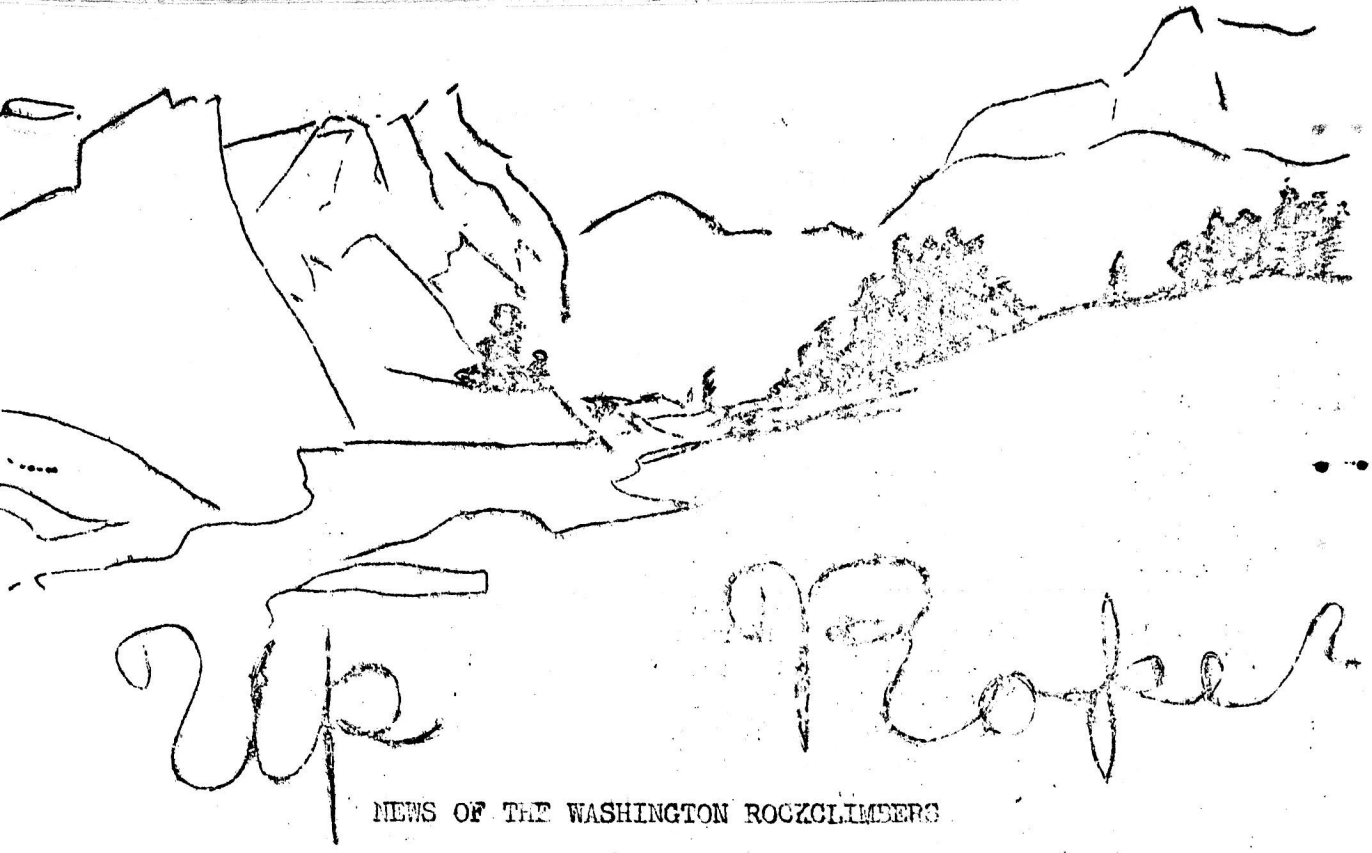

Up Rope

NEWS OF THE WASHINGTON ROCKCLIMBERS

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OPERATION SPILLIMACOOK, 1947

by Pete Peterson

This is a somewhat personal account of a month-long mountaineering trip into a rarely visited section of the Purcells and Southern Selkirks in British Columbia. The region is one that barely comes within the edge of published maps, with many square miles of unmapped mountains lying just to the south. It was a back-packing trip in which the party was completely self-sufficient,--no dependence being placed on such fish and game as the country afforded. This review is by the least mountain-wise member of the four man group.

The Preliminaries: Washington to Parson.

For some weeks I had listened avidly, at every opportunity, to Donald's and Arnold's plans for their second trip to the Selkirks with Sterling; the details were necessarily vague in spots but most interesting. Sterling was an old hand at mountaineering; the other two had been on several such trips before and had, besides, a considerable rock-climbing background, my experience in both mountaineering and rock-climbing was quite limited. On Wednesday morning, July 2, I had no serious thought of going along; by noon of that day the last intangible straw must have been piled on, for I was "in". By midnight of Thursday most of our baggage was checked at the Silver Spring depot for shipment ahead. The following Wednesday evening, July 9, saw us on the train west. At Chicago we hurried about, between trains, purchasing some of our supplies; we returned to the station laden with packages of raisins, nuts, cheese, meat tins and a conspicuous garlic-fortified salami. The four day train ride saw us through Minneapolis, Portal, Moose Jaw, Calgary and Banff to our take-off point at Golden, B. C., on the Saturday afternoon of July 12.

