

TWO LESSER FIRST ASCENTS IN THE CANADIAN  
ROCKIES, 1925.

BASTION PEAK AND THE DEVIL'S HEAD.

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IN the early afternoon of August 11, 1925, Mr. Howard Palmer and the writer were established in a camp near the south shore of Moat Lake, some twenty-five miles by trail S.W. of Jasper Station (3469 ft.) on the Canadian National Railway. We had with us the young Swiss guide, Hans Kohler of Meiringen, and a well-equipped pack train of horses and three men supplied by Otto Brothers of Jasper. We had left the town the day before by motor, and picking up the horses near Portal Creek Bridge, had followed the Portal trail and camped for the night below the summit of Maccarib Pass (7150 ft.). A wet and cold evening was followed by a lovely bright day, and we had a pleasant and interesting ride over the Pass into Tonquin Valley in which Moat Lake is situated, our trail skirting toward the end of the way the north shore of the Amethyst Lakes.

Our camp (6400 ft.) was placed almost immediately under the north side of the col that connects the then unclimbed Bastion Peak, which was our first objective, with Mt. Redoubt on the east. Grassy slopes, a few hundred feet in altitude, sparsely timbered with large spruce, separated us from the short rocky plateau at the foot of the col. Bastion Peak (9812 ft.) belongs to a group, four in number, which has already been brought to the notice of the readers of this Journal by the description of the first ascents of Mts. Geikie and Barbican, the two westerly peaks of the Ramparts.<sup>1</sup> Between Geikie and Bastion is situated Turret mountain (10,200 ft.), still unclimbed. Both it and Geikie appear to be unscalable from the northern side. During the afternoon one of the main couloirs below Turret Peak on the Moat Lake side was swept by stone and ice avalanches, the cannonading of which could be heard for miles around.

On August 12 we arose at 4 A.M. and, after a comfortable breakfast, left camp an hour later. *Festina lente* was the

<sup>1</sup> *A.J.* xxxvi. 342 seq. (with map and many illustrations).

maxim of our behaviour ; for we believed that, barring quite unusual difficulties, there would be ample time in which to carry out our plans.

Mounting easily through the trees and over open grassy slopes, we reached the scree and thence easy rocks by which, with earthy and shaly bits between, we ascended to the col between Bastion and Mt. Redoubt ; keeping on the left of the glacier which, as shown in the picture, descends at a very steep angle on the N.E. side of the Peak. At about 1300 ft. above our camp we came out on the ice and crossed a hollow bounded on the S. by a steep though not high rock wall. An icy patch next the massif of our peak in which some twenty steps were cut gave us access to the top of the col. A cairn was erected and a quarter of an hour's rest enjoyed. It was now 7.15 ; we were at an altitude of 7950 ft. with the weather favourable.

A long traverse to the right across coarse scree, interspersed with slopes of grass, under the southern ridges and spurs of Bastion and involving a descent of some 400 ft., brought us in an hour to a S.W. ridge, if it can be called a ridge, composed of large and closely piled rocks, up which we climbed. The top of it ended at a large buttress reached at 8.45. Here at 8500 ft. a stop of half an hour was made, and some of the party changed to crepe-rubber-soled shoes, an excellent substitute for rope-soles ; while Palmer and the writer left their axes, and we tied up. We skirted the buttress on the right and thereby reached a couloir which leads up the south-westerly side of the mountain.

This deep and commodious couloir was mostly ascended by ledges on its right side ; its neck requires care. There are several steep places and some short traverses around rather slippery rocks, but the handholds are satisfactory. Higher up the couloir broadens out to such an extent as to be hardly definable. It leads to a high and precipitous rock wall, some 300 ft. below the summit. This deflected us to the right and from here onwards the more difficult and interesting part of the rock-climbing begins. Several hundred feet below this point Kohler had donned his rope-soled shoes and left his axe.

The first really stiff bit of the climb consists of a perpendicular lateral ledge some 15 ft. in height, devoid of footholds at the base. Palmer, who was next to Kohler, gave him a start in a well-defined crack, by supporting his feet, and we were both glad of a slight pull on the rope. One then lands on a convenient level platform, underneath a similar difficulty of about the same height, but not quite so steep. The footholds

here in a narrow crack between the main wall of the mountain and the lateral block are better defined ; the handholds are on the right on the outside of the block, a place more agreeable to ascend than to come down. Again, a short and almost level ledge leads to another very steep block slightly longer than the foregoing, but less difficult. Above this one stands under the final and stiffest piece of the climb. It consists of a smooth perpendicular rock wall some 18 ft. in height at right angles to the last lateral block and split by a very small seam. It illustrates well the proverbial difficulty of the beginning. Palmer again supported Kohler's feet until he could get his fingers high up into the seam and reach a stand place whence he could work up over the top. Fortunately he found a good belay for the rope, which greatly aided the amateurs. The remainder of the way is an easy walk over large rocks, well packed together, to the sharp and much-disintegrated summit reached at 12.30 P.M. From Moat Lake it has the appearance of an inverted spade. It looked so fragile and toppy that although the day was fine and warm, we descended and made ourselves comfortable a little below it.

