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Impossible Heights: From Mining to Sport in the Mountain West, 1849 to 1936

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**IMPOSSIBLE HEIGHTS: FROM MINING TO SPORT IN THE
MOUNTAIN WEST, 1849 TO 1936**

By

Jason Andrew Strykowski

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

History

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Albuquerque, New Mexico

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DEDICATION

For Fran, David and Jill – my guides through life.

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WEST, 1849 TO 1936**

by

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ABSTRACT

The discovery of gold in California inspired a rush of amateur miners to the Sierra Nevada mountains in 1849. Meanwhile, Europeans hurried to their Alps to climb during the Golden Age of Mountaineering. These events, seemingly separate, came from the same basic impetus. The Scientific Revolution eased the old fear of mountains from the religious tradition and gave humans the license and curiosity to explore. Mountains also offered capital incentive to adventurers in the form of mineral deposits, tourism and the glory that comes with athletic accomplishment. Between 1849 and 1936, "mountaineers" transformed the nearly inaccessible high places of the North American West into destinations for industrial tourism. For profit and pride, these capitalists changed locales that had once only hosted temporary visitors into permanent homes.

This study charts the change from extractive industry to tourism in a handful of mountain communities throughout the North American West with a focus on those places most integral in the development of American skiing and mountaineering. In each of these communities the extractive industry led directly to tourism. Skiing and mountaineering became performative and utilitarian acts for the miners and their successors. In one community, ski races helped miners train for long seasons in the snow and backbreaking labor. In another, the death of a climber spurred the Europeanization

of the North American mountain by paving the way for Swiss guides. In Utah, a former miner sold his claims to the United States Forest Service so that the property could be transformed into a ski resort. Taken together, these are the stories of how North Americans took their obsession for the untamable wilderness and for profiteering and used it to create and sustain two different industries in the same landscape.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION: SILVER AND COLD

On May 8, 1963, Mayor William Sullivan of Park City, Utah could be found posing for a photo shoot. He appears in the frame of the picture along with the foreman of United Park City Mines (UPCM), Mark Jolley, an old miner and town marshal, named Tommy St. Jeor, and a burro. The jackass sported the biggest grin, of course, but it was Sullivan and Jolley who had the real cause to feel fortunate. The two were about to rewrite history, attract big industry and embark upon an effort that would save their hometown.¹

Sullivan called for the photo shoot and accompanying press conference, so that a crowd of locals would be present when he proclaimed their invitation to a parade set to march through town two days later. "Bonanza Days," as he called the event, had a two-fold purpose. The first purpose was to celebrate Park City's past as a capital of silver mining; the second was to herald its future as a mecca for skiing and recreation.

On that single day in 1963 – almost a hundred years after the beginning of the area's mining boom, and more than fifty years after that industry's collapse – Park City citizens proselytized the tone future, and feted the spirit of the past. Mayor Sullivan wanted to celebrate the change he saw coming. "The theme of the day," he said, "will be the contrast between the old and new bonanzas" that have, and will, support the citizens of the region.² The transition from industrial mining to industrial recreation, would later

1. *The Park Record* (Park City, Utah), May 9, 1963.

2. *Ibid.*

define much of North America, well beyond the Wasatch Mountain region of Utah. This parade celebrated that coming change for remote places like Park City.

Roughly thirty miles from the Great Salt Lake, Park City rests deep in the Wasatch Mountains, making it difficult to reach even in the summer. Despite its geographic disadvantages, the mines of Park City boomed once established there around 1869. The settlement blossomed into a small hamlet sandwiched between 12,000-foot peaks. However, with the economic crisis of 1893 the value of silver plummeted, affecting the worth of the mines, whose industry began a slow decline. Corporate operations in Park City limped along for a time, drawing some capital investments into the town. But flagging profits did little to cover expenditures after the turn of the century. The boom became an echo, and prospectors slowly trickled out of town.³

Sullivan hoped to arrest the outpouring. With the help of Jolley, and others, Sullivan procured \$2 million in funds to transform the mining town into a modern ski resort and vacation destination. With these funds, the city purchased nearby properties on which to build a gondola, a golf course, and plots for potential second or third homes for the vacationers they hoped to draw to the area. In this manner, they followed the example of communities such as Sun Valley, Idaho and nearby Alta, Utah, which were already making money as tourist hot spots. Park City seemed a natural choice to join the new rush. The Bonanza Day celebrations signaled the town's intention of joining the recreational ranks.⁴

3. Mark Wyman, *Hard Rock Epic: Western Miners and the Industrial Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

4. "Almost \$2 Million is Ready Now for Park City Construction," *Summit County Bee* (Coalville, Utah), Dec. 13, 1962.

Much of the town got involved in the festivities. Marshal Tommy St. Jeor anchored the parade alongside the supply-laden burro from the photo. Ahead of him, marched the US Navy Color Guard and the local high school band. Behind St. Jeor, came multiple floats brought in from Salt Lake City, a tractor, a few cement mixers, a group of patrolmen in jeeps, and a cadre of Japanese hikers on a United States tour, all of whom moved slowly uphill. Utah Governor George Dewey Clyde, Senator Frank Moss, and a group of employees from United Park City Mines waved to the crowd from inside their vehicles as the process progressed.

Fittingly, it snowed on parade day; not so much that the organizers had to call off the festivities, but enough to cancel the last little stretch of the route as it led uphill toward the Silver King Mine. The snow was, in fact, a good omen rather than a damper to the excitement of the 4,000 attendees, since bountiful precipitation in May hinted at a long ski season for the planned recreation. All the same, the cold weather forced authorities to end the route at the Silver Wheel Theater. There, some 300 people sat down for a period meal based on 1890's cuisine, and priced at a period-appropriate twenty-five cents. Following this meal, of mainly hash browns and sausage, the guests square-danced until the evening's close.⁵

The only hitch in the day's events, was that the cold weather prevented Parkites from witnessing Governor Clyde and his silver pickaxe break ground at the Silver King Mine. St. Jeor spent the preceding days picking up silver rocks from along the parade route to bury at the ground breaking site, so Clyde could appear to unearth them as a symbol of the new wealth citizens would find on the mountain. Construction was to

5. "Bonanza Day in Park City Proves Success in Every Way," *The Park Record* (Park City, Utah), May 16, 1963.

commence near the entrance of the old mine for a massive, state-of-the-art skier's gondola to take vacationers to the top of Treasure Mountain. If all went well, UPCM officials predicted that between tickets and real estate sales, the town could draw some \$50 million in investments over the next quarter-century.⁶

Although the change did not take place overnight, Park City became one of the top vacation spots in the world, growing at a clipped pace until 2002, when hosting the Winter Olympics put the small city on the international sporting map. Park City is now home to three major ski resorts and a booming market in second homes, proving that Sullivan and his contemporaries correctly predicted the growth of an industry. They also made themselves into knowing exemplars of a greater historical trend.⁷

More than fifty years later Park City wears its mining heritage on its sleeve. Much of the mining infrastructure remains standing and is visible to vacationers. Treasure Mountain, for instance, now called Park City Mountain Resort, still features the hoist used by the Silver King Mine to drag ore up the tunnels. The Resort is also highlighted by an old miner's lodge, which was renovated in the 1980's to serve meals to skiers.⁸

What Park City demonstrated in 1963, and what it continues to display today, is the connection between two very different industries that would appear to be opposites on the surface. Mining is an extractive business that profits from the destruction of the earth, whereas outdoor recreation depends upon the unspoiled ardor of the natural world. Yet,

6. "Droubay Predicts Investment of 50 Million Inside 25 Years," *The Park Record* (Park City, Utah), June 6, 1963.

7. Andrew Denning, *Skiing into Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).

8. "Park City History," last modified July 29, 2014, <http://www.parkcitymountain.com/site/mountain-info/learn/park-city-history/index.html>.

outdoor mountain sports are inexorably tied to mining throughout the North American West.

Mining led to an age of industrialized outdoor recreation, through the creation of physical infrastructure that was readily convertible to sporting traditions in the mountains. These separate industries are also connected by a cultural foundation built in the nineteenth century, and held over from the Scientific Revolution (roughly 1550-1700). In this period, the American Gold Rush (1848-1858) coincided with the Golden Age of Mountaineering (1854-1868) because new technologies for travel, coupled with human avarice and pride, curbed fears of the unknown, while modern technologies enabled both activities in what were previously the earth's most inaccessible places.

Scope and Narrative Summary

This dissertation covers the rise of outdoor sport, with a focus on skiing and mountaineering in the North American West, from the California Gold Rush (beginning 1848) to the Second World War (beginning 1939). The Gold Rush marks the beginning of large-scale industrial extraction, while the period immediately before World War II witnessed the birth of industrial recreation in the out-of-doors. So, these events serve as a good framework, within which to build a narrative. Some mention of the Scientific Revolution and early exploration attempts will cover the roots of the sports. And some discussion of the modern ski and recreation businesses after World War II will elucidate trends and explain the outcomes of what is described.⁹

9. Other sports, such as river rafting, might fit in this discussion. However, I've limited my study to mountaineering and skiing, as they are most intrinsically tied to the

To frame its questions, this dissertation considers chronologic case studies of relevant settlements. Each of the communities included for analysis typifies a greater trend in the change from mining to outdoor recreation among North American territories, and personifies an aspect of that conversion. Some of these locales were agents and instigators of change worldwide. These stories are also all related, despite their separations in distance and time, specifically to each other, as the people who tie the expansive outdoors together through tradition, tale and technique, are never far apart in the narrative experience.

This study starts with the Gold Rush, not because it was the beginning of mining operations in North America, or the start of outdoor recreation, but because it witnessed the modernization of both. Mining was an ancient art that changed rapidly during the nineteenth century, especially in States like California. Many of the mines in North America also shared a similar historical trajectory. They largely arose after innovations from the Gold Rush enabled them technologically. Then, many of the mines were destabilized by the drop in silver prices during the Panic of 1893. After this catastrophe, many of the extractive centers of the United States experienced only short periods of profitability until they closed permanently in the mid-twentieth century. American skiing followed something of an opposite historical path.

Several forms of winter travel already existed as popular pastimes by the beginning of the California Gold Rush, but the Gold Rush spread their use in North America. Norwegian-style skiing, for instance, arrived with immigrants sometime in the early-1800's and Native American raquettes, or primitive modern webbed snowshoes, world of mining. These are also the sports that grew directly out of the tradition of exploration.

were in heavy use by European traders and fur hunters at least a century earlier. Members of the John Frémont Expedition, as an example, reported the use of early skis during their travels across North America in 1804. By the middle of which century, around the time that James Marshall discovered gold at Sutter's Mill in the California Foothills, modern skiing and mountaineering were crystallizing in European thought as a viable mode of movement and recreation.¹⁰

Skiing was originally part of the European military tradition, and rose as a method of recreation during the Golden Age of Mountaineering, the period during which the most of the major summits of the Alps were first reached. The age begins with Alfred Wills' 1854 summit of Wetterhorn in the Swiss Alps, after which Europeans assaulted a number of peaks in the area, hoping to capture international fame; perhaps none more so than Edward Whymper, whose conquest of the Matterhorn made him a celebrity.¹¹

Whymper's fellow Briton, Albert Smith, surpassed Whymper's fame when he turned his obsession with Mont Blanc into a touring side-show, which played more than a thousand times throughout England. Smith would stand in front of a sketch of the mountain and regale the crowds with stories of his survival and endurance. Although, In actuality Smith was more a performer than an explorer, his success captured succinctly the Europeans' hunger for the mountaineering.¹²

10. E. John B. Allen, *From Skisport to Skiing: One Hundred Years of an American Sport, 1840-1940* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996).

11. Roland Huntford, *Two Planks and a Passion: The Dramatic History of Skiing* (London: Continuum Press, 2009), 68-69; Andy Selts, *Ways to the Sky: A Historical Guide to North American Mountaineering* (Golden, Colo.: American Alpine Club Press, 2004), 9.

12. Mick Conefrey and Tim Jordan, *Mountain Men: A History of the Remarkable Climbers...* (New York: De Capo Press, 2002), 23.

With this kind of notoriety, the sport spread rapidly across Europe, whose people flooded to the Alps in particular, where local guides were more than happy to take them up the mountain for a fee. As the number of interested climbers grew, they began to form interest groups to support travel and mitigate costs. The Alpine Club, which formed in England in 1857, pioneered this model of expeditions by creating a national organization for climbers. The English were among the first nations in the world to industrialize, giving them the social imperative and the financial ability to escape the rising cities and conquer the slopes. Their Alpine Club continues to be active today, still delivering Britons to the Alps. Such was the infrastructure of recreational commerce that was brought to America during the nineteenth century.¹³

These ideas migrated with European entrepreneurs as they travelled to California in search of gold. California mining camps filled with English, Irish, Welshmen and Norwegians, who arrived with experience in hard-rock mining, as well as mountaineering and skiing. Thrown into the mix were the various Asian and South American miners, who arrived with little idea of how to survive in colder climbs. In the merging of these groups, a unique culture arose in the American West, extrapolated mainly from the European experience of mountains and mining, but adapted to the American environment.

Resourceful miners in Sierra Nevada mountain camps, for instance, developed a primitive sort of wax to keep their skis slick in the dense, wet snow through which they trudged daily. This wax kept the valuable hardware in good shape for longer periods, increased speed, and decreased the effort needed for movement on skis. "Dope," as it was

13. P.H. Hansen, "Albert Smith, the Alpine Club, and the Invention of Mountaineering in Mid-Victorian Britain," *Journal of British Studies* 34, no. 3 (1995): 300-324.

called, was all the talk in the camps. The miners invented scores of different recipes for every type of snow, and every stage of the season. When racing became popular, dope applicers become the Sierra equivalent of today's NASCAR pit crews, using specialized knowledge to match conditions with chemical content and get racers back on the slopes quickly when their longboard skis failed.

The Sierra seems to have been an outlier in its preference for longboards, or "Norway skates," which were typically constructed of tight, vertical grained Douglas fir cut to eight or ten feet in length. Despite the fact they were eventually replaced by shorter more maneuverable European skis that resort goers preferred at the onset of the twentieth century, longboards quickly spread in usage through much of the Mountain West once they were introduced to the mining camps in the 1850's.