At Golden one of us, at least, anticipated a full afternoon for grocery shopping, a leisurely Sunday for selecting and repacking luggage and a takeoff for the mountains on Monday morning. It must be noted that the sorting out of one's equipment here was a vital matter: you had to consider each little item with respect to its relative usefulness, its edibility and, above all, its weight. The tyranny of "things" assumed large proportions. What went into your duffle bag here you either carried the whole way, or threw away or ate en route: I had unpleasant visions,-as I hefted my beloved second camera,-of its weight finally becoming intolerable but yet finding myself unable to throw it away; and nowhere could I recall a recipe for making a camera edible.

A word about some of my hastily borrowed luggage. Among the things that came with me to Golden were Jim Lamb's parka, Sam Moore's mosquito net, Sterling Hendrick's spare ice-axe, Paul Bradt's crampons and Leo Scott's snow goggles; most of these accompanied me into the mountains. Friends seem to be even handier at some times than others.

The tangled skein of minor events in Golden is about as involved as a "whodunit" plot and the soon-to-be-weary reader will be spared many of the details. The problems resolved into securing any available information about the region into which we were headed, of getting transportation as far into it as possible and of buying most of our groceries. We first arranged with Sid Feuz of Fridhem Hotel for storage of our city clothes and surplus baggage. Then Sterling reflectively chewed a straw or two, took Arnold in tow and disappeared down the road; their inquiries apparently set a most efficient grapevine into operation for they located two men,--W. J. Coles and David H. Simpson,-who knew many of the answers we sought. Simpson had even explored the edge of our region and had some most informative photographs. It appeared that the 31 mile trail up the Spillimacheen River to McMurdo Creek, which we had thought to travel by pack-horse, was now passable by jeeps. Further, the local ranger was due to make a trip over this route shortly and if we could get down to his home base at Parson in time we might even arrange to ride with him. Then about 4 P.M. events galvanized us into a sudden splurge of getting ready. Arnold's carefully prepared lists, that he and Sterling had worked over on the long train ride, proved their full worth; two hours later the final buying, sorting and repacking for a month's trip into the bush was done and we were in a truck bound for Parson,--a way-station 20 miles S. E. of Golden.

At Parson we camped overnight and again those opium dreams of a leisurely day crept softly in: the whereabouts of the Man with a Jeep, Irving Parker, who we hoped would take us on our next stage, was unknown; we guessed he would show up the next evening at earliest. Instead, he appeared early in the morning and ready to go. Nine O'clock saw us again packed and now headed for the upper reaches of the Spillimacheen River. The jeep was well loaded: three sat in the seat; in back were the jeep's radio equipment, our tents, ropes, crampons, packboards, ice-axes, a month's supply of food and all the other necessary evils that one designates by "etc". The other two riders hung on with the baggage somehow.

That one night camp at Parson stands out in my memory for two things: There was my first try at setting up Arnold's tent; the occupants, Arnold and Sterling, grumbled mightly that night at my having left a few bull-thistles beneath the thin tent floor; a week later, with their backs seasoned by heavy packing, the thistles would have gone unnoticed. At the next camp I was alleged to have pitched the same tent over a sawed-off stump. After this, Arnold set up his own tent.

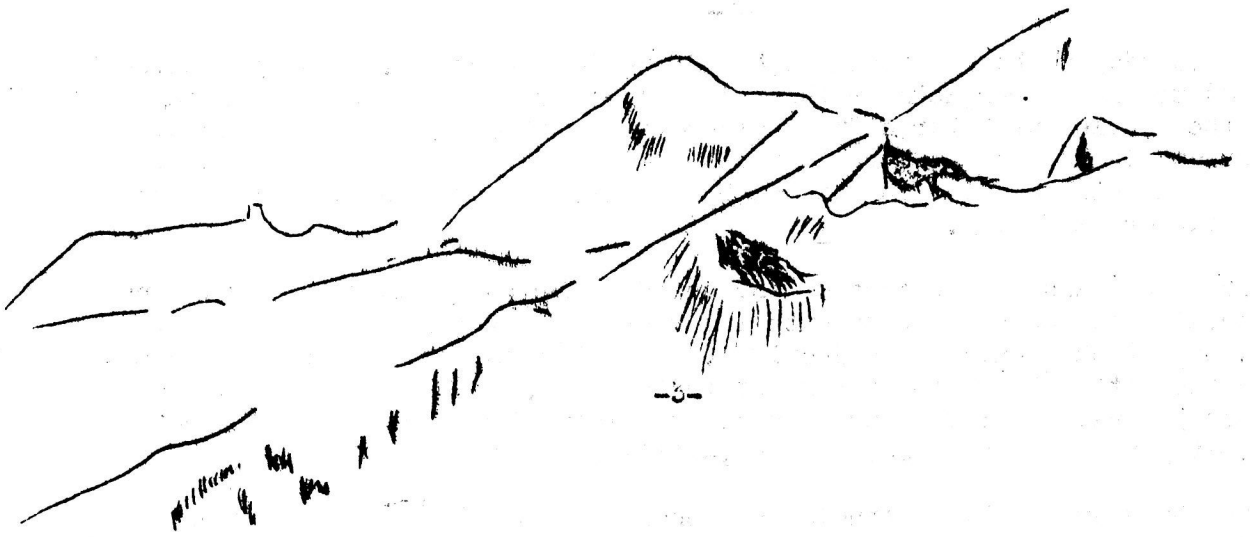
Also at Parson I assumed the job of dish-washer for the party and found my first chore was to scrub out the residual butter and powdered milk from canisters that had been on last year's trip. A dearth of soap and an over-abundance of conflicting advice complicated an otherwise reasonable task.

