

it for ever afternoon, flooding sky and mountain-land in warm luminous colour, which deepens the distances, adding atmospheric perspective to ridge after ridge of serrated and barren peaks—all these purely æsthetic qualifications are possessed in a high degree by the Lofoten Islands.

Moreover, for those who are willing to spend a lazy, delightful summer holiday in camps far from busy crowds and the worries of civilisation there are few spots more peaceful, more fascinating, or more beautiful than these islands, where the wondrous summer skies slowly change their rich colouring of long drawn out evening for the exquisitely delicate tints of the early dawn, and where the restless waves of the great Arctic Ocean are for ever washing against the precipitous sides of the bare gnarled mountains.

THE FIRST ASCENT OF MT. ASSINIBOINE.

By Rev. JAMES OUTRAM.

THE Canadian Rockies, thanks to Professor Collie and other members of the Alpine Club, have already begun to claim the attention of mountaineers as a desirable field for climbing and exploration. Were it not for the distance and the inaccessibility of all but the peaks that rise close to the Canadian Pacific Railway, there would have been dozens of climbers at work, revelling in first ascents, enjoying the discovery of new regions, and entranced by the splendid scenery.

Hundreds on hundreds of untried summits await the alpinist; miles on miles of noble glaciers, and scores of grand valleys with their beautiful lakes and waterfalls, greet the traveller in this huge mountain tract, where several Switzerlands could be comfortably stowed away. The more easily reached peaks are of low altitude compared with those of the Alps, but further from the railway line that embodies civilisation in the N.W., there are far loftier summits, estimated at 13,000 and 14,000 ft., with the promise of good climbing to attain their conquest.

Up to the present Mt. Assiniboine has perhaps been the most talked of mountain in the Rockies, owing to the striking photographs and fascinating descriptions of Mr. W. D. Wilcox, one of the chief explorers of the Rocky Mountains, to whose kindness I am indebted for permission to reproduce two of his splendid pictures. It stands on the ridge of the Continental Divide, a most conspicuous landmark for miles round,

