

19 April 1974

1950

Chapter ~~16~~ <sup>17</sup>

### INNOCENTS ABROAD

Time had come for the first step beyond home hills, a step closer to — who could say what? In some dim future of wealth I might venture to Tierra del Fuego, the Southern Alps of New Zealand, the Mountains of the Moon, or even the Himalaya.

Such ranges were for dreaming, not planning. The arena of practical ambition was my home continent. And the direction? Inevitably north — north to bigger, icier, wilder mountains than the Cascades — north to the British Columbia Coast Range, whose super-Alpine summits I'd seen sharp and clear from Baker ~~that~~ <sup>one</sup> crystalline October day — north to subarctic ranges of the Yukon and Alaska. With more experience and more money these ~~would be within~~ <sup>could come</sup> within my reach.

For now, also north, there were the Canadian Rockies, the Purcells, the Caribous, the Monashees, and the Selkirks. Where to begin? How to choose a goal that was more than I'd ever tried yet not more than I could hope to achieve? I wanted to be ~~seared~~ <sup>tested</sup> but not humbled.

The problem was connecting home hills to foreign ranges. Journal articles were no help; they were written by strangers of unknown or — as in the case of Fearless Fred — supernatural ability. Among people whose

skills I could compare to mine, few had visited distant peaks; Mountaineers were mostly poor folk and non-travelers, unlike rich and wide-roaming Easterners, the Ivy League bunch.

However, several years before I joined the club a local gang had saved up pennies and journeyed to the Selkirks. Memories were vivid; Burge, one of the elder statesmen I most respected, never lectured on any subject without some reference to Sir Donald. From my first months in the Course that knighted mountain symbolized the challenge of the faraway — but not, as with St. Elias or McKinley, too faraway. During the 1949-50 winter, plotting the summer of glory, bewildered by riches of Canada, I read about the clean lines of quartzite ridges and faces rising to a classic horn 10,818 feet high.

At Climbing Committee meetings and practices and experience climbs I propagandized Sir D, but nobody was interested in far travels — unless to the Tetons, which were east, not north, and therefore bored me. Tom was the sole convert. Well then, he and Betty and I were the group. Good enough.

Through spring and summer we read and re-read Thorington's Climbers' Guide to the Interior Ranges of British Columbia and back issues of the Canadian Alpine Journal, Thorington was cryptic, narratives of ascents were antique and thus largely irrelevant, ~~and~~ photographs were few and fuzzy. For all our research the peak remained mysterious, exciting.

As added intrigue, the climb began from Glacier, once the site of famous Glacier House and principal tourist center of the Canadian West, but early in the century replaced in favor by Lake Louise and Banff and now

studying every scrap of information about Sir Donald we could find.

merely a railroad station. Glacier was accessible only by train — no highway, no tyranny of automobiles, no mobs of park-decal collectors chasing beggar bears and clicking Brownies. Captivated by the novelty, we decided to travel entirely by rail. Saturday, August 19, we'd take the <sup>American</sup> train north to Vancouver, transfer to the Canadian Pacific, and after an overnight coach ride arrive at Glacier Sunday, ready to climb Monday and a dozen days thereafter. Some simple things first, maybe Uto and Tupper, to get the feel of the terrain. When ready, Sir Donald. Then across the high white sea <sup>of</sup> the Illecillewaet Névé to Dawson.

We didn't catch the train Saturday because we went to North Peak instead. Returning to the apartment Monday afternoon to plan a fresh start, <sup>Tom and I</sup> heard the news from Betty:

"Canadian railroads stopped running yesterday. Everybody is on strike."

Had Vic been handy I'd have strangled him with an old sling rope.

Tuesday we called the local Canadian Pacific office and were told a settlement was expected momentarily. Wednesday, same story. The northern land we still desired, but were developing hostility toward the northern people. (Confound their politics! Frustrate their knavish tricks!) Thursday, no change.

Friday morning, August 25, Tom and Betty and I surveyed the wreckage. Nearly half the planned 2-week vacation gone and nothing to show for it but damnable North Peak. The end of the Glory Summer near and

Sir Donald forever lost and no step taken toward McKinley. Hardy was right — the typical human tragedy doesn't come from character flaws but from getting run over by a ~~train~~ train. *In this case, a train that wasn't even running.*

One thing was sure — another day in town and we'd go berserk. In a frenzy of sudden resolution we tossed gear in the Jeep, ran through ~~the~~ ~~supermarket~~ a supermarket buying groceries at random, and were off and away across the Cascades and the Columbia Plateau and over the border into a foreign nation. Late that night, 500 miles from home, we pulled to the side of the highway and slept in a field, listening to cows moo and coyotes (which Tom and I convinced Betty were wolves) bark under Canadian stars.