A Jeep Up the Spillimacheen

The trail-like road up the Spillimacheen River was navigable by jeep to McMurdo Creek. A mining outfit is developing a claim somewhat beyond this point; at the time of our trip several Swede lumberjacks were blasting out the larger trees and making log bridges; a bulldozer followed them up, pushing aside the small trees and roughly grading the way,-making 4 or 5 miles of such road per day. per day.

The log bridges were of some interest. Two 18-inch logs were laid side-by-side across the stream or gully to be spanned; these formed a shallow groove,-call this "a",--for the tires on one side. Then 3 more logs were laid close together, forming 2 more grooves,-"b" and "c". Log sizes and spacings were such that jeep rode grooves a and b, and a standard-width light truck rode a and c. It was alright until the tires climbed out of their gooves.

A jeep ride over a rough trail is somewhat of an experience. Each person must work out his own technique for staying on,-governed by available hand and toe-holds; ropes and pitons are not usually used. My own location,-on the front seat, outside position,-called for a sort of wedging procedure combined with a modified inverse layback. Such a jeep ride is somewhat



similar to a ride on horseback. While the feeling of hazard in horseback riding due to the great altitude at which one sits is not present, it is replaced by an even greater psychological reaction: the ground whizzing along just beneath gives one practically the sensation that his feet are dragging. Prolonged riding, we were told, resulted in sores indistinguishable from saddle sores; medical authorities prescribe the same treatment for both, namely, namely, interdiction of equitation until healing is achieved.

We reached the lumberjack's camp at Whiskey Creek by mid-afternoon. Olson, the cook, treated us to "efter-middage" coffee; Swedes, like the navy, are of little use without their coffee. A couple of newly-fallen spruce trees briefly stopped progress above Whiskey Creek and called out the ever-ready axe. In early evening we reached the end of jeep travel, by the old trapper's cabin at the meeting of McMurdo Creek with the Spillimacheen River 31 miles from Parson. Beyond here we walked, for four weeks.

Any figures on walking distances which may be included herewith are given about "as the crow flies." The true mileage covered by the same crow stumbling along under a heavy pack, through a pathless infinity of brush, rocks, slide alder, devil's club, fallen trees, steepness and perversity cannot well be guessed at.

Spurt the First: Up McMurdo Creek to the West Spillimacheen.

The three days of back-packing into the Spillimacheen Divide were weary ones. Our duffle at the start amounted to about 120 pounds per man, requiring two carries; well over half of the weight was in food, figuring at the rate of but 2 pounds per man per day for a month's supply.

A tolerably good pack trail leads up McMurdo Creek to the mining claim. We followed this for 8 miles and then started steeply up hill through the "bush". About 5 miles later we reached an open boggy meadow, well up in the pass between the Spillimacheen Range and Silent Mountain; here we cached our loads, suspended by wires between trees so as to be out of reach of bears, and returned to the trapper's camp.

The others of our party had been in similar country before and had a fair idea of what lay ahead; this was my first initiation and that first day held out two promises.

It had been a 22 mile day, half of it uphill with packs upward of 65 pounds. Three miles were trailless and steep and it was my first try at beating through "bush" under heavy load. Also, we had returned to camp after dark and in a rain squall.

By any previous experience of mine 22 miles over mountain trail with only a light pack was a good comfortable day's work. Adding 40 percent to my weight, taking away all semblance of trail for a third of the way, and doing this on our first day out, made it something quite special. The promise was that of one hell of a lot of work ahead.

The second promise was mixed up with that alpine meadow we reached. Patched with flowers, crossed by snow-fed rills, framed in straight standing spruces, and with far glimpses of tumbled snowy mountains that finally made the horizon,-it caused the first promise to look quite pint-sized.

On Tuesday we bade a final "ajö" (Swede for "adieu", in case you haven't guessed) to the lumberjacks at the trapper's cabin, carried our remaining loads the 8 miles up McMurdo Creek and camped overnight. The next day saw all our duffle carried forward to another meadow, at the top of the pass. This was directly off the end of the West Spillimacheen Range, overlooking the Duncan Creek Valley.

From the pass we saw more of the southern range spread before us. One pile of mountains we looked at with much interest: we thought it to be the Battle Range, one of our tentative objectives. A better view, from a higher point, showed the Battle Range to be farther to the west, and this other massive pile was yet nameless; for purposes of our discussion we called it "Nemo", which,-if you recall your Jules Verne,-still means "nameless".

