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THE FOREST PRIMEVAL.

J. A. Parker

A GLADE IN THE FOREST IN HORSETHIEF CREEK, PURCELL MTS., BRITISH COLUMBIA.

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A VISIT TO THE MOUNTAINS OF BRITISH
COLUMBIA.

BY JAMES A. PARKER.

BRITISH COLUMBIA ! To the mountaineer there is magic in the name, and it was with a keen sense of anticipation that I boarded the Vancouver steamer at Victoria on the 12th May, 1928. The steamer was one of the C.P.R. fleet and took about four and three-quarter hours to the trip, a journey which appeared to be all too short. For hours the steamer found its way up the lagoon-like straits which lie between Vancouver Island and the group of small islands which fringe its eastern shore and which reminded me strongly, on a bigger scale, of the islands of Loch Lomond and Loch Maree. Finally the steamer slipped into a narrow and tortuous passage between two of the islands and emerged on to the more open waters of the Strait of Georgia, across which, in the far distance, the City of Vancouver could be seen on the horizon at the foot of the imposing mountains of the Coast Range. The sail was most beautiful ; but after all it was only a foretaste of the much more beautiful one that I was to take three weeks later right up the coast to Skagway in Alaska. My purpose here however is to give some account of what I was able to do in the mountains of British Columbia.

I had introductions to the leading members of the Alpine Club of Canada in Vancouver, and the kindness of the reception that they gave me exceeded all my expectations. They cordially invited me to attend their Dominion Day outing for the ascent of Mount Baker, Wash., 10,827 ft. and also to attend their Summer Camp at Horsethief Creek in the seldom visited Purcell Mountains. To mark time till these two fixtures matured I spent a fortnight at Cameron Lake on Vancouver Island, took the wonderfully beautiful and impressive steamer sail up the West Coast to Skagway in Alaska, and spent over a week near Mount Robson.

This mountain is the highest of the Canadian Rockies and is 12,977 ft. in height. It stands about 6 miles north of the Yellowhead section of the Canadian National Railways. To reach it I went, on June 18, to Mt. Robson Station, which is about 35 miles west of the Great Divide, and there I was met by a cowboy driving a two horse buggy. I was at first rather in awe of the cowboy, in case he carried a gun; but my fears instantly disappeared when he spoke to me—which he did with a strong Glasgow accent. As I was endeavouring to speak with an Aberdeen accent we were a well-matched pair. And so he drove me off in the buggy much to the admiration, and I hope envy, of the passengers on the Observation Car of the Continental Limited. A short and somewhat precipitous drive down a very steep winding road took us to the Mt. Robson Ranch which is run by Mr. and Mrs. Roy Hargreaves, and where I was received with the greatest kindness. Roy's first question to me was, "What do you propose to do? Shoot bears or what?" I told him that my modest plan was to walk up to Berg Lake Cabin, which is a log cabin about 15 miles off on the north shore of that lake and right opposite the steep north-west face of Mount Robson. Roy's reply was laconic and was, "I reckon you can't do that unless you are a first-class swimmer and even



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MOUNT ROBSON.
LOOKING SOUTH ACROSS BERG LAKE.

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then it would be dangerous as there are several bad fords. You will require to take a horse and ride."

So next forenoon I was mounted on a white horse called "Chief" and set out on the 15 miles ride to the Cabin. Rather ambitious on my part as I had not ridden a horse since 1923 and I speedily found out that riding in Canada is slightly different from doing so in the Pyrenees. The trail, which was in bad condition, led up the valley of the Grand Fork River to Lake Kinney (3,259 ft.) and thence up the Valley of a Thousand Falls to Berg Lake (5,500 ft.) at the far end of which stood the log cabin. Apart from my want of experience in the gentle art of horsemanship the ride was most delightful, the scenery being very fine indeed. The feature of course was the magnificent appearance of Mount Robson which towered overhead on our right. I say "our" because the "outfit" consisted of Dick Hargreaves, who was guide, Esther the cook who proved herself to be a most efficient person, myself, and a pack horse. Ker, the cowboy, was to follow later by himself. As a matter of fact we were opening the Cabin for the season.

I spent four or five very delightful days at Berg Lake walking, riding, and climbing; but I felt the want of a climbing companion very much. With Dick I had a try at Mount Mumm, 9740 ft., which is quite a simple climb but we were turned by bad weather when only about 250 feet below the summit. Mount Robson is very difficult and can only be climbed when a certain ice passage is in suitable condition, and this does not occur every season. The face of the mountain overlooking the lake presents a riven face of rock, snow, and ice 7,500 feet in height, and for majesty and beauty compares favourably with the Italian face of Mount Blanc. The mountain is not climbed by this face.

