



SULITELMA
 from
*The Swedish Government
 Kjellström's & Westman's
 Maps.* by *V.H. Gatty.*

Glaciers 

Norway
 Sweden

Miles 0 1 2 3 4 5

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SULITELMA.

By VICTOR H. GATTY.

FORBES, in 'Norway and its Glaciers,' describes Sulitelma as the highest of Arctic mountains, 'not only in Scandinavia, but in the North Polar regions,' and writes, 'Its very remote position with respect to habitations, its great northern latitude, its uncommon height, and, what is perhaps not without some weight, its high-sounding name, make it a real feature in the physical geography of the country.'

During the fifty years which have elapsed since these words were written much has happened to modify these manifold claims to eminence. The height and the latitude are still the same, but as titles to respect they have depreciated sadly; remote it still may be, but not from habitations, which, since the discovery of copper ores, have grown up round its very base. Sulitelma's last and most enduring title to a special standing amongst mountains is to be found in the writings of Wahlenberg, who, to quote Forbes again, nearly a century ago accurately described its glaciers 'in a manner which had not been done in any other place save the vicinity of Mt. Blanc.' 'On this account,' he continues, 'it deserves to be considered classical.'

Of the meaning of the Lappish name each traveller seems to hear a different version; Wahlenberg translates it 'the festival-day mountain,' which he derives from the legend that in olden times the Lapps on a certain day made sacrifice there to some supernatural ruler of the hills. I was told that it means the 'Eye of the Sun,' which seems at least a fitter rendering of a 'high-sounding name.' This title, according to my informant, derives its significance from the circumstance that the midnight sun shines out from behind the mountain, seen from a certain point.

The annals of the range, though spread over a period of close on a century, are yet scanty; they commence, of course, with Wahlenberg's exploration of the Salajækna and ascent of South Sulitelma (about 5,500 ft.*) in 1807, which have received less than the attention they merit at the hands of the historians of mountaineering. As describing, perhaps, the first of glacier expeditions outside the main European ranges to which the methods of the mountaineering craft were applied his narrative is of great interest, and, as it has never, I believe, appeared in English, I have reproduced it in his own words below. The frequent references to De Saussure which his book contains make it clear whence he derived his inspiration, and most probably his craft. The next ascent of one of Sulitelma's peaks appears to have been that of Lektor G. Elowson, who in July 1868 was the first to reach the summit of the highest Swedish peak (1,878 m. = 6,159 ft.).† The climb was made from the S.E. across the Stuorajækna, and he seems to have encountered no especial difficulties.

Next follows the conquest of the sharpest and most abrupt of Sulitelma's peaks by Herr Ed. Aanderud, of Bodö, who on July 30, 1888, made the first ascent of Stortoppen,‡ which had successfully resisted his assaults in 1884 and 1886. The climb was made by the N. arête from the Salajækna. In 1891 the same peak was climbed along the jagged W. arête from Vardetoppen by Herr J. T. Dahl, another Bodö climber.

These ascents did not suffice to settle the vexed question as to which country could claim the highest summit of the range. The circumstance that Norway and Sweden divide its peaks and glaciers almost equally, and that no official map even now exists on the Norwegian side, has resulted in much confusion, to which is to be added that arising from the lack of distinctive names to the many summits which go to make up Sulitelma; the history of the range is so bound up with the consequent misapprehensions from which few references are entirely free that some allusion to them becomes a necessary part of it. The following extract from the 'Norwegian Tourist Year-book' will serve to illustrate the perplexity in which the subject is involved:—'It still cannot be said with certainty where Sulitelma's highest peak is

* G. Wahlenberg, *Bericht über Messungen und Beobachtungen zur Bestimmung der Höhe und Temperatur der Lappländischen Alpen*. (Translation from the Swedish.) Göttingen, 1812.

† *Kgl. Vettensk Academiens förhandl.*, 1869, fol. 190. Stockholm.

‡ *Norwegian Tourist Club Year-book*, 1889.