On Thursday Sterling, Arnold and Donald climbed the middle peak of the West Spillimacheen Range. Their route was up the north face between two small glaciers to the east ridge to the summit; it was a first ascent for this peak.

The fourth man spent the day sleeping in the sun, photographing flowers, with a heel-blister at one extremity and a head-cold at the other, and enjoying the bliss that only surcease from a heavy packboard can give. Leisure had at last caught up with me, if only for a day.

Spurt the Two-th. West Spillimagooks to the Beaver Dunks.

Relaying our stuff forward from the West Spillimacheen Pass to the Beaver Duncan Divide took two more days and was attended by one notable incident. Partway along, on the first day, we mislaid half of our baggage at a relay point and this cost us several hours of quartering the mountain-side,-looking for certain clear landmarks that proved quite otherwise for a time. As a result nightfall found the four of us at the Beaver-Duncan Divide, camping on a small dry s ot in a swamp with half of our duffle; we had one of the tents, two sleeping bags and a miscellany of food and utensils. On the next night, with both tents and all our other duffle at hand this camp in the swamp was fairly comfortable.

The swamp camp, in keeping with Donald's ubiquitous "Law of Opposites", had certain features about it,--some good, some bad. The spot was dry enough. It was well located as to drinking water with a pond and stream 20 feet away. Surrounding us with luxuriant clumps of mountain rhododendron, masses of creamy white blossoms that were a delight to see. Being in a dense wood, firewood was abundant. In the stream were a few small fish that we looked at a bit hungrily. (Another year's telling and these will have grown into a ravening school of steelhead salmon; so go such things). Ptarmigan and fool-hens came near enough to be clubbed but peaceful counsel prevailed and they, too, were let be. The swamp was, however, dark enough to be a haunt of the Dismal Sauger and hardly a spot in which to dry out after a rain. Also, one couldn't see the nearby mountains for the trees.

So, after our two nights in the swamp camp we moved tents and belongings about a mile, out into a broad, open game trail close to the headwaters of Beaver River; this was on the old moraine below Beaver Glacier, a place where the spruce stand was not yet fully established. Wood was not so plentiful here and the drinking water, from the silty stream out of the glacier, had to be settled before use. Before our tents, however, was the towering view of Mts. Sugarloaf, Beaver and Duncan with their glaciers and snowfields. Beside the pure enjoyment of it, such a view also had its practical aspects: the glaciers could be scrut inized to determine climbing routes and to locate "live" areas or avalanche tracks; each distant roar of avalanching snow turned all eyes upward to find its origin.

On the day we moved camp, Arnold and I did most of the moving while Sterling and Donald explored down the Duncan River to "Holway's" Creek. Their purpose was to survey the possibilities for getting in to the Battle Range from that direction; Andy and Betty Kauffman, with Norman Brewster, were working toward the objective from the southwest and our party had some thought of attempting it from the northeast. The scouts returned with a discouraging report: it looked as though getting in the 10 miles or so to the Battle Range from th direction; and then coming out again, might well absorb all our time and energy for a month. So at this time the matter was temporarily shelved. Later observations from Mts Sugarloaf and Duncan resulted in abandonment of the idea entirely.

The Sugarloaf Climb

The peak of Sugarloaf, some 10,750 feet in altitude and 6000 feet above the level of our base camp, was the next objective. Arnold, who takes a keen delight in mountaineering history, informs me that The "loaf" was climbed in 1890 by Forster, Huber and Topham and again in 1907 by the Carson Survey Party; in 1910 the South Peak was climbed by Holway alone.

Should a real mountaineer read this account he probably will want a explicit account of the route than my own words will give him. So, from Arnold again, I secured the following concise description: we went up the left edge of Beaver Glacier to the spur ridge leading onto Grand Nevé, then up the north Arete to the north peak, and finally to the south peak. My own recollections of the climb, as you will see, are much less precise: it was my first experience with glaciers, snowfields, ice axe and crampons and the strangeness and newness of everything left me with but a curious collection of impressions.

It was a long day, starting at about 4 O'clock dawn with the wading of icy Beaver River. Then there was a scramble up a long moraine slope, under the suspicious eyes of a family of mountain goats. A little higher and we were skirting the serac area with its fantasy of ice-columns and blue-green depths.

Out in the crevasse and snow area, we roped up. Arnold and Donald took turns at the labor of breaking trail. Sterling usually brought up the rear, as anchor man. I put one foot in front of the other as required and tried hard to keep rope, ice-axe and crampons in a proper state of subjection. It sometimes seemed as though these items wanted to reach up and bite one, and a crampon finally did. Later I may try to write coherently about the ice-axe.

After the snow-work there was more rock scrambling, this time over broken, frost-loosened shale; at times this sounded and felt as though one were wading through the wreck of a crockery store.

We reached Sugarloaf's "summit",-presumably its first visitors since the time of Holway in 1910,-enjoyed the usual climbing lunch of hardtack, jam, nuts, raisins and chocolate, took pictures (always tied in to the rope-end and under watchful eyes), and briefly rested among the rock crevices away from the wind. Arnold noted compass bearings and made sketches for later use in filling in some of the unmapped topography to the south

About this time the thinkers of the party, with too much leisure on their minds,-and with the aid of a protractor and crude plumb-bob-began to rationalize as usual. They decided that perhaps the snow-corniced peak a half-mile away might be a little higher than where we were, making it the true summit of Sugarloaf; privately, I couldn't see what difference that should make but, anyway, we climbed up onto that peak too (the south peak) and then headed back for camp.

