MOUNTAINEERING IN THE CANADIAN ROCKIES.

By S. E. S. ALLEN.

III.

A DESIRE to make the further acquaintance of Mount Assiniboine and its beautiful environment drew me to Banff in the summer of '95, in company with my friend Dr. Howard Smith, and on July 3 we left Banff with a train of two assistants and six ponies for Simpson Pass. Heely Creek was a foaming torrent, and it was with a feeling of relief that we finally camped in the broad meadow at the base of Simpson Pass.

Owing to the late advent of the summer, the summit of the pass was still buried under deep snow, whose surface crust quite failed to bear our weight, so that the efforts of our caravan to struggle across were both amusing and laborious.

In crossing the tributary * next morning occurred an incident which at the time served for those who witnessed it to offset, but for the participant to augment, the chill of the dismal weather. My friend Dr. S., in crossing this swollen stream, failed, through no fault of his own, but owing to the enormous force of the current, to arrive at a satisfactory place on the further shore. The pony, with the obstinacy characteristic of the cayeuse, began a frantic struggle to ascend the precipitous shore. Foreseeing a catastrophe, and fearing to be submerged beneath the animal, whose posture was nearly vertical, Dr. S. dropped into the river, intending to swim ashore; but the strong shore current began to carry him rapidly out to the confluence of the two rivers, where they were thundering in wild rapids and whirlpools.

I happened to have reached the shore below, and shouted for assistance to one of our men, who was not far away; but my voice was drowned in the din of the waters. I made a rapid calculation of the probable path which Dr. S. would follow, and, for want of anything better, bent down a long willow bough until its end was submerged in the foaming water. He fortunately came in contact, and managed by its aid to reach the shore. Meanwhile, the pony had been rescued by one of our assistants.

The passage of the larger Simpson, further down the stream, was made without incident, though taxing the horses greatly. It is amazing to what size these streams, ordinarily presenting no difficulty, can grow in the early summer.

Ascending the steep trail upon the left side of Walandoo Creek, we found upon reaching the ford, some 900 ft. above the Simpson Valley, that it would be madness to risk the horses in such a seething cauldron.

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* The name 'Shuswap River' would seem fitly applicable to this stream, as perpetuating the Indian name of Simpson Pass. I have for this reason known it by that name.

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This little torrent, though of no great size, has a very steep descent, and at such a time neither man nor beast could have found a footing. It became necessary to continue to ascend the left or western bank, heavily timbered and strewn with débris. Despite all our precautions, one of the ponies succeeded in wedging a leg between two rocks. The delay in removing his pack and prying the rocks apart caused us to be practically benighted upon this steep bank, where, with no pasture for the ponies, we tried to forget, in soaked sleeping bags, beneath a hastily erected tent, the inclemency of the weather.*

Safely crossing the Walandoo Creek next morning, July 6, we continued to ascend the right bank. Every spray of fern and moss, every bough and wild flower was a study in silver filigree, or in rare intervals of sunlight radiant with flashing jewels. These our caravan ruthlessly destroyed and was generously soaked in consequence.

At length, toward evening, Walandoo Lakes appeared, at the base of two great rocky masses of the same name. Here our ponies forgot their recent fast in the abundance of a meadow of the lake shore, while we, drying by a roaring camp fire, discussed the possible result of the morrow's attempt at crossing Walandoo Pass—which looked exceedingly snowy—to Lake Assiniboine.

And this traverse I shall long remember with mingled feelings. By 8 o'clock we were under way, skirting the left shore of Walandoo Lake, on whose inky surface, in the shadow of the sombre walls, floated great blocks of winter ice, one of which was more than 20 by 30 yards. After leaving the lake, seeing that the open meadows behind it were deep with snow, I bore to the left, but in so doing went too far and got into worse difficulties. The ponies, breaking through the weakened crust, were rendered helpless. The packs we carried over the worst portion.

The worst place was a steep ridge just to the left of my five days' bivouac of the previous September. In some way, by one device and another, we finally reached it, and in the deep snow partook of lunch, discussing the situation.

There was still about 500 ft. to be covered, and quite a traverse to be made to the summit of the pass, which was considerably to the right, and the whole intervening distance seemed covered with deep snow drifts. Among and around these we picked our way, dragging the ponies over the worst places, and at 4 o'clock were upon the crest.† Clouds obscured Mount Assiniboine entirely, and the cold wind caused us to hurry down the other side. In spite of haste we were overtaken by night in the fallen timber of the valley,

* The greater rainfall of these British Columbia valleys is only too apparent to one crossing a pass in the watershed from the Alberta side.

† To a striking pillar on the N. side of Walandoo Valley I applied the name of 'The Pinnacle,' and that of 'Pinnacle Peak' to the peak to which it is nearest. The Pyramid, and the amphitheatre behind it, suggest a similar feature on the continental watershed in the valley of Cataract Creek, and already referred to under the name of 'Obelisk.'

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LAKE AND MOUNT ASSINIBOINE.

