



(Photo. Mrs. Don Munday)

THE SPEARHEAD RANGE FROM NORTH
Wedge Pass towards left with frozen lake. The glacier above it was visited, also the glacier beyond canyon of main branch of Wedge Creek near middle of view.

Spring Ski-ing in Wedge Pass

By W. A. Don Munday

“THOSE things won't be much use here,” was the greeting our skis received when unloaded from the Pacific Great Eastern train at Alta Lake, B.C., the last week in April.

Wholly novel to local residents seemed the idea of taking ski to the snow; at lake level, 2,200 feet, snow lurked only in sheltered corners, for the winter's snowfall had been much less than normal. But we knew the driving clouds hid glacial peaks rising 5,000 to 7,000 feet above the lake.

Although a few pairs of skis are owned around Alta Lake, the residents seem never to have discovered the real utility or joy of them. The lake is a beautiful still-unspoiled summer resort with possibilities as a winter resort.

Our host was P. (Pip) H. G. Brock, the comfortable family cottage, “Primrose,” being our headquarters. The third member of our party was Gilbert Hooley. The fourth, my wife, was due on the next semi-weekly train.

Sproatt Mountain, rising directly for 4,800 feet from the lake, possesses a trail to a prospector's cabin near timberline, and Pip recommended this as a work-out. Scanty sunlight and generous shadows marched across the morning sky. Half a mile from Primrose we passed the tragic site of the aeroplane crash which took the lives of both Pip's parents the previous summer while he was on a mountain trip with my wife and myself.

The trail mounted through timber smaller and more open than in the true coastal belt, and undergrowth was negligible. At about 3,500 feet a disused cabin could readily be made habitable for a fair sized party. At about 4,500 feet Charlie Horstman, the prospector, amused us for half an hour with anecdotes about his year-round life there.

An open valley led us up to the bald southerly summit of Sproatt, with a view north down Green River and southward down the Cheakamus to Squamish valley. Tempestuous clouds almost wholly hid the broad snowfields of Garibaldi Park which spread eastward of the huge trench these valleys formed across the range.

We had hoped to thrust our questing skis across the miles of whale-backed white ridges extending promissively far north-westward of

Sproatt, but vindictive weather chased us down to shelter awhile in Horstman's cabin before resigning ourselves to a descent in rain.

"This hiking is getting to be quite a fad," Horstman told a climbing party the previous year. "You're the second party this year."

London Mountain (always Whistler in local usage) is probably rightly rated as a magnificent viewpoint. Though often climbed in summer not even a blazed trail exists. Pip's account of its open woods made it sound like a ski mountain to me, but some early morning vanity led (or misled) him and Gilbert into not taking skis.

About a mile down the railway a rough trail from R. A. Jordan's ranch at Nita Lake took us in a few minutes to the mountain's foot. I did not find really skiable snow for about a thousand feet upward.

Thereafter I loafed along while my friends fulminated at their folly while they floundered in thaw-undermined snow until we emerged to kindlier footing in the open where, many years before, an avalanche 300 yards wide had taken 50-foot ridges in its stride. It had originated in the cirque of a glacierette below the peak.

Snow squalls drove across the mountain, but a pallid sun held out hope of clearing. Above timber-line Pip and Gilbert went directly up a steep rock and snow shoulder. I worked round southward on wind-compacted snow and joined them for lunch perhaps 500 feet below the summit.

Visibility (or invisibility) being what it was, I left skis here, and we climbed as much as possible on rock to the windy western peak. Now and then a shift of the clouds revealed entrancing ski-fields lit with sunlight in Desolation Valley below the Black Tusk. Of the doubtless grand ski country for miles eastward of London Mountain we saw nothing.

Descent alone on skis in the fog was eerie. The inch or two of new snow did not spoil fast running, but turns swept it off in such masses that edges could not bite.

