
C A RUSSELL

One Hundred Years Ago



Lt Col Edward Strutt. (Reproduced from *The Last Habsburg* by Gordon Brook-Shepherd, published by Weidenfeld and Nicolson, now part of Orion, which is unable to trace a copyright holder.)

In the aftermath of the First World War many Alpine resorts, severely affected by the global influenza epidemic, which had raged for several months, were still often almost deserted during the opening weeks of 1919. With the exception of local parties few skiers were in a position to return to the principal regions. Aldo Bonacossa and Adriano Revel made the first ski ascents of the Helsenhorn and other peaks to the east of Monte Leone; and Arnold Lunn, while assisting former prisoners of war who had been interned in Switzerland, completed a number of ski tours in the Bernese Alps with Josef Knubel.

With the restoration of normal communications in Europe several members of the Alpine Club returned to the Alps and were able to complete a series of outstanding climbs in August during a long period of perfect weather. In the Mont Blanc range S L Courtauld and E G Oliver made the first ascent of the Innominata ridge on the south-east face of Mont Blanc. After undertaking various training climbs and examining the route from

Punta Innominata Courtauld and Oliver bivouacked above the Col de Frêne with their guides Adolf Aufdenblatten and Adolphe and Henri Rey. On the following day they completed the climb and continued up the Brouillard ridge to the summit where they met and were congratulated by Francesco Ravelli who with the brothers Giuseppe and Battista Gugliermina had attempted the route on several occasions.

Elsewhere in the range George Mallory and Harold Porter climbed the Aiguille des Grands Charmoz and opened a new route on the north-west face of the Aiguille du Midi. A few days later R L G Irving, climbing alone, made the first ascent of the Aiguilles Grises ridge, joining the frontier ridge above the Col de Bionnassay. Later in August the first traverse of this col was completed by R W Lloyd with Josef and Adolf Pollinger after climbing the steep north face. Lloyd and his guides then moved to Zermatt where they followed an unusual route on the Matterhorn, climbing the north-east, Hörnli ridge, traversing the *Galerie Carrel* on the west face and descending by the north-west, Zmutt ridge. The fine weather enabled guideless Italian parties to complete two new routes on the Liskamm: the Gugliermina brothers reached the east, higher summit after climbing the south-west face; and Ravelli's party ascended directly to the west summit by a line on the south face.

In September Harold Raeburn, another Alpine Club member, undertook a daring expedition in the Dauphiné. Climbing on his own he completed an east-west traverse of the Meije with a diversion to examine the west ridge before descending to the Promontoire hut.

In South Africa the Mountain Club had been seriously affected by the conflict with many members absent on active service. Although the club was greatly reduced in size exploration of Table Mountain (1087m) was continued by a few enthusiasts including J W Fraser and F Humphries who completed *Spring Ridge*, another severe route for the period.

In the Southern Alps of New Zealand heavy snowfalls during the winter months were followed by a long period of bad weather and it was only in March that settled conditions allowed Samuel Turner to pursue his ambition to make a solo ascent of the High Peak of Mount Cook (3724m). After being forced to retreat by strong winds during a first attempt Turner retraced his steps two days later and finally reached the summit where his flag was seen by Alfred Cowling, a guide at the Hermitage hotel, and another witness. Although as Turner acknowledged he was fortunate to negotiate the Linda glacier and north-east ridge alone, his success – the first solo ascent by an amateur – was an outstanding achievement by a determined climber.

In Bolivia Rudolf Dienst, one of several German climbers resident in La Paz, completed a number of notable climbs in the Cordillera Real. In May he made the first ascent of the imposing ice peak Huayna Potosi or Caca Aca (6095m) accompanied by O Lohse, the manager of a local tin mine. In the following month Dienst with Adolf Schulze of Ushba fame made the first ascents of Ancochuma (6430m), the highest peak in the Sorata group, and the neighbouring Haukaña (6206m).

In the Canadian Rockies V A Fynn and the guide Rudolph Aemmer

explored a large area south of Banff where they made the first ascent of Mount King George (3422m), the highest peak in the Royal group. After attempting to ascend the unclimbed Mount Sir Douglas (3406m) near Palliser Pass, Fynn and Aemmer were disappointed to learn that J W A Hickson with Edward Feuz Jr had reached the summit of this peak on the previous day. Hickson and Feuz also made the first ascent of Mount Joffre (3450m), another high peak in the region. Further north Howard Palmer's party made the first ascents of McDonnell Peak (3270m) in the Fraser group and Paragon Peak (3030m) in the Rampart massif while visiting the Jasper district.

At home the revival of mountaineering after the war was led by a group of outstanding climbers in the Lake District including G S Bower, C F Holland, H M Kelly and J I Roper. With *D Route* on Gimmer Crag, *Great Central Route* on Dow Crag, *Kern Knotts Buttress* on Great Gable and numerous other severe or very severe routes the standard of climbing was raised considerably during the year.

In March the death occurred of Frederick Gardiner who had climbed in the Caucasus with F C Grove, A W Moore and Horace Walker and is remembered as an early exponent of guideless climbing. He completed many notable expeditions with the brothers Charles and Lawrence Pilkington including the first guideless ascents of the Meije and Finsteraarhorn during a long and successful climbing career.

This account is concluded by recalling a remarkable achievement by a member and future president of the Alpine Club. During the chaotic period following the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Karl, the last Habsburg emperor, who had refused to abdicate, had taken refuge with his wife the Empress Zita and their family at Eckartsau, a hunting-lodge near the Danube north-east of Vienna, where they were suffering from lack of supplies and medical attention. In February, following an appeal to King George V, Lt Col Edward Strutt, an officer serving with the Royal Scots in Salonika and a linguist fluent in French and German, was instructed to proceed to Eckartsau to assist the family by all possible means. In March, after arranging for the delivery of food and fuel Lt Col Strutt on his own initiative and with a small detachment of British soldiers succeeded in escorting the emperor and his family by train to safety in Switzerland.

The emperor, who died at an early age and his family never forgot this chivalrous action and many years later the empress recalled their rescue in a message to the Alpine Club to mark the Club's centenary.

... Once more on this occasion my thoughts and my prayers go towards your former President, gallant Colonel Strutt, whose magnificent support to my family and to myself in the crucial times of the beginning of 1919 I shall always remember in deepest gratitude. ...

A fitting tribute to a brave and resourceful soldier.

- For a fuller portrait of E L Strutt, see Peter Foster's article on p189.