Their spread is often attributed to the movements of the legendary John Albert "Snowshoe" Thompson, a Norwegian immigrant who delivered mail throughout California's Sierra Nevada. Thompson's long treks and stamina made him famous. The tales of his prowess spread interest in the type of skis he used. The Sierra miners may also have spread longboard skiing when they enlisted in the Civil War, which caused a lot of migration and interaction among disparate Americans; or when they sought richer mineral deposits and moved to other territories. One way or another, these wooden skis used for racing and transport became a fixture of North American life.

Past their basic utility, longboard skis were used to create sport in the long winter months when the mines were not workable. Skiing cultures of recreation in mountainous mining towns grew to resemble, and hold a similar community-building purpose to the

baseball played in Eastern company cities – they brought people together and fostered local pride.

Longboard races were common in the Sierra until the first decade of the twentieth century. In La Porte, California, for example, miners gathered regularly, year after year, for winter races where they blazed down hillsides at speeds approaching 80 miles-per-hour. A ball and party almost always followed the races. These were major events for the isolated miners who were confined to mountain villages by their limited funds and the deep snowpack. In accounts of the parties that popped up in local papers, miners and townspeople were said to have stayed up all night celebrating. Slowing of the Sierra mining economy eventually resulted in the dwindling of the local population, however, making races difficult to sustain.¹⁴

After the turn of the twentieth century, the groups that set the standards in the mountains increasingly came from the cities rather than the isolated company towns. The first rudimentary ski lifts that appeared in the Sierra, around 1913, catered to this more pampered crowd of athletes, instead of the hardened miners whose races invariably included many long treks to the top of the mountain. These weekenders skiers and hikers formed clubs that went as groups up into the mountains and began to transform the terrain for tourism.¹⁵

The first of the North American weekenders outdoor clubs sprang up in the Appalachian Mountains of the East, in 1863; just a few years before the La Porte Ski

14. Mike McLaughlin, *Longboards to Olympics: A Century of Tahoe Winter Sports* (Carnelian Bay, Calif.: Mic Mac Publishing, 2010), 31.

15. Scott Lankford, *Tahoe Beneath the Surface* (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2005), 174.

Club was formed in the Sierra. This organization was founded by Professor Albert Hopkins of Williams College in Williamstown, Massachusetts, which is located right on the Massachusetts / Vermont / New York border and is visible from what is now the Appalachian Trail. Several members of the Alpine Club of Williams College (later the Williams Outing Club) went on to found the better-known Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) in 1873. Both of these clubs are still active today.¹⁶

In 1897, members of the fast-growing AMC, in search of challenges outside their native territory, took a few of their most promising climbers to a peak near Banff, Canada, in the Cascade Mountain Range, often called the American Alps. Although the peaks in Canada do not reach the same heights as those in the Alps, cold weather and sheer conditions make the climbing often more difficult and technical. The weather on Mt. Lefroy – the specific peak this group meant to summit – was not favorable that year, unfortunately, and the trip went horribly wrong. One of the most skilled members of the party, a prominent lawyer from a pedigreed family in Boston named Phillip Abbot, fell to his death while the others from his group looked on.¹⁷

North American climbers were horrified by the news. Abbott was one of their own, and a strong climber. A large funeral was held in Boston and members of the AMC wrote at length about the incident and its meaning. Much of the burden of blame for the tragedy fell on a local guide who took the AMC group up Mt. Lefroy. After all, this was an experienced group of climbers, all of whom had previously climbed the Alps under

16. Clayne R. Jensen, *Outdoor Recreation in America: Trends, Problems and Opportunities* (Minneapolis: Burgess Publishing Co., 1970), 26; *Ibid.*, 250;.

17. Appalachian Mountain Club, *Appalachia, Volume 8* (Charleston, S.C.: Nabu Press, 2010), 2.

local supervision, where they encountered no problems. European guides would be the favored leaders for American mountaineers in the latter nineteenth century due in a great part to the blame placed on the American guide after this tragic event.

Just over a year after Abbot's fall, as part of a marketing campaign aimed at persuading more people to travel west, the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) began courting European guides to escort wealthy Americans and Canadians up the treacherous mountains near Banff. Why go to Europe, claimed the Canadian Pacific Railway, when European-style climbing was available much closer to home? The Canadian approach to mountain tourism was audacious, if not original; effectively repackaging and selling natural beauty that had previously held little tangible value.

In the United States, the owners of the Union Pacific Railroad would eventually take notice of the Canadian plan and replicate it. E.H. Harriman, the railroad magnate often remembered for his relentless pursuit of the outlaw Butch Cassidy, chartered and planned an expedition to Alaska in 1891. Harriman brought along some of the top artistic and scientific minds in the world to help him explore the mysterious Alaska Territory in which he was looking to invest railroad money.¹⁸

The Great White North was just then beginning its siege of the American imagination at the end of the nineteenth century. The Alaskan bush attracted everyone from Edward Sheriff Curtis and John Muir (who went as Harriman's personal guests), to the Duke of Abruzzi and Jack London. They came for the rushing rivers and the abundant wildlife, or they came for the gold. They were always attracted to the mountains, especially the tallest peak in the United States territories, Mt. McKinley.

18. E.J. Hart, *Diamond Hitch: The Pioneer Guides and Outfitters of Banff and Jasper* (Banff, Canada: Summerthought Publishing, 2001).

McKinley, named by passing prospectors as a joke about its resemblance to the profile of then-presidential-candidate William McKinley, was the highest of many imposing Alaskan peaks. At the turn of the century, Americans began a contest to claim its summit. The frontrunner in the affair was Frederick Cook, an adventurous and educated doctor who made a name for himself on numerous expeditions to far-flung locales.¹⁹

Cook made his attempt in 1903 and published an account of the trip soon after. The trip and the climb were the stuff of legend, in part because the story was riddled with inaccuracies and geographical impossibilities that made it a good read for the masses. For a time, Cook's triumph was heralded. But his competition with Robert Peary, another famous explorer and Cook's nemesis to reach the North Pole, put Cook's reports of both McKinley and the Pole itself under the microscope. Among Cook's many detractors were a handful of Alaskan miners including a man by the name of Thomas Lloyd, an old "Sourdough" who moved up to the Alaskan bush from Utah. Lloyd knew the terrain well enough to find holes in Cook's story, and he was not shy about vocalizing them. Lloyd made a bet that *he* could *actually* climb the mountain and thereby prove Cook's tales were false.²⁰

A hardened frontiersman once employed in Harriman's hunt for Butch Cassidy, Lloyd assembled a team of four hard-luck diggers to make the long trek. They chose the dead of winter to make their climb in the hopes that the ice would be more stable,

19. Belmore Browne, Frederick Cook and Hudson Stuck, *Denali: Deception, Defeat & Triumph*, eds. Bill Sherwonit (Seattle: The Mountaineers Books, 2001).

20. Terrence Cole, *The Sourdough Expedition: The Story of the Pioneer Alaskans Who Climbed Mount McKinley in 1910* (Anchorage: Alaska Northwest Publishing Co., 1985), 7.

making the climb safer and less likely to release an avalanche. They set off with minimal supplies, and were not heard from for months. When the Sourdoughs eventually returned, it was with their own unbelievable story. They said that they had reached the top of the mountain and left a flagpole there as proof. But, nobody could see the flagpole from the foot of the mountain, and like Cook before them, their story did not quite add up. In a rush to get in on the story, several clubs and groups headed to McKinley to find the truth and to make their own summit bids. Before this time McKinley was already a fixture of climbing lore, but with Cook's and Lloyd's questionable claims it became a household topic of conversation, and the argument is ongoing.²¹

Both the Sourdoughs and the AMC climbers made news just as American outdoors clubs were gaining in popularity and prominence in the US. Almost a half-century passed since the first clubs sprang up in the East, but now their memberships were growing, and the weekend retreat became popular. Rope tows for weekend skiers appeared all over the mountains. Popular hikes and routes in places like Yosemite were overrun. Outdoor sports were monetizing and organizing.

By 1935, it was apparent that the wilderness was a potential cash cow. Using the infrastructure created by old mining towns, industrial tourist hotspots opened in towns such as Sun Valley, Idaho, Alta, Utah and Truckee, California. Over time, chair lifts replaced home-rigged rope tows. Mountainsides were stripped of vegetation. Second home developments proliferated. Pausing for World War II, tourism developed in the high places of the West for seventy years running.

21. Ibid.

The mining landscape proved surprisingly adaptable to skiing. Old equipment was reconstituted. Tailing dumps became handy ski jumps. And former mine operators discovered that skiing presented a perfect excuse to delay or entirely forego costly land reclamation projects. Most importantly, skiing gave an alternative source of income to locals losing their major source of employment.²²

Themes, Paradigms and Frameworks

Under the surface of this study lies a series of themes and fields of study, each of which owes a significant debt to prior studies and publications. Mining and skiing relate to land use, and, in this particular study, the human attitude toward the earth. Environmental history, therefore, is a key explicator; as is sports history, wilderness study and tourism development. Other pertinent issues include the body, exploration, and transportation, as they are affected by high-altitude environments.

Crossing each of these themes and fields is the concept and reality of mountainous terrain. Mining, skiing and mountaineering frequently require venturing into high altitudes that are commonly unpleasant. Geography plays a determining, but not exclusive, role in creating and sustaining these pursuits as industries.

Within the confines of this study, mountains function as a departure from other geographies. The architecture of mountains exposes mineralogical deposits and steep slopes, two elements essential for the activities of concern here. To be more accurate, tectonic action forces mineral deposits formed lower in the earth's crust to a point at

22. Some communities experimented with gambling as a replacement for mining. This alternative, like skiing, relies on specialized and commercial recreation to fuel tourist, but was more commonly doused by state regulations against it.

which contact with humans is possible. It just so happens that this geophysical realigning also creates features most prized for sports. This collision is far from a coincidence – mining, mountaineering and skiing all developed to take advantage of these places, not to shrink from their challenges.

In a sense, the union of workscape and recreational landscape could be construed as a "hybrid landscape" in the terms defined by Richard White. Both mining topographies and those used by sports are inherently influenced by culture, much as White predicted. "The nonhuman world is not about to vanish into culture, as much as our understanding of it continues to be inevitably cultural," wrote White. "But hybrid landscapes are where we spend our lives, and, as much to the point, where most wild creatures spend theirs."²³ These periods of hybridity between the mines and recreation only lasted for limited amounts of time.

Altitude also makes a difference to human biology. Many of the communities described in the following chapters stand a mile above sea level or more and, as a consequence, render humans less effective physically and often mentally. At high elevation the body must expend greater amounts of energy on movement. Human work on the mountain is, therefore, much harder. There is also truth in cliché when it comes to mountains. The air is indeed thinner up high, because lesser atmospheric pressure leads to fewer particles of oxygen in the ambient air. The body must adjust by increasing the number of white blood cells to carry the limited amount of oxygen.

The higher climbers reach, the more dangerous the exposure becomes. Mountaineers are constantly at high risk of pulmonary and cerebral edema; a condition in

23. Richard White, "From Wilderness to Hybrid Landscapes: the Cultural Turn in Environmental History." *The Historian* 66, no. 3: 557

which fluid fills the lungs or brain. Even basic altitude sickness can render climbers and adventurers vulnerable. For centuries these illnesses were recognized, but misinterpreted and misunderstood. The effects were obvious, and they served as yet another deterrent for humans to establish themselves at high altitudes, but it was unknown how to effectively deal with the causes and symptoms.

Elevation tends to scatter more than human energy. Between the erratic forces of weather, gravity and geology, energy transfers quickly and without specificity near mountain peaks. Severe storms, avalanches, rockslides and tectonic movements are all part of the mountainous environment. These are hectic places. Both mining and industrial recreation demand significant alterations to the environment and machinery constructed so that humans can function comfortably and efficiently.

Mountains, in other words, are truly wild and unpredictable. At some level, wilderness must always be a conceptualization, and the locations at the heart of this study both reinforce and combat that notion.²⁴ Roderick Nash's provocative *Wilderness and the American Mind* (2001) sets forth the problem of wilderness as a construct on a sliding scale of human presence and interference. The locations at the heart of this study are geographically determined to push themselves to the wildest side of that measuring chart. Precisely because of that placement, humans pull these environments back to the middle. Mountains are glorified and turned into fantasied objects of desire, but they are also genuinely dangerous geographical realities. All of the industries at the center of this

24. Max Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

dissertation attempt to tame the wild, even though their methodologies seem entirely different.²⁵

Accepting that wilderness is both a place and a state of mind and that elevation may be the cause of key ecosystem differences, I have relied on the environmental history canon established by Richard White and William Cronon. In particular, *Changes in the Land* (2003), Cronon's precedent-setting tome in the field, was pivotal in constructing this narrative. It also strongly influenced the paradigms set up by White in both his book, *The Organic Machine* (1996), and his essay "Are You an Environmentalist, Or Do You Work for a Living" (1995). The last two works introduce concepts of energy expenditure in environmental systems of work and play by the human body.

For further explanation of human play, we can turn to sports history, especially as it pertains to social formations and community. Among a handful of deeply analytical critiques of sport as an American convention and signifier, Allen Guttman's *A Whole New Ballgame: An Interpretation of American Sports* (1988) puts the history of sport in perspective. Guttman describes sport as structured play constantly tied to its organization, therefore distinguishing it from both haphazard childlike activity and more rigorous fashions of work. Some skiing and mountaineering traditions are inexplicably tied to military training. In this context, play in the mining camps could be construed as an aspect of physical conditioning for a capitalist army.

Exploration fills the breach between work and play in the West. Here we turn to William Goetzmann's *Exploration and Empire: The Explorer and the Scientist in the*

25. William Goetzmann, *New Lands, New Men: America and the Second Great Age of Discovery*. (New York: Penguin, 1986).

Winning of the American West (1966). Mountaineering and patrolling the high places of the North American West proved to be a valuable activity for the economy of the United States. Goetzmann takes a closer look at these explorers in *New Lands, New Men: America and the Second Great Age of Discovery* (1986).

The act of exploration was also a form of sport in the pursuit of glory and first ascents. Clarence King (b. 1842 - d. 1901), and other men commissioned by the US Geological Survey and the Army, became early climbers in the United States and produced a body of writing charting their exploits. But, as Goetzmann notes, they ceased to be trailblazers at the end of the nineteenth century as exploration itself became a realm of play.