From Robson I returned to Vancouver and from there was motored by Colonel Forster, of the A.C.C.,

to Glacier Inn at the entrance to the Mount Baker National Forest, U.S.A., on the 30th June. And on the same afternoon, and evening, we "hiked" up a ten mile trail to the Mount Baker Cabin of the Bellingham Climbing Club which had been placed at the disposal of the A.C.C. It was a pretty long "hike," involving an ascent of something like 3,500 ft., and as we had started far too late a few members of the party that I had started with were benighted and only reached the cabin about an hour after midnight. Certainly not a good preparation for the big climb up Mount Baker. The cabin was badly overcrowded as there were about 45 people present.

For the ascent of Mount Baker we got away the next morning about five o'clock, and after climbing up moraines and easy glacier for about 2,500 feet in thick wet mist we got above the clouds into blazing sunshine. The route followed the easy and slightly crevassed Coleman glacier to a dip on the south-west ridge of the mountain. This ridge we followed upwards for about five hundred feet and then by traversing across a steep and none too safe-looking snow slope we reached the summit. Little was to be seen except the upper surface of the cloud layer beneath us which stretched in every direction as far as the eye could reach. One or two peaks, such as Shuksan, stood up above the clouds. It was a magnificent view; but as a stranger I would have liked to have seen more of the country.

The descent was made by the same route, and in the late afternoon we dipped into the mist and on getting back to the hut were told that it had been raining there most of the day. The expedition took about 13 hours, the height climbed having been about 6,500 feet. There seems to be a very big snowfall on these western mountains and I was surprised to find so much snow and ice on Mount Baker as on Mount Mumm we did not touch snow till near 9,000 feet. At Mount Baker we were on snow from 6,000 feet

up. Before returning to Vancouver I spent three nights at Mount Baker Lodge, which is a large palatial establishment at a height of about 4,500 ft. on the north-east flank of Mount Baker. There is a first-class motoring road to it from Bellingham.

My next fixture was to go to the Summer Camp of the Alpine Club of Canada during the last fortnight in July, and as a first stage I went by rail to Banff where the Club House was the rallying point. The Camp was pitched near the head of Horsethief Creek in the Purcell Mountains. To reach it we were sent forward from Banff in small detachments by charabanc to Wilmer, near Windermere, in the upper Columbia Valley, a distance of about 95 miles, and thence by light car up the rough road leading westwards to road end in the Horsethief Creek Valley, a further distance of about 21 miles.

This all took the best part of a day, and on arrival we found that a fairly comfortable base camp had been established and at which we spent the first night. The last part of the day's trip in the case of my party had been pretty miserable as we had had four punctures to our "char," which vehicle we finally had to desert, and then in the relief light car we smashed its transmission box and had to walk the last mile into the Base Camp. All of course done to the accompaniment of heavy rain notwithstanding the fact that the region is supposed to be one of the dry areas in British Columbia. But this was the last of the rain and we had nothing but brilliant sunshine for the rest of the fortnight.