We'd no idea where we were going — someplace in the Rockies -- all unfamiliar, our research having been concentrated on the Selkirks. As we continued north Saturday morning *me at the wheel,* Tom unfolded maps and flipped through Thorington's Climbers' Guide to the Rocky Mountains of Canada. The bare-<sup>(</sup>bones prose stirred no enthusiasm in our hearts, still committed to Sir D. Nor did the first looks at brown heaps of parched rubble. We drove by Columbia Lake, the beginning of the great river draining east slopes of our home Cascades, but this was not our home. We turned east over Sinclair Pass, up the Kootenay River, and over Vermilion Pass to the Banff-Jasper Highway. Above the junction rose Eisenhower, more than 9000 feet high yet unappealing.

Not only were the mountains alien but the whole nation was cockeyed. I bought gas and the gallons had 5 quarts. In change I received gaudy-colored

paper with French words and pictures of English kings — the entire currency was counterfeit. At a restaurant I ordered a strawberry milkshake and the waitress poured milk in a glass, added syrup, stirred with a spoon, and that was it. I was too dumbfounded to ask if they'd ever heard of ice cream.

We turned north at the junction, <sup>ascending</sup> ~~following~~ the Bow River. The flat-lying stratified sediments made trashy mountains, exceptionally-steep and obviously-rotten cliffs almost submerged in enormous aprons of talus.

Then we came to the foot of a huge block with a hanging glacier gleaming on the hazy-remote summit roof — Temple — and the white ice contrasted so joyously with blistering brown we decided to climb something. What? More flipping of guidebook pages, rustling of maps. There was a place we'd heard of, Abbot Pass, with big peaks around. It might be a decent spot for a high overview.

In early afternoon, packs on backs, we walked neatly-clipped lawns beside 5044-foot Lake Louise, past the Chateau, which our hero Frank Smythe in one of his books called "The Penitentiary." On benches were dummies in tweed suits and white mustaches, holding walking sticks, perfect caricatures of retired English <sup>colonels.</sup> ~~majors.~~ The dummies lived! Waxen faces screwed up in distaste, nostrils sniffing, mustaches <sup>+</sup> ~~tw~~itching. We were recognized as a raffish colonial militia. Well, our American boys were catching hell from gooks in Korea and damned if we were going to take any crap from these gooks, with their 5-quart gallons and Monopoly money and ice cream-less milkshakes and trains that didn't run.

From the Penitentiary compound we hiked a highway-wide trail upward in forest, stepping aside repeatedly to let horses pass, walking very carefully to avoid <sup>steaming -</sup> fresh piles. We met a genuine Swiss guide with several customers, ~~and~~ <sup>^</sup> Also a coolie with a shovel; he was too weary to throw very far and the trail was a trench through horse flop.

Late in hot, asphyxiating afternoon we reached the Plain of Six Glaciers Tea House, at 6900 feet on a wooded shelf above the white "plain." A short bit beyond were a lovely meadow and waterfall, a delightful, home-<sup>(</sup> like alpine camp — except the meadow was solid flop and the stream hopelessly filthied. Obviously we were going to have to send in troops, proclaim the whole country a National Park, and ship the gooks to penal colonies in Australia.

The only clean ground was in front of the tea house and there <sup>e</sup> we belligerently cooked supper on a primus stove, every move closely observed by an elderly lady and gentleman sitting regally in easy chairs on the porch. When we unrolled <sup>our</sup> ~~the~~ bags the lady gasped, leaned forward, and in that queer accent characteristic of the English speaking English said:

"Surely you are not intending to sleep out. You will have your death."

Conversation was unavoidable and we discovered she was a nice lady, ~~and~~ a refugee from the Penitentiary, which she called the "orphan asylum," <sup>and</sup> a lover of wildness even though gentility permitted <sup>her</sup> no closer approach than a tea house. We politely assured her there was no danger <sup>^</sup> ~~she~~ <sup>she</sup> knew better and declared she would not rest knowing three human beings were suffering a few feet from her bed. Seconded by a nod from the tweedy

old gentleman, she summoned the houseboy, discreetly hovering in the background, and insisted we be given shelter from the elements. He ducked his head and, deferring to the only paying guests, invited us to sleep on the rug by the fireplace, under the protection of the Empire.

He asked if we wished breakfast. So that was the game! Free rug as a come-on, then sting us for food. We declined with thanks, saying we were leaving very early. But "breakfast is served whenever you desire, sir." And the price? Incredible. The poverty of the coolies was appalling, embarrassing. At 4:30 a.m. we sahibs, sacked out luxuriously on the rug, heard the cook start to work in the kitchen below. At 6 o'clock the houseboy summoned us to a table groaning under orange juice, bacon, eggs, toast, marmalade, and coffee — for just one buck a head, in Monopoly money at that.