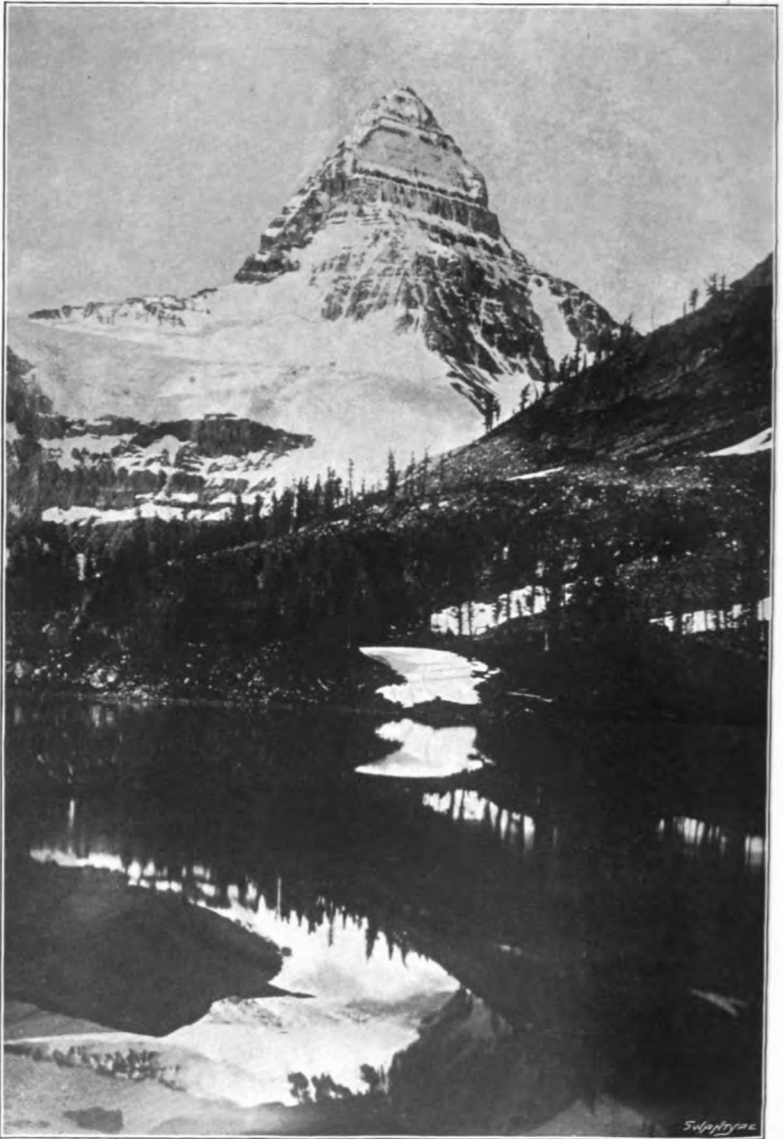


Photo by W. D. Wilcox.

[Swan Electric Engraving Co.

MT. ASSINIBOINE FROM THE N.

towering fully 1,500 ft. above any of its immediate neighbours, and enjoying the distinction of being the loftiest peak in Canada S. of the railway line. It commands attention by its majestic outline and striking character, and has been dignified by the title of "The Matterhorn of the Rockies," from the remarkable resemblance which it bears from certain aspects to the Swiss monarch.

It has for some time also borne the reputation of extreme difficulty for the ambitious climber, the N. face having been pronounced probably inaccessible, and the only supposed feasible route considered a serious problem. It was to attempt to disprove these theories that my expedition was undertaken.

The mass rises like a monster tooth when seen from the N., and is formed of the usual limestone of the Cordilleran range, much eroded and disintegrated, and of a very friable consistency. The strata are almost absolutely horizontal, with a very slight dip towards the N., and on that side present a fine series of vertical cliff belts, with glistening slopes of ice, excessively steep, intervening. The east side and southern buttress are practically sheer precipices, 5,000 or 6,000 ft. high in places, but the S.W. is more broken, and affords a more inviting prospect. The height is 11,860 ft., 4,700 ft. above the head of the valley of approach, and some 3,000 ft. above the glacier beneath its northern face.

Three previous attempts at least have been made to ascend this picturesque and fascinating peak. In 1898 Mr. H. G. Bryant, of Philadelphia, and Mr. L. J. Steele, of England, made a reconnaissance to about 10,000 ft. by the N.W. arête. In 1900 two brothers named Walling, from Chicago, tried by the N. face, with three Swiss guides, but failed to scale the first cliff wall. Again, last summer, Mr. Bryant made another assault, accompanied by Mr. Wilcox and two guides. Passing round the mountain they camped on the S.W. side and ascended by the easy S.W. ridge to 10,750 ft.; from this point the difficulties, especially in connection with avalanching snow, appeared insurmountable, and, after ascending 100 ft. or so further, they abandoned the attempt.

The news of this disappointment fired afresh my desire to visit Mt. Assiniboine. Stimulated by the confident assurance of Bill Peyto (the 'outfitter' of Mr. Edward Whympers's camp, where I was a guest for some weeks) that I could certainly make the summit, and buoyed up by his promise to reduce the usual time of three days to reach the base from civilisation, I determined to try, if opportunity offered.

At the close of August I found myself unemployed, and the customary break in the weather, which occurs about September 1, lasting about a week and concluding with heavy snow even at low altitudes, had not yet arrived. As the barometer promised fairly well, I resolved to make a dash for Mt. Assiniboine, and, Peyto concurring, the race for the summit between our party and the coming snowstorm was entered on.

