
C A RUSSELL

One Hundred Years Ago



Members of the 1921 Everest Expedition at camp. Back row, left to right: A F R Wollaston, C Howard-Bury, A M Heron, H Raeburn. Front row, left to right: G L Mallory, E O Wheeler, G H Bullock, H T Morshead.

We are having a most extraordinary winter up here. Men of seventy-five and eighty tell me they have never seen so long a period of drought. We have not had any rain worth mentioning since last October, and very little snow.¹

The exceptionally dry spell experienced in many Alpine regions during the early months of 1921 continued into March when favourable conditions enabled Hans Fritsch with his guides Othmar Supersaxo and Gustav Imsenge to make the first winter ascents of the Dürrenhorn, Hohberghorn and Stecknadelhorn. Starting from the Mischabel hut the party crossed the Ried glacier from the Windjoch to reach the Hohbergjoch and the short south-east ridge of the Dürrenhorn. After traversing the Hohberghorn and Stecknadelhorn Fritsch and the guides continued to the Nadelhorn before returning to the Windjoch and descending to the hut.

The fine and settled conditions continued for much of the climbing season and several notable expeditions were completed. In the Mont Blanc range

1. Written by the American-born bibliophile and archivist Henry Fairbanks Montagnier (1877-1933) from his home, the Chalet Beau Réveil at Champéry. Montagnier was instrumental in uncovering the true story of the first ascent of Mont Blanc.

George Finch joined forces with S L Courtauld and E G Oliver accompanied by their guides Adolf and Alfred Aufdenblatten to repeat the route to Mont Blanc de Courmayeur by way of the Frêne glacier and the upper section of the Peuterey ridge pioneered by James Eccles and his guides many years earlier. In the Bernese Alps the guideless party of Hans Lauper and Max Liniger completed an outstanding climb by forcing a route up the steep rib bordering the north-west face of the Mönch. After overcoming numerous exposed snow and rock pitches the party reached the north-east ridge a short distance from the summit.

In September a famous route on the Eiger was completed when the Japanese climber Yuko Maki with Fritz Amatter, Fritz Steuri and Samuel Brawand made the first ascent of the north-east, Mittellegi ridge. The main step on the ridge, which had been descended on two occasions and had defeated many attempts to ascend was finally overcome by the guides with the aid of iron stanchions and a long pole provided with hooks.

In May the Mount Everest reconnaissance expedition led by Lt Col Charles Howard-Bury left Darjeeling with a number of local men as porters, having received permission to enter Tibet and approach Everest (8848m) from the north. The organisation and arrangements for the expedition were overseen by a joint committee of the Royal Geographical Society and the Alpine Club chaired by Sir Francis Younghusband. Four members of the Club were selected to assess the prospects for an ascent. Alexander Kellas and Harold Raeburn both had recent Himalayan experience: Kellas on Kamet and Kabru and Raeburn in the Kangchenjunga region. George Mallory and, at short notice, Guy Bullock in place of Finch who withdrew owing to illness were experienced alpinists. A fifth member, Alexander Wollaston was included as doctor and naturalist. The party was completed by a detachment from the Survey of India led by Henry Morshead and Oliver Wheeler, the geologist Alexander Heron and baggage animals, all provided with the co-operation of the Indian government.

Despite early setbacks – Kellas died during the approach march and Raeburn was absent for a long period while recovering from dysentery – and frequent spells of bad weather the expedition achieved its main objectives. The northern, north-western and eastern approaches to the peak were reconnoitred in depth: ascents to the Lho La (6026m) at the head of the main Rongbuk glacier and a col to the west provided extensive views to Nepal and the Khumbu glacier; and a route was identified to the North Col (6985m), reached by Mallory, Bullock and Wheeler from a camp on the East Rongbuk glacier. In addition a large area in the region was surveyed for the first time and the geology and flora examined.

In South Africa exploration of Table Mountain (1087m) was continued by members of the Mountain Club. George Londt and other leading climbers completed several new ascents including *Panda Crag* and *Columnar Face*, both very severe routes for the period.

In the Canadian Rockies in August Henry Hall Jr and a companion with the guide Edward Feuz Jr made the first ascent of Mount French (3234m),

one of the high peaks in the British Military group east of Palliser Pass. In the following month L S Crosby and J W A Hickson with Feuz reached the north, higher summit of the unclimbed Mount Fifi (2621m), one of the imposing rock towers in the Sawback range near Banff.

In the far north members of an expedition organised by Oxford University visited Spitsbergen to study the fauna, flora and geology and to explore the interior. In August a party including Tom Longstaff and Noel Odell traversed Mount Terrier (1211m) for reconnaissance and survey purposes during a journey for some distance inland. An expedition led by James Wordie explored the remote Arctic island of Jan Mayen where Wordie and two companions made the first ascent of Beerenberg (2277m), the volcano in the north of the island.

At home G S Bower, H M Kelly and other outstanding climbers continued their exploration in the Lake District. *Innominate Crack* on Kern Knotts led by Bower and other severe routes were completed during the year. A welcome event was the formation of the Pinnacle Club for ladies, founded by Kelly's wife Emily 'Pat' Kelly 'to foster the independent development of rock climbing amongst women.' Members were required to have mountaineering experience and 'the ability to lead and to direct rock ascents of a moderately difficult order.' Eleanor Winthrop Young was elected as president with Mrs Kelly as secretary.

In March the death occurred of Edward Theodore Compton, the distinguished Alpine artist and mountaineer whose work is admired for his outstanding ability to represent in form and colour mountain scenes throughout the Alps and in other parts of Europe. Edward Theodore Compton, who settled in Bavaria, completed a number of notable expeditions with Karl Blodig including the first complete descent of the east face of the Aiguille Blanche de Peuterey.

This account is concluded with an extract from a summary of the Mount Everest expedition by Norman Collie, president of the Alpine Club.

The 1921 expedition was, in the nature of things, merely a reconnaissance; and when all the difficulties and unforeseen mishaps that always occur in preliminary explorations are taken into account, one must congratulate Colonel Howard-Bury and all the other members of the expedition on having been so extraordinarily successful.

• The editor of the *Alpine Journal* would like to congratulate and thank Chris Russell who has been contributing his snapshot of the mountaineering world 'One Hundred Years Ago' for 50 years.