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and made the ascent to Lake Assiniboine in almost total darkness, camping on the shore. I subsequently blazed a trail from Walandoo Lake over to the North Fork trail, where the Assiniboine Creek flows into it, as will be mentioned hereafter.

Lake Assiniboine, as I have mentioned, lies at the foot of a semi-circular wall whose crest shows a number of individual peaks and aiguilles bearing beautiful hanging glaciers, yet overtopped by the great peak itself with which it is connected beyond. Under a blue sky and warm sun Mount Assiniboine, shedding clouds of mist continually down its southern sides, and apparently quite inaccessible from this point, amply confirmed my vivid memories.

Whether to proceed from this point to the right or to the left, whether to first visit the S.W. or the S.E. side of the peak, had now to be decided. I chose to go to the right, partly because it would take me down toward the Kootenie River, which I hoped to visit *viâ* an unexplored region, and partly because of my previous observations on Mount Temple and elsewhere, that in general the S.W. or S. slopes, or more particularly the S.E. side of the S. arête, offered in these peaks of the limestone series the best chance of ascent.

We had found the fallen timber so annoying in ascending to the lake that we tried the experiment of descending by a 'short cut' to the valley of the North Fork. It was worse here, as it proved, for we encountered a chaos of fallen logs strewn over a series of ledges, over which one of the ponies took a 'header' for 40 ft., and the others followed with more difficulty and less rapidity. We saw that we must make immediately for the river bottom, some 1,000 ft. below. The heat was most oppressive. The descent took over four hours, and looking up at our route I could hardly see how we had descended it in safety. On the whole, however, remembering that we were in British Columbia, it is doubtful if we would have made much better progress with the forest green and standing.

On the right or W. bank of the North Fork, where we forded, we found, as I expected to find, a faint Indian trail—or what had been a trail before the fire had swept the valley—of which I had seen a vestige the previous year. Following this to the bend of the river, where it begins its southern course after rounding the W. spur from Mount Assiniboine, we camped in a luxuriant meadow at the foot of the Walandoo peaks, whose whole S. side was clearly seen. These peaks from the Walandoo Lake—their N. side—appeared as a consecutive wall. From the S., however, they show a decided amphitheatre, enclosed by the three higher rocky peaks, the central one being highest, while two smaller rocky peaks, a little to the S. of the other three, complete the little group. The highest of the group must be about 10,000 ft., or perhaps more. They would be by no means easy, and I hoped later to have time to attack them. The view from their summits should be very grand, owing to their central position.

Where the valley bends southward two small streams join the

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North Fork, the smaller from the left flowing from a narrow cañon or gorge in the W. Assiniboine spur, while the larger flows from a semicircular snowy peak to the right or W. The country became sparsely wooded, and the trail, such as it was, continued to follow the right bank until the valley broadened and the river banks grew low. Then it ceased, the proper method being simply to cross and recross from flat to flat. It is fascinating work to follow these Indian trails. They show a truly wonderful amount of ingenuity in avoiding obstacles and traversing difficult places, and to follow them smoothly and without unnecessary delay, particularly for the first time, is an art both difficult to acquire and delightful to practise, involving, in addition to the skilful use of the senses, a certain subtle instinctive element quite analogous to the finer points of climbing, and acquired only after considerable practice. There are many of these trails scattered throughout the mountains, in general following the banks of streams, but often crossing the high divides and traversing thick woodlands.

It would be comparatively easy to put these trails in excellent order with small outlay, and thus establish a quite complete system of routes for alpine and tourist travel.

Some 3 miles below the bend there was a decided depression in the ridge upon the left, whence a small stream issued. As I wished to adopt the easiest and shortest approach to the S.W. side of Mount Assiniboine, I determined to camp here and ascend the stream next day. As it was still early in the afternoon, however, we proceeded round the W. spur or peak, in order to examine its S.W. side. This did not look encouraging, and for horses was absolutely impossible. From this peak there ran a low slate ridge to another peak of similar height 2½ miles to the S., and forming the left side of the North Fork valley. Beyond this latter peak a valley evidently opened from the North Fork valley to the N.E., and another slightly nearer to the S.E.

We returned to the gorge, and next morning succeeded in getting a pony with a week's provisions up through the gorge, and into an amphitheatre above. The scenery here was very wild and rough, and the peaks enclosing the amphitheatre were evidently the same that we had seen from Lake Assiniboine. They would offer no particular difficulty of ascent from this point. There was a broad snowy pass upon the right, overlooked still further to the right (S.) by the sharp rocky peak forming the N. turret of the slate ridge. Its southern extremity, as I mentioned, was a similar peak. These I have called respectively the N. and S. turrets. Their elevation must be about 9,000 ft. above the sea.

I saw that to reach Mount Assiniboine I would be obliged to continue round the S. turret, and reach the valley lying E. of the slate ridge. The gorge was quite rich in minerals, crystals of sulphur, alum, and iron pyrite occurring in some abundance.

The peaks upon the W. side of the valley, though not high, were bold and rugged. One in particular, somewhat higher than the Walandoo peaks, bore upon its northern face a considerable

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mass of hanging glacier, much resembling in its shape the N. face of Mount Bonney at Glacier.