From cozy unreal tea house we hauled packs into grim familiar reality of gray dawn under low, swift sky, descended moraines to the Victoria Glacier, clean and cold as American ice, and ascended the narrow slot between rubbish walls of Victoria and Lefroy, both over 11,000 feet. Rain began, grew to a deluge, <sup>turned to snow.</sup> Lightning flared, thunder clapped. In black-as-night blizzard we crossed the bergschrund to 9598-foot Abbot Pass and hurried into the hut.

Strange to be in tomb-cold stillness while storm raged around. At 11 a.m., soaking wet and shivering, we stripped off clothes and hung them from rafters to drip and burrowed into ~~heaps of~~ <sup>bunks heaped high with</sup> Hudson's Bay blankets. At 2 p.m. we crawled from bunks, donned sleeping bags, and ate lunch

listening to roaring winds. Obviously we would climb nothing here. At 3, with sleep the only available entertainment, back to bunks. Up at 7:30 p.m. to cook supper on the primus. At 9, back to bunks. We were higher than the summit of Bonanza and sleeping under piles of blankets in a stone mansion built by Swiss guides imported by the Canadian Pacific Railway. Odd. Not quite the Alps because there was no peasant to keep a fire going and sell us <sup>wine and</sup> hot soup, but certainly a world away from our Cascades.

At 7 o'clock Monday morning a bright light woke us. Sunshine! Wind was blasting and the temperature was below freezing but we'd exhausted our capacity to sleep and anyway body chemistry was compelling.

Once on feet we'd no choice. To retreat in blue-sky morning was to deliberately flunk. Tom and I shuddered into pants and shirts pulled from rafters. They were frozen solid, and boots and socks too. The transfer of sleep-sluggish bodies from warm bags to ice-hard clothes was a horror.

Which way to go? Shivering allowed no leisurely discussion. Lefroy shot straight up from one side of the pass, white-bleak and terrible after the night's snowfall. On the other side was Victoria, 11,365 feet, no challenge but the sole rational option.

Climbing began at the hut, frozen clothes only partly thawed and legs and heads still awkward from hibernation. The route was a scramble, a hike — except the staircase of rock walls and scree shelves was coated with slippery verglas topped by loose powder; we couldn't wear crampons because they'd ball up and Bramani lugs were like skates. And below was the eternal drop to the Victoria Glacier. Not a comfortable hold anywhere,



not a single artistic move; we felt clumsy, incompetent, but nevertheless soon stood in fierce wind atop the 11,000-foot South Summit of Victoria.

Close by were frightful Lefroy and Hungabee. Down east lay the Plain of Six Glaciers, Lake Louise, and the Bow valley. Down west was Lake O'Hara, and beyond rotten brown cliffs of miscellaneous peaks, the wide air gap of the Columbia valley, <sup>across</sup> ~~beyond~~ which rose the Selkirks of our frustrated dreams. Somewhere in that hazy gathering stood the lost Sir Donald.

A mile north and a bit higher we saw the Main Summit — apparently a simple stroll along the ridge crest. Walking ended as the crest thinned to a knife-edge of snow dropping steeply to a saddle. So we'd have a bit of genuine climbing after all. I belayed Tom as he cut steps downward, first scooping away powder, then hacking at the ice. <sup>However, it wasn't</sup> ~~not~~ honest blue ice breaking out in chunks but laminated verglas splitting off in plates, leaving no good steps. The rope ran out and Tom was nowhere near any possibility of a belay. To continue, I'd have to abandon <sup>g</sup> my stance and for minutes we'd both be poised above the long glissade down hanging ice, over cliffs, to the Victoria Glacier.

It's stupid to risk death on ~~such~~ a simpleton ~~one~~ peak. We returned to the hut defeated and glum and there met an Englishman and a Swede equipped with hobnailed boots and walking sticks and a short length of clothesline; they were blithely lunching before starting up Lefroy. We descended, suspecting these brave alpine walkers would make tough Lefroy while we chicken climbers had failed on easy Victoria. That's the difference between

Old World and New. We Americans have the Bomb but when it comes to mountains are still bush league.

Humble and hostile we drove north from Lake Louise to 6878-foot Bow Pass, down the Mistaya River past Waterfowl Lakes to a somber evening at Mosquito Creek Campground. We hardly paused to view the succession of lofty peaks which any average gook could handle with no sweat but to us were so baffling we couldn't see how to get off the ground. Impossible mountains. Titan gooks.

Tuesday morning we continued up the trench, now ascending the North Saskatchewan River, the peaks less rugged, the valley a vast arctic meadow, the river first braided in wide gravel flats and then flowing in solution channels through limestone. We envied those who hiked this magnificence a few years earlier, before the highway was built. But we were seeing it from a <sup>machine</sup> ~~car~~, like sitting in a theater watching a travelogue. Our great adventure had dwindled to a car-camping tour. All we lacked were decals.