The day was perfect for climbing, almost windless, the only drawback being the smoke which increased in density during the afternoon. From the summit ridge on which we spent over an hour, we could, of course, see Moat Lake and our tents and some of the more pronounced features of the unclimbed Mts. Redoubt and Dungeon to the E.; Paragon and Fraser and Simon Peaks appeared only very dimly; a little more clearly to the S. the unclimbed Casemate and Postern. These, together with Bennington Glacier and the snakelike river and the three glaciers sweeping down to Icefall Lake, constituted a surprising and unique bit of scenery. The only other locality in the Rockies which rivals the Tonquin Valley for charm and variety is that around Mt. Assiniboine.<sup>2</sup> Turret Peak next us to the W. impressed one greatly by its steepness. It looks impossible from the Bastion side ; and after seeing it from the S.W. a few days later, the writer obtained the impression that it will provide as hard a rock climb as any hitherto achieved in the Canadian Rockies, perhaps surpassing even Mt. St. Bride in technical difficulties.

After building two cairns on the summit crest, under one of

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<sup>2</sup> They are so different as to be non-comparable. As a climbing centre the Tonquin is easily the more attractive; but it has no such beautiful peak as Mt. Assiniboine.

which a record was deposited, we began the descent about 1.30. The highest rock wall and the three cracks below it required half an hour. Kohler was spared the necessity of using a belayed rope through support from the powerful shoulders and strong arms of Palmer. At 2.50 we picked up Kohler's sack and axe and made a short stop. The steep bits of the couloir had to be descended slowly, and the first breakfasting place was reached shortly after 4. Nailed boots having been put on, and rucksacks and other articles collected, the traverse back to the col, reached at 6.15, was a tedious and rather wearisome zig-zag walk. After the short ice wall was descended, it was easy going back to camp, reached shortly before 8. It was a lovely night; but the air was thick with smoke and the barometer was falling, an indication of bad weather which began next day.

After three days of forced inactivity, we seized an opportunity of carrying out an excursion to the S. side of the Rampart Group. Here we spent a day in an unpremeditated attack on the exceedingly steep crags of Mt. Geikie (10,854 ft.) by a previously untried route. The description of it can await another occasion. Suffice it to say that after four and a half hours of exceptionally hard climbing, more arduous than anything encountered on Bastion Peak, and through which we had gained about 1000 ft. in altitude, we desisted at 9000 ft. on account of the certainty of spending a night on the exposed summit ridge and the approach of a heavy storm. On the following day, in a snow storm, it required considerable exertion to get ourselves and our horses over Tonquin Ridge and reach our main camp at Moat Lake, where we were snowed in for several days, and whence we eventually took refuge in the more permanent shelter of Jasper Lodge.

Three weeks later the writer made his way to Lake Louise to discuss the possibility of several first ascents with that *fidus Achates* of the Canadian Rockies, Edward Feuz, Junr. The weather was not propitious, and owing to frequent snow-falls one after another of our plans had to be put aside for a more convenient season. At last on September 12, later than the writer has ever climbed in the Rockies, we rushed over to Banff and met L. S. Crosby of that place, with whom we had been in telephone communication during several days.

The barometer had risen, and although skies still looked threatening, Crosby urged us to start on a trip up the Ghost River, which we had previously discussed, with a view of attempting the Devil's Head, an unclimbed peak (9174 ft.)

that had long been an object of attraction to the mountaineers of Calgary and Banff, and which Crosby, himself, a few years before had more than inspected. In a few hours after our arrival he had dispatched a small pack train with two men from Banff; which proceeded with such wonderful rapidity that when he, Feuz and the writer reached the E. end of Lake Minnewanka, about 6.30 the same afternoon, they found the men and the horses, notwithstanding they had to go by a poor trail around the Lake, had already arrived at our halting place for the night.<sup>3</sup> Crosby, besides being an excellent cragsman, is a hustler in the best sense; he combines quickness of decision with thoroughness of planning and accuracy of execution. It was dark by 7 and too late to 'brush' the tent, but we slept well without this usual bedding. Some small clouds resting low down on the mountains were a disturbing phenomenon to the writer, but Feuz declared they were not unusual at this time of year and not portentous of bad weather.