We did not return to camp that night. The last traces of light, about nine O'clock, saw us well below the glacier, picking our way among the rocks of the long moraine slope. A half-hour later found us, roped together for safety, lowering ourselves by turns down the steep bed of a cold water trickle, half sitting in water, with a wet rope and weary dispositions. About then we located-mostly by feel,-some dead tree-snags fallen from the crumbling morain-crest above; and with these to feed a warming fire we spent the hours until dawn in the lee of a boulder, alternately dozing and swapping yarns, freezing on one side and steaming on the other. It was a memorable night in good company. A two-hour walk in the dawn light brought us to camp and food.

Donald's first remark on untying his tent-entry was "Hey! someone's been here, I never tie up my tent this way." It seemed a joke; we were in a country visited only by occasional winter trappers and we knew of no mountaineers who had been here since Holway's visit a third of a century before. A note in Arnold's tent disclosed that two men,-Fabergé and Speck,-were camped nearby and would like to meet us. We had several pleasant visits with them. They had just come up the Beaver River-a route which was to be our outward course; in their short stay they made climbs of Sugarloaf and the south peak of Duncan and then headed back down the Beaver.

There now ensued 4 days of intermittent rain, which resolved into a foot or so of new snow on the peaks above us. Our army mountain tents proved to be of waterproof fabric,-as advertised,-but someone had forgotten to coat the sewed seams and these dripped merrily ("merrily" in restrospect only), onald's technique of building a pile of spruce boughs on which to pitch the tent paid off somewhat: It gave us the semblance of an island about which the water trickles flowed as in scuppers, leading to the corner grommet holes from whence they finally escaped to the larger lake outdoors. In other tent (Lake Wexler, it came to be called) fared less well; one night saw Sterling wearing his rain jacket for protection inside his wet sleeping bag. The sun finally came out; we dried our wet belongings, picked tiny strawberries at the rate of a mouthful an hour, slept, ate and felt better.

The next climb was the south peak of Mt. Duncan. The day started with a scramble up over the timbered spur that lies between the Beaver and Duncan headwaters, bringing us out to Duncan Glacier. The traverse of the glacier was enlivened by one crevasse,-a shallow one,-which had to be circumvented the hard way: we went into it and then climbed up out of it. There also was the crossing of an avalanche track safe enough at this time of day but not loitered over. The glacier route brought us to the East Arête(to me another mess of "broken crockery" as on the Sugarloaf climb), which lead us to the south peak of Mt. Duncan.

This day the mechanics of climbing were less new to me and there seemed more time to absorb the other impressions of the mountains. There were the blue-green depths of the glacier crevasses with the fine tracery on their walls. There were the lights and shadows one could find in all the whiteness of snow. There were the avalanche tracks to be studied and avoided, and the grandstand view of one nearby avalanche with the muted roar of its tons of rolling snow. Beyond all was the calm serenity of the distant snowy mountains from the top of Duncan was a sweep of scenery to stay long in one's memory. Seventy miles to the east we saw Assiniboine and the other peaks of the Rockies; way to the north were the great icefields; northwest were the half-discernible peaks of last year's expedition; closer in, northerly and northwest, was our friend Sugarloaf, with Mts. Grand and Wheeler and the snowfields of Deville and Illecillewaet echeloned beyond. Southwesterly was the Battle Range; we wondered if the Kauffman party might be even then on Mt. Butters. Southerly was a new and uncharted territory,-the Houston and "Holway's" Creek country with our newly "discovered" Mt. Nemo. Far to the southeast we saw the smoke-plume of a forest fire. Much of the distant topography was known to Sterling from previous journeys and his being able to give the names to the land added mot a little to one's delight in it.

One of my most vivid impressions is that connected with the wearing of dark snow-goggles up among the snowfields. As you put them on, the blue-white glare of the snow, the cobalt blue of the sky, the green of the far forests gives place to another world. You are in an immensity of blacks and whites. As your eyes relax from the glare, the snow takes on a pure whiteness, sculptured only by gray shadows and without trace of other colors; the vault of the sky is essentially black, relieved by sharp white clouds merging into the tenuous gray of the high cirrus clouds, this a backdrop for the even blacker mountain masses; every rock seam and crevice stands out sharply, either in shadings of "black" or in dense black slashed by crevice-caught snow. It is an etching of large masses limned in wonderful detail, unrelieved by colors.

A minor emergency on the downward trip demonstrated our mountaineering technique. The lead man, Arnold, suddenly slid into a shallow crevasse; the second man, Donald, with limited warning, was unable to recover and slid nearly to the edge of it. The third man,-Pete,-promptly forgot all he had been told, let go the sure anchor of his imbedded ice-axe, grabbed the rope with both hands; dug in his heels and,-he firmly believes-stopped the slide. Sterling, meanwhile, was well positioned above, the handle of his ice-axe planted deeply in the snow, waiting to take the load, Everyone recovered and grinned; my chagrin lasted quite a while.