In view of the reputation of the mountain and the absence of any thoroughly expert amateur, I took with me the two Swiss guides stationed at Field by the C.P.R. Christian Häslar, the senior, had been my companion on several previous ascents, and was a tried and trusted friend; and Christian Bohren proved himself an excellent addition to the party—pleasant, willing, and skilful. Twenty-four hours after the inception of the idea we were in the train from Field, my summer's headquarters, bound for Banff. Here Peyto met us, and after a morning spent in final arrangements and packing, we got under weigh at 1.30 on August 31.

Peyto had chosen out his four best pack-horses, and under his leadership, with Jack Sinclair as whipper-in, a remarkable record was established, and in a day and a half we were encamped at the base of Mt. Assiniboine. Although but twenty miles in an air line from Banff, the exigencies of valley and pass demand a route some five and forty miles in length, crossing the Divide fully 3,300 ft. above the altitude of Banff, and after a steep descent of 1,500 ft. or more remounting to an almost equal elevation.

The scenery was full of interest, an epitome of Canada's effective mountain views. The broad and fertile valley of the Bow, with its lazy, eddying current; the steep, wooded vale, where Healy Creek threads its tumultuous way in the dark narrows leading to Simpson Pass; the abrupt forest track by stony gully to the flower-strewn, mossy park and wilder upland expanse of the great alps that crown the long ridge of the Divide. Deep, sudden cañons cleave the range on either hand, with sombre forests thickly massed in their abysses; a sharply serrated skyline bounds the view to right and left, and straight in front looms the dark pyramid which is our goal, bearing a very striking likeness to the Dent Blanche, and overtopping a blue-black, glacier-hung ridge, some fifteen miles away. Some little lakes, without any outlet visible, are passed as we cross and recross the watershed, and then we seem to enter a new world of barrenness and desolation. Fire has devastated the once heavy growth of evergreen that

clothed the upper reaches of the Simpson river ; tall, gaunt poles rise spectre-like amidst sparse grass slopes and long tongues of tumbled scree and broken boulders. Our trail pitches downward in a tremendous sharp descent of 1,500 ft., and Peyto's skill is fully tested as he threads, with scarcely any hesitation, and but little loss of speed, the wild network of blackened fallen logs that fill the valley. Then a steep pull to higher ground again and a long journey up a long dreary valley, where the climax of weird desolation meets the eye. Green-grey rocks and stones are strewn and piled in wild confusion amidst sparse, stunted pines ; crumbling drab-coloured side-hills are lost in jagged, broken ridges and shattered pinnacles ; and over all a sullen sky broods heavily and rain falls sharply as we wend our tired way along the rugged path. Each afternoon has culminated in storm and thunder, and many a doubt of ultimate success made its unwelcome presence felt.

At length, at 7.20, we reached our chosen camping-ground, sheltered by a grove of firs, beside a little rivulet and close to the shore of a dark lake, some two miles long, which almost laves the lower cliffs of Mt. Assiniboine, whose noble mass springs grandly into the blue vault of heaven nearly 5,000 ft. above our heads, more splendid than even expectation had conceived.

Next morning, after an all too warm night, whose silence had been broken ominously by distant thunder and the fall of ice and débris from the glacier a mile away, we started on the climbing section of our expedition. Peyto, who had accompanied Mr. Wilcox in his tour of the mountain in 1899, came with us to give us the benefit of his knowledge of the further side, for neither the guides nor I had ever been near the peak before.

Being wholly unaware of the character of the S.W. side and the direct approaches to it (for Mr. Wilcox had made his circuit by the valleys, involving huge détours), we prepared for the most probable event of spending a night out in the open, and were equipped with blankets, a light tent, and provisions for two days. Thus laden, at 6 A.M. we traversed the long mile to the dark cliff that forms the first line of fortification, and at 7.20 we gained the glacier above. Making for the jagged col at the base of the N.W. arête, we had an easy 40 min. along the gently rising glacier, and took the opportunity to scan with curiosity and interest the mighty northern face. It rises more than 3,000 ft. above the glacier. Two jagged ridges trend sharply upward from the outlying

spurs, until they meet in a dark rocky apex just below the glistening snowy summit; between them lies the formidable face, set at an awesome angle and banded with almost horizontal strata, which form an impressive alternation of perpendicular cliff belts and glassy slopes of ice. The lowest band is specially remarkable: a spectacular, striated wall of brilliant red and yellow rock, running apparently entirely round the mountain, and particularly striking where the erosion and disintegration of the ridges leave a succession of coloured spires and pinnacles, radiant in the glowing sun.