At noon we entered the wasteland of 6678-foot Sunwapta Pass, evacuated by ice only within the past dozen years, and joined the horde walking to the edge of the Athabaska tongue of the Columbia Icefield. We gained a degree of solitude, marred only by the tourist icemobile, hiking several miles up bare ice, on the way amusing ourselves with an ice-ax engineering project, diverting surface streams into a single channel. The icemobile driver must have been puzzled as the afternoon went along and on each trip he was forced to ford a steadily larger creek.

¶ Wednesday Tom and I climbed the elementary snows of Athabaska, 11,452 feet, and saw such giants as Alberta and Robson, and the long, wide Saskatchewan Glacier, and the massive dome of the Columbia Icefield, the hydrographic apex of North America, waters draining from various tongues to the Atlantic, Pacific, and Arctic Oceans. Impressive, but not Sir D. ~~I heard no urgent call here.~~

The summit gave one thrill. We knew the first ascent had been made by the fabulous Norman Collie and that the great Smythe had visited the top. Now, on a scrap of paper in a wine bottle, we found the record of an ascent several days earlier — and one of the party was the very Odell who was the last man to see Mallory and Irvine as they disappeared forever into a cloud on Everest. This close we'd come to the virgin summit of Earth.

To celebrate we decided to give the primus a rest. While waiting for supper to be served at the Icefield Chalet we fell into conversation with the park warden, originally from Australia; he told of lone journeys deep in Canadian wildlands and of the time he was mauled by a grizzly and staggered 20 miles, fording large rivers, before reaching a road and fainting; scars on face and neck testified to the fury of the claws. After eating we drove south to camp again at Mosquito Creek; there we met Joe, a young Scottish hillwalker and cragsman in a state of perfect bliss, having just come over the seas and climbed his first real mountain, Edith Cavell. The Rockies were cosmopolitan, the Cascades strictly provincial. As were we.

Thursday we headed home. Tom was scheduled to lead an experience climb of Boston on Labor Day weekend, and though as part of the North Peak deal Vic had agreed to substitute if we were late returning, we had our fill of alien hills. At Cascade Pass we'd salvage what was left of the vacation. No Glory Summer, this.

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Chapter ~~17~~<sup>18</sup>

SIR DONALD FOREVER

We wouldn't bother with Seattle, we'd drive direct to the Cascade River and hike to Cascade Pass Friday, do Mixup or Magic Saturday, then join the experience-climb party for the Sunday ascent of Sahale and Boston. Lord, how good it would be to see home hills again, and friends.

Descending from Kicking Horse Pass to the Columbia, passing the yards at Field, we noted <sup>a</sup> locomotive<sup>s</sup> with steam up, cars being shuffled. Apparently the strike was over, too late to help us; the stagnant railroad doubtless would be days getting rolling again. I saw no reason to stop in Golden but Tom thought we should check, just so nobody could say we used the strike as an excuse to chicken out.

The station master, busy shuffling papers, ignored me. Feeling stupid I asked when the next train west was due. (Would it be Saturday? Monday? On to Cascade Pass!)

Not looking up, he curtly said, "On time. All trains on time."

We stood dazed. In a couple hours would arrive the train stranded at Field. This was Thursday. We didn't have to be home until Monday. We could have Friday and Saturday in the Selkirks. With plans based on 2 weeks, what could we do ~~with~~<sup>in</sup> 2 days? Nothing much. We'd never considered trying

Sir Donald without warmup climbs. Yet if we didn't take that train the might-have-been would haunt us the rest of our lives.

We walked all the way from Golden to Glacier, up and down the cars; as the only passengers we were free to sample views from every window. The rail line left the Columbia River for a slow ascent of the Beaver River. Peaks appeared, not repulsive heaps of brown sedimentary rubble but gray metamorphic mountains, wet green waterfall-and-brush-jungle mountains. After degradation abroad we were coming home — and in high style on our own private train.

Into the Connaught Tunnel, burrowing 5 miles under Rogers Pass, out to daylight — and there it was. Not a blurred photo nor hazy dream-image but sharp and stark Sir Donald in person, a ~~gray~~<sup>gray</sup> horn ripping blue sky.

A sudden chill. This was a <sup>truly</sup> giant step. How dared I?

At Glacier we felt like celebrities, welcomed by the entire population, the whole 20-odd. Of course, they may have greeted us incidentally while picking up the first mail and supplies in a dozen days. There was, however, nothing perfunctory about the hospitality of the park warden, Noel. We expected to camp out but he insisted on driving us a mile in his Land Rover to the Wheeler Hut, 4096 feet, local headquarters of the Alpine Club of Canada. Not members? No matter. Ice ax and rope are the admission ticket.