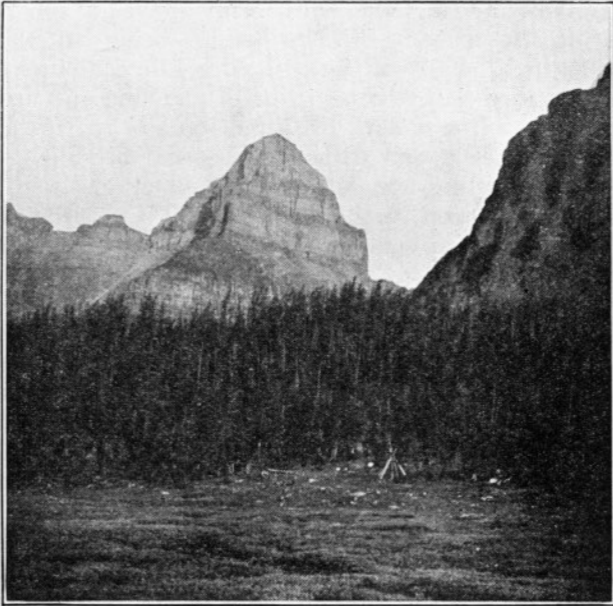
Next morning we were on the trail before 9. Besides our saddle horses we had only two pack horses, so that we were able to make good time. Moreover, the trail for the most part was easy and in excellent condition. Proceeding in an easterly direction it skirts a couple of large un-named lakes and rises pleasantly through poplar trees which were now very lovely with their light golden foliage. After a couple of hours, we came out on a great waste as barren-looking as a Siberian plain, whence a gentle descent through the Devil's Gap brought us to Ghost River, the bed of which held a much-diminished stream. This was the eastward limit of our route. We now turned sharply to the left and proceeded in a north-westerly direction, sometimes along the river bank and sometimes over the gravel flats of its bed. Our peak soon came into sight, a very impressive object to the E. of the river; rising in a dominating way among bare and uninteresting hills. Crosby on a previous trip had camped too low down Ghost River, and had experienced considerable difficulty in working round a deep canyon on his way to the mountain. So we proceeded a couple of miles beyond his former camping ground and established ourselves at 2.30 p.m. near the confluence of a small mountain stream flowing almost due W. into Ghost River and in line with the N. end of the Devil's Head. At

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<sup>3</sup> The west end of the Lake is 8 miles from Banff, and the length of the Lake from west to east is about 17 miles.

this point we were about 16 miles by trail from the E. end of Lake Minnewanka at an elevation of 5450 ft.

All the way up the river and from this point also some three miles in direct line from it, our peak looked almost impossible ; and it was not until Feuz and the writer walked to slightly higher ground N. of the camp and scanned it very carefully with the glass, and he pointed out an interesting fact con-



[Photo L. S. Crosby.]

THE DEVIL'S HEAD FROM THE N.

nected with the upper part of the ridge, that I felt there was more than a possibility of success. Everything now depended on the weather, which looked threatening around 8 P.M. ; but the barometer remained steady and thus partly reassured us.

We left camp on September 14 at 6.20 A.M., a little later than we had planned ; armed with extra ropes and a few iron spikes which we thought might be indispensable. As it turned out none of them were needed. It was a fine warm morning without wind. The top of a ridge directly E. of our camp was gained at 7.40 o'clock : which brought us near to tree line. Proceeding along it for half an hour in the direction of our peak, which was now in full view, we descended several hundred feet

into a hollow through which flowed a welcome rivulet, and thence ascended the gravel and shale slopes on the W. side of our mountain. No time was lost en route; all was easy going until we reached the main couloir on the W. side of the mountain at 9.20.

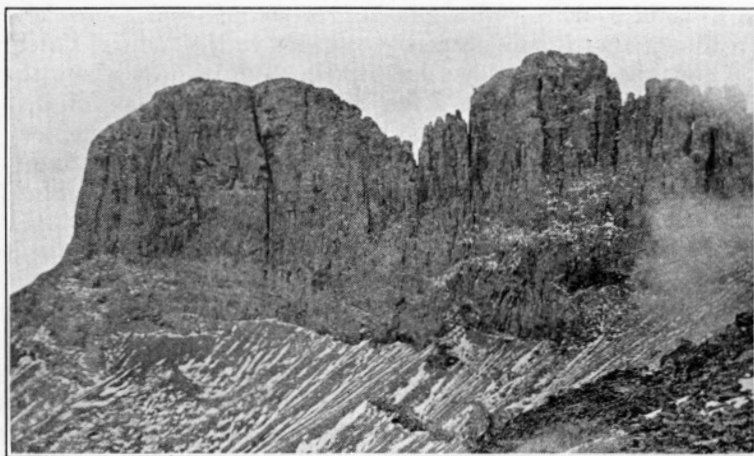
A little higher up this couloir was split, and after a brief stop for food we followed the left arm which Crosby, who had been this far before, suggested was the more likely route of ascent. The rocks beneath our feet and at our sides were very sharp and jagged, but thus far there was no difficult climbing. After an hour we stopped to look around; for we were getting into a maze of couloirs with confusing turrets and rock pinnacles. We knew that it was necessary to swing to the right in order to gain the summit ridge, but it was doubtful just where to begin. Feuz left us for a few minutes to climb one of the turrets as a viewpoint, and on returning expressed the opinion that the outlook was favourable. The walls of the mountain are so steep that none of the recent snow lay on them, and for the same reason are almost wholly bare of loose stones.