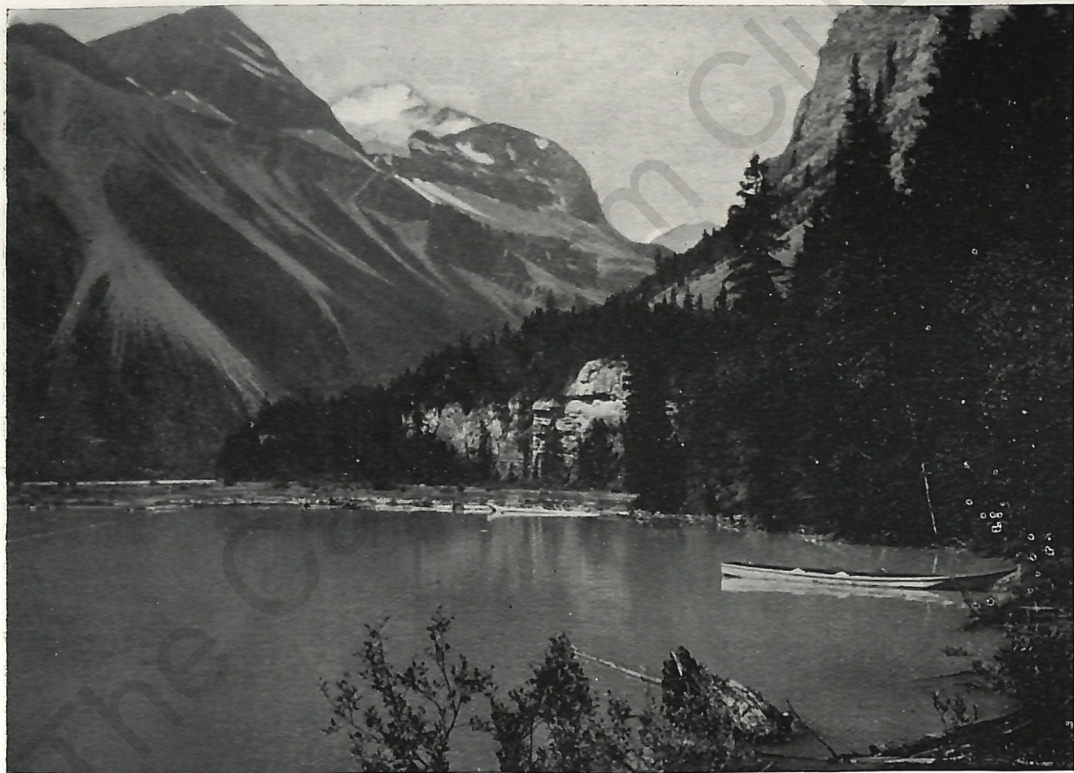
The A.C.C. does things mighty well. The Base Camp held about thirty people and was looked after by a professional cook. Half-way up the valley there was an intermediate "fly" camp consisting of a few tents for those who fell by the way, and where a boy provided hot tea and sandwiches, etc., as required. And then at the end of the trail was the Main Camp which was placed on the north side of the creek and

at a height about 5,700 feet above sea level. It consisted of about forty bell tents, a large dining tent, and the kitchen tent. There were two professional cooks. The camp arrangements were excellent and the food very good.

The Horsethief Creek Valley is very beautiful and runs west from the Columbia Valley into the heart of the Purcell Mountains, a distance of about 40 miles or so to the snout of the Starbird Glacier at the head of the valley. The district is primeval, and there seemed to be no human habitation west of Wilmer at the entrance to the valley. The sixteen mile trail from the Base Camp was in very good condition, having been repaired by the Government in view of our visit and that of the Trail Riders, who were to follow us and use our camps. The mountains at the head of the valley run from 10,000 ft. to 11,500 ft. in height, the principal summits being The Dome, Mount Thompson, and Mount Bruce. A side valley called Farnham Creek branched off to the south from the main valley at the intermediate camp, and a fly camp had been established in it for those who wished to climb the peaks there.

For climbing purposes, the district compares with the Tirol, with of course the important exception that it is entirely uninhabited. Some of the peaks had not been climbed before our visit. The favourite walk for an off day was from the Main Camp up a side creek to the Lake of the Hanging Glaciers, a very delightful excursion by a good trail. Personally I spent eleven days in the Camp and climbed The Dome and Mount Thompson. The former was an easy climb; but Thompson was decidedly interesting, beginning with a long walk up the central moraine of the Starbird Glacier to the foot of the mountain and then up it by steep rocks and glaciers to the final peak. The ascent of the latter was up a rather steep and narrow rock ridge which was very exposed at one or two places.

The climbing arrangements at the Camp were in the hands of the Climbing Committee. Each evening the



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LAKE KINNEY, B.C.

LOOKING NORTH-WEST. MT. WHITEHORN ON LEFT AND SLOPES OF MT. ROBSON ON RIGHT.

Committee decided what climbs were to be done the following day and how many could go and who were to act as guides. Sheets were then posted up in the dining tent and those who wished to go put their names on the appropriate sheet. The Committee later on decided who were to go. Next morning the starters were wakened at four o'clock and after breakfast the roll was called at five and the parties were allowed to move off. No parties were allowed to leave the Camp unless the Secretary had been advised as to their probable movements.

There were about 120 people in camp altogether, about one half of them being women. And we were a very cheery bunch of people. They were all very kind to me and made me a guest of the Club for the Camp as representing the Alpine Club of England. Since then I have however become a member of the Canadian Club.

The journey back to Banff was without incident and after that, on my way home, I did no more climbing of any note with the exception of the ascent of Mount Washburn, 10,346 ft., in the Yellowstone Park. This was however pretty strenuous consisting of a 13 mile hike there by a beautiful trail through the forest, and a seemingly much longer hike back over a hard road to the big Camp at Canyon. No one is supposed to go hiking in the Yellowstone Park, the proper thing is to go by motor charabanc and play the part of a rubber-necked tourist—as I did afterwards with complete success.