The result of our observations was locked in our breasts, and only revealed the next afternoon when on the summit.

We gained the col, which forms the skyline to the W., at 8, and below us lay another glacier, trending towards the N.W., a small lake, as usual, lying in the green valley beyond. These lakes are a feature of the neighbourhood; a dozen were counted from the summit, gathered close round the mountain between its long-extended spurs. Most of them have no visible outlet, their waters draining through the porous strata, and issuing suddenly as a full-grown stream in some distant valley-bed.

To our left a second col, a narrow pass at the base of the main W. arête, was disclosed as our next objective point. Rapidly descending the steep loose débris on the further side of our ridge, we followed up the steep glacier, which was dignified by some fine schrunds, and at its head came to the narrow gap above mentioned.

We were now 9,600 ft. above the sea, 2,400 ft. higher than our camp, and the time 9' A.M. A fine view of the lower portion of Assiniboine's south-western side was opened out, and, much to our satisfaction, we perceived at once that nothing formidable lay between us and the S.W. ridge, by which we hoped to make our way towards the summit. The face itself was mainly a long succession of sheer or almost perpendicular cliff-belts for some considerable distance, intersected by steep gullies, every one of which seemed to be a much-used channel for stones and ice and snow, and of extreme steepness. No inducement was offered to try an upward route nearer than the next main ridge: but narrow ledges, sometimes with slopes of débris, ice, and snow, stretched away almost horizontally, and after 10 min. rest we embarked upon the traverse. Below us the mountain shelved steeply down in long expanses of loose stones and snow, with some ice, into the depths of a contracted valley far beneath, containing the inevitable lakelet.