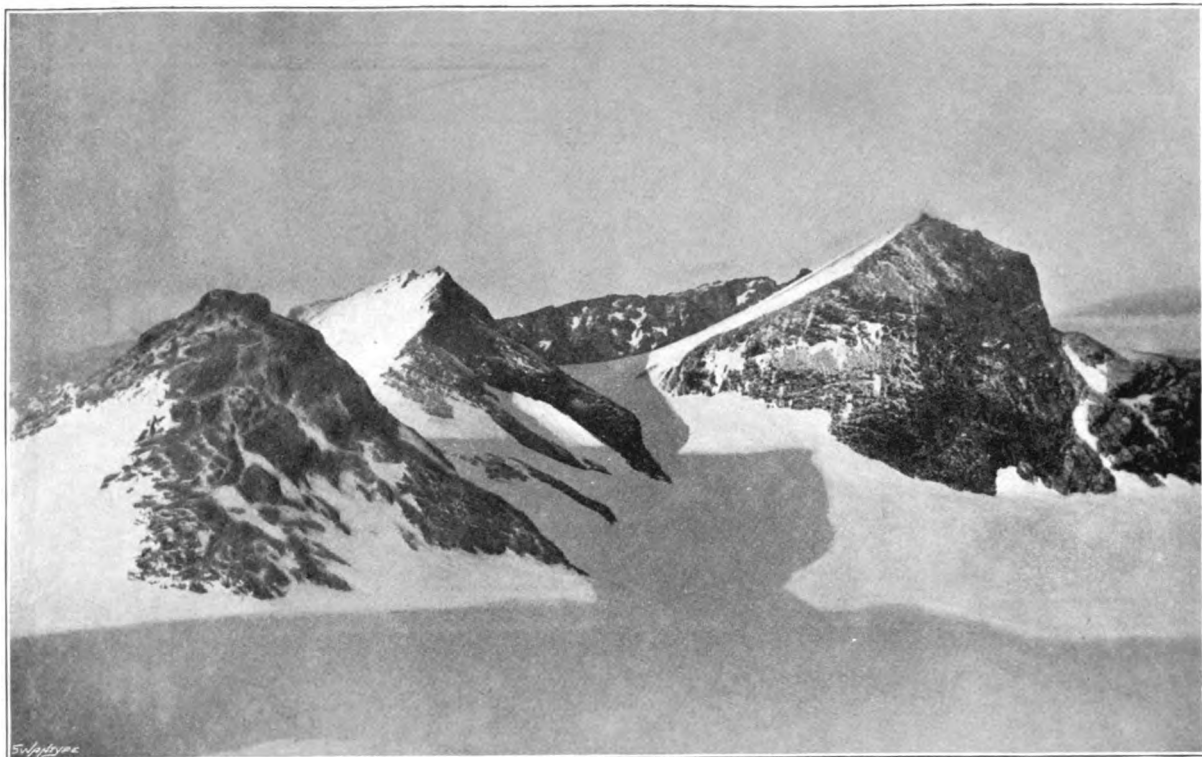


Photo by V. H. Gatty]

NORTH SULITELMA, FROM STORTOPPEN.

[Swan Electric Engraving Co.]

situated. N. Sulitelma was found (by Wahlenberg) to be 6,001 ft. If this be correct the highest summit of the whole group is on the Swedish side; this last was climbed in 1868 by G. Elowson, who says, "On the Norwegian side there is a higher peak which is inaccessible to the foot of man." Herr K. Widmark also assumes, like Elowson, that the Norwegian peak (east horn) is the higher; it is therefore probable that Wahlenberg has measured wrong, and that the honour of possessing the highest peak belongs to Norway.' By the Norwegian peak Stortoppen alone is meant, as the context shows. The key to this conflict of authorities about so simple a matter of fact is to be found in a recently published and most instructive map * by Dr. J. Westman, which for the first time shows clearly the relation between the peaks on both sides of the frontier; it proves that neither Stortoppen nor the Swedish peak can claim supremacy, but that the place of honour belongs to a third peak lying between the two entirely in Norway, which, strangely enough, seems to have dropped between two stools and to have been almost entirely overlooked. Its height is given as 1,903 mètres (= 6,241 ft.), and there can be no doubt that it is the peak named North Sulitelma by Wahlenberg, and described by him close on a century ago as the highest summit; so in the end the old geographer is justified. Since this peak is named on Westman's map Störstetoppen, it is not surprising that his estimate of its height has been taken to apply to Stortoppen, an entirely different peak. It is, no doubt, the higher peak referred to by Elowson, and seems to have escaped the notice of Norwegian climbers, owing to a mistaken identification of the mountain, in the absence of a map, as the Swedish peak which lies behind. To complete the disentanglement requires the confession of a triple error on my own part. I expressed the belief† that in climbing Swedish Sulitelma we had made the first ascent of the culminating point of the range. Further investigation has disclosed the facts that the Swedish peak is not the highest, and that it had already been climbed, but has also made it clear that we did not climb that peak at all, but North Sulitelma (or Störstetoppen), which seems, in fact, to be the culminating point, and which was still unclimbed, from which it appears

* This map accompanies a detailed description of the glacier system of Sulitelma by Dr. J. Westman, illustrated by numerous photographs and panoramas. *Bulletin of the Geological Institution of the University of Upsala*, vol. iv. part 1, no. 7, 1899.