With regard to the above incident, it should be mentioned that four men were involved and that there are at least that many versions of what happened. In later argument over the matter Donald insisted that <u>he</u> had snubbed the rope; Sterling quite agreed with him, pointing out that the word "snub" means to "treat with scorn" or to "have nothing to do with."

Sleeping in the wet tent, with heels propped up on a pack to keep out of the puddles, had caused a crick in one of my knees; it was hardly apparent at first but became quite painful on the return from Duncan. It was impossible to say whether it was a temporary thing due to fatigue-curable by rest and food,-or whether it might be something more serious. After some discussion of the matter,-and after chewing another reflective straw,-Sterling thought it best to put aside the original plan of getting to glacier circle over the high Deville Nevé and we headed down the Beaver River instead. Decisions such as this may seem simple in retrospect; at the time, with their possibilities for good or bad unknown, they can be most important and they may make or break a trip.

Third Spurt, Beaver Duncan Divide to Glacier Circle.

The last day of July saw us wading, for the last time, the wide, cold shallows of the Beaver River in the divide and then heading down its left bank. Our food consumption to date, plus ruthless discarding, had now reduced our loads to 60 or 70 pounds per man, my pack was the lightest of the lot but it still was a heavy enough load to roll beneath and rise up with. The west or "true left" river bank was chosen, since, if the knee showed improvement, we could strike west up Grand Glacier to the Deville snowfield without further stream crossing. By late afternoon, despite several vigorous massages by Donald, the knee still ached. So the Deville plan was given up and we made another fording of the Beaver, now grown to a respectable stream. Sterling carried an end of the rope across,-getting well dunked,-and then the rest waded across with the packs; the water was waist deep and ice-cold, and it required a strong assist from the rope to keep one's balance in the swift water. That evening's camp was in a grassy meadow studded with bluebells; rills of snow-fed water made their little sounds all about us. The troublesome knee was without an ache the next morning and gave no trouble again.

Three hours beyond the bluebell meadow and we came to a well-defined trail,-the first since McMurdo Creek over 2 weeks back. It proved to be interrupted by fallen trees,-about 10 to the mile,-but it was a trail and a great relief from the slow, patience-trying way through the "bush". Bush packing under heavy loads becomes quite a task: it is continuous repetition of scrambling over fallen logs, through wet brush, pushing aside springy boughs, across bogs, and steeply up and down over loose rocks or slippery slopes. Occasionally there are open and fairly level stretches but these seem few. I had rarely appreciated a trail so much as this one we came upon. It gave us a new sense of ease and relaxation and put us all in a skylarking, holiday mood. Our 5 mile trudge down the trail to Beaver Camp, through long shadowy aisles of towering spruces and giant cedars, was a fast and good one. At Beaver Camp there is a forester's locked cabin, and little else but scenery.

Then ensued two days of loafing in the sun about Beaver Camp. With much rest, food under our belts, and equipment well dried out, we really "recharged our batteries." It was my first real sense, on this trip, of being completely relaxed, full of the sun's warmth and at ease. Forester's sometimes came to Beaver Camp on horseback and the resulting manured spots about the corral and along the trails were marked by stands of mushroons; Donald, our mushroon addict, had a field day identifying the varieties with all their resounding Latin names; with firm faith in his knowledge he cooked up a soup of rough-stemmed Boletus in water and powdered milk and supped heartily: the others of us found the flavor good but dared little more than a lip-wetting taste; it was Donald's inning for he suffered no ill-effects.

The westerly view from Beaver Camp was superb. At your feet were the flat islands formed where a side stream flowed into the Beaver River. Your eyes moved upward from them, over the forested valley, up past the alder-covered gashes of old avalanche tracks, up over the rocks above timberline and finally to the snowy top of Selwyn. This peak framed by the rock precipices of the Guardsmen,-as Mts. Macoun and Topham are called,--dominated all the lesser details. Your eyes would take in flowers, streams and wooden slopes but finally they would turn again to the high slopes of Selwyn.

Another day saw us under packs once more, crossing over the now full-grown Beaver River on,-surprisingly,-a little car that rode along a steel cable. Then we started up through the woods for Glacier Circle and Mt. Selwyn, four miles away.

On this day we encountered the severest travel of our entire trip. After an easy climb through the woods we found a 300-yard width of arbor vitae between us and the bare rock beyond. A thousand-foot climb would have brought us above it. We started through and found too late that we should have gone up. It proved to be an almost impenetrable mass of the small tightly-growing cedars, sprung up in an avalanche track. It snatched at us and our pack with a thousand springy fingers as we slowly wormed our way through, under and over it. After three hours hot work we finally came out to the rock slopes beyond. Sterling had won through ahead of the rest of us; he reported that he would spot our location by the movement of the foliage and minutes later the foliage was still moving in very nearly the same spot.

By late afternoon, after crossing the boulder field below Deville Glacier and scrambling up a 500-foot moraine slope, we were in the high valley called Glacier Circle. After some searching we found the originally well-built, but now dilapidated, cabin that Sterling knew of; its unkempt interior and its littered front yard let us know that we were nearing the warrens of men again. We pitched our tents in the spruce woods, but did use the cabin for a night or two after we had time to give it a cleaning up.