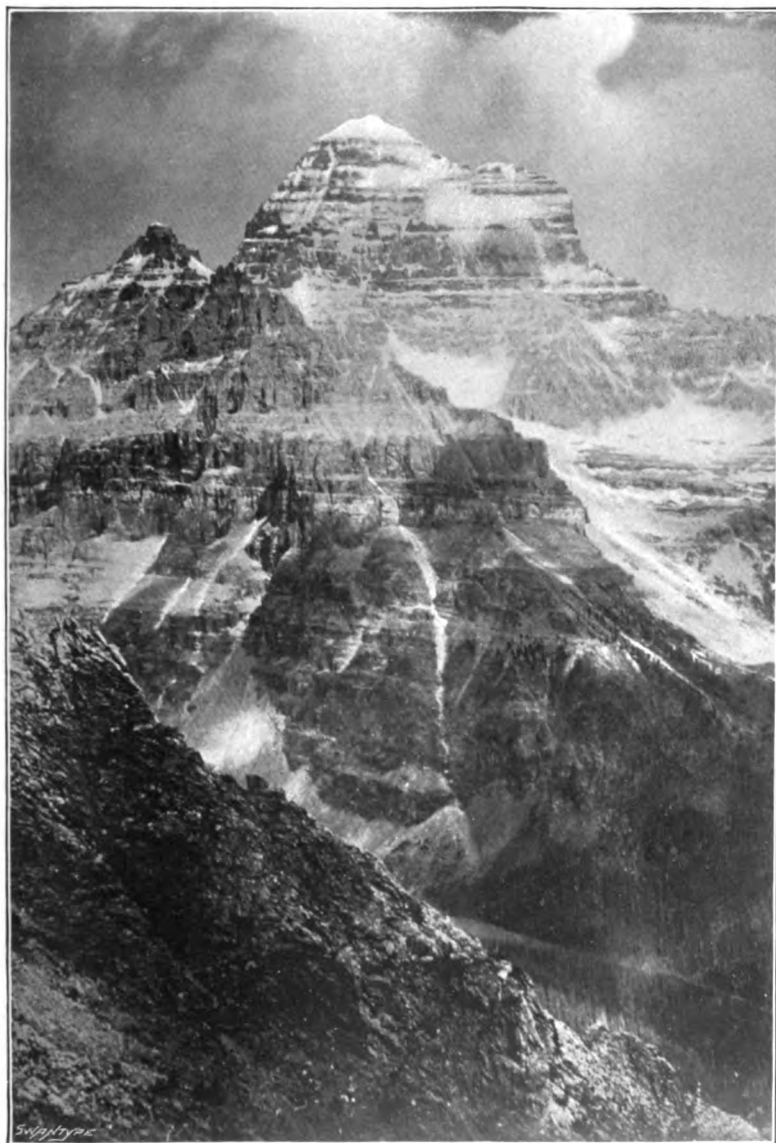


Photo by W. D. Wilcox.]

[Savan Electric Engraving Co.

MT. ASSINIBOINE FROM THE S.W.

Unfortunately, however, our joy at the discovery of a simple access to the determined line of ascent was mingled with grave doubts about the weather. Fleecy clouds were gathering in the west from sunrise, and ere we left our second col we were enveloped in light mists at intervals, which gradually grew shorter, till a grey shroud hid everything beyond a radius of 50 to 100 yds. and fine but steady rain commenced to fall, varied as we climbed higher by sleet and hail.

Hoping, against our expectation, that the clouds might lift as time went on, we continued our onward way, completed the slippery traverse, and halted on the S.W. ridge for a second breakfast at 10.15, at an elevation of about 9,500 ft. Here we 'cached' our blankets, tent, and superfluous provisions, and at 10.35 moved upwards through the mist, erecting little 'stone-men' every few yards to guide us in returning. Nothing of note occurred in the ascent, which was over loose rocks mainly, with scrambles up a few short rock-faces and rifts, until at 10,750 ft. we saw, looming out of the clouds, a grand cliff wall; its top was out of sight (we found it about 80 ft. high), its face vertical, with a considerable overhang near the base. This, from the general formation, we had expected to find, and anticipated its repetition two or three times, and the problem of the mountain seemed to lie in the existence or not of a climbable cleft in these cliffs. We had, of course, never seen the S.W. face, as revealed in Mr. Wilcox's photograph. Our impression was that the peak was toothlike from every aspect, and that this side would be similar to the northern, the only one we had had an opportunity of seeing. We concluded, therefore, that this wall was continuous, and probably inaccessible where it broke off at each arête, and we at once set about finding, if possible, some means of scaling it.

Peyto had left us half an hour before to do some prospecting for ore on his own account, and hence we had not his remembrance to draw upon. Mists are always embarrassing, and on an unknown mountain render one's position rather vague. So, thinking we were much further to the left than was really the case, our first reconnaissance was to the right, and we skirted the cliff base without seeing any likely opening until we were suddenly pulled up by the precipice which ends the southern buttress. The wall rose sheer above; a huge abyss, with wreathing clouds, yawned at our feet; peering round the sharp angle we were confronted by a vertical face some thousands of feet in height, and below the

narrow ledge of our approach the mountain-side shelved rapidly away to unknown depths. This put an abrupt termination to our investigations in that direction and we retraced our steps, till we spied a rift which appeared feasible. The lower portion was slightly overhanging, but there were some firm holds which permitted of a gymnastic scramble to easier positions, and thus the barrier was surmounted.

