

VALLEY HISTORY

AND THE WINDERMERE VALLEY MUSEUM

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CONRAD KAIN

*information excerpted from OFF BELAY
article by John Miles, February, 1976*

Conrad Kain was born in Nasswald, Austria not far from Vienna in 1883, into a poor family living in a poor village. Early in life, Conrad developed a wanderlust as he climbed in the Austrian Alps. He began work in a quarry as a young boy but his free time was spent climbing. His knowledge of the mountains paid off and by 1904, he guided his first clients.

Conrad was a strong climber, blessed with natural ability and his skills developed rapidly. He built good relationships with his regular customers and many of his clients came to be his friends.

Over the next few years he became very dissatisfied with his life in Austria and decided he would have to seek his fortunes elsewhere. It was a time of great emigration to North America and that became his goal. He realized the importance of learning English and with the help of client-friends in Vienna, set out to learn it. He also, in 1908, became fully certified as a professional guide.

In 1909, Conrad learned of opportunities for mountain guides in Canada and through a client made contact with A.O. Wheeler, Director of the Alpine Club of Canada. The club had been founded in 1906 and sought good European guides to help develop its climbing program. Kain arrived in Calgary in June 1909 to a land of new opportunities. All around were unclimbed and unmapped mountains.

Unlike the European Alps, the Canadian Rockies contained no huts and few trails and roads. Most of the great

Canadian mountains, virtually all unclimbed, were so inaccessible that lengthy expeditions were necessary to climb them. In 1909, for example, it was a 250-mile pack trip to Mt. Robson, where he made a first ascent some years later.

During the summer of 1910 Kain, along with Longstaff and Wheeler, made a survey across the Purcell Range, travelling through the Bugaboo and Howser Valleys to Duncan River. This was the first time mountaineers had travelled among the magnificent Purcell spires. Conrad fell in love with the area and returned many times to make a number of first ascents in the range, notably of Bugaboo Spire, Howser Spire and North Tower.

During the next winter he did another survey of the Banff area and in the summer of 1911, with Rev. Kinney, made a first ascent of Mt. Resplendent next to Mt. Robson, a solo first ascent of Mount Whitehorn and many other ascents, at least twenty of which were with survey equipment. On the 1911 survey was Ned Hollister who invited Kain on an expedition to Siberia the following summer, and after a winter of trapping, he left for Europe. This expedition was not a survey but for exploration and zoological collections. After several months in Siberia, Conrad returned to Vienna and spent several months with his mother.

The winter of 1913 found him in New Zealand, very alone and very poor. He was 30 years old and very depressed and discouraged about his circumstances. In April a letter from A.O. Wheeler reached him urging him to return to Canada to a job surveying the Continental Divide. As a further enticement, Wheeler added that the Alpine Club would hold two mountaineering camps that summer - one at Lake OHara

and one at Robson Pass with an attempt at Mt. Robson from the east side.

On July 30, 1913, along with Captain Albert MacCarthy and William Foster, he threaded his way up the dangerous Robson Glacier to the top of the dome and on to the summit. Conrad later wrote of Mt. Robson, "It is one of the most beautiful mountains in the Rockies and certainly the most difficult one.... Mount Robson is one of the most dangerous expeditions I have made. The dangers consist in snow and ice, stone avalanche and treacherous weather."

The Robson climb is the feat for which he is most famous. It assured his good reputation and plenty of guiding work. It also cemented a friendship between Conrad and Capt. MacCarthy.

In October 1914, at the invitation of Otto Frind, a wealthy young Canadian climber, Conrad went as a guide to New Zealand's Southern Alps. During three months of climbing he made many summits among them 18 first ascents and several new routes. His skill so impressed local guides that the New Zealand Tourist Department invited him back the next year as assistant to the chief guide, Peter Graham. After that season he returned to Canada and stayed there the remainder of his life.

The two summers between the New Zealand climbing seasons he continued to work on surveys and guide for the Alpine Club of Canada. In 1914, accompanied by Capt. & Mrs. MacCarthy and party, he made a first ascent of Mt. Farnham, the highest Purcell summit. They repeated the trip in 1915 and 1916. Also in the summer of 1916 he led the first ascents of Howser and Bugaboo Spires. Conrad regarded the Bugaboo Spire as the single most difficult ascent that he had ever done.

