

March 9, 2007

Mountaineering

My Climbing—doing what required the purchase & use of an ice axe & going where you couldn't get to the summit on skis & could fall, vertically—began with the BCMC, BCMC members. I have no recollection of climbing initially with the Varsity Outdoor Club (VOC of UBC); so, I probably began about 1956 when I graduated from UBC. Accordingly, I would have been climbing with people now deceased (not through climbing) & many who are not now climbing, either because of age or ailments, or, I must tell Bey, because they have wives. We all have different attachments to Mountaineering, to passing time in the mountains if only to sit & look & to have a Pilsner Urquell.

Since I had something in 2,000 & annually since, that has deprived me of memory, I can remember a few names of mountains & areas climbed in & of people I was with but other than a few notes of 5-6 climbs & some inadequate color slides, I can recall nothing. I am told by Gary Gordon, now Bishop of Whitehorse as of 2006, that I introduced him to mountaineering when he was a student in the Benedictine Seminary at Mission. We climbed, he said, Mount Slesse, about 7,650 feet. It was visible from the highway past Chilliwack & became known to the folk living in this Province when a commercial airliner crashed into it in 1956. When I was taken to the mountain for a 1st climb, I don't recall but I know I was pleased with myself for having done so. It is labelled on a photo in Chic Scott's book, *Pushing The Limits*, as "an awe inspiring tower".

I would have met Seminary students through a member of the Order, Fr. Damasus Payne of the Abbey & he in turn I would have met on a weekend Retreat at the Abbey with the Newman Club of UBC or its Alumni (probably the latter). Father Payne was killed not many years after I met him, in a fall in the mountains, occasioned I think, when he was taking a photograph & backed off a rock.

Interestingly now, the 'climbing fraternity' was small enough that in looking through a 'story of Canadian Mountaineering', Chic Scott's book, recording climbs & climbers, I can say I have known dozens of the people, & it may be, I have climbed with most. We, in the Province, had the Alpine Club of Canada & the B.C. Mountaineering Club. The Varsity Outdoor Club at UBC did organize climbing trips but its activities were more skiing & doing whatever young folk do when they are away from home. There was 1 mountaineering supply store & it was in Seattle, the R.E.I. Vancouver's Co-op, as I recall it, was a 1 room den somewhere, that sold the few pieces of equipment we were satisfied with in the 1950's, climbing ropes, boots, slings, ice axes, crampons, packs, some clothes & sleeping gear. Packs that could be bought were the wooden framed Trapper Nelson with a large canvas bag, no zippers, no small pockets. Norwegians introduced the Bergen, a metal framed pack & it had small pockets, even 1 in the top flap. It was much used in ski touring, a game indulged in by Scandinavians principally. It would not carry the load of a Trapper Nelson which could have the bag filled, a container of some sort or gear that wouldn't go into the bag, like a tent, poles, shovel & worse & more tied to the sides. By the time I began going out with the BCMC, the REI in Seattle was making & selling a tubular metal framed pack with a large red nylon fabric bag in excess of 3 feet high, very light weight, with zippered outside pockets. Its advantage over the T.N. was that it was lighter, the bag held more & it had pockets & could have a tied-on load as well & it was more comfortable & stable. The packs of today to be used for large & heavy carries require some learning to be able to use & a week's wages to acquire. I have a vague recollection of going to the REI more than once for they were providing equipment that better served our purposes than what was attainable here.

March 9th, 2007

Until I find a record of dates & places, I must record only those for which I have slides & these seem to be few. The BCMC had annual summer camps & unless I was on McKinley, Logan or St. Elias, I would have been on them. As well I would have gone on week-end trips the year through. In the winter I skied, acquiring a season pass for Whistler annually, about the time it opened for business. The Club, through someone's initiative sought to have its camps in areas in which little had been travelled, 'done', I guess one would say, so that we would be doing some 1st ascents. I associate this climbing with Martin & Esther Kafer, Swiss, who had come to Vancouver by, I expect, 1958. I list the camps for which I have slides. These were about 2 weeks from Vancouver & back. Access was by gravel road & walking in some cases, & by float plane in some.

-1961-Lake Lovely Water

-1964-Tomyhoi-Falls River

-1965-Icewall Lake(a dozen 1st ascents were made (Chic Scott)

-1962-Waddington (a special & not the usual summer camp)

-1968-Ape Lake

-1975-Blowdown Creek

-1971-Mount St. Elias-this was the 1st Canadian ascent.

Among the summer camps of the BCMC were the following (some of which I may have missed. May, I say, because some names are familiar & I think today, would not be had I not been on some)

-1963-Lillooet Icefields

-1966-Nirvana Pass

C.S. in his book refers to the Kafers as the movers & doers in Coast climbing. The attraction for both was to go into areas that were difficult of access & largely unclimbed, as was the Icewall Lake area.

These were the days, by 1960 into the 1970's, one could still finance a month or more in the mountains by doing as did Dick Culbert, induce the Government to provide money (like \$ 400 each for him & Glenn Woodsworth & Arnold Shives, to do some prospecting for minerals (Shives, now an artist, is Liam's God-father)

I can now enjoy reading in C.S.'s book about friends in the mountaineering world whose names are associated with the 1st ascents of mountains.

Alice Purdey-for a time, Culbert-is another, that C.S. says was the leading woman mountaineer of her era in Canada, & possibly North America. "The high point of her career came in 1971 when she reached the summit of St Elias with a BCMC expedition." She was our woman member. She was also with us on Mount Logan in 1971, the North ridgen not yet climbed, which we left so. Some years later I was talking to her about a phone call received from someone asking if I would lead a Club trip. I said to her that I told the caller I was too old-about 79 or so- & she said: Oh, I thought you were too old when we were on Logan. This was in 1971.