Noel was a climber, as was everyone at Glacier, whether visiting or working on railroad or trail crew or running the store. Glacier maybe

was the one place in North America that belonged exclusively to climbers.

Noel was full of surprises. From the train we'd noted a smoke column and supposed he had a big crew chopping firelines.

"Well," he chuckled, "It's not what you'd call a big crew. I do have a man camped in the meadows watching it."

Smokey Bear would throw a fit. Where was the frantic rabble of "forest managers" shoveling and hacking in the American Way, strenuously, bravely, fruitlessly? Canadian forests manage their own affairs, including lightning and fire, as they always have. Man watches, admires.

We mentioned finding Odell's name atop Athabaska. Noel was a buddy of Odell! More, he was a buddy of none other than Frank Smythe. We were awed — we were now friends of a friend of a friend of Mallory, moved in the same mountain circles as the great Smythe.

Or would if we passed the initiation. Sir Donald, there was the ~~rb,~~  
~~question~~

Noel dropped us at Wheeler Hut, deep in woods, rustic-luxurious, and almost empty. A Harvard boy was awaiting return of a rescue party from Glacier Circle, on the far side of the Illecillewaet Névé, where one of his companions had developed a hangnail; the boy himself had been too enfeebled by dyspepsia to assist in the rescue and barely made it back ~~over~~ <sup>over</sup> the Névé without belching.

There also was a Canadian family. Not gooks — none of the Canadians at Glacier were gooks. The husband knew Sir D well and we inquired about our planned line of ascent, the Vaux Route up the Southwest Face.

"Why bother with the Vaux?" he asked. "It's all right, you know, but rather a shag. Now the Northwest Ridge, there's the proper way to do the Donald."

Northwest Ridge! The Mountaineers whose tales had impelled us here had climbed the Vaux and thought it plenty good enough. They spoke respectfully, wistfully, of the razor edge leaping 2600 feet from the Uto-Donald Col.

He went on: "Never a nasty moment. Everything neat and tidy. Not so much cragging as bouldering. Hours and hours of fun."

Winter-spring plans were junked, ambition escalated to a giant step and a half. We'd ~~probably~~ be the first from Seattle to try the Northwest Ridge — assuming weather permitted us to try anything, unlikely with afternoon cirrus followed by evening altostratus.

At 2 o'clock Friday morning Tom and I arose quietly, lit a kerosene lamp in the chill kitchen, and ate corn flakes shivering, listening to pitter-patter on the roof. In minutes we'd be soaking wet, trudging sippy trail by flashlight toward our objective 6700 feet above. A sudden drumming on the roof. No guts. Back to cozy bunks.

The Harvard, ~~and~~ <sup>and</sup> his ~~companions~~ <sup>companions</sup> newly arrived from Glacier Circle, ~~and~~ <sup>and</sup> the Canadians left early to catch the train east, the first since the strike. We three were alone in the Selkirks, sitting on the cabin porch drinking coffee, watching drizzle. So, months of planning lead to a weekend in Canadian ~~Gray~~ <sup>Gray</sup>. Sir Donald, lost and found, lost again. And Magic or Mixup and Boston and Sahale as well. Perfidious gookland! The Glory



Summer was ending not with a bang but a whimper.

Drizzle dwindled to mist. The fact penetrated lethargy. Calculations began. We had to leave Sunday morning but could stay over Saturday. By pushing to a high camp this afternoon we'd be in position to take quick advantage of any break in the weather. ~~The~~ Vaux didn't demand perfection, was possible in anything short of a downpour and/or thick fog. Abruptly Tom and I were on the trail.

If conditions were too grim for the Northwest Ridge,

With boots actually pounding Selkirk earth, we realized how little we knew about where we were going. The Glacier Park map was on a scale of 2 miles to an inch and the contour interval was 200 feet; our entire hiking and climbing route lay within a single square inch of the sheet.

Thorington didn't believe in pampering ~~strangers~~ <sup>foreigners</sup>. His total information was: "Trail from Glacier to watercourse below Overlook. Cross snowfield and reach Uto-Sir Donald col from whence the ascent is made, following the N. W. arete closely. The rock is very firm, rubber-soles useful, and the climb one of the finest and most favored in the Selkirks."

Our Canadian advisor, though eloquent about the ridge, had only said of getting there: "Take the trail toward the Névé as far as the Vaux Torrent and leave it and follow your nose to the col."

Simple. Except that as we climbed from trees into huckleberry bushes solid blue with tons of fruit (and freshly stomped by a bear — a grizzly? Where was it now?) we crossed a succession of torrents, any of which might be the Vaux as far as we could tell, the map being so skimpy and low clouds hiding Overlook and every other reference point. We'd

probably walk right past Sir Donald and end up on the Névé. Well, the dense clouds would allow no climb tomorrow anyway and the Névé was better than nothing.