In the twentieth century, the great Western trip fell into the hands of a new class of explorer, the tourist. Hal Rothman's *The Devil's Bargain* (2000) investigates a pay-to-play West, often using the term "scripted industrial tourism" to describe the way that the wilderness merges with the planned environment as part of the commercial experience. Outdoor recreation represents just one of several attractions available to these communities to encourage visitation. However, all of them, including gambling, relied on the infrastructure of transportation built in the American West over the course of the twentieth century and designed to bring people to remote places.²⁶ In this study, industry and recreation are constantly intertwined.

26. Earl Pomeroy, *The American Far West in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

Precedents

Turning from our thematic and paradigmatic groundwork, we can touch on those studies from which I build and borrow most directly. Skiing, mountaineering and mining all have long and distinguished literary traditions. A handful of these have a direct influence in the following pages.

No prior works mirror this one so much as those on the history of skiing. This sport, in part because it creates such wide demographic chasms, has inspired a swath of scholarship. The two works that have proved most valuable to this study are Annie Gilbert Coleman's *Ski Style* (2004) and Mike Childers' *Colorado Powder Keg* (2012). Both look at the development of skiing in Colorado and the cost of the industry's rise. Coleman focuses on the exclusivity of the sport and its inherent socioeconomic boundaries. Childers is more interested in land development than social formation. Hal Clifford's *Downhill Slide* (2002) examines more closely the relationship between skiing and real estate in a handful of mountain towns.²⁷

The touchstone history of skiing is E. John B. Allen's *From Skisport to Skiing* (1996), which traces the sport from its Norwegian roots in America to the beginning of the Commercial Age. Most usefully, he draws out the concept of *idraet* - the Norwegian notion of physical fitness through sport for a healthier life and military excellence. It is impossible to escape the idea that skiing ties in to a militaristic tradition. The sport was

27. Annie Gilbert Coleman, *Ski Style: Sport and Culture in the Rockies* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004); Michael W. Childers *Colorado Powder Keg: Ski Resorts and the Environmental Movement* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012).

designed to allow travel under difficult conditions, but even as it has evolved into recreation, the insistence on the sport's ties to healthy living has not diminished.²⁸

Mountaineering creates a less specific architecture than skiing, because infrastructure is not as essential to the sport. The extant effect of mountaineering is, therefore, not quite as easy to follow. Rather, mountaineering ties directly to exploration and industry in other ways. While skiing intersected with, and experienced a great boom during the Gold Rush, mountaineering's Golden Age grew out of the Scientific Revolution and reached maturity in the mid-nineteenth century.²⁹

Robert MacFarlane in *Mountains of the Mind* (2003)³⁰ writes about mountaineering in the broader context of geography and exploration, building something of an intellectual historiography for the sport. For MacFarlane, the impetus to climb came from the Scientific Revolution and grew into a fabled contest for peak bagging. Competition soon bred recreation as technology allowed more and more people to reach the summit.

As that happened, the effects of high altitudes on humans, particularly upon their bodies, became increasingly apparent. Susan Schrepfer effectively addresses climbing and the gendered body in *Nature's Altars* (2005)³¹. For her, the body and the mountain environment are inseparable. In victory over the sublimated mountain, she wrote, the

28. E. John B. Allen, *From Skisport to Skiing: One Hundred Years of an American Sport, 1840-1940* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996.)

29. T. Louis Oxley, *Jacques Balmat: Or, the First Ascent of Mont Blanc, A True Story* (London: Kirby and Endean, 1881).

30. Robert MacFarlane, *Mountains of the Mind: Adventures in Reaching the Summit* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003).

31. Susan R. Schrepfer *Nature's Altars: Mountains, Gender, and American Environmentalism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005)

body develops. Schrepfer extends her interest to the landscape itself, finding evidence of gendering in the names of the mountains.

Mountains are a platform that can do far more than create gender roles. They also grant acclaim and acceptance. They can even breed wealth based on sport alone.

Mountaineering would ultimately evolve into the very structured sport of wall climbing.

As Joseph Taylor notes in *Pilgrims of the Vertical* (2010),³² climbing became incorporated in the early-nineteenth century and would soon turn rock walls into their factories, layering them with bolts and lattice works. Yosemite was transformed from a preserved wilderness to the world's most famous outdoor climbing gym.

Before its second life as a climbing mecca, Yosemite drew the world's attention as the celebrated cause of John Muir. It's glacial landscape became the crossroads for Americans torn between John Muir's preservationist methods and Gifford Pinchot's conservationist aesthetic. Muir's biography provides useful context for this study. The Sierra Club he inspired will also play a central role. Michael Cohen's biography of the Sierra Club and Donald Worster's biography of Muir will also be referenced.³³

As it comes to the extractive businesses and their toll on the environment, a few studies of mining are essential and relevant. For background, and a general understanding of the processes involved, Otis Young Jr's *Western Mining* (1970) is invaluable. Also of great use is Rodman Paul's and Elliott West's, *Mining Frontiers of the Far West* (2001). Tim LeCain charts the development of open-pit mining and its consequences for the land

32. Joseph Taylor, *Pilgrims of the Vertical: Yosemite Rock Climbers and Nature at Risk* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010).

33. Michael Cohen, *The History of the Sierra Club, 1892-1970* (New York: Random House, 1988); Donald Worster, *A Passion for Nature: The Life of John Muir* (London: Oxford University Press, 2011).

in his *Mass Destruction: The Men and the Giant Mines that Wired America and Scarred the Planet* (2009).³⁴

Recent studies have expanded the conversation on mining and mining communities. Principle among those is *Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold Rush* (2000), Susan Johnson's groundbreaking analysis of the people who populated the mines. At some level, this is a study of social activity in the mines, an additional layer added to Johnson's study of social formation and different sorts of leisure. Mary Murphy explores similar issues in *Mining Cultures: Men, Women, and Leisure in Butte, 1914-1930* (1997), but she looks at a different variety of mining in a very different, more industrial, locale. Duane Smith reconstructs the metropolitan quality of the mines in *Rocky Mountain Mining Camps: The Urban Frontier* (1967).³⁵

Finally, regional histories were indispensable for the case studies that comprise each of the following chapters. Journalist William Banks Berry compiled a great deal of information in his book on high California, *Lost Sierra: Gold, Ghosts and Skis* (1991). In Utah, the work of ski pioneer Alf Engen proved very relevant. Two studies of the Banff region in Canada by E.J. Hart are equally illuminating.³⁶ Idaho's Sun Valley is so

34. Timothy J. LeCain, *Mass Destruction: The Men and Giant Mines that Wired America and Scarred the Planet* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2009).

35. Susan L. Johnson, *Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold Rush* (New York: Norton, 2000) Mary Murphy *Mining Cultures: Men, Women, and Leisure in Butte, 1914-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997.) Duane A. Smith *Rocky Mountain Mining Camps: The Urban Frontier* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967.)

36. E.J. Hart, *The Selling of Canada: The CPR and the Beginnings of Canadian Tourism* (Banff: Altitude Publishing, 1983); E.J. Hart, *Diamond Hitch: The Pioneer Guides and Outfitters of Banff and Jasper* (Banff: Summerthought Publishing, 2001).

legendary now that the truth is almost obscured by the myths, but Wendolyn Holland offers thorough coverage in her book, *Sun Valley: An Extraordinary History* (1998).³⁷

Placing This Study

The tie between skiing and mining is readily observable to anyone who has set foot on a ski resort in the North American West, or any of the nearby bars and retail establishments. This point is not lost on Annie Gilbert Coleman, or many other historians of skiing. The ghosts of mining that linger in the resorts do more than sell souvenirs and shots of whiskey. My intention through the course of this dissertation is to prove that the mines, and the people who worked them, contributed to the creation of the large-scale industrial-recreational complex that now dominates America's outdoors scene.

As this work delves into human motivations behind mining, mountaineering and skiing, the commonalities that arise, go well beyond coincidence. These pursuits seem so similar, because outdoor recreation in the North American West is inherently an industrial activity. That connection was manifest from the dawn of mountaineering, and, to a lesser degree the rise of skiing. Early mountaineering and skiing served utilitarian commercial purposes. Mountaineering was a tool of exploration and prospecting and skiing was equally designed for mobility. Chapter 2, of this dissertation examines the roots of these sports in Europe, mainly in the Alps, and their intrinsic tie to capitalist activity. The corporatization and industrialization of both activities began almost with their respective modern inventions.

37. Wendolyn Holland, *Sun Valley: An Extraordinary History* (Boise: The Idaho Press, 1998).

Chapter 3 explores the California Gold Rush communities and their early adaptation of ski clubs as a method of involving and conditioning miners who might otherwise fall prey to lack of activity and depression in the winter. The races that these camps organized resembled the semi-pro baseball games that dominated factory life in the Midwest and Eastern United States and served the same general function. Although many permutations would arise over the next century, this was the cradle of American skiing. While these races may seem lost to history as outliers, they became instrumental in the promotion and styling of the Sierra's modern resorts.

Chapter 4 expands the study of clubs in North America. While groups in the Sierra formed in the isolated mining camps, mountaineering clubs formed in urban areas and specialized in retreats to nature. The Appalachian Mountain Club changed the outdoors scene in North America after a major accident left one of their most prominent members dead. The result was a drive to create a uniform mountain experience that still determines the look and feel of high-altitude playgrounds.

Chapter 7 witnesses a major shift in the dynamic of exploration and contestation. At the center of this story is America's tallest peak, Mt. McKinley. The contest for reaching the peak of that mountain grabbed the attention of Alaskan miners, New York socialites and much of the rest of the country. The resulting hullabaloo said much about access and figurative ownership of the mountains during the twentieth century.

Chapter 9 picks up with the creation of the modern outdoor recreation industry in Sun Valley, Idaho. The first destination of its kind in North America, its founders effectively converted an old mining town into a state-of-the-art attraction. The Union

Pacific Railroad created Sun Valley in the hopes of spurring traffic on to the rail. But, the new form of skiing they invented was tailor-made for the automobile.

Among the many former mining localities to follow Sun Valley's example was Alta, Utah. Like nearby Park City, Alta yielded a great deal of silver before rising costs of operation defeated the mines. Much of the land fell into the hands of an eccentric old prospector who failed repeatedly to get the mines up and running, so he promoted the area as a ski hill and eventually gained the favor of the U.S. Forest Service, avoiding costly reclamation fees. Chapter 10 looks at the mayor of Alta and its direct transformation from mining center into ski resort.

Finally, this study concludes where it began – in Park City. The opening of ski operations there witnessed a strange holdover from the old days of mining. Former miners were employed to drive skiers through a drift to the top of the mountain on a converted underground rail dubbed the "Skier's Subway." These drivers were literally linking the past and the future.

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While there is a certain irony in the historical progression from extractive to recreational industry, the similarities between the two forms of businesses reveal an aspect of the way humans interact with some of the more extreme environments on earth. Difficult geographies are attractive because of the opportunities they present and the dangers they pose. Miners had the audacity to follow deposits into these regions, while explorers and vacationers made a point of seeking them out for recreation and personal glory.

The environments at the center of this study are those that shift the fastest on Nash's sliding scale of wilderness. Mountains, by their very topography, defy human presence. These geographies threaten the body with altitude and challenge man-made construction with ever-shifting weather and geologic action.³⁸ Mountains are a region apart. Humans are not meant to reside in these places and make changes upon the land to them. At altitude, humans are solely visitors who stay only long enough to extract natural resource and then move on to a safer and lower plain. Yet, the difficulty of these environments only makes them more attractive. Miners, adventurers and developers targeted these high countries and sought to make a lasting impact upon them to prove that the wildest environments could be civilized the fastest and to capture the pride available to those who could control the summit.

When we follow this imperative we come to understand why the Golden Age of Mountaineering coincided so closely with the Californian Gold Rush, so many mining areas converted so quickly to ski resorts; and, finally, how the high-altitude vacation became a nearly uniform experience for so many travelers in the modern era. We also come to understand that the land itself has a distinct agency in environmental history. The topography and shape of mountains determined their human interaction. For some time, peaks scared away people. Then, mountains only welcomed temporary visitors. Groups that sought out these areas for their lush animal life and the green fields watered by snowmelt. The modern age then gave humans the mental tools and capitalistic need to not only visit the mountains, but establish themselves as permanent residents. Thus, miners

38. Nash, *Wilderness in the American Mind*, 7.

came for the wealth of precious metal and then stayed to subdue the mountain using recreation and tourism. Capitalism and bravado fueled generations of mountain-goers.

This study traces the drive to make mountains into hybrid landscapes in order to call attention to the dangers of an uncertain future. Rapid climate change has lessened the amount of snowfall at many of the world's ski resorts. As a result, ski areas will sell fewer lift tickets and experience less tourism traffic. Fewer people will visit and pay for meals, travel and rentals. Fewer people will buy second homes. Once again, capitalists will begin to look for alternative ways to make a profit from the mountain. Perhaps, they will return to mining and the relationship that people have formed with the mountains will continue to be unstable and dangerous.

CHAPTER 2: FROM THE TOP - THE SKIING AND MOUNTAINEERING TRADITION

The modern age and capitalism gave rise to two sports of fame and profit.

In the fall of 1853 a handful of professional French guides and the adventurous Englishman Michael Carrier, trekked through the alpine Valley of Sixt, just south of present-day Geneva, in search of an unusual prize: the body of a climber who perished on a glacier some 19 years earlier. According to an eyewitness report, lay concealed under 400 feet of ice and snow in a glacial crevasse. The corpse belonged to mountaineer Jacques Balmat, the first man in recorded history to summit Mont Blanc.¹

Mont Blanc stands at some 15,780 feet high, making it the tallest mountain in the Alps and in Europe. Though surrounded by equally imposing peaks, Mont Blanc has a striking profile cut by glaciers and crevasses. Even the lower buttresses and slopes are covered in snow much of the year. Frequent storms ravage the area, making the massif unpredictable and consistently dangerous even to modern climbers. Nearby peaks can be equally treacherous. The neighboring Matterhorn and Wetterhorn are sharp granite spires that seemed utterly unclimbable to early enthusiasts.

Regardless of the perilous geography of the Alps, Europeans moved into the lowlands centuries ago. These hardy souls were known as "mountaineers" long before

1. Oxley, *Jacques Balmat*, 35.

athletes would later reclaim and reassign the title for themselves.² These mountain-dwelling locals maintained an intimate knowledge of the peaks that overlooked their homes. The French guides who joined Carrier insisted on interviewing some of these nearby residents before they began their recovery expedition to gain local knowledge.