Back in the woods again, delight of such easy going probably led me to miscalculate distance and I emerged at Alpha Lake instead of Nita, being properly punished by a tramp through combined villainy of logging slash, swamp, thick brush and patches of waist-deep snow. Consequently the boys reached the railway a few minutes ahead of me.

Had I suspected the brilliant perfection of the next day I might have climbed the mountain again for photographs, and have come down in time to meet my wife on the 4.50 p.m. train.

The day after her arrival the four of us tramped ponderously with our packs for four and a half miles north along the railway to Green Lake, bound for Wedge Pass in Garibaldi Park. Recent logging gave Pip some trouble finding where the trail connected with the tractor road. Chas. Chandler had not

worked his trap-line up Wedge Creek the previous season, so the winter's exceptional wreckage opposed us with a tangle unmitigated by a single axe stroke.

Snow had wrecked the bridge across the torrent but an eight-inch log slanted across in a 50-foot span. Even when hampered with skis and a pack of 50 pounds plus, Coast Range mountain-goers are expected to amble callously across such places. However, one member crossed in a safety-first posture requiring seemingly that he be appropriately calloused physically instead of mentally.

A week before on Mount Seymour, North Vancouver, we had skied on more than ten feet of snow at 4,000 feet elevation—here in Wedge Valley, 60 miles distant, snow was not really continuous at the same height! First one leg plunged through knee-deep, then the other hip-deep, then both waist-deep, the final jar resulting usually in a blow on the ear from carried skis.

Glimpses through the forest of shining glacial sky-lines urged us on. In desperation we put on skis. The snow wore countless warts of ice three to six inches high. Most down timber was uncovered by snow. It was nightmare skiing, but we could at least make some progress on skis. A foot or two more snow would have made a lot of difference.

Wearily we camped at 4,300 feet—just about twenty-four hours behind schedule from Alta Lake! Enthusiasm began to "perk" late (very!) next morning. Without definite objective, we presently arrived at Billygoat Lake at the crest of the pass, 4,610 feet.

The most distant glacier of the Spearhead Range toppled shadowily in two successive icefalls. A string of lakelets, progressively smaller, led toward a wide white, strangely enclosed plain below another nameless glacier. A smaller plain, similarly mountain rimmed, led us to our glacier's vast lateral moraine.

Snow on the inner scarp of the moraine held scant margin of safety against avalanching. At no very distant date the ice-front used to cascade over the lip of its "hanging" valley 1,500 feet towards Billygoat Creek below.

We outflanked the lower icefall, mounted a broad slant to the base of the splendid upper icefall, then climbed a snowy mountain shoulder overlooking an abysmal valley with handsome glacial summits beyond, most of them nameless. Wedge Mountain soared magnificently behind us, and camp at its foot seemed rather remote except for our talismanic skis.

Up-curling clouds cursed the wide slopes with a blank light which for a few minutes eerily destroyed all idea of angle, contour and height a ski-length away. We almost groped our way down to the glacier.

We pointed skis straight down, the quite moderate gradient producing such immoderate speed (spring snow) for half a mile that my

wife declared "the marrow bubbled in her bones."

The bugaboo moraine had flung down rocks, mud and snow upon our tracks, so respectfully we took off skis and climbed to its spine. The outer scarp was safe but a bit heavy for stem-christies.

Miles slipped so easily behind us that to the surprise of the least experienced of our party we went to bed with the spring birds after we had dined mightily on beans, bannock and peaches.

Pip had climbed Wedge Mountain in summer. He said we must go up it on the morrow. It is a perfect avalanche factory and probably rarely fit for ski-ing. Frozen snow on its hugest avalanche track led us up for about 2,000 feet to snow-free southerly slopes dotted with opening crocuses (*Anemone occidentalis*).

Balking at cutting steps for 2,500 feet in frozen snow, we tackled one of the score or so of challenging rock ribs soaring to the summit snow-cap. (We all had nailed ski boots, three of us preferring Tricouni nails). Rock was somewhat loose, the mountain singling out my wife for most attention; a quarter-tone wedge dropped at her feet, and once she had to struggle to delay unprovoked descent of a bigger fragment till Gilbert could move clear.