Why did I feel so kindly toward these clouds? Was I a fake, in love not with the reality of Sir D but merely the idea of Sir D? Was I using the clouds to ~~hide~~ me from myself?

A movie recently had been made of Ullman's novel, The White Tower, and the innocent local distributor had invited Climbing Course leaders to a studio preview. The show was even funnier than the book and the startled distributor kept asking, "What's wrong? What are they laughing at?" Glenn Ford, symbolizing Hero America, was such a spastic he'd need a derrick to get up Little Si. Lloyd Bridges, playing Villain Germany, moved beautifully and was the only member of the cast having any business on a mountain. The moral we drew was not the one Ullman had in mind. On subsequent climbs whenever a sackout lasted a minute too long someone was sure to burst out with Bridges' wonderfully arrogant line: "To rest is not to conquer!"

The Nazi was right. And it was also true that to be discouraged by weather is not to conquer. The first symptom of being over the hill is a preoccupation with menace of the sky, an ill-disguised fondness for clouds.

Was my gloom at the strike, at the rain, caused not by the loss of Sir Donald but the ~~understanding~~ <sup>realization</sup> I lacked the nerve to live my dreams?

The cloud base slowly lifted. A large moraine materialized above, then a snout of bare ice, then a mist-vague wall. Was that ice the Vaux

Glacier? That wall the foot of Sir Donald? The trail crossed still another torrent, apparently from the glacier, and if that was the right glacier this must be the right torrent. We left the path and scrambled up the bouldery avenue of waterfalls.

As we rose, so did clouds. Atop the moraine we decided the gray wall looming in gray fog belonged to Sir D. Off to the left the wall seemed to shade abruptly to a lighter, more sky-like gray — presumably the col. Nobody had seen fit to mention it was guarded by a naked cliff. Damn the titan gooks! American stumblebums would be lucky to handle the despicable Vaux. We dropped packs in a tiny meadow among moraines at 7000 feet. A pretty camp, some consolation. If the weather cleared we would, at most, attempt the shag.

However, we had the afternoon to kill and might as well look at the col. Rope and iron in rucksacks, we climbed moraines and talus. A possible route emerged — a horizontal crack leading from the talus across the cliff to chimneys that conceivably could be stemmed to the crest. As we ascended, the crack expanded to a ledge. And as boots made contact we found the "ledge" was so wide and smooth it needed only a yellow stripe down the center to be one of the better gookland highways. Canadians shrank from titansto supermen.

On the 8200-foot Uto-Donald Col we looked down to the Uto Glacier, the Beaver River, and over the valley to meadow ridges. And we looked up: northward to the steep spine of 9620-foot Uto, the summit hidden; southward to appalling overhangs of the Northwest Ridge and flawless slabs of the

North Face.

We sat, our bottoms on the bottom of Sir Donald, and stared. If clouds continued to lift we'd climb tomorrow. The Vaux? A piece of cake, no giant step at all, hardly worth the trip. The Northwest Ridge? Plainly not our definition of bouldering, yet what choice was there for friends of a friend of a friend of Mallory? We laboriously fetched packs from the pretty meadow, found a patch of dirt flat enough for ~~sleeping~~<sup>g</sup>, and collected water from snow drips at the glacier margin.

Half the afternoon remained and Uto now <sup>was</sup> cloudfree, the summit 1400 feet up and seeming closer; almost we yielded to a mad urge to run to the top. But no, we'd better save energy, forego the warmup, take Sir D cold turkey. It would be prudent, though, to feel out the start of tomorrow's ridge.

No longer buffered from reality by months and miles, with hard rock in hand, I was a quivering incompetent and soon stopped. Tom, more eager or more nervous, scouted to the first overhang, returning to report it could be passed by a detour onto the North Face, which wasn't completely flawless.

Encouraging — but myriad more overhangs required detours and the face might truly be flawless up there in blowing fog, lying in ambush. Our Wheeler Hut friend might be the sort who boulders where we would need pitons and slings.

We set the primus in a sheltered nook and repeatedly relit the wind-deviled flame and eventually warmed a hoosh of soup, corned beef, and canned potatoes. Dark clouds rolled on, rising but not thinning. The

entire Northwest Ridge was revealed — half a vertical mile of cold gray quartzite, swift clouds giving away their motion to the peak, making me dizzy. Dear God, the summit was terribly far. Smythe had come closer to the top of Everest.

We'd never done a pure rock route with more than several ropelengths of climbing, as contrasted to scrambling. We'd gained 2200 tough feet on North Peak but that was garbage and cedars. Here, starting from a col higher than all but a handful of Cascade peaks, we faced 2600 feet of continuous difficulty and exposure, ending at an elevation higher than Baker.