They had reason to be concerned about the trail ahead of them. The Frenchmen found trouble almost immediately. After a three-mile hike the "intrepid guides commenced a rapid ascent along the edge of the precipice; first they had to climb grassy slopes, alternating with almost perpendicular rocks," wrote Carrier. From there, they had "to cross several deep ravines before, arriving at the foot of a glacier."³ They believed Balmat would be nearby.

When they finally reached Balmat's icy tomb, Carrier recorded that "It was with sentiments of deep emotion that our guides regarded the frightful chasm, where Balmat had met so tragic a fate."⁴ Balmat's great nephew, Auguste, himself an accomplished guide, volunteered to rappel into the crevasse. He only made the descent for a number of feet before he thought better of it and signaled to his crew to pull him up. Disappointed, Carrier's team walked back to Sixt without the body of Jacques Balmat.⁵

Although Balmat was not to receive the Christian burial that would give solace to his family; it was fitting that he should be buried in the ice. The high Alps had long been his home, and he showed little fear of them throughout his life. Balmat walked to his

2. Nineteenth century miners who relocated to the mountains of the American West were also dubbed mountaineers.

3. Oxley, *Jacques Balmat*, 36.

4. Ibid., 35.

5. Ibid., 36.

death against numerous warnings to avoid the Valley of Sixt. He refused to listen. There was gold in the region, however. Despite the danger, Balmat believed he could wrest some of the precious mineral from its high perch. He pressed forward with the confidence of an experienced mountaineer who made a living hunting for crystals in the mountains. He was accustomed to long days on the trail and nights spent bivouacking in the cold.

Born in the Chamonix region of France, in 1762, Balmat was literally raised in the shadow of the Alps.⁶ He grew accustomed to the mountains and demonstrated a knack for exploration early on. For most of his life he worked as a prospector, foraging for gold and crystals. Balmat earned international fame when he began the chase for a different sort of valuable. Instead of a precious metal, Balmat joined the hunt for a purse.⁷

This prize stood for nearly thirty years; ever since Swiss aristocrat Horace Benedict de Saussure put a reward on the summit of Mont Blanc. No one, including de Saussure, had managed to make it to the top. Balmat tried to make it on his own, but failed. When, by chance, on the way back from one solitary attempt, he bumped into Gabriel Paccard. Paccard was a local physician with plenty of climbing experience. By pooling their collective talents, they figured they would have a better chance. The two decided to make the climb together.⁸

They departed on August 7, 1786, aiming for the top of Europe. They elected to take a route that, even by modern standards, is quite dangerous – a ridge between two glaciers called Montage de la Cote. They bivouacked a night, using rugs to stay warm,

6. Ibid., 6.

7. Ibid., 1.

8. Jim Ring, *How the English Made the Alps* (London: John Murray, 2001), 22.

before pushing to the summit where the ridge comes to an intersection. The cold bit Paccard's fingers and caused him to temporarily lose his sight. They still managed to trudge up to the top before turning around almost immediately. From the single-pointed summit, the snowy Alps could be seen in every direction. Good weather and clear skies allowed the duo to make the descent safely, however, and moonlight guided them back to Chamonix.⁹

Balmat and Paccard collected their reward after their return, but the two explorers were also rewarded with international fame. Newspapers reported on the climb to a curious European public. Some were so impressed by the feat that they hoped to replicate it. In the years following their achievement, Balmat and Paccard took a number of others back to the top, including de Saussure. They had singlehandedly popularized a sport, and, created a market for mountain guides. Balmat hosted visitors to the Alps for the rest of his life.¹⁰

The ascent of Mont Blanc encapsulated the major themes of the next century of outdoor sport. Balmat and Paccard seamlessly combined sport, scientific exploration, tourism and the search for mineral resources in their adventures. The two were essentially commissioned researchers working under the banner of Saussure, a talented scholar who attained a post as professor at the Geneva Academy at the tender age of just 21. The young philosopher fell in love with the Alps, and the reward he offered for reaching the

9. Oxley, *Jacques Balmat*, 30.

10. *Ibid.*, 32.

mountain ranges' highest peak was born out of this enthusiasm. He almost singlehandedly spun the sport of mountaineering out of the age of modernism.¹¹

De Saussure's excitement first had to overcome the Europeans' longstanding aversion toward the wilderness, which they largely feared as unknown and cursed. Mountains, in particular, were thought to be virulent parts of the world's anatomy. These geographic bodies were misunderstood and frequently misinterpreted. Avalanches were misconstrued as the result of minor happenings, like the movement of a bug or bird. Fear of the extreme and the untamed was the norm.¹² The Alps, in particular, were "a region essentially supernatural, a hazardous and uncomfortable journey, inhabitants stricken with poverty and disease."¹³

The roots of this sentimentality and these mythical phobias of the mountains were centuries old by the time that Balmat and Paccard made their climb. The forests belonged to malevolent creatures of fairy tales, not to adventure-minded civilians. The Alps, for instance, were said to be the home of a particular breed of dragon that would likely descend on those foolish enough to enter its realm on the mountain.¹⁴ Fairy tales and religious dogma created only part of the rift between humans and their environment. These attitudes were holdovers from Judeo-Christian beliefs dictating that the wilderness was the home of the devil. "In early and medieval Christianity, wilderness kept its significances as the earthly realm of the powers of evil that the church had to

11. Ring, *English Made the Alps*, 21.

12. Macfarlane, *Mountains of the Mind*, 15.

13. Ring, *English Made the Alps*, 15.

14. Peter Hansen, *The Summits of Modern Man: Mountaineering After the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 11.

overcome."¹⁵ If not cultivated and civilized, it was thought, these dangerous places would only grow larger and more pernicious. These parables, be they in popular form or as scripture, served the very practical purpose of scaring people away from the woods.

The woods offered plenty of real-life dangers emanating from actual flora and fauna. Even the mountaineers who lived in the Alps, and elsewhere, were careful to avoid unnecessary trips through uncivilized regions. The developed areas that offered safe haven from the wilderness arose out of a process that similarly rendered the wilds unnecessary for human survival. In *The Idea of Wilderness* (1991), Max Oelschlager explains how the divide between people and their environment formed and grew:

The separation of humankind from nature's embrace began long ago with the Neolithic turn and the advent of civilization in Sumeria and Egypt. The Pre-Socratics intensified the separation by making nature an object of intellectual study; the paragons of Athens reanimated the natural world, conceiving of nature as organic and self-moving, yet they divorced the essence of our humanity (psyche) from nature.¹⁶

Humans, in other words, removed themselves from the wilderness by developing primitive technologies and agriculture. These developed areas, which offered safe haven from the wilderness, arose out of a process that rendered the wilds unnecessary for human survival. Humans reinforced that separation by creating studies, stories and cultural mores warning citizens to stay within the safety of civilization's walls and boundaries. The process worked slowly and after enough time collected knowledge eventually achieved the opposite effect.

Such mores were not to last, however. The Renaissance bred Modernism which, in turn, begat the Scientific Revolution. This intellectual movement introduced a new

¹⁵. Nash, *Wilderness in the American Mind*, 17.

¹⁶ Oelschlager, *The Idea of Wilderness*, 95

method of thinking that stood in stark contrast to the secular traditions of wilderness comprehension. Sir Isaac Newton marked this period through his theories on physics. The concept of gravity explained the mechanics of the natural world to the layman and scientist alike. "The new physics realize[d] humankind's desire for a logical and ostensibly absolute understanding of the natural world."¹⁷ So, the shroud of mystery upon the earth could be lifted in favor of rational investigation.

The Scientific Revolution demystified the wilderness and made it more appealing. While other scientists could test their hypotheses in a lab, explorers had to take to the field. Discovery was the key tool for adventurers. In this manner, the Revolution ushered in the great age of cartographers; turning the previously undesirable into the highly prized. There was a great deal to learn from the wilderness for those who were able to brave its perceived terrors.

Among the first scientists to step into the breach were the geologists, for whom the study of the earth and its formations was paramount. Sir Charles Lyell became the most famous of these early geologists. His book on the foundations of the earth served as a building block upon which Charles Darwin based his theory of evolution. Lyell's work also changed the general conception of mountains and other extreme geologic formations.¹⁸

The scientific approach would ultimately be just one of many methods for reconsidering nature. Others, such as Romanticism and Primitivism, would revere and venerate both nature and the condition of being wild. Meanwhile, the Roman Catholic

17. Ibid., 90.

18. Macfarlane, *Mountains of the Mind*, 37-40.

Church maintained its traditional interpretation of nature. Although these paradigms may seem contradictory, they all coalesced in the minds of nineteenth century climbers, who managed to seamlessly blend these disparate schools of thought during their adventures. The scientific approach to nature, however, was just one of several paradigms to wrestle with the meaning of nature.

The Romantics idealized the woods and made them a place apart from the growing urban centers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In many respects, the Romantics were the exact opposite of their Judeo-Christian predecessors. They treasured the wilds. Poetic passages about the forests appeared in popular eighteenth century literature, awakening a widespread interest in the mountains. Historian Roderick Nash sees Romanticism as "an enthusiasm for the strange, remote, solitary, and mysterious."¹⁹

Both of these movements were in counterpoint to the Enlightenment while the Scientific Revolution also gave rise to another movement – capitalism. Nothing displays this change better than the publication of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, which, initially, increased the distance between people and nature. According to Oelschlager, "with the publication of *Wealth of Nations*, the line between civilization and the wilderness was clearly drawn."²⁰ Yet, capitalism would ultimately fuel a growing interest in the starkly wild places on Earth. Mountaineers at the top of their game stood to make profits from their achievements. The English Alpinists of mid-nineteenth century all profited from their climbs. Even Balmat managed to turn his climbing skills into a

19. Nash, *Wilderness in the American Mind*, 47.

20. Oelschlager, *Idea of Wilderness*, 95.

cottage industry. Explorers wanted to enter nature because they knew they could extract valuable materials from it, or at least point others in the direction of those potential commodities.

Despite the trailblazing efforts of Balmat and Paccard, as well as the changes in perception championed by Lyell and others, mountain climbing remained too difficult and foreboding for most. The French Revolution and the rise of Napoleon in France also kept potential visitors away from the Alps for decades. Only after Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo did the slopes of the French Alps open up for visitors to try their hand at mountaineering. The handful of attempts to reach difficult summits or even make exploratory climbs prior to the -nineteenth century did little to change mountaineering from an oddity into a major European sport and enterprise.²¹

Likewise, skiing failed to attract a popular following until roughly the same time. Skiing had been viewed as an unglamorous and rude method of transportation that showed some signs of advancement and organization, but it failed to find a wide audience in recreation or exploration. Only a limited number of military bodies advocated skiing as suitable for a small group of soldiers marooned in the Nordic countries. Otherwise, the sport had little organization.

Rudimentary skis can be traced back at least 6,000 years. Forms of skiing appear in Norse legends and in the national saga of Finland. In fact, one Norse deity, Ullr, is typically depicted with skis. Equipment with proto-modern designs began to appear as early as the sixteenth century. The word "ski" was not yet in usage, but these basic, light-weight boards were tapered at the front and back and proved responsive to human

21. Ring, *English Made the Alps*, 32.

movement. Still, they had not yet been adapted for fast downhill movement or uninterrupted flatland travel.

In the eighteenth century Scandinavians structured skiing for the purposes of training their winter army. Ski troops underwent highly organized drills. They institutionalized the drop-knee style kick turn that is still in use today. This gave soldiers the ability to make quick turns and to navigate steep hills. Military authorities also regulated the size and material of the skis.²² Regulation and implementation did not encourage popularity for skiing.

In 1767, a Norwegian General issued contest rules for a test of ski fitness designed for the troops. Because many of the locals practiced the "sport" regularly as a practical means of getting to or around their farms, they already perfected the skills needed to perform the tasks set forth in these events. The challenges were surprisingly modern: moguls, slaloms, speed, cross-country and biathlon. These activities, however, were intricately tied to the troops and not to the populace at large and "without the call of duty, incentive withered. To begin with, skiing was no pleasure but an irksome necessity."²³

The first ski race for civilians is not on record until 1843, when a priest named "Little Theodor" organized an event in the isolated town of Tromsø, Norway. The little hamlet was home to fishermen, sealers and a long winter, given Tromsø's location above the Arctic Circle. Despite the fact that water surrounds Tromsø, it also borders against

22. Huntford, *Two Planks and a Passion*, 47.

23. *Ibid.*, 33.

modern-day Sweden and Finland, making the town a point of cultural exchange and a likely place for skiing to find roots.

Little Theodor was a sometime-reporter, turned parish priest, who taught at a local school, and in his free time crusaded for skiing. Aside from organizing the two races, he published an editorial exaltation of the joy of ski touring. A consummate frontiersman, Little Theodor felt that the exercise would be beneficial for his neighbors; that it could uplift the body and the religious soul.

Other isolated Norwegians soon followed suit. In Trondheim, 100 miles south of Tromsø, locals organized ski touring events that were less specialized than the open races championed by Little Theodor. Trondheim became more of a skier's paradise than Tromsø, and one had to look no farther than the region's topography to understand why. The Trondheim area ripples with small hills and valleys making it ideal for what we now call Nordic skiing – a cross-country method using smaller, slimmer skis and allowing for uninterrupted travel on flatter terrain. Trondheim also had the distinct advantage of a military tradition, and was therefore rife with regional army officers who possessed plenty of experience on skis and a keen understanding of ski conditioning. The officers embraced these organized races as a means of training for their conscripts. The mid-nineteenth century saw a rapid expansion of skiing as recreation and sport throughout the Nordic countries. Numerous postings for ski tours and ski races appeared in Trondheim and its environs.

This rapid modernization of skiing in Norway coincided with the popularization of downhill races in California's Sierra Nevada. It is not a coincidence that these two very distinct and distant parts of the world developed competitive skiing at the same time.

Both communities inherited basic techniques and designs from the European tradition. These communities also inherited the mantle of modern thought and found good reason to engage in nature.