The winter of 1916-1917 was spent trapping and on the MacCarthy's Karmax Ranch at Wilmer. It was there he met Hetta and married her in June 1917. They settled on a farm in Wilmer and Conrad became a fur farmer, trapper and hunting guide. He promised Hetta he would give up mountain

climbing and kept the promise for three years.

In 1923 he met J. Monroe Thorington and over the next ten years made many expeditions with him. His love for mountains never faded and he climbed to the end of his life. In his later life he wrote mountaineering articles and with Thorington wrote his biography, "Where The Clouds Can Go."

Hetta Kain died in 1932 and Conrad mourned her deeply, and in 1934 died himself. He was remembered by his friends for his wit, his gentle nature and his storytelling. Thorington recalled him being a kind, honest man.

Conrad Kain came to Canada as a guide and worked as such throughout his life but he was much more than a guide. People like A.O. Wheeler, Otto Frind, Albert MacCarthy and J. Monroe Thorington became his close friends. These men, all expert mountaineers learned from Conrad and taught him. Conrad himself never forgot his "peasant" background but his North American friends regarded him as their peer. They assisted in the realization of his dream, "to do something good and great for the world."

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**REMINISCENCES OF EDWARD
MALLENDINE
manager of the CVI
written September 17, 1912**

"First money I earned was on C.P.R. survey during school holidays in 1879 on lower Fraser River, before the Western division was completed in B.C. In 1883 I was in Portland, Oregon following the driving the last spike of the Northern Pacific Railway. In 1884 a year in California. In 1885 I was in Farwell, now Revelstoke, B.C. and saw Sir Donald Smith drive the last spike on the C.P.R. at Craigellachie on November 7th. I was one of the original signees of a petition to the Government of British Columbia asking that the new town

NEWSCLIPS FROM THE PAST

1955 "GOLDEN STAR"

An estimated 122 homes and businesses immediately adjacent to the highway between Golden and Edgewater in the Upper Columbia Valley will receive electricity for the first time when the B.C. Power Commission completes a new distribution system.

Power will be fed through a transmission line now under construction from the hydro development at Spillimacheen which is scheduled for completion in the early half of next year.

1916 "GOLDEN STAR"

January 6 - Frank Richardson of Athalmer, a Captain in the 197th battalion East Kootenay Light Infantry, went to Kamloops Monday to take examinations for a commission with overseas forces.

January 13 - A meeting of the ratepayers of Athalmer was held in the school house to consider whether they would care to join a consolidated school as suggested by the inspector, A.E. Miller.

The ladies of the Red Cross sewing circle met in the Windsor Hotel on Friday evening.

January 20 - Four more Athalmer boys have enlisted for the front. They are Bert Rutherford, William Pye, Chris Rawles and Arthur Foulds. They left this week en route for Kamloops to join the 172 regiment C.E.F.

The annual meeting of the Windermere District Agricultural Association was held in Athalmer. There are now 100 members on the books. G.E. Parham was returned as president; James McKay of Athalmer was elected vice-president; Samuel Brewer of Windermere honorary president and A.C. Cuthbert, secretary-treasurer.

The directors are Messrs. Ed Tunnacliffe, J.S. Johnston, John Jones, H.H. Peters, Joseph Lake, Walter Stoddart, Fred Kenward, James Lambert and Norman M. Marples.

1912 "THE GOLDEN STAR"

The work on constructing a new wharf on Lake Windermere commenced August 30 by the driving of piles to hold the superstructure. This will replace the wharf which has done duty here for some years.

The first issue of the Columbia Valley Times which will publish at Athalmer is due to make its appearance the first of September. The paper is under the management of Charles Johnston, late of London, England, who has had long experience as a printer and publisher.

A new swing bridge will be constructed over the Columbia River this winter close to the present one.

Work on the Dominion Experimental Farm buildings is going along, the first of the permanent farm buildings is completed.

1906 "THE OUTCROP"

There has been good iceboating on Windermere Lake the past few days.

For the first time in the history of this thriving town, Wilmer had two church services at the same hour Sunday evening but neither were overcrowded.

The Upper Kootenay Valley, from Canal Flat to the headwaters would make a magnificent game and park preserve.

A "Quebec Sugar Party" will be given in the Windermere Hall. The proceeds will be divided equally for the benefit of the English Churches at Wilmer and Windermere. All are invited.

F.L. Snook reached Wilmer with his four-in-hand freight wagon on Tuesday. He has been taking advantage of the good sleighing from Golden to Spillimacheen where he now has four big loads of freight which he will bring up on wheels.