Slow progress ensued as we zigzagged here and there by ledges and clefts, section by section being negotiated as it appeared before us through the gloom. A general bearing to the left resulted in our reaching ere long a broken ridge, with a sheer drop on the further side. In our condition of ignorance as to the mountain's shape, we immediately concluded that this was the main W. arête, and joyfully advanced up its narrow, jagged crest till, in 10 min., to our astonishment we found ourselves upon a *peak*: a small one certainly, sharp and rugged, but undoubtedly a peak of some sort. Two ridges descended to the E. and W.: the steep face of our ascent, steeper and straighter still near the top, towards the S., and perpendicular precipices on the other side, save where its line was broken by a short buttress, with almost equally sheer walls, and edged with jagged pinnacles.

Where had we got to? Never having imagined a subsidiary peak, and being closely wrapped in cloud, with driving sleet and hail, we were quite lost. Häsler insisted that we had struck the veritable summit, but neither the altitude nor the configuration of our location would allow of this. We strained our eyes, but, though the breeze kept the mist in constant motion, we never saw beyond 100 yds. We shouted in this direction and that, and at last received an echoing answer from an evidently higher and larger mass, lying behind the ridge by which we had just reached our little summit.

It was now evident that a second, minor summit, severed from the main peak by a considerable break, must rise from the south-eastern ridge, which was far longer and less steep than we anticipated.

Here on our 'Lost Peak,' at an elevation of a little over 11,000 ft., we waited for a long and dreary hour, wet and cold, in the hope that some glimpse might be afforded of the real goal, by which we could gain some knowledge of the appearance and character of the final 1,000 ft., which formed the crux of the ascent. But all in vain, and at 1.50, after erecting a stone-man, we commenced the downward journey along the line of our approach. Continuing by the arête, a few feet lower than the point at which we struck it coming

up, we were arrested by a chasm, which proved to be about 200 ft. deep, and forced us to return by our ledges and cliff route to the base of the long wall.

A few moments' walking in the opposite direction to that of our former search brought us to a broad snow couloir, where the cliff receded and trended upwards to the gap into which we had been gazing from above not long before, and away to our left stretched the wide face of the great peak itself.

Time put a stop to any further attempts to reach this goal that afternoon, so we descended to the 'cache,' where Peyto joined us, and, during a meal, the position of affairs was fully discussed. Unanimously it was decided to shoulder our packs and return to camp. Rather than descend 2,500 ft. to timberline by an unknown way to a rude bivouac, and climb up again next morning laden with our impedimenta, with the strong possibility of a wet day again, and a retreat for want of food, we much preferred to go back to our quarters, and, if fine, return in easy marching trim, and have no stores half-way to make it imperatively necessary to descend by the same route.

So at 6 o'clock we departed, our shoulders burdened but our hearts lighter; as the evening gradually improved, the clouds decreased and disappeared, and a fine sunset closed the disappointing day. Yet, in spite of mist and rain, we had achieved *something*, reached a higher point than any previous party, and had good reason to expect that nothing impossible lay before us on the morrow.

Half an hour took us to the higher col, in 30 min. we were across the lower, but darkness caught us ere we had quite finished the cliff at the valley-head; a wild, tumbling glissade over steep, hard snow ensued, and we stumbled through the blackness into camp at half-past 8 o'clock.

A bright starry sky, a brilliant moon, and the clear chill of frost were excellent auguries for success, and the dawn of September 3 found us astir, enthusiastic and confident.

At 6.10 our trio set out in the best of spirits, encouraged by the hearty good wishes of our packers, and made rapid progress by the route of the day before. In $2\frac{1}{2}$ hrs. we were on the second col, and this time enjoyed a wide view of indented ranges and deep, dark valleys, and the lower portion of Assiniboine clear before us. A quarter of an hour's halt and half an hour on the traverse and our 'cache' was passed, and, going steadily, we arrived at the foot of the long cliff wall at half-past 10.