The same period also witnessed the Golden Age of Mountaineering. Unlike the expansion of skiing in Norway, the growth of mountaineering in the Alps became an international movement in the 1800's. Balmat and Paccard made headlines across the world, although neither of them published their exploits in English right away; neither did Saussure. A report on the Alps written by Alfred Wills is credited with kicking off the Golden Age of the sport. Wills climbed the Wetterhorn in Switzerland ten years after the first ascent of that mountain, and published a memoir detailing his efforts. When printed two years after Wills made the climb, his memoir *Wanderings among the High Alps* (1856) became a sensation in Great Britain. This book also added to the growing interest in the Alps, making the Golden Age of Mountaineering a true phenomenon. The remainder of the 1850s and much of the 1860s witnessed a number of first ascents and an amateur rush to the mountains.

The way to the Alps was opened with the advent of frequent steamers crossing the English Channel and the improvement of roads throughout France.²⁴ Even before the great climbs, the British fostered an interest in the mountain. Scores of vacationing Victorians made the trip in the 1830s. The flood of amateurs into the Alps created a need for expert guides to accommodate the onslaught. The Chamonix Company of Guides chartered and created a virtual monarchy over the high Alps. Effectively, this group corporatized the Alpine experience picking up where Balmat had left off.

24. Ring, *English Made the Alps*, 478.

The British responded by co-opting the experience, turning it back into their own hands. They soon formed the London Alpine Club in 1857, the first organization of its kind, to retain some autonomy in the Alps. But, the Brits hardly needed to distinguish themselves from the French and the Swiss. They flooded the area. "The resulting Anglophilic shadow over climbing history stems less from great ascents than the sport's industrialization in London."²⁵ Even during the most celebrated stretch of mountaineering history, business could hardly be disentangled from recreation.

The sport also maintained a culture of fame and celebrity. English climber Edward Whymper became the face of the Golden Age. Like Wills, he published a travelogue of his exploits in the Alps. Eventually, Whymper far surpassed Wills as an athlete. He personified the Golden Age of Mountaineering by logging a multitude of first ascents throughout the Alps. His capture of the Matterhorn, however, has become the climb most closely associated with his legacy.

Perhaps the greatest of the Victorian mountaineers, Albert Smith was a man whose mountaineering skills were less important than the fact that he knew how to put on a show. Born in 1811, Smith grew up just as the Alps were becoming a popular vacation destination. He voraciously read the published memoirs of Saussure and other adventurers. Smith even learned the French language so that he would not have to wait for Saussure's book to be translated. As an adult, he took his fascination with the Alps a little farther, all the way to the mountains themselves. Smith climbed Mont Blanc and descended the mountain with a good story to tell.

25. Taylor, *Pilgrims of the Vertical*, 22.

A natural showman, Smith returned to England from his trek in the Alps and went on a barnstorming tour. He regularly played to packed houses throughout England and literally used word of mouth to spread the popularity of the Alps. Between Whymper, Mills, Smith and the London Alpine Club, the Alps gained international fame and mystique. Eventually the much taller peaks of the Himalaya would capture the world's stage. But, the Alps dominated nineteenth century conversation and set the world's precedent for mountaineering. Several decades later, the Alps would also set the trend for the styles for skiing.

Even in North America, the legacy of the Alps could not be ignored. Climbing clubs formed in the American Northeast and West based themselves on the European model.²⁶ Americans who wished to make a name for them in the sport had little choice but to travel to the Europe and log an ascent in the Alps. Conversely, some established British adventurers chose to pursue the challenges offered by the Americas. Edward Whymper's brother, Frederick, for instance, went on a tour of Alaska and later moved to San Francisco, where he worked for a local newspaper.

In his travelogue Frederick Whymper went so far as to encourage other Britons to move to California. He took a keen interest in the agricultural industry of the region, especially winemaking, but found other incentives to persuade the British to make the long and expensive trip. As he stated, "California and the Pacific Coast, generally afford a wide and fresh field to the scientific man, the artist and the traveler, as well as to the capitalist, the agriculturalist, and the emigrant."²⁷

26. See chapter 3 for further discussion.

27. Frederick Whymper, *Travel and Adventure in the Territory of Alaska, Formerly Russian America* (London: John Murray, 1868), 306.

At least one founding member of the Alpine Club in London moved to North America for its natural challenges. Edmund T. Coleman relocated from the United Kingdom to Victoria, British Columbia. From his home he had an unspoiled view of Mt. Baker, a particularly impressive peak in the Cascade Range of Washington state, and he endeavored to climb it. He failed to claim that peak, but later logged an early ascent of Mt. Rainier. Despite the feat and his ties to the first organizers of mountain climbing, Coleman failed to gain further fame in America. However, he did just enough to spread the gospel of the Alpine club to America.²⁸

While Coleman stands apart as one of the earliest adapters of European climbing techniques in North America, the region already had its own tradition of mountaineering by the dawn of the Golden Age. In fact, Native North Americans had a millennium of high-altitude accomplishments under their belts. Evidence of non-documented climbs abounds. Archaeological evidence indicates that Native North and South American tribes including the Aztecs reached the tops of many of the highest peaks on both continents. Their motives were not unlike those their later European counterparts. They sought vantage points atop the peaks. They probably also sought pride by proving that they could survive such arduous treks. Mountains also held religious significance for many of these groups.

In fact, Native Americans pioneered the routes and methods to many of the highest places in America and left a tradition that white settlers hoped to follow. Historian Jared Farmer discussed the legacy of Native mountaineering in his book and place names and settlements in the mountains that surround present-day Salt Lake City.

28. Selters, *Ways to the Sky*, 11.

"By telling legends about the trail – or *on* the trail- white hikers could both invoke Indian superstition and transgress it," wrote Farmer. "Primitivist hikers were similar yet superior to the legendary primitives who hiked."²⁹

Spanish conquistadors insisted on mimicking some of the famed climbs in present-day Mexico because the locals had dared them. The Spaniards responded by reaching the top of Popocatepetl. Their feat, and the resulting quibble over who made it to the top first, prefigured the Alpine age by several centuries.³⁰

The Golden Age in the Alps apexed in the middle of the 1860's, but the first few decades of that century also witnessed a number of visitors. The same could be said of American adventurers in the North American West. Like the Alps, the American West already hosted a stable population of residents, some more traditional than others. Just as the Alps popularized in the Western consciousness after the scientific revolution, so too would the American West gain popularity in the world's imagination. The West, however, bested the Alps in its breadth of potential opportunities. Perhaps no other region in the world could match this one for promise of adventure, intrigue and perceived riches.

The great explorers of the American West in this period rarely had the singularity of purpose that their brethren in the Alps enjoyed. The goal for these adventurers was never simply to climb a mountain and set a record. Meriwether Lewis and William Clark exemplified the North American explorer. They crossed an impossible landscape (homelands for many Native peoples) and did so with a strict government mandate to

29. Jared Farmer, *On Zion's Mount: Mormons, Indians, and the American Landscape* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 332

30. Ibid., 4.

catalogue new findings and record the potential of a huge swath of land. William H. Goetzmann, in his book *Exploration and Empire* (1966), stated their impact succinctly:

Their expedition demonstrated the great width of western North America and its potential riches in fur, minerals, fishes and other natural resources. Thus they succeeded in making the West itself an object of desire...³¹

The Western explorer operated under a wider set of directives than the Alpinist (not the least of which were their encounters with the Natives).

Members of the United States Geological Survey (USGS) distinguished themselves as some of the best-known and most publicized explorers. While Europe's elite aggrandized and claimed the Alps, members of the USGS performed a similar function in North America. This task previously belonged to the Army's Topographical Engineers. Goetzmann summed up the transition as follows:

The civilian scientist had begun to come into his own as Western explorer. No longer the general-purpose naturalist who accompanied the army expeditions, the new scientific explorer tended to be a specialist-most often a geologist or a metallurgist; and he had been trained either in Europe or in the new scientific schools attached to the prominent Eastern colleges like Yale and Harvard.³²

Clarence King was one such Bulldog and probably the most famous of his generation of geological explorers. He graduated from Yale, and while waiting for the fall Regatta months after his commencement, came across the public reading of a letter from William H. Brewer. This letter detailed the mission of Brewer's employer, the California Geological Survey, to Mount Shasta in Northern California, and all of the

31 Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire*, 3.

32 Ibid., 355.

attendant glories and struggles. The story hooked young King, who immediately began to refashion himself as a geologist by reading a handful of texts.³³

The next step for King was to secure passage to California and hope that he could use his new education to find work. Two friends agreed to accompany him on the cross-continental voyage, knowing full well that the train would only take them as far as Missouri, from where they would have to ride on horseback the rest of the way. The three adventurers made it to California, where a spot of good luck validated King's interest. Aboard their paddlewheel boat bound for the San Francisco Bay from Sacramento, King bumped into the same Brewer whose letter inspired his long journey. They struck up an immediate friendship and Brewer took King to the Survey office. King volunteered to the join the USGS on the spot, joining the organization's experienced ranks.³⁴

Projects in California under the USGS began in 1848, virtually at the exact onset of the Gold Rush. Phillip T. Tyson was the first emissary of the USGS who studied gold rich California in 1849. He eventually published a report on his findings, but it was King who elevated the report from insider information to popular reading pastime for mountaineers and their followers.³⁵

King had a gift for the written word, and in no time at all established himself as one of the premiere memoirists of the American mountain. His adventure logs were published as magazine articles and, eventually, as best-selling books. He became one of the most important American voices of the Sierra Nevada, but he had very distinct and

33. Thurman Wilkins, *Clarence King* (New York: McMillan, 1958), 42.

34. *Ibid.*, 54.

35. Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire*, 14.

highly regarded company in that respect. As much as it is a sport of profit, mountaineering is equally a sport of fame. The American mountaineers learned to use the memoir as a tool just as the Alpinists did.

John Muir, the famed naturalist and preservationist, also wrote extensively about the Sierra Nevada during this Golden Age. Like King, Whymper, Wills and Smith; Muir knew how to tell a story. The son of Scottish immigrants, Muir trained as a chemist at the University of Wisconsin before a small accident at work left him with a sense of wanderlust and no eyebrows. Nearly losing his sight scared the Scotsman, and provoked him to reevaluate his life. He decided to walk from his home in Wisconsin all the way to the Gulf of Florida.

The journey opened the eyes that Muir had almost lost. When he reached the Gulf of Florida, he decided to keep going. Muir boarded a charter that would take him from Florida to New York and then to Cuba. From Cuba, Muir travelled through Panama and on to California. If he was searching for something, Muir found it in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. He fell in love with the state's grand wilderness and started writing for the Smithsonian Museum about the area's natural history. Muir also made monthly contributions to *Overland Monthly*, a San Francisco-based magazine that provided an outlet for his theories. Muir worked diligently to contribute some eighteen articles to the magazine, but it was not enough success for Muir. So, he tried to write and sell a full-length memoir. This became a difficult task, but when he finally succeeded in getting it published, Muir made a much bigger splash. His memoirs made him a celebrity.

Muir and King became the voice of the Sierra Nevada and, more broadly, the American mountains. King, had far more in common with Gifford Pinchot, the architect

of the United States Forest Service, than he did with Muir. Pinchot and King shared a pragmatic view of nature that drew from the Romantic, but also from the needs of a rapidly industrializing society. Muir, on the other hand, was more of a preservationist than a conservationist. If the two did not see eye-to-eye on their plans for nature, they could agree on their passions for the wild and high places of the West.

Their adventures brought both Muir and King into close contact with another breed of explorer in the Mountain West - the miner. King wrote at length about these vagabonds in the final chapter of his signature memoir, *Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada* (1915). He had very little sympathy for these miners. In this account he wrote:

Those few 49ers who linger ought to be gently preserved for historic specimens as we used to care for that cannon ball in the Boston bricks or whatever might remind this youthful country of a past they are altogether harmless now possessing the peculiar charm of lions with drawn teeth.³⁶

These 49ers were soldiers in a different, mercenary capitalist army. Like King, and, to a lesser extent Muir, their success depended almost entirely on their ability to log new discoveries. Prospecting, after all, is very much the art of exploration in a different guise. King searched for empirical information - statistics regarding the size and shape of the Sierra. The 49ers sought new deposits and the telltale signs of mineral-rich areas.³⁷

It is ironic that King so fiercely detested the 49ers. They were the target audience for much of his research. Miners would draw from USGS publications and apply the information therein directly to their prospecting. Perhaps King disliked sharing the slopes of the Sierra with this unwashed horde of profiteers, who demonstrated so ably that others could survive in the mountains just as he had.

36. King, *Mountaineering*, 304.

37. Ibid.

The bunch of cannon balls, as King called them that swarmed into the Mountain West, however, came from a very diverse set of backgrounds. They came, literally, from all over the world. Many began their journeys on the American East Coast and choose between the arduous overland trip across the Great Plains, or the grueling sail around South America, and later through the Panama Canal. Others migrated north from Central and South America, while the Chinese dreamt of "Gam Saan," the golden land and endured the westward trip over the Pacific. Still others brought Old World mining skills from Europe.

The mining methods used in California's Mother Lode country, at the outset of the Gold Rush, were not state-of-the-art. In fact, the technology came from the middle ages and had hardly changed. Placering, for instance, was a common method that took advantage of gold's dense mass and allowed gravity to separate the precious metal through a simple shaking method that demanded little but gold-rich sand from the bed of a river, a pan and water. The relatively low initial cost of this method meant that anyone capable of raising the funds to travel to California had a chance at wealth.³⁸

The height of the placering period in California gave way to hard-rock mining once much of the surface-level gold had been retrieved. Mining further underground necessitated more start-up capital and more experienced miners with related skills. Influxes of miners came into the Sierra from European countries with a tradition of technical mining, including Britain. Many of these miners came from Cornwall and brought with them hard-rock skills acquired in the copper mines of their homeland. Their

38. Otis E. Young and Robert Lenon, *Western Mining: An Informal Account of Precious-metals Prospecting, Placering, Lode Mining, and Milling* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), 108.

labor was necessary when corporate mines took over the Sierra Nevada to retrieve gold from farther underground.

The Cornish were lowlanders, but others who rushed to the camps had experience in the high country. Based on the immigration patterns from Europe, it is highly likely that more than a few of the miners were exposed to, or had participated in, the climbing culture of the Golden Age. Whymper and Coleman were only two figures of a much larger movement of Europeans across the seas. The British were joined by Italians, French and Swiss. For them, the Sierra offered both the chance for monetary gain and for adventure.