† *Alpine Journal*, vol. xx. p. 277.

that though two wrongs do not make a right the resultant of three may come very near the mark.

Herr Aanderud, to whose co-operation and acquaintance with the subject whatever accuracy and completeness the foregoing chronology of the range possesses is in large measure due, tells me that an attempted ascent of N. Sulitelma was made on August 8, 1865, by Prof. J. Anderson, which failed from unavoidable causes, which are summarised as the 'mountain's steepness.' Apart from this it seems to have enjoyed a complete immunity from attack, which is seldom the fortune of the *doyen* of a range, in this aspiring age, for nearly a century after its earliest recognition.

To return to the opening chapter of Sulitelma's history, Wahlenberg's narrative relates that he reached the shores of the Lommijaur on July 12, 1807, and found the lake still ice-bound and buried beneath a mantle of water-logged snow. On the 14th he set out along the shore to the further end, and thence struck upwards on to the Salajækna glacier, which he crossed to its eastern end, and thence ascended the Lairo Fjall, in order to observe the glacier better. He mentions that it was broken by huge crevasses, and relates a story showing how a Lapp of his acquaintance had learnt the value of companionship and the rope whilst voyaging amongst them. This Lapp was out on the glacier leading a string of reindeer behind him; what he was doing there in such company does not appear, but in the event he fell into a crevasse, and only extricated himself by clinging to the reindeer line, the animals themselves refusing to pursue the venture further. No doubt the incident confirmed their owner still more deeply in the conviction that they are the one thing in this world which really would be missed. The account of the rest of the expedition is best given in Wahlenberg's own words. 'When the observations were completed,' he writes, 'I made my way back over the snow-field and climbed the glacier where its edge was covered with snow, and went on further up the glacier above the ice cavern, making my way towards the highest peak of South Sulitelma. Here the glacier was covered a foot deep with snow, which rendered the wide crevasses invisible, and on that account so dangerous that we walked tied to one another by a rope at fixed distances apart, in order that we might be able to rescue any one who should fall into a crevasse. From here there rose before us a great snow wall, to be climbed, a half-mile continuously upwards, which was a laborious business, and took the greatest part of the day; no bare patch or uncovered rock

was there to be found on the whole ascent from the lowest edge of the glacier up to the highest peak ; the snow was so hard that scarce a footprint could be perceived on it. The refulgence of the dazzling white snow and the cutting glacier wind caused the eyes and the sight to be attacked by a slight inflammation, although I made use the whole day (as always on excursions above the snow line) of a tolerably thick black veil. Thirst plagued me much, and no water was there to be found on the whole mountain; for plentiful as is water in mountain regions below the snow line it is rare above. I was thus forced to suck out the water from the snow, which set up an inflammation on the lips which did not heal for nearly the whole summer ; therefore I warn others against it. Where the declivity ended the two highest tops of S. Sulitelma were girt round by huge transversal schrunds in the snow mass, to come across which there was no other way than to avoid them altogether by a long détour. Such details cannot be distinguished by an inspection such as we made at a distance of half a mile. At last, about half-past five in the evening, we reached the highest peak of S. Sulitelma, which is distinguished by a dark-coloured rock wall on the S.E. side, and there, for the first time, was I able to examine the bare rock. . . . As concerns the view, I found it in no way pleasing ; it was incomparably extensive.

‘As night was approaching it was desirable to find some nearer way for the descent on the north-west side. To commence with, at the point where the declivity begins the most dangerous crevasse in the snow mass had to be crossed. These crevasses were often a fathom wide, and the narrow ones over which we leaped seemed to be 60 or 80 ft. deep . . . for all that we ventured at once on the descent after roping ourselves together and furnishing ourselves with large “ snow spurs.” We went far down over the glacier between S and N.W. Sulitelma,* then west over the base of S. Sulitelma, and last of all right down the cliff to the shores of the Lommijaur.’