No storm would save us. When the sun touched the horizon the clouds exploded in flame and shriveled to wisps of smoke. Wind stopped. In eerie red brilliance and spooky silence we looked west to peaks and glaciers from Dawson to Bonney to Grizzly. Two lonesome Americans at 8200 feet in Canada as blackness surged from the east and a billion fires pulsed.

We snuggled into bags — and immediately were attacked by a "snafflehound," a rat said to be peculiar to the Selkirks above timberline, perhaps a mutation since the coming of climbers in the late 19th century. The creature concentrated on my pack the first half of the night, then switched to Tom, who repelled assaults with obscenities newly invented for the occasion.

Of true sleep we had none. In darkness we gave up the battle and ~~swallowed~~ <sup>masticated</sup> a ~~rat~~ pulp of cornflakes and lumps of powdered milk <sup>and icewater</sup> and waited for the ridge to crystallize. At 6 o'clock rocks took dim shape, the time had come.

In halflight we fumbled over frost-wedged boulders of the col. All those brave plans, all those dreams of glory — and now, sick to my stomach, I trembled with cold, shuddered with fear. Well and good to snap carabiners and talk big in winter. The oral history of American mountaineering is filled with heroes who every December sign up for expeditions and every June are kept home by appendicitis.

We roped at the foot of the ridge and Tom led the first pitch and set a belay. A deep breath, and follow. It has begun. The quartzite was well-broken yet solid, not a loose hold anywhere. And when I reached Tom he was sitting on a broad ledge — and I realized he so far hadn't said a single dirty word. My stomach steadied. He led again, and I followed, and the Uto Glacier was falling below and the surrounding emptiness was expanding. Now, the first overhang — we must go onto the awful North Face.

A sling at the top of the overhang was frightening — if a party must rappel, the North Face detour could be no cinch. But it was! Tom retrieved the sling — nothing less than \$4 worth of 7/16-inch nylon! Harvard boys, no doubt, of the sort constantly traveling to famous ranges and crapping out, then filibustering in journals. And they rappelled here! We Cascades provincials might not measure up to Canadians but we weren't the worst hillwalkers in the world. Where wealthy Harvards rappelled from expensive nylon, we were bouldering tied to poor-man's manila.

The laughter loosened us. Tom offered me a lead and the fretting of a waiting Number Two was dispelled by the concentration of a probing Number One. I became a full partner and that was the end of trembles.

Cold wind honed our skill as we climbed leapfrog, alternating leads and belays, a smooth-working two-man machine. Dawn lightened into morning and we passed more rappel slings. Clumsy Harvards! The rope, scarcely needed but worn for form's sake, impeded our pace; to reduce line-hauling we re-rope, wrapping coils around waists and shortening the interval between us to 30 feet — no pitch of the Donald was longer.

Morning sun brightened Uto. Still in freezing shadow, we here and there kicked steps up pockets of powder snow lingering from the storm we'd slept through at Abbot Hut. (Noel had told us the storm had put all peaks "out of shape," completely halting climbing by those who knew the country; retreating on Victoria was no disgrace.) To pause was to shiver but the sun glorified Selkirk summits blossoming north and west and south, and Rockies east, infinite horizons of sky-high peaks and sprawling icefields. We would climb many in summers to come, and others in equally exciting faraway lands. We drew even with the top of Uto and were halfway to the goal and moving free and glad.

Our upward rush was slowed by a few pitches exceeding bouldering, welcome tests. Often we cat-stepped the knife<sup>e</sup>/blade crest, exulting in tremendous exposure to Beaver Valley left, Asulkan Valley right. We savored quartzite with eyes and fingers and (through tennis shoes) toes — the clean edges, the layered, variegated tones of gray — the loveliest rock we'd ever caressed. Some was pearly white and in a more convenient location would have been quarried to build palaces.

Uto sank far below. We decided belays were a nuisance and climbed

simultaneously. Yet tension mounted because horrid surprises might be lurking and the nearer the summit the more crushing the defeat.

But if Sir Donald had a fault it was in prematurely conceding. The ridge gentled and we walked, and as we walked remembered — remembered months of anticipation and hours of self-doubt, the Pyrrhic victory on North Peak, the unlucky chance of the strike, the humiliation on Victoria, the lucky chance of the last-minute settlement, the lucky meeting with the Canadian at Wheeler Hut, the unlucky rain, the lucky sunshine — hours and days and months and years compressed in the triumphant minutes walking onto the 10,818-foot summit of Sir Donald at 11 o'clock in the finest morning of our lives.

We photographed horizons — there wasn't time to exhaustively soak them up with eyes; later we'd study snapshots and maps and fully comprehend where we'd been.