Glacier Circle is a high hanging valley at about 6000 feet altitude; it has a fairly flat floor,-partly wooded and partly in marshy, flower-dotted open meadows. A ring of steep cliffs nearly encircles it, with half-a-dozen ribbon-like streams dropping into it from the snowfield above. Across its lower ends the moraine slope dams in the water to form a mountain lake shaped like an arrow head; turquoise in color when seen against the afternoon sun, it looked a cold, steely blue, flecked with pink, when we saw it from the west one early dawn. A lively stream tumbles from the lake down over the 500 foot moraine dam. Out in the upper meadows are several projecting granite islands on which spruce trees have found footing; one of these is reminscent of a certain sketch of San Michele. On one edge of the valley the spruces have ventured too close to the cliffs; the destruction wrought by snow avalanches with their attendant winds can be traced in the swaths through the trees.

Our one climbing day from Glacier Circle took us over the shoulder of Mt. Fox across Fox Glacier, up on Mt. Hassler (11,123 feet, the highest peak in the Southern Selkirks), and then over to adjoining Mt. Selwyn (11,025 feet). It was more glacier and snow work, more plodding over loose, shaly roc slopes, culminating in another sweeping panorama of near and distant mountains and valleys. Again there was the feeling of being a tiny speck,-though a reasonably triumphant one,-in a great vastness. Small triumphs of this sort, impersonal to the rest of the world and having little to do with any earthly concept of usefulness, are none the less a refreshment to one's inner being.

The return, down over Deville Glacier, struck a snag in getting past the icefall. We were a couple of hours finding a route down over the cliffs along the east edge of the glacier; after much scouting Sterling and Arnold located a usable way down, a short rapelle was the final key to the problem.

Donald, behind me on the rope, saved me twice from my inexperience that day. Up on the shoulder of Selwyn my feet took to fumbling with the rocks and he steadied me with the rope. On Deville cliffs a hundred-pound rock, my handhold for a moment, hurtled down past me; I might have done likewise, perhaps, except for his assist on the rope again. (Well, that's what Donalds and ropes are for.) Mountaineering,-it appears to this amateur,-requires a curious combination of speed mixed with great caution; the two seem quite incompatible until one gradually finds that confidence is the catalyst by which they are combined.

The delay on the rock slopes made another night bivouac seem imminent, but the problem suddenly finding solution, a hard, fast walk brought us into camp by the last light of dusk.

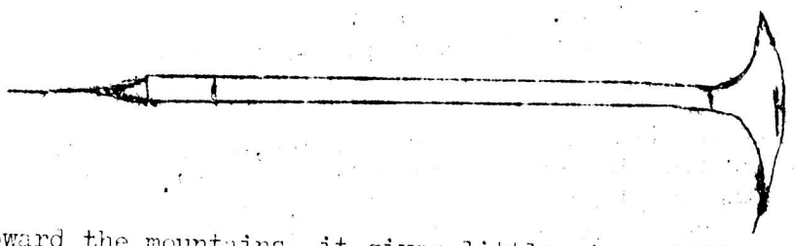
At this point we were through with ice-axe work and a description of this implement and its ways might be included.

On Ice Axes

The Romans had their two faced Janus, Stephenson wrote of Dr. Jekyl and Mr. Hyde, Christianity has in Satan an Angel fallen from grace. Mountaineers? They have the ice-axe,-inanimate perhaps, but of a truly dual personality nevertheless.

For the benefit of the blissfully ignorant, the ice-axe is a tool developed for mountaineers use in snow and ice. It somewhat resembles a lightly built pick-axe. The head, about 12 inches across, is made of steel, forged, tempered, and ground; one end of the head tapers to a long curved point; the other end is flattened like a small adz blade. The three-foot wooden handle attaches to the head by a well-reinforced eye; its other end terminates in a metal spike. The tool is beautifully designed for its purpose: it is quite light to carry; the cutting edge is useful in hacking out steps on icy slopes; the sharp-pointed end may be driven in to secure a hold in firm snow or ice or to increase one's reach. The long, spiked handle is especially useful: holding the axe by its head and jabbing the handle deeply into soft snow at every other step, it gives a good anchor against sliding; the long handle readily penetrates the new, fluffy snow into the more firmly packed layers beneath; with a loop of the rope thrown about the implanted handle one can brake quite heavy loads. Even the handles oval cross-section is functionally planned; a slight twist of the head and the oval handle enlarges its hole in the snow so that it is easily pulled out. It would appear that the-axe is a boon companion in its proper element.

Now lets look a little further into this thing. As you travel through



the bush toward the mountains, it gives little sign of its capabilities one way or the other. True it is a little troublesome; because of its length, it cannot be packed away; the best way to carry it is to ram the handle down along the edge of the packboard,-threaded through the lashings and tie it in securely; you are frequently made aware of its presence for, if you tie it high, the T-shaped head projects above your load and gets caught in tree limbs; while if you tie it low, the long spike comes below your load and catches on things, while the head may work around to nestle against the back of your neck. At camp you must hang it safely out of harm's way and then not forget it the next morning when you break camp. So far, however, it has been but a moderate nuisance.