Turning to the left, we crossed the couloir, full of deep

snow upon an icy basis, and began our real battle up the final 1,000 ft. This was a series of escarpments, broken by tiny ledges or short, steep slants of ice; occasional sharp pinnacles rose from the eroded battlements, and the arête was far too jagged to admit of any progress by that way. Our general line lay diagonally across the face; but the only means of following it was by a succession of zigzags. Working along some cliff base by a narrow ledge or steps cut in the ice, which was extremely hard, we would at length find a more broken bit of wall, or, generally, as the only upward opportunity, a cleft or crevice, very rarely big enough to call a chimney, at distant intervals, and usually practically vertical. Quantities of snow and solid ice filled almost every cavity and rift; the rocks were very brittle and extremely insecure; and to the ordinary difficulties was added the abomination of *verglas*, which covered all the rocks, from the night's frost after the rain and sleet of yesterday.

So progress was slow, détours frequent, and care constant and intent, as we clambered up foot by foot, and finally, after an energetic scramble by a long, icy gully nearly straight up, we emerged upon the S. arête barely 300 ft. below the summit, which rose grandly before us, with only an easy slope of snow between us and victory.

The precipice on the east was a grand one, and above it the huge cornices of the crest itself hung in massive grandeur. Behind us lay the sharply serrated ridge that fell away to the gap which severed it from our pointed peak of yesterday. Light, sweeping clouds were drifting across the mountain, and, fearing a repetition of the previous day's disappointments, we halted but a few brief moments to enjoy the wide view and take a photograph of the white top that loomed through the mist.

In twenty minutes more, at half-past 12, we stood at last upon the apex of the noble pyramid. The summit is a double one, crowned with icé and snow, the two points rising from the extremities of an almost level and narrow ridge, some forty yards in length. On the western side snow slopes tilt downward at an abrupt angle, whilst on the east a stupendous wall is overhung by a magnificent succession of enormous cornices, from which a fringe of giant icicles depended.

The panorama was superb in its extent, although the atmosphere was hazy and unsuitable for camera-work. Perched high upon our isolated pinnacle, 1,500 ft. higher than any neighbouring peak, range upon range of brown-grey

mountains followed one another to the far horizon. Many were glacier-hung and laden with snow, and the vast chasms intervening loomed dark and deep on every side, while many little lakelets gleamed in the sunlight, nestling in the sombre valleys. Far to the N.W. lay the familiar summits of the railway belt, from many of which we had looked on former occasions with longing eyes to the proud peak from which we now were gazing back. To the E., the sudden clear-cut line



THE NORTH CORNICE OF MOUNT ASSINIBOINE.

appeared, beyond which the prairies swept away from the base of the huge cliffs that wall their western limits. On the S. and W., new worlds (to us) were opened out, with several prominent and interesting peaks to lure the mountaineer to further penetrating into the wild and desolate interior.

The guides were now content and anxious to return immediately by the same route; but I had other wilder schemes simmering in my brain. The main ridge northward, after a sharp descent of 50 ft., falls gently for a hundred yards

or so, and then takes a wild plunge down to the glaciers at the mountain's base. Desirous of at least looking at the splendid northern face from above, I insisted on going to the rocky brow commanding this most imposing and characteristic feature of Mt. Assiniboine's grand mass.

On our right the drop is perpendicular, a mighty wall with frequent overhanging strata and a pure snow curtain hanging vertically beneath the crowning cornices. The north face itself, though not so sheer, is certainly more striking, I might say unique. The shining steeps of purest ice, the encircling belts of time-eroded cliffs, sweep downward with tremendous majesty and irresistible fascination. Between the two faces a ragged ridge is formed, narrow and broken, like a series of roughly fractured wall-ends.

Scarcely had we gazed a minute ere the question came, 'Could we not manage to get down this way?' and the hope of crowning our triumph by a traverse of the mountain and conquering the reputedly inaccessible front (and that, too, in the descent), together with the certainty of getting an absolutely first-class bit of climbing, decided us to try.

True, three great bands of cliff lay there below, any one of which was quite likely to have no possible way down it, and such a contingency would mean a return over the summit, and probably a night out very high up; other difficulties too might prove insurmountable, but from our surveys upward and downward we anticipated a rebuff to be only possible from these: and on the other side some rift had been found in every case where skill could effect a passage somehow.