Their counterparts from Norway, Sweden and Finland arrived with another set of skills. Some of them could ski. Sierra miners would soon become the second group in the world to hold official ski races, following Little Theodor by only a few years. Yet others emigrated from the Nordic countries to the American Midwest and later followed the Rush to the West. American skiing would eventually become unique, but it almost certainly mutated from the Nordic form.

The diverse group that flooded the American West shared at least several traits. Obviously, they were all in search of mineral wealth. But, they also hunted for manliness. The Gold Rush had riches, tough living conditions and mountains, which were a perfect combination for the Victorian man seeking to make his name and fortune. "Turn of the century American men relished Romantic landscapes. But they also sought to make their mark in nature and through the wilderness. According to historian Susan R. Schrepfer:

Such formulas marked the masculine sublime as a colonial fantasy. In the 1890s the idea of empire fired imaginations. American climbers emulated explorers of known social stature, correct ethnicity and cosmopolitan perspective.³⁹

The mountains of Western North America offered everything. The tallest peak in the lower 48 states, Mt. Whitney in California, stands just a thousand feet below Mont Blanc making the Sierra Nevada and the Rockies appealing for climbers. (The highest point in Alaska, Denali -formerly Mt. McKinley- reaches above 20,000 feet.) These mountains also contained a multitude of mysteries that even the USGS could not fully solve. The region made the Alps look comparatively civilized. The West was almost unmatched as a destination for adventure and sport. And, of course, precious metals hid in the rock.⁴⁰

The Golden Age of Mountaineering swept the world at roughly the same time as the Gold Rush. Both were sustained by a sweeping change in the conception of the natural world. Both were also influenced by the rising tide in Victorian manliness and the famed and publicized adventures of the era's most famous explorers.

Between Balmat and Whymper, the sports of mountaineering and skiing morphed from oddities that drew limited attention into popular pastimes that transfixed the Victorian public. On the cusp of changing attitudes about the wilderness, both of these sports became organized and industrialized. They established a clear precedence that would later set the course for the major, modern age of skiing and mountaineering. The

39. Schrepfer, *Nature's Altars*, 58.

40. Ibid.

Alps would continue to inspire the trend. Americans, however, invented their own forms of these sports adapted to their particular environments and lifestyles.

CHAPTER 3: DOPE TIMES: SKIING AND CULTURE DURING THE GOLD RUSH

The earliest ski races in North America support industry while creating a legacy unique to the American West. A century later, this tradition is used to promote skiing in California.

In 1938, Albert Gould was 62 years old and had not raced on skis for nearly three decades. He was, in fact, so outdated that his skis barely resembled those used by vacationers on the nearby Sierra Nevada rope tows, because they came from another era. So did Gould.¹ Like others in the revival held that year just above the old mining town of Johnsville, California Gould raced on antiquated skis not in competitive use since 1914.²

Commonly called "long-boards," the skis that Gould and others rode on 15 March 1938, stretched some 14-feet in length and resembled nothing so much as flat telephone poles. Shorter versions of these skis were known as "snowshoes." Built of local pine or fir and tapered and curved at the tips. The most important ingredient covered the bottom of the snowshoes. They called the alchemical mixture of pine tar, spermaceti and spruce oil "dope" and it functioned like modern ski wax. Dope prevented a buildup of the Sierra's damp, dense snow on the underside of the ski.³ "Making ski 'dope' was a fine

1. "Old Time Race Reported," *Feather River Bulletin* (Quincy, California), Mar. 31, 1938.

2. "Ski Races Reported," *Plumas National Bulletin* (Plumas, California), Mar. 15, 1914.

3. William Banks Berry, *Lost Sierra: Gold, Ghosts and Skis*, ed. Chapman Wentworth (Soda Springs, Calif.: Western America Skisport Museum Press, 1991), 103.

science a hundred years ago in the Sierra," he said. "Those old-time ski riders had as many as twenty different secret recipes to match any kind of snow, and they would have shot anyone who tried to pirate them," explained a latter-day dope maker.⁴

These skis were, in all likelihood, adapted from traditional European models brought to the United States at the opening of the nineteenth century. The typical "Norse Skate" was significantly shorter and not designed for the same terrain and speed. Americans made their own improvements for the treacherous and fast Western mountains. They fashioned snowshoes that excelled at downhill racing. Speed trumped maneuverability for these massive skis. Slightly shorter planks proved more versatile as cross-country vehicles capable of transporting pioneers over long distances. Regardless of their design, almost all of these snowshoes were homemade and popular throughout the high countries of Western America until the early-twentieth century.

Only a handful of people even recognized the snowshoes or the dope that covered them when a few Sierra Nevada-based activists began to push for a revival in 1931. The antiquarians recalled a yesteryear when these snowshoes dominated the Sierra winters.⁵ Less than a decade after the Gold Rush began reports of winter travelers and leisure goers moving about on wooden runners began to surface. By the 1870s, snowshoe races filled the local newspapers and the isolated Sierra winters. During cold and long snow sessions when work was difficult or impossible, the races brought desperately needed play. All that was over when Gould came back to the sport after 27 years in hiatus.

4. Robert Laxalt, "Golden Ghosts of the Lost Sierra," *National Geographic* (September 1973), 352.

5. "Ski Riders of La Porte are Taking an Active Interest in the Proposed Revival of Winter Sports in Plumas County," *Feather River Bulletin* (Quincy, California), Oct 15, 1931.

Both Gould and his skis suffered from the slowing of the mining economy in California. The turn of the century witnessed a substantial decline in the population of the boomtowns. Scared away by a downturned economy and devalued precious minerals, the prospectors abandoned their claims and headed out of the Sierra Nevada. Without significant populations, the grand skiing events that preoccupied the mining camps had no subscribers. Both the camps and their native sport, however, were soon to become part of a showy new industry.

Ski trains to the Sierra Nevada popularized the sport among the urban centers in California in the 1920s and 1930s. Then the 1932 Olympics in Lake Placid, New York made skiing famous. Newspapers in the Northern Sierra began to push for revival races in 1931, probably sensing that there was money to be made and pride to be gained from these events. Promoters pushed the Sierra Nevada as a snow play center, lobbying to draw attention away from other popular mountainous retreats. Commercial skiing was on the rise. Austria and Switzerland were generally recognized as the epicenter of the sport, but California could gain prestige for its own tradition and form of downhill racing. The Union Pacific Railroad established a famous ski location in the middle of Idaho, so Californians had reason to believe that they could do even better thanks to the nearby urban centers in San Francisco and Los Angeles.

It took the better part of seven years to organize, but in 1938 the *Quincy Feather River Bulletin* announced a snowshoe race to be staged above Johnsville.⁶ Like other pockets of Plumas and Lassen County, Johnsville was an active placer mining district for nearly a century from the Gold Rush to the Second World War. The growth of skiing in

6. "Many Enter Old-time Snowshoe Race," *Feather River Bulletin* (Quincy, California), Mar. 10, 1938.

the 1930s convinced residents of the town and the local winter sports club to build a ski lift just above the town's old stamp mill. They saw the ski area as both a valuable amenity to local sportsmen and a possible engine to drive tourism. The area's historic link with ski racing made great fodder for publicity. Locals even went so far as to claim that Johnsville was the home to the world's first chair lift. Johnsville proponents said that miners used to ride the ore tram to the top of the mountain just to ride back down on snowshoes.⁷

The revival races brought skiing back to Johnsville and not only gave Gould the chance to race again, but also to brew dope. He put together a special batch for another race in 1941, this one for a much younger racer. Like Gould, Johnny Redstreak came from a family of miners in Plumas County. Unlike Gould, Redstreak never joined the old miners because he was not yet born. Redstreak reportedly learned to ski before he could walk. He could run on his snowshoes at incredible speeds and he would need to be fast to beat the modern skiers slated to compete against him in the 1941 exhibition.⁸

The people of Plumas County scheduled the race for the Johnsville tracks, but the lack of snow that March forced them to find an alternate location. Sugar Bowl Ski Resort, a modern, lift-enabled attraction, offered the old-time racers a home for their now-famed annual events. Sugar Bowl could not miss the opportunity for publicity and the developing resort framed the ceremony to maximize the impact. Guests were encouraged to wear nineteenth century garb.⁹

7. Morten Lund and Jean Vives, "The Way it Was," *Ski* 43, no. 6 (Feb. 1979), 112.

8. "Johnny Redstreak," *Indian Valley Record*, Jan. 21, 1981.

9. *Feather River Bulletin* (Quincy, California), Mar. 15, 1941.

Only the inevitable loss of the old-time snowshoers could put a damper on the day. Despite the fact that people around the United States still used homemade wooden skis in rural areas, manufactured models controlled the commercial slopes. The new skis were faster, lighter and more controllable. Especially on the feet of former racing champ Hannes Schroll, the newer model of skis would leave the snowshoes in the powder. But, Redstreak and Gould had a plan. They chose the proper dope mix for the bottom of Redstreak's skis and gave him a straight downhill trajectory.¹⁰

Even on their outdated rigs, the snowshoers could still fly. As long as they pointed straight down the hill and never had to make a turn – at their length the wooden runners are nearly impossible to manipulate – snowshoes could amass great speed. The old-timers got down on their haunches and blazed ahead. Legend said that snowshoeing great Tommy Todd once achieved speeds approaching eighty-seven miles-per-hour, but the new skiing techniques still had more grace and maneuverability.¹¹

Schroll had retired from the racing circuit, but he still possessed world-class speed. He did not take the big snowshoes too seriously. Redstreak recalled to a reporter, for an article in *National Geographic* about the Lost Sierra and its eccentric inhabitants, that:

... [Schroll] couldn't hide a grin when he saw me getting into my long-boards. I was set to teach him a lesson, and I went all the way out. My skis were rattling like rifle shots, and I couldn't see two feet in front of me, because, you know, I was averaging more than 60 miles an hour. But I had aimed my balance pole like a gun to the big flags at the end of the runout, and I just sighted along that and kept to the grooved track.¹²

10. "Redstreak and Gould Winners of Snow Races" *Feather River Bulletin* (Quincy, California), Mar. 20, 1941.

11. J.H. Hildebrand, "Duelling Skis" *California History* 61, no. 4 (1983), 277.

12. Robert Laxalt, "Golden Ghosts of the Lost Sierra," 355.

Schroll did not take the big snowshoes as seriously as he should have. He understood that the race was designed for promotion, but the ski racer also knew that he was unlikely to lose if he made an attempt to win. It surprised Schroll that he failed to win his first race. He did not even manage to finish among the top three in any heat and neither did any athlete racing on new skis. "Hannes Schroll was one surprised man. He told me afterward, 'Never did I believe that skis could go so fast, '" said Redstreak who won the overall day. The race made him the most famous of the antique skiers and cemented a reputation that kept him in the local public eye for another 50 years. He later appeared on Disney's *Wide World of Sport* in 1956.

Before the finish of the day's events, Schroll tried on the old planks and took a few heats on them. But, the skis were not to be taken seriously by the larger world of skiing. Shorter skis that were far more controllable were then in vogue. Boots and mounts had also become considerably more advanced.¹³ But, as a publicized part of the Sierra aesthetic, the skis were in constant demand. They would be used as an emblem of the Sierra's unique past and heritage for the next three decades. The snowshoers also had a very willing agent in a local journalist named William Banks Berry.

The son of a state senator, Berry was based in the Sierra Nevada and an avid promoter of the local ski economy. He took to calling the home of skiing in California "The Lost Sierra." It was a romantic title for the region, but perhaps a misleading one. The area is deep in the Northern Sierra Nevada and is often called the Northern Mother Lode country, but it was never misplaced or devoid of residents. The population of the Northern Camps dwindled after the crash of 1893 and a few of the boomtowns vanished,

13. *Feather River Bulletin* (Quincy, California), Mar. 15, 1941.

but not all of them. Downieville, La Porte and Quincy all remained intact. Berry, in fact spent a great deal of time interviewing former residents of the camps. He would eventually take a post as the ski historian of the National Ski Association. Berry used the post to engage in several very public debates over the location of the world's first ski races with the Norwegians. For a time, California hinged its skiing status on the claim that the state was the home of the ski racing.

Berry's efforts were of greatest value in the several years that led to the 1960 Olympics hosted at Squaw Valley. This was the moment to demonstrate California's legacy and to distinguish it from European skiing or even the resorts of the Eastern United States. His writings, hyperbolic at times, held great truth. California was a cradle of skiing decades before most Americans were even aware of the sport. The area hosted the second historically recorded organized ski races in the world and the first in the United States. The races were real and represented an entirely different era of the sport and an unusual interaction. Sun Valley may have bred the resort age of American skiing, but California was the birthplace of the organized American sport. The tradition was more than just nostalgia. The races were an integral part of life in the Sierra Nevada.

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Berry exaggerated when he called the Northern Mother Lode Country the Lost Sierra, but not by much. Although this area is just 90 miles from Reno, Nevada, that distance is riddled with canyons and mountains. Stands of pine trees cover most of the terrain. Even now, only a few roads carve through this lonely stretch of the Sierra Nevada connecting what remains of the Northern Mother Lode boom towns to each other. A few

of the camps have all but vanished, but their ruins can still be reached over dirt roads. Others, like Downieville, are tourist draws.

Downieville, on the Feather River, was the first of the region's camps. Miners began working the placer bars for gold in 1849. Placer bars are typically accumulations of stone along the banks of a mountain river. Gold washes from deeper bedrock veins and drags through the water current to a resting place, typically along bends in the river. Due to its density and weight, the gold then settles to the bottom of these banks. These caches of gold could be worked via panning, a sluice or a long john. All of these methods simply used gold's specific gravity and weight to trap it once the lighter and minerals were washed away. This was the easiest method for upstart miners and it is likely that at least a few prospectors travelled past the Feather River in 1848. The placer deposits along the Feather River were discovered so early in the Gold Rush that initially few neighboring digs surrounded the camp. Once word got out about the strike other miners rapidly followed.¹⁴

The journey to the Feather River was demanding even in the fall. William McPherson, among the many who attempted to make a living in Northern Mother Lode Country, described the arduous trek in his journal. "I followed the pack trail to American valley, thence to Downieville, traveling a distance of a hundred miles in three days and a half, all the way over mountains, high, rough and steep," wrote McPherson. "The journey is one of continual toil from daylight till after and then perhaps half the night." Once

14. James J. Sinnot, *Downieville: Gold Town on the Yuba* (Volcano, Calif.: California Traveller, Inc., 1972), 5.

McPherson and other prospectors reached the Northern Mother Lode Country, they probably had little desire to cross the Sierra Nevada again, especially in the winter.¹⁵

Major William Downie, who largely developed the town, earning its namesake, arrived in November of 1849. Shortly thereafter, Downieville sustained a growing population of panners and diggers. The town served as county seat. It would also be home to several sawmills, machine shops and a foundry. Downieville hosted a few newspapers, most notably *The Mountain Messenger*, which has been in operation for a century-and-a-half and moved from Gibsonville and La Porte to its present location. The paper became the great harbinger of skiing. Its legacy eventually made the revivals possible.