Then you take it on a climb. You start out fresh, with a light pack on your back and ice-axe in hand. Wading a stream, it is quite useful in keeping your balance; up the moraine slopes you carry it jauntily; using it occasionally to steady yourself. Then you have a little rock climb and you begin to have some slight doubts about it; it seems to be getting the way more than usual but you soon forget that. Upon the snow slopes the ice-axe finally comes into its element: it gives you a great feeling of confidence as you ram the handle deeply into the snow and more than once it saves you from sliding; you gain almost a positive affection for it and you wonder how you ever came to mistrust the little devil.

Well, it's when you come to the mean going of the loose, crumbly rock ridges that you finally and fully see the other, the evil,side of the shield. Now the going gets rough. Every foot step has to be consciously and rapidly analyzed for its treachery: one you can trust, one you use lightly and quickly, one slides a little under you; you try not to let any of them throw you. You're not quite sure whether a slab is fixed for all time or whether it is a frost-loosened, delicately balanced thing waiting only an extra ounce to go tumbling down. You long for half a dozen hand-holds. You find you are no octopus and have but two hands. Then you find that even these two are no good for in your left hand is the ever present coil of rope, leading to the man ahead, and in your right hand is that confounded ice-axe! So you do the best you can with a fistful of rope, one with a fistful of axe. Somewhere along the way you rig a wrist thong for the axe which is of some help; with this you're not so likely to drop it over a cliff in a weak moment. But it still remains a clumsy, clattering impediment to free use of those precious handholds

and your animosity toward it becomes personal indeed. On the way down you try tying it to your pack: you tie it low and the spiked handle either awkwardly catches in crevices or jabs you in the leg, and the head worms around to poke its cold steel into your neck; you tie it high and the head reaches out to snag overhanging rocks and the handle spike now gives you only an occasional stab in the buttocks. The high position seems to give the most mitigations of your troubles and you leave it so, you have long ago turned to profanity for relief,-first silently, then more and more vocally; long years of piloting a car behind erratic motorists are hardly adequate training for this ordeal but you are thankful for such stock of short Anglo-Saxon expressions as you have. My fulminations made a noteworthy contribution to the melting of at least two glaciers in the Southern Selkirks. Also I'm now doubly barred from that clan of mountaineers who are of the strong, silent type.

This should give the reader some slight concept of the remarkable dualism that is inherent in the lowly ice-axe.

One might suppose that the Bermani-soled ski shoes we all wore would likewise seem a mixed blessing: they appear enormously clumsy and weigh nearly seven pounds to the pair. Somehow, I felt nothing but undiluted affection for these monsters.

Fourther Spurt. Homeward

The trek up over the cliff behind Glacier Circle and then across the illecillewaet snowfield to Perley Rocks,-(in the shadow of Sir Donald)-marked our last day as a four-man team. The going was quite safe and Sterling let me set the pace; as is the manner of inexpert pace-setters I went too fast.

By this time my supply of film had become rather low,-a thing which I regretted exceedingly on our crossing of the Illecillewaet Nevé. This expanse of snow was something to please a mathematician, had he been along. It stretched away in great warped surfaces that could almost be set to equations. Superimposed on the primary surfaces were sub-patterns of ridges, furrows and hollows, sweeping along with hill and dale like contour plowing. Some patterns seemed to be formed by flowing water and others from direct melting or sublimination by the sun; winds may have contributed as well. Mt. Sir Donald with its out-lying skirt (no comments, please) knelt alone at the northern edge of the snow plain, looming slowly larger as we plodded toward it; around were farther and lesser peaks but Sir Donald dominated the nevé.

Below Perley Rocks we struck the t ail that drops 4000 feet to the railroad at Glacier, B. C. On the down tril we found a small camp which later proved to belong to a solo-climber named Petit, the third man we were to meet in nearly a month's travel. Beneath Mt. Sir Donald, at about 7500 feet, three of us made camp, intending to stay as long as our food lasted; Sterling decided he'd better get back to his bread-and-butter work and after seeing our camp set up, left us here. Arnold and Donald attempted an ascent of Sir Donald the next day but the weather turned nasty and they compromised by making the less exposed climb of Uto Peak instead; en route they were joined by Petit, who had heard of their climbing plans from Sterling the evening before in Glacier. Early next morning we could see a rainstorm coming up the valley; so we broke camp and headed for Glacier, reaching civilization again in a heavy downpour. A cup of hot tea at the Canadian Alpine Club cabin, with Betty Kauffman as hostess, marked the end of the trip. (Unless two steak dinners apiece, for the next three days, constituted a more fitting ending).

At this stage statistics seem a bit boresome to the writer, especially since they must be qualified in so many ways to give them meaning. To make a very rough estimate, we walked,-apart from the climbs,-25 miles by trail and 50 miles sans trail. The climbs, if converted into miles, would have considerably less meaning; of the three main climbs two were of dawn-to-dusk length (16 hours or so), and the other one spilled over into the next morning by a couple of hours. It was a four week trip.

On this journey I had hoped to find what makes mountaineering,-with all its toil and hardship by urban standards,-so appealing to the thousand or so people on this continent who enjoy it. I may have found out.