Forbes credits Wahlenberg with the ascent of the highest peak of Sulitelma on July 15, but there is no confirmation of this in the old explorer’s narrative. He writes, ‘July 14 was the most noteworthy day of the journey through the exploration of what is, so far as I know, the greatest glacier in all Scandinavia and through the ascent of South Sulitelma.’ On the 15th he was travelling downwards between the Langvand and the Örevand.

As to my own experiences, little needs to be added to the

* Stortoppen.

account already given.* The journey to the foot of the mountains is now a very simple matter. After the period of detention, which is the necessary penalty of Norwegian travel, has expired, Furulund is reached in less than twenty-four hours from Bodö by means of steamers on the chain of lakes, which reaches nearly to the Swedish frontier, and a short connecting mineral railway. The officials of the mining company are most obliging, and rooms are reserved at headquarters for the use of travellers. We were furnished with a map and with the welcome information of the existence of a higher peak than Stortoppen, still unclimbed.

Our first night in camp was marked by a deluge and a gale which beat against the back of the tent, with the lamentable result that the pocket in which everything worthy of a place above the floor reposed was found next morning to be full of water. Warned by this we were inspired to spend several hours in erecting substantial outworks, whereupon the wind changed and blew in at the door for the rest of our stay. The ascent of Stortoppen was in the nature of a surprise on the demon who regulates the weather in these parts. Starting at once in the afternoon after the rain stopped, with no definite plans, the climb was completed on a brilliant evening, and rewarded by a splendid panorama of snowy peaks stretching seawards and southwards for a hundred miles. My Norsemen were most attracted by the wide view over Sweden; to scan the territory of the somewhat estranged partner from some high point of vantage seemed to cause them a kind of weird delight, and always called for the quotation of a tag beginning, 'Hearst thou what says the Swede to Norske man?' We reached camp late in the evening, and were again on the glacier at eight next morning, but the presiding genius was on guard and never again relaxed his vigilance. Everything was buried in a veil which might have suggested home to some early Briton from the neighbourhood of the capital before the purity of its fogs was contaminated by human arts, and whatever reproaches might be levelled at the condition of the immediate defences of Sulitelma's citadel are at once met by a consideration of the wider strategy which made it a matter of difficulty to find the mountain at all. We traversed the course across the glacier to the base of North Sulitelma three times under the same conditions, and if the tracks did not come within the Euclidian definition of a straight line they at all events afforded ample demonstration of the correct-

* *Alpine Journal*, vol. xx. p. 276.

ness of the proposition that two sides of a triangle are greater than the third.

We finally left the shores of the Lommijaur on the worst terms with the weather; the tent was saturated within an hour of striking, and the joys of packing were heightened by a steady downpour. The early morning fording of the Tjeurajokk fresh from the melting snows above, which followed, suggested Queen Elizabeth's pronouncement on speeches (according to an eminent authority), and none will deny to mountaineering difficulties of the kind the foregoing paper attempts to solve a place in the same category of 'things we chiefly bless when once we've got them over.'

WITH LADIES IN THE LEPONTINES.

By GEORGE BROKE.

(Read before the Alpine Club, May 7, 1901.)

IT has generally been the custom for a member, when commencing his paper, to declare that nothing but the sternest sense of discipline, or else a very real personal friendship for our Secretary, would have induced him to occupy such a prominent position. I am afraid that I must be less modest than most men, for the full disadvantage of the promise I had given only came over me by degrees, as effort after effort to obtain slides proved a failure. I had a certain number of inferior specimens of my own, and had not anticipated any difficulty in making up the rest. But London shops and personal friends were alike drawn blank, and at last in desperation I took to showering letters promiscuously, writing to every one, whether I knew them or not, whom I had any reason to suppose had ever been in the Lepontine district. Even so nothing resulted for some time, but at last I struck oil, and, thanks to the great kindness of total strangers, am able to make a fair show this evening. And in view of the title of my paper it is worth while laying some stress on the fact that almost every photograph shown to-night has been taken by a lady or with the assistance of a lady.

Now, the first point to which I wish to call your attention is the sad fact that so many of our members, after doing five, eight, or ten years' good work in the Alps, suddenly give up climbing altogether. Only the other day a man, in writing to me, said he was sorry that circumstances had placed him on the retired list. What circumstances? So far as I know