Downieville's greatest claim to fame was an unpleasant piece of news. The hanging of Juanita, a Hispanic woman of unknown origin, likely Mexican, turned the area upside down. A quickly assembled mob was responsible for judging and then executing the woman despite the fact that it remains unclear if she was involved at all with the shooting for which she was sentenced. The violent episode indicated greater maladies in the area. Downieville and its neighbors were hastily assembled communities filled with itinerant capitalists. Residents of the camps came from a variety of backgrounds and filled a number of occupations. As the superficial gold was claimed and more industrial work was needed, populations grew more diverse and the potential for disharmony blossomed.

Several other placer boomtowns followed Downieville in quick succession. The towns had haphazard names and were all connected to Downieville by a rugged dirt trail

15. William McPherson, "Journal of Overland Travel" *Orange Daily News* (Orange, Calif.), Aug. 11, 1937.

just north of town. This was the heart of Berry's Lost Sierra and the camps included Rabbit Creek, Whiskey Flat, Poker Flat, St. Louis, Gibsonville and Port Wine. A local merchant, Samuel Auerbach, described one of them in his diary:

La Porte had one street beginning as you came to the town from Marysville and ending as you went out of town. To the left was Gibsonville; to the right to St. Louis, Howland Flat and Poker Flat. The other street started from Brewster & Co.'s stage office building [later versions say it started at the Union Hotel] and led to Port Wine, Brandy City, Camptonville and Downieville, the county seat of our Sierra County.¹⁶

La Porte began its life as Rabbit Creek and was later renamed after a town in Indiana, the birthplace of one of the townspeople. The first recorded discovery of gold came in 1850. By that summer, miners were already diverting water for gold retrieval.¹⁷

La Porte was a placer town like its neighbors. These communities all engaged in placer mining and, later, hydraulicking. This violent technique was capable of moving entire hillsides, originated in California and was perhaps the Sierra's greatest contribution to world mining and its greatest crime against the environment. Auerbach detailed it:

There would be a brass nozzle fastened [to it], say, three or four inches in circumference, that would be held against a hill or mountain that supposed to contain gold. A powerful stream of water would be played against a gravel bed and all the gravel would be washed into wooden ditches – troughs or sluices containing riffles and also woolen blanketing. On that, quicksilver was placed to attract the gold as it passed with the sand and dirt through the ditch. As the heavy gold passed through these boxes, it would fall to the bottom of the flume, be caught in the riffles and be attracted and amalgamated by the quicksilver while the worthless dirt and rocks, being lighter in weight, were carried away by the rapidly flowing streams of water. At regular intervals, the amalgam would be

16. Judith Robinson ed., *Utah Pioneer Merchant: The Memoirs of Samuel H. Auerbach (1847-1920)* (Bancroft Library, University of California; Berkeley, Calif., 1998), 49.

17. Jan Garvis, *The Roar of the Monitors; Quest for Gold in the Northern Sierra* (Santa Ana, Calif.: Graphic Publishers, 2004), 115.

removed and the blankets carefully washed to the gold and fresh quicksilver added.¹⁸

Eventually, some forty-eight mines would open and close in La Porte producing \$155,000,000 in gold bullion according to the *San Francisco Call* over their lifespan. Claims varied in size from single-man operations to corporate endeavors. In 1858, fifteen mines employed 300 men.¹⁹

Even at the height of corporate mining, La Porte could not be reached easily. A wagon road stretched over hill country and across several deep canyons to Quincy. From Downieville and the camps just north, the trip to La Porte demanded extraordinary effort in the town's first few years. An express delivery service could haul valuables to Marysville, seventy-five miles away, but equipment and people had to come via pack train. Drivers overloaded their mules and they moved slowly. The trip to San Francisco and Sacramento was a tenuous one at best in the winter.²⁰

Those able to make the trek could only look forward to difficult labor and dangerous weather. In a letter to his brother, Walter, Sam Spooner described the work in the Northern Mother Lode Country.

...and if I can only get enough to pay my way back to Stockton I shall leave these parts as soon as I well can. for I am heartily sick of it. Hydraulicing is hard work. We can only water night times so are up to our knees in snowwater all night keeping the course open and have to throw out rocks the next afternoon making from 16 to 18 hours a day of the hardest kind of work. Well we shall soon get through night work but we are pretty well tired out.²¹

18. Ibid.

19. Garvis, *Roar of the Monitors*, 115.

20. Ibid., 4.

21. Samuel Spooner, *Correspondence: Samuel Spooner to Walter R. Spooner*, June 4, 1850, Walter R. Spooner Letters, HM 56919, Huntington Library.

Despite their isolation and the difficult nature of the work, the camps continued to grow. The boom towns teetered on the edge of the civilization. Residents of the camps had to build independent communities of their own to survive the harsh conditions.

By 1859, La Porte offered a full line of retail stores including Arnold's Butcher Shop, Dr. T. Baker's dentistry, a watchmaker and jeweler, the Rabbit Creek Barber Shop, a bowling alley, a furniture maker, a brewery and a Chinese Laundry.²² *The Mountain Messenger* began publishing in La Porte only to move to Downieville in 1864. This paper became the great chronicler for the skiing events in the area, often accepting and printing reports from correspondents in the diggings.

La Porte was also home to the Union Hotel. The building, still standing, bills itself as the world's first ski hotel. While Port Wine, Gibsonville and the other neighboring communities stood just miles from La Porte but, a return trip in one day during the winter would have been difficult, if not extremely dangerous. The races frequently lasted for a few days, giving most people a chance to ski and celebrate. During ski races, spectators and skiers would have little choice but to stay for a few nights. The races were the highlights of difficult winters. "An occasional snow-shoe race, dog fight or biped fight is all that breaks the monotony between eating, drinking and sleeping," wrote an editor in the *Downieville Mountain Messenger*.²³

Races began in the area around 1857, possibly as early as 1852, attracting skiers from the camps along the road to Downieville and throughout the Northern Sierra. All of the races drew crowds, received coverage in the local papers and ended in parties or balls.

22. Ibid., 19.

23. *Downieville Mountain Messenger*, Feb. 7, 1863.

Miners attended theatrical productions and usually danced into the early morning. Events sometimes included jumps. They always featured races down a local slope dubbed Lexington Hill. A La Porte resident, John Bean, told a reporter about the atmosphere at these multiday events.

We'd start at La Porte, Port Wine, Gibsonville and Table Rock with dances and poker parties-real winter sport. Racing wasn't for the purse. It was for the hell of it. You never went to bed and if you did they pulled you out. You put on your walking shoes (9-foot skis), packed a couple of pairs and walked 12 miles to the races. You cooked 'dope' (ski wax) on the stove and kept the shoes hot. Then, late in the evening, when the slope is so hard a horse can stand on it and the track is like ice, you could hear 'em practice.²⁴

Bean's experience was not entirely typical. Many of the races did have purses for the fastest skier down the hill. Sometimes, winners left with substantial sums of money. A race at a camp named Howland Flats offered a prize in excess of \$800, a very handsome amount for a seasonally unemployed miner.²⁵

To facilitate the races and sponsor the heats and prizes, many of the boom towns created ski clubs. They functioned very much like baseball teams, giving racers the opportunity to practice and schedule their contests. The clubs also afforded some local pride to many of the Lost Sierra camps. The first of these groups formed in La Porte and called itself the Alturas Snowshoe Club. They would also be responsible for the events after the races. The Alturas Snowshoe Club might well have been the first of its kind in the world.²⁶ Their initial tournament was held in February of 1867. Soon after, official contests were held at several spots throughout the Lost Sierra because many of the little

24. Kenneth Pratt, "Gold Rush Daredevils," *San Francisco Chronicle* (San Francisco, Calif.), Apr. 25, 1954.

25. McLaughlin, *Longboards to Olympics*, 30.

26. Berry, *Lost Sierra*, 60.

towns followed in the footsteps of the Alturas Snowshoe Club. Snowshoeing organizations sprang up throughout the Sierra Nevada.

Under the guidance of these clubs, the races became regimented affairs with strict rules. For most of the 1850s, downhill snowshoeing had been a loose affair with courses marked only by grubstakes. The clubs had very specific requirements for their contest grounds. "Racing tracks were selected and cleared of trees, shrubs and other obstructions. The courses were between 1500 and 2500 feet in length, with an angle of descent of fifteen to thirty-five degrees, always in as straight a line as possible. On race days, entrants had to pay a dollar entry fee and were grouped into squads for each heat. Generally, racers represented their hometowns. After winning each heat, they progressed to the next one."²⁷

The heats were intense and fast affairs as each of the competitors awaited a drum to signal the beginning of the slide. Most of them had fresh dope covering the bottom of their snowshoes and had little chance of stopping effectively once they got underway. Without the ability to change direction, they also struggled to stay in their assigned lanes. The wait for the start of the race must have been a little nerve-wracking. Bean described the heats.

Riders, their long, snows-shoes pointed down the slope, held themselves back with a single oak pole (about 6 feet long) jammed in the snow in front of them. Judges tapped a drum or fired a pistol, stopwatches clicked below and the race was on.

'If you started before the signal,' Bean says, 'you were ruled out. Your first pole puts you ahead 40 feet. On the slope your shirt looks like a bag of wind. You sit on these snow-shoes and pass through the poles below and 'brake up' for 200 feet.

'We went 1800 feet up there in 16 seconds from a dead standstill,' Bean says.

27. Ibid., 41.

To 'brake up' after whipping past the finish flag, the rider held the astraddle one hand high in front and the other low in back, then jammed the tip of the pole into the snow between his snow-shoes. A great wake of snow sprayed out behind as he sat his weight on the pole and slowed down in the flat.²⁸

As the racers approached speeds of sixty-miles-per-hour or more they made quite a sight.

While the races lasted only a few seconds each, most racing days had enough heats to keep a viewing gallery happy and entertained.

While the men's long-board races were the marquee event, other events held during these skiing meet-ups demonstrated more diversity. Women and Chinese community members had to race separately. La Porte could count some 136 Chinese residents in 1858; the majority of them dedicated placer miners. Despite some considerable financial success that hopefully made the work worth the effort, many of these individuals met constant racism and the Chinese races were greeted by the white townspeople as something akin to a circus act. During one odd incident, a man even raced in drag to win the women's purse; thus convincing the crowds that men, by nature, possessed greater speed than women.

The point was mistaken. Women racers barely trailed the men in speed, despite the fact that they raced in long dresses. The women's races also drew crowds comparable in size to the men's events. Men far outnumbered women in the camps and it was an impressive feat that so many of them had a presence at the race. These ski races, in many ways, helped to provide that sense of community and were an activity which all could participate in. Admiration and interest for these races spread throughout the Sierra and even those unable to attend the races kept up on the results thanks to the newspapers which dutifully reported the results. *The Mountain Messenger* even employed its own ski

28. Pratt, "Gold Rush Daredevils."

correspondent. Although not exactly Grantland Rice, Hendel skied between the mines and gave briefs on the results of each race. "Quicksilver Charlie" was a German immigrant who arrived in California to mine, but instead fell in love with skiing. Despite his efforts and the impressive accomplishments of the racers, another snowshoe-bound Californian dominated Sierra headlines.²⁹

The Inevitable Defeat of Snowshoe Thompson

Despite the super-human speeds of the racers, only one snowshoer in the Sierra transcended into legendary status. John Thompson was a living treasure. Over the years, Snowshoe Thompson gained a following as an accomplished athlete, personal savior and postman. As a mail carrier, Thompson had relatively few equals. He crossed the treacherous Eastern Sierra going distances upwards of ninety miles to deliver a rucksack worth of goods and correspondence. In the dead of winter, when snow piled up along narrow paths, the Northern Mines might only be connected to the rest of the world by Thompson's skis.

Much of what is known about John Thompson comes from a lengthy profile of the skier written by Dan DeQuille. A journalist and contemporary of Mark Twain and Bret Harte, DeQuille had a penchant for literary writing that sometimes exchanged fact for dramatic verse. DeQuille described Thompson in a *Hutchings' California Illustrated Magazine* article:

Mr. Thompson was a man of splendid physique standing six feet in his stockings, and weighing 180 pounds. His features were large, but regular and handsome. He

29. Berry, *Lost Sierra*, 41.

had the blonde hair and beard, and fair skin and blue eyes of his Scandinavian ancestors; and looked a true descendant of the sea-roving Northmen of old.³⁰

DeQuille seized on Thompson's Norwegian ancestry with good reason. Thompson was actually born as Jon Torsteinson-Rue in Luraas-Rue Gard in Tinn, Telemark, Norway in 1827. At the age of ten he came with his parents to the United States, living at first in the Midwest. Thompson later followed the crowds west to the California diggings only to find that he lacked the luck and skill necessary to make much money at prospecting.³¹

Moving just out of the Mother Lode Country, Thompson next tried his hand at farming. At this he was no more successful than his mining efforts. He found himself once again in need of a career. Here legend becomes difficult to separate from history. In Sierra mythology, Thompson heard that a postman was needed to deliver the mail over the mountains during the difficult winter period. He recalled the skis from his childhood in Telemark and soon fashioned his own.

As romantic as the image of Thompson spreading skiing through the Sierra as a version of Johnny Appleseed, Thompson had neighbors who skied and he was far from the sole person in the Sierra mounted on wooden runners. The story was irresistible for the local press. Thompson was already larger than life, so giving him sole credit for the popularization of California skiing fit the legend. In truth, Thompson was not even the first ski-bound mailman.

30. As cited in *Dan DeQuille the Washoe Giant: A Biography and Anthology*, eds. Richard A. Dwyer and Richard E. Lingenfelter (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1990), 14.