We camped for the night at the foot of Portal Gorge, as we called it, in the grassy meadow. The atmosphere was becoming very hazy, and the aspect of the Walandoo group to the N. was very weird and striking.

Our difficulties began again next morning, when we encountered the first of a series of cañons some three miles below our camp. The trail was of no assistance, for it was quite obliterated by débris. From this point until its junction with the large stream from the E. the North Fork trail is of little use. The banks are steep and the upper portions strewn with fallen timber. The trail is well indicated along the earth banks by the numerous footmarks of our caravan.

At length, having ascended an unusually steep bank from the river to the plateau above, I saw that we were directly below the lowest portion of the slate ridge, and not far from the S. turret. So, camping here, we ascended to obtain a view of the region to the E., toward Mount Assiniboine, climbing the dry rocky bed of a stream, and finally, in a drenching rain, a rocky rib running up to the top of the ridge, 8,000 ft. above the sea.

The rain had stopped, and the clouds lifted sufficiently to show us a scene for whose grandeur we were quite unprepared. Eastward from the N. turret, whose summit was visible, five great peaks, their summits wrapped in clouds, formed the N. and E. boundary of a narrow valley containing at its head two lakes, one of a light blue, the other a jet black. The streams from these united to form a very winding river, which, flowing down the valley, was hidden by the S. turret from our view. We could see, however, that it must join a stream observed in a valley further to the right, running N.N.W. to S.S.E. The valley was as black as charcoal, as indeed was the valley at our feet, except that at the head of the blue lake was a patch of vivid green, indicating splendid pasture. This fact I carefully noticed; but for that patch of green I should not have ventured subsequently to take horses into this valley.

While we were debating which peak was Mount Assiniboine, the clouds parted and settled the question. East of north, high above all the others, rose the great peak, its summit a sharp pinnacle,* and bearing upon the narrow upper southern face a snow-covered glacier. Below this ran a series of steep black cliffs, on the left or W. extremity, several hundred feet in height, becoming much lower upon the E. or right. The middle portions of this face were perfectly white with snow, though, as a later experience showed, it does not remain all the year on these middle portions of the southern face. The lower portions of the mountain were great quartzite ledges, down which mountain torrents had worn steep

* As seen from this point; but as seen from Walandoo Pass its long summit ridge is conspicuous, while from the N. its appearance is even more like a pinnacle.

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gorges. The summit could not be less than 3,500 to 4,000 ft. above us, or 11,500 to 12,000 ft.* above the sea, and over 6,000 ft. above the river bottom.

I speak of the 'southern face,' because no climber would care to look twice at the S.E. and S.W. arêtes, except at their upper portions. The former began as a cliff of about 900 ft., culminating in a lesser peak, succeeded by a deep depression, and rising from the ridge connecting Mount Assiniboine with the next peak to the S. This cliff, in fact, as I afterwards discovered, is the profile of part of the E.S.E. face. Above it the angle of the arête is more respectable, though this is balanced by the serrated condition at the level of the 'black cliffs.' Just below the summit plateau it becomes, as does the S.W. arête at this point, easy until the two meet to form the S. extremity of the Assiniboine summit ridge. The cliffs upon the S.W. arête are less lofty than the first are on the S.E., but more numerous and very steep. It rises from a ridge connecting Mount Assiniboine with a very sharp aiguille to the S.W.—the 'Thumb,' as I named it, on account of its appearance from this point. Up to this depression there rises a steep, but accessible, snow couloir, from a névé basin at the base of Mount Assiniboine. There also runs, from the middle portions of the S. face and half-way between the two arêtes, a subordinate arête, of which I shall have more to say hereafter. The two rock peaks S. of Mount Assiniboine, on the continuation of the S.E. arête, though not so high, would not be easy of ascent. To the northerly, at a later time, I applied the name of 'Shäffer'—for Dr. Charles Schäffer, of Philadelphia, a distinguished authority upon the flora of the Rockies. The black lake lay at the foot of Mount Assiniboine, the blue lake at a lower level to the left of the 'Thumb,' and enclosed by an amphitheatre of rocky peaks, containing much reddish and yellowish limestone, of which the one E. of the N. turret was highest—approximately 11,000 ft. This wall was, of course, the S. side of the peaks seen from Lake Assiniboine; but, on account of its southern face, it contained less ice and snow, though several glaciers were observed, and to the left of the 'Thumb' a blue ice couloir, filled with séracs and lined by a gaping schrund. The contrast of the blue sky and ice, white snow, and the colours of the rocky peaks above, with the blackness of the burnt valley below, was, from its novelty and variety, very effective.

W. and N. the winding North Fork shone like a silver snake in its beautiful valley, while S.W. rose a graceful semicircular group bearing a fine névé area, to which I applied the name of 'Topham,' that of the well-known explorer in the Selkirks.

It was not a day to linger and enjoy such a scene, and the cold wind made our fingers very numb as we sketched and took notes and bearings. Photographs of the panorama were not procured until a later visit.

* As then estimated. A table of my triangulated heights of this and adjacent peaks will be appended to a subsequent paper.

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