"Higher than anybody has stood in Gari-paldi Park before," Pip reminded us on the peak, referring to the temporary extra height of the snow apex.

Weart Glacier, doubtless accessible from Wedge Valley through 7,500-foot passes, shone unscarred by crevasses for four miles northward. How we yearned to be there on skis!

In the glorious panorama of mountains—100 miles or more in diameter—countless peaks appealed to the skier or climber or ski-mountaineer. From southwest to northwest extended vast sky-line snowfields, regions to dream about. Just across Wedge Creek Valley gleamed the northern glacial mantle of the Spearhead Range alluringly near to our camp.

There we confidently expected to be next morning, but rain marred the day. In late

afternoon we prospected a route a mile up the canyon of the main branch of Wedge Creek to a flat upper valley below three glaciers. Many big pot-holes in the snowy canyon floor revealed the cascading creek below.

A rainy Sunday followed. We dissipated with attempts to make walnut fudge. Snowfleas swarmed over the uneaten remnants, and doubtless we swallowed an undetermined number in various items of food. Though a capable hopper, the snow-flea is no relative of the ordinary flea, and has no predatory interest in human beings.

Monday brought little better weather, but we persisted upward into rain clouds to the glaciers. Wet falling snow on the central glacier spoiled running. But at rain level, below a cliff capped by the misty menace of a hanging glacier, the spring snow on a long moraine crest of easy gradient amazed us with its speed—even in the driving rain it was worth repeating twice. Not expecting speed down it, we had discussed tallowing our skis. Pip, an unhallowed punster, said he was not counting on making any "tallowmarks."

The collapsing snow-floor of the canyon demanded "no-fall" ski-ing now. At the base of rock walls we shot past dark holes where the noise of water leapt at us like throaty growls of lurking monsters in their lairs.

This ended Gilbert's mountaineering education for the time being, as he was due back in Vancouver to receive a university degree, so we returned in rain to Alta Lake on Tuesday. Boisterous wind drowned the rumble of a pursuing freight train until a hundred feet from us its whistle just about literally blew us off the track.

About a mile below our Wedge Creek camp there is a one-man trapper's cabin, but I believe the same man has built, or is building, a larger cabin somewhere off the trail. It might be available for use of skiers.

Our outing led members of the party to alter a tuneful popular song to run:—

*"When we get too old to climb
We'll have this to remember."*

Timing by Radio or Telephone

A telephone line connected the starting and finishing line at slalom and downhill races at the Western Canada and Rocky Mountain Championships at Banff in March, 1936, and likewise will serve at the Dominion Championships there in March, 1937. The following notes in the *Boston Ski Bulletin* on two way Radio timing of Downhill races bear on this method: On Brodie Mountain on New Year's Day . . . two ultra short wave radio sets were used, furnishing a most desirable communication between the start and the finish, for reasons of safety and the smooth running of the race, as well as timing. Under this system all timing is done with one master stop watch at the finish line. This watch is continuously checked against two regular watches. The starter who is at the finish line gives starts from the master watch over the radio, and the racer and starter who is at the start line can hear it. The starter at the top gets a firm grip on the racer, and does not release him until the signal comes through.

Then the racer is off. The starting time is recorded both at the finish line and the starting line. An assistant starter at the top, who has a duplicate list of racers, records the order of start and their times by his watch; because if anything went wrong with the radios the method of timing would revert back to the usual one. At the finish line is the timer who clocks each racer and an assistant timer who checks his time. A recorder gets the racer's number and records his time.

The success of this system has been measured by its several advantages. The officials knew the times would be accurate and had complete control of the race at all times. The racers were assured of accurate times and liked the idea that at the other end the officials knew what was going on and that everything was O.K. The spectators knew a bit more of what was happening at the top and appreciated the smoothness with which the event was run off. By this system results can be announced very shortly after the race.