location of the mountain he climbed.⁸ His description of the view is most compelling:

The view of the valley from above was marvellous; for miles above and below a wonderful network of river channels cut the grey mudflats like a skin of green silk flung ravelled on the floor. At the head of the valley we saw the same splendid snowfields and peaks and walls as from the last mountain, but at a different angle.⁹

Again, Coleman is describing the Columbia Icefield. Since he refers to seeing this mass of ice twice in his book, he must have kicked himself upon reflection years later for not realizing the importance of what he was seeing.¹⁰

After breaking camp at the confluence of Jonas Creek and the Sunwapta River, the Coleman party headed north where they soon came upon a huge scar on the Endless Chain Range where a cubic mile of rock had broken from one of the mountains and swept across the valley. Visitors to the valley today still stop to ponder this incredible natural landform that has changed little since it blocked Coleman's way north through the Sunwapta Valley more than a century ago.

After passing Sunwapta and Athabasca Falls, the Coleman party went on to Jasper, where they met Lewis Swift, the legendary prospector and explorer who lived at a farm on the Athabasca River. After procuring supplies from Swift, Coleman wasted three days scrambling through the wrong valley looking for the Whirlpool River. On the second day of their journey up the Whirlpool, a sharp sapling drove through Coleman's stirrup right into his horse's side. In the ensuing melee, Coleman smashed into a tree and was thrown from the saddle. The next day his left knee hurt so badly that he could only walk with the aid of crutches. It was the end of climbing on this expedition – and for many years after. Though in excruciating pain, Coleman did not want to abandon the expedition so close to its goal. On August 18, 1893, Coleman and his party at last reached the Committee's Punch Bowl and the summit of Athabasca Pass. They looked everywhere but there were no giants.

Even though it was clear that Coleman had solved the mystery of Mount Hooker and Mount Brown, not everyone was willing to accept that Himalayan-sized giants could not exist in the Rockies. When the celebrated British climber John Norman Collie was invited to the Rockies four years later to make the first ascent of Mount Lefroy, he used his visit to Lake Louise as an opportunity to search to the north for Douglas's fabled giants. Years after Coleman had proved Douglas a fraud, Collie still questioned aloud if Coleman hadn't reached the wrong pass and whether further explorations weren't warranted to validate Douglas's claim. Gentlemen, and especially English gentlemen, didn't lie. Finally Collie, writing in 1903, vindicated Coleman:

If Douglas climbed a seventeen-thousand-foot peak alone on a May afternoon, when the snow must have been pretty deep on the ground, all one can say is that he must have been an uncommonly active person. What, of course, he really did was to ascend the Mount Brown of Professor Coleman, which is about nine thousand feet high. These two fabulous Titans, therefore, which for nearly seventy years have been masquerading as the monarchs of the Canadian Rockies, must now be finally deposed.¹¹

Coleman made many other trips to the Rockies and was later instrumental in the creation of the Alpine Club of Canada. His most recognized exploration achievement, however, remains his discovery of Fortress Lake.

Standing on the shores of Fortress Lake you can still feel Coleman's presence. The lake has changed little if at all since he first visited it and one cannot escape the feeling that the wild mountains that surround the sparkling water still harbour the ghosts of Hooker and Brown.