We put on the rope and left our ice axes, and for the first time this season the writer followed the example of his fellow climbers in wearing a pair of gloves as protection against the horribly rough and spiky rocks.

We entered a narrow and deep although not very steep couloir, up which we could force our way through knee and elbow work on the side ledges. Emerging from it over a sharp nose, we gained a good platform whence easy ledges led into another couloir. Just beyond this we climbed a steep and fairly difficult wall of some 25 ft. in height, rather devoid of footholds at its base. A short ascent over ordinary ledges and a traverse under a rock wall to the right brought us to another narrow and precipitously walled couloir, one of the many minor ones which split the peak in all directions in its interior; and at the end of this we reached a level place immediately below the very narrow and steep but not very long arête which connects with the summit table; for so it can well be termed. After a stop of ten minutes we ascended the arête one at a time, Feuz firmly anchoring himself before the next climber moved. At one point it becomes very thin, and on the left or E. side, on which there is a slight overhang, one looks down an unbroken wall of at least 1200 ft. Having crossed this we took off the rope and walked briskly over the broad and gently rising ridge to the summit, reaching it a few minutes before noon. A cool strong wind, which had

sprung up and had been felt even in the couloirs, speedily drove us to seek shelter below the top on the S.E. side.

The sun here was pleasant, the view over the prairie fairly extensive and novel. It was the first time in climbing in the Rockies that the writer had seen into the plains. Some of the larger ranches were distinctly visible; but not Calgary, about 65 miles distant in direct line. From the roof of the Palliser Hotel in that city the Devil's Head can be distinctly seen on a clear day. But the atmosphere was much dimmed by the usual autumn haze. Mt. Aylmer to the W. with its fresh



[Photo L. S. Crosby.]

SUMMIT RIDGE OF DEVIL'S HEAD FROM THE E.

snow cap was the most prominent feature of the landscape. By the aid of our glasses we could see fairly distinctly Mts. Assiniboine, Deltaform, Neptuak and St. Bride, formerly Douglas, N.E. of Lake Louise. The great barrenness and utter forlornness of the hills around us on the E. and S. must be directly perceived in order to be appreciated; great mounds of gravel and shale, devoid of any vegetation, above 6000 ft. No game of any kind could be seen, although we had heard much about its prevalence before starting out.

Two cairns were erected on the summit, a smaller one in which was deposited a record, and another about 5 ft. in height which could be plainly seen the following day almost the whole way down Ghost River. The descent was begun at 1 P.M., the rope was picked up and put on, and the route of ascent

retraced with only one variation. A halt was made at the ice axes and some time spent near the top of the main couloir in photographing the very remarkable buttresses, turrets and gendarmes which characterize this peak. Above the main couloir in which we had begun the ascent are two extraordinarily curved pinnacles which might appropriately be designated the Devil's horns.

Shortly after 3, near the foot of this couloir we took off the rope and skirting the W. wall came rapidly down over the shale slope to the refreshing rivulet crossed earlier in the day. Twenty minutes later we were on the top of the ridge overlooking our camp whence the wall of the mountain, broken only by two couloirs and one of which is probably impossible, showed up very impressively in the afternoon light. While waiting here to use the last film of a roll, one of the party called attention to a well-marked human profile on the S. side whence presumably the name for the peak has been derived; otherwise it is singularly inappropriate, the Devil's Tower being a much more suitable designation.

Camp was reached at 5.15 P.M. A high Chinook wind prevailed all night. Next day it was still windy, mild and overcast. The air was actually balmy. The autumn foliage was entrancing; golden yellows and crimson and vermillion reds intermingled with the evergreens, and between the trees and shrubs the long grass varied through shades of green and yellowish brown. Threatening skies stimulated our march and the first stop was made on the eastern shore of Minnewanka where, after a late luncheon, the men and horses left the climbers and we awaited the coming of the launch. It appeared promptly at 4.30, and we quickly got our sleeping bags, other dunnage and ourselves aboard, and reached the Banff end of the Lake in less than two hours; the horses and men arriving there almost immediately afterwards, having come around the shore of the Lake at a terrific pace. The three days of fine weather prognosticated by the meteorologist of Banff were at an end; shortly after our arrival the weather broke with a tremendous convulsion, and next morning the mountains all around down to 6000 ft. were covered with a thick blanket of snow. Under lowering skies, Feuz and the writer parted until another season.