From our tennis shoes the eastern scarp plummeted 7000 feet to the Beaver River, a silver thread meandering parkland and forest of a fault-line valley dead-straight for 35 miles. Beyond stood the green plateau of Bald Mountain, the modest but ice-scooped Dogtooth Mountains, hazy emptiness of the Columbia trench, and then the Rockies from southern foothills to gigantic Robson, highest peak in the range.

Steeply below to the south spread the high white sea, some 15 square miles, of the Illecillewaet Névé, and across the deep hole of Glacier Circle on its far margin, the even larger Deville Névé and cold mysteries of the rarely-visited Dawson Range, Bishops Range, Purity Range, Battle Range. And farther south the Purcell Mountains and the shocking aiguilles of the



Bugaboos. We'd have to spend much time there.

Northward from Rogers Pass the super-wild Northern Selkirks climaxed in the Sir Sanford and Adamant Ranges. We definitely had to have a whack at that.

For the first time we belonged in Canada, and Canada belonged to us.

Restless eyes roving the great circle, we ate lunch. The larder was nearly bare; we had nothing left for the climb but Sailor Boy pilot bread and slabs of milk chocolate, which we made into "Sir Donald sandwiches" ~~and~~ washed down with orange-like juice.

The entire afternoon would not have sufficed for this place, this moment. Too quickly we recalled how far we must go in the short September day. We'd climbed on morning's strength. What was left for afternoon? Descent is harder — we'd met less than half the challenge of the Northwest Ridge. We inspected the Southwest Face, the line of the Vaux Route; one could run around and play hopscotch there. Noel wouldn't blame us for taking this quick escape — most Northwest Ridge climbers did. But our axes were at the col and crawling down the Vaux Glacier, pitons in hand, would be messy and graceless. By the ridge we had come and by the ridge we would return.

At 11:45 we confronted the downward plunge. Uto was far, far below — and when level with its summit we'd be only halfway to the security of the col. The ridge looked altogether new, strange, intimidating. Several false moves led into traps and we got as jittery as at dawn.

Yet with a pause or two for deep breathing and recollecting the

Harvards we adjusted to the new perspective, to the new posture facing not rock but air. The ridge was sun-warm, washed by cool breezes and exhilarating gusts. To take the Vaux escape would have been to throw away the best of the fun.

High in enormous Selkirk sky we flowed down the narrow crest in the stream of gravity. I was lighter than ever in my life, no lump of solid flesh, rather a bubble bouncing down exquisite quartzite. A flick of the feet and I could soar over the gulf to Uto, and kick again and fly to Eagle, then Avalanche, Tupper, Sir Sanford, and on, on, on.

Down, down, down, and I was sad to see Uto above because that meant the death of this day's life was near. Heaven would be to float forever down the Northwest Ridge of Sir Donald.

At 5 o'clock we flopped in the col. Ah, for another day, a week, to do it all again tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow. But night was coming, and the morning train. Packing, we noted our camp companion had eaten the leather wristloops of our ice axes. We held no grudge.

In the darkness of 8 o'clock we burst into Wheeler Hut. Betty had boiled up our total remaining provisions and served us the result — a slurry of noodles and <sup>canned</sup> tomatoes. But good! She, too, would leave Canada happy, having spent the day hiking to the Asulkan Glacier with Raymond, a young Swiss working on the trail crew.

During after-dinner tea Raymond arrived in person, a volcano of glee, chattering non-stop as fast as words could spill out: He'd gone to Glacier Circle to help rescue the Harvard (he despised wealthy Eastern Americans)

and while there had stolen a day to make the third ascent of Wheeler in the Puritys — worth putting up with Harvards! On returning he'd found Betty at the hut and learned we were on Sir D and proposed that he and she run up the Vaux to greet us on the summit (he loved Betty and Tom and me and all poor Western Americans) but settled for the Asulkan gambol. He mourned the civilizing of the Alps that had driven him to emigrate and rejoiced in his first summer roaming wilderness mountains.

Raymond, our new Swiss friend, enlarged the day and trip, as had the English gentlewoman at the Plain of Six Glaciers Tea House, and the Australian warden at the Columbia Icefield, and Joe the Scot at Mosquito Creek, and Warden Noel at Glacier, and our Canadian advisor at the Wheeler Hut — and Odell and Smythe and Mallory.

Standing from the table, full of noodles and tea, I sought a handhold before walking across the room — and laughed at the reflex — and remembered the wholeness of the 10 hours moving always with hands as well as feet, a unity of man and mountain.

I'd have to build new dreams. Sir Sanford, highest of the Selkirks? A good next step toward McKinley. Too soon to plan, though. Just back from Heaven I was depleted, serene.

If 1951 brought as long a leap beyond 1950 as that of 1950 was beyond 1949, it was going to be a hell of a year. I could not imagine 10 finer hours than the Northwest Ridge. If bigger peaks gave commensurately grander days, I must surely outgrow humanity and become a god.