Thus at 2.20 we embarked upon our final essay. With utmost caution, for the rocks were often glazed and always rotten, one moving at a time, we clambered downward along the shattered ridge, with occasional divergences to the northern face, where our wall-end was too jagged or broke off sheer: to the right it was invariably a precipice, sometimes with an overhang. Ledges, small but sufficient, intervened satisfactorily at times; buttresses with some projections gave us hold at others; now and then a rift allowed a wriggling descent; and again, staircases had to be cut in the solid ice-expanses.

The cliff-belts, as expected, offered the greatest problem, and one of them demanded quite a long excursion along its upper rim ere a suitable cleft was discovered; but the chimneys and rifts were ample for the purpose, though very icy and in places extremely objectionable, with straight, smooth slabs of rock on either side. Steps were sometimes very long,

gymnastics were fairly frequent, worming round projecting points along the tiniest of ledges gave anxious interest; but sometimes easier bits relieved the strain, and for some time before the final belt the going improved considerably.

Still, even for our usually very rapid party, 3½ hrs. were needed to descend 1,800 ft., and then our confidence was justified, the last difficulty lay behind us, a gay descent over



THE SUMMIT OF MOUNT ASSINIBOINE FROM THE NORTH ARÊTE, ABOUT 100 FT. BELOW THE TOP.

snow that needed no step-cutting brought us to easy continuous rocks, and at 6.15 we unroped.

Thence into camp was simple. A speedy swinging down the broken rocky ribs, with now and then a brief glissade, and we were on the glacier below in 40 min. An hour later, in the gathering darkness, we arrived in camp, after an absence of 13½ hrs., and received a great ovation from Peyto and Sinclair, who had seen us on the top, and were welcomed by strains of martial music from the latter's violin.

Before turning in we took a last look at the great obelisk above us, brilliant in the moonlight beneath the dark canopy of a star-strewn sky; and next morning awoke to a world of snow, which lay thick and soft around, whilst whirling masses of storm clouds drifted across the mountain and wrapped its summit, giving but an occasional glimpse of its steep flanks, covered with freshly fallen snow.

After a short journey in the afternoon in most unpleasant weather, we camped at the head of Simpson river, and next day made a tremendous march of about forty miles. The first part, up the steep slopes to the wild uplands of the Divide, was through the ever-deepening snow; the weird maze of fallen logs and fire-swept bare poles was outlined against the spotless white, and the bleak valleys looked even more desolate than before. A fierce wind swept the unprotected uplands, with driving sheets of snow, and made the tramp a terribly fatiguing one; but in the afternoon, as we descended through the calmer forest to Healy Creek, the wind abated, snow gave place to rain, and later, the weather clearing somewhat, the guides and I left Peyto and his horses at the junction with the Bow, and about 7 P.M. arrived at Banff, just 5 days and 5 hrs. from the time of our departure; and next morning were enjoying a good rest at Field.

To Peyto and his rapid forced march to the mountain base our success was largely due, as we succeeded in our climb on the very last day in 1902 on which an ascent could have been made.

The climb itself reminded me more than anything of the Dent Blanche in fairly bad condition with *verglas*. On the S.W. side it cannot be called a very severe ascent; only about 700 ft. are difficult at all for practised mountaineers; but the northern side will always, I think, provide a climb equal in interest (though only 1,500 ft., perhaps, of the highest order) to almost any peak in Switzerland.

The 'Dent' form is not uncommon in the Rockies, and Mt. Forbes, 1,000 ft. or more higher than Mt. Assiniboine, and with no long back ridge, appears to me to offer very probably an equal, if not superior, climb, without any 'back way' of an easier type; and others, loftier still, and doubtless as inviting, await the enterprise of Alpine Club men, and will not fail to satisfy their most eager aspirations.