31. Kenneth Bjork, "Snowshoe Thompson: Fact and Legend," *Norwegian-American Journal* 19 (1956), 62.

Thompson hardly needed help from the press to make him a larger-than-life figure. His daily tasks demanded incredible strength and courage. His route stretched from Placerville to Carson Valley a distance of ninety miles directly across the heart of the Sierra. On most trips, Thompson carried at least one bag filled with mail and often he brought two, each usually weighing sixty to eighty pounds and sometimes as much 100 pounds in a rudimentary canvas backpack. When Thompson's services were most in demand, temperatures hovered around freezing and the snowpack was dense. Thompson refused to use dope and consequently he had to pause consistently to clear the accumulated snow from his skis.

Aside from the mail, Thompson carried little else. This minimalist style seems a little absurd, but it allowed Thompson to travel faster, encumbered only by the weight of the mail. According to DeQuille, "While traveling in the mountains, Snow-shoe Thompson never carried blankets, nor did he even wear an overcoat. The weight and bulk of such articles would have encumbered and discommoded him. Exercise kept him warm while travelling, and when encamped he always built a fire."³² When necessary, Thompson would improvise camps usually seeking a felled tree or other natural structure that could provide some shelter from the weather. He used mailbags for pillows when he lay down for the night.

Thompson's diet on these trips was sparse. He brought just a handful of dried foods with him in each direction. "His food was limited to what he could eat while on the move--jerked meat, crackers, or biscuits. For water he turned to mountain streams or

32. Dwyer and Lingenfelter, *Dan DeQuille the Washoe Giant*, 14.

scooped up snow and melted it in his mouth."³³ Without a gun, hunting seemed unlikely, so Thompson had to survive on high-calorie dry snacks. Here, however, DeQuille probably under reports the food that Thompson must have consumed before each journey. At that altitude in the middle of the winter, Thompson would have burned thousands of calories each day.

It was, of course, the ruggedness of the terrain that kept Thompson employed. Few vehicles could penetrate the mountains in the summer, and almost none could hope to improve upon Thompson's abilities in the winter. Even after the arrival of the railroad, Thompson was still essential. His frequent deliveries insured that isolated areas had stable contact with metropolitan San Francisco and Sacramento. Coupled with his nearly superhuman trips, it is not difficult to understand how he became so popular in the Northern Sierra.

If Thompson had a shortcoming in the eyes of fellow Sierrans, it would have been his relative disinterest and dislike for the ski races. Although he lived in the Sierra at the time that the races found traction, he never took to them. Thompson was perturbed by the style of skiing that the miners practiced. Their short tracks had little in common with the cross-country treks to which he had grown accustomed and skilled. Worse yet was the miners' incredible devotion to "dope." This stuff, they said, could rule a man's fortunes on the slope. Like chain lubricant or engine oil, dope came in a multitude of consistencies and the shape of the ski or the conditions of the snow determined the dope's form. To Thompson, the dope addiction seemed like lunacy. He kept his skis in shape, but found the constant application of wax to be obsessive.

33. Ibid.

Thompson, though, decided to test his mettle and wood at one of the club races in the mines. The snowshoers practiced an entirely different form of skiing, with different rules and skills. Thompson had good reason to be concerned about his fate, or not to go at all. He showed up and appeared ready to gamble with his reputation. Thompson joined a crowded field that day, one filled with experienced racers, several of whom were touted for their blazing speed down the short track. None of them, however, could even approach Thompson's reputation for notoriety, following or experience. Thompson, after all, had logged more miles on skis than any other man in the mines. He had also been born and raised in the cradle of skiing. At forty-two years of age, perhaps Thompson had lost some of his speed, but he was still snow-bound royalty.

Extreme confidence in both his skills and style of skiing brought Thompson to La Porte on 22 February 1869. The races were scheduled in heats and supposed to last for the next five days. Thompson went to the starting line on the first day a little overmatched, but a perennial favorite all the same. Ahead of the racers stretched some 1800 feet of racecourse. Almost as the soon as the race was underway, Thompson fell behind. While the other racers crouched on their haunches and pitched themselves forward, Thompson settled back on his short skis and stood upright. The relative drag made Thompson into a sail. His big frame caught the wind and pushed back on his smaller skis. Worse yet, the lack of dope on his skis created friction and build-up, slowing him down. Thompson fell behind immediately. He never recovered and was soundly defeated. For Thompson, the humiliation was complete and made even worse when a reporter from *The Mountain Messenger* called him a slow "cow" without dope.³⁴

34. McLaughlin, *Longboards to Olympics*, 42.

Thompson did not take the defeat or the editorial comments lightly. He took to the local newspapers to publicize his gripes with the club competitors and their strange techniques. Thompson insulted the racer's method of skiing. He called their style of ski-racing "unscientific" and a mere excuse to make dope. Thompson also derided the club competitors as tobaggoners – men who pitched themselves downhill with little more skill than a child on a sled. Thompson's solution was to challenge the racers to an endurance contest that included ski jumping, a long ski descent from an 11,000-foot peak and several shorter runs. If anyone was bold enough to answer Thompson they did not report it to the papers.³⁵

Thompson's public sparring with the club racers spoke to a feud that went well beyond a small number of obsessed skiers. It also signaled the growing divides between styles and uses of snowshoes. Skiing in the Sierra had evolved. Perhaps the Norwegian tradition was responsible for the onset of skiing in the United States, but if the Norwegians had come with the seven or eight-foot skis used for cross-country travel, the miners had converted them into twelve-to-fifteen foot racing skis. "They have their Norwegian Derby and it lasts two days with their best runners and jumpers taking part. But out in the high Sierras where I was stationed for some years, the like better the long distance runs. In the West skees are often called snowshoes but they are much different from the Easterner's idea of the word," wrote a visitor to La Porte. They also refined a crouching downhill style that allowed for little lateral movement, but that proved absolutely effective on a b-line down a slope.³⁶

35. Ibid., 43.

36. C. Newhall Fogg, "A Maine Man at La Porte Skee Races," *Lewiston Journal Magazine*, March 20, 1912.

The races recorded in the La Porte region were among the first of their kind anywhere in the world. Norwegians clocked a few of their military drills in the 1840's and they probably bet on the occasional downhill or cross-country jaunt, but the people of the Northern Mines who organized their events were on to something entirely different. Events roared straight down Lexington Hill. The races fit the competitive milieu of the camps. Winning gold in a ski race was not so different from wresting gold from the earth.

The races, in their own way, were also somewhat ironic. Most of the miners in the La Porte region practiced some sort of hydraulic mining. At its least malicious, hydraulic mining causes the reorganization of an area's geographic profile. Realistically, the greater process was responsible for leaching damaging chemicals into rivers and ultimately into nearby valleys. In an industry of environmental destructors, water-powered mining was the biggest of the perpetrators. The technique would eventually be banned in California as dangerous run-off threatened California's valuable agricultural industry.

While some modifications were made to the racecourse at Lexington Hill – trees cleared and other obstacles removed – the races were inherently an outdoors activity that took advantage of the same natural world that the miners were constantly engaged in destroying. Yet, the races were the real highlight of the winter season for the miners who found little else to enjoy during very long and hard winter seasons. Perhaps these two relationships made skiers hypocrites. To their minds, causing damage to the landscape did not necessarily preclude them from enjoying it. There was gain in both activities.

In this environment, skiing may have changed from a method of transportation into a form of fun, but it still had its purpose. The Norwegians called the concept "idraet"- the idea that skiing led to fit body and mind. This was most useful in times of

war, but the camps were not directly involved in fighting and miners were not precisely soldiers. They were, however, enlisted in the capitalist cause and reliant upon physical abilities to make a living.

Allen Guttman in his landmark study of sport, *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports* (2004) discusses the Marxist interpretation of sports and their relation to the workplace. Organized sports occupied and conditioned the work force. "In capitalist society, sports like soccer and baseball are reserved for the laboring class. These sports have as their major goal the maintenance of a maximally productive work force," wrote Guttman.³⁷ In the American Midwest, semi-professional sports clubs focused on baseball, football and basketball. The play organized and united company towns. The skiing races in the Sierra followed a similar model, but tailored their sporting events to the mountainous conditions. While football clubs could play through the early winter, skiers needed deep snows.

Skiing became much needed exercise in the winter. For the viewing gallery, it became much needed respite from the drudgery of winter. After the Snowshoe Thompson loss, a conversation about the nature of snowshoeing arose in the papers. The President of the Alturas Snowshoe Club had this to say:

First, I will tell Thompson...what the Alturas snowshoe was not organized for, and then what it was organized for. It was not organized to make business for undertakers by running races down steep and thickly timbered mountains or over high precipices nor for the purpose of encouraging gambling, otherwise we might be induced to accept Thompson's' bombastic challenge...it was organized to fill in the time during the long, tedious winters when everybody is idle, affording an innocent amusement and health-giving exercise, thereby keeping the muscles in tune for the labors of the summer. This being our object, we have always selected

37. Guttman, *From Ritual to Record*, 59.

our tracks and managed our races with a view to safety, and invited all lovers of that kind sport to come and take for the purses."³⁸

This wholesome image of skiing was likely exaggerated, but part of it certainly held true. Gambling was an essential part of the races. When the entire purse awarded to each champ, it provided one of the great attractions to the event. Skiing as a sport offered a great deal of exercise even in its purely downhill form. Prior to the advent of the motorized lift, the only way to go downhill was to walk up first. The Northern Sierra is crossed with hills and canyons, making virtually all trips strenuous.

In Europe, skiing was a part of military training and the concept of idraet fit into a greater scheme of conditioning for soldiers. The miners of the Sierra were dedicated to an entirely different cause, but they also had great physical demands placed upon them. Digging was hard work, requiring hours of sloshing through mud and water each day. And while some work was possible in the winter, the miners were largely forced to await the spring to return to their labors. They had to be in reasonable shape by the time the snows began to melt, and skiing became an absolute necessity, plus an enjoyable way to keep physically fit. The sport had simply become faster in American hands.

The snowshoe era lasted until the second decade of the twentieth century when the last race was run in Quincy just two years after the finale in La Porte. Some of the clubs continued to exist, including the Alturas Snowshoe Club, which would later campaign for ski resorts in the Sierra Nevada in the 1930s. They were, however, among the last of their breed until Gould and Redstreak returned to the spotlights in the races after 1938.

38. Berry, *Lost Sierra*, 11.

Skiing in the 1910s and onward would be better defined by the spread of rudimentary rope tows, the proliferation of winter festivals and the spectacle of ski jumping that took cities by storm and gained a substantial following. Worse yet, the ski was rarely needed as a method of transportation thanks to the coming of the train and the automobile. Only some isolated pockets of the Sierra still relied on the skis. Employees of California's Pacific Gas & Electric Company published instructions on snowshoe construction in 1912.³⁹ Elsewhere, snowshoe mail delivery continued until 1919.⁴⁰ The long-board had become the domain only of the old timer.

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The legacy of the snowshoes can be found throughout much of Western America. The craze extended well out of the Sierra Nevada. Races similar to those run in La Porte also occurred in Colorado. The same style of skiing was used in Utah, Idaho and likely elsewhere as well. Construction of the actual skis and racing style remained uniform in all these different areas, although native woods and snow conditions dictated some differences in the form of the ski. Diaries and letters from the period indicate that people routinely enjoyed skiing as recreation in all of these places.

Norwegian immigration to these regions could partially explain the spread of the sport. Some probably moved to the Mountain West through California, while other Norwegian miners went directly to each boomtown. Others still, took the skiing techniques that they learned in the Sierra Nevada and brought them elsewhere.

Californians followed mineral discoveries, duty and the mail to these other mountain

39. Egbert Beach, "How to Make a Pair of 'Skis'," *Pacific Gas and Electric Magazine* 3, 425.

40. Garvis, *Roar of the Monitors*, 104.

ranges. Snowshoe Thompson made a few trips to Salt Lake City and if he introduced anyone to skiing in California, it stands to reason that he did the same in Utah. California volunteers were stationed in Salt Lake City during the Civil War.

Other mining towns in the Mountain West hosted ski clubs to support their local long board racers. In Gunnison, Colorado, just miles from the coalmines at Crested Butte, a ski club organized regular events. Years later, a Gunnison resident described the clubs:

About 1886 we had a ski club that attracted much attention all over the country. We gave exhibitions on the steep hillside run just south of town. We gave the fastest runners first, second and third prizes of real worth, usually gold stick pins made to order. Had folks from Gunnison and other towns, such as Montrose, Delta, Grand Junction, Salida and Denver come to the ski exhibitions at the Buttes. There were also snowshoe contests and exhibitions near Gunnison on north slopes, but spring snow at the county seat was uncertain. The club was made up of all expert skiers.⁴¹

The Gunnison teams were not far removed from their predecessors in the Sierra Nevada. Coloradans gathered in groups to watch the events and celebrate their best method of winter transport. Nearby Crested Butte would inherit this interest in skiing and eventually became a noted ski area.

A little farther south, in the San Juans, a less organized form of ski play became common. On weekends in the aptly named Silverton, groups assembled for lighthearted lessons and free skiing in the town commons. As in the Sierra, skiing in the San Juans was partly legendary in tone, depicting feats of mailmen who made their way over fierce mountain passes to make deliveries. These heroic trips made the curious sport even more popular for locals.

41. J.E. Phillips, "When Snowshoeing Was All the Rage In Gunnison Fifty-Five Years Ago, As Told By J. E. Phillips" *Gunnison News-Champion*, Mar. 12, 1940.

When he wasn't carrying mail, the increasingly popular Greenell was giving snowshoe lessons to the ladies of Silverton, and was fondly remembered for years thereafter in this connection. "(He) might be said to have been the originator of that pleasant winter activity," Kendall later wrote. The women of Silverton were obviously a source of pride to all who had anything to do with the camp that first year. Greenell taught them to make the most of the situation. And in the spring, prospector Charles H. Slocum located a claim in honor of the Mrs. Greene, Earl, Cotton and Holmes – and named it the Rose of the San Juan.⁴²

Greenell was not Snowshoe Thompson, but he too spread skiing to the people just as he delivered the mail in snowy country that could rival the Sierra Nevada for mountainous treachery. Silverton, although it sits just miles away from Durango and its Purgatory Ski Resort, is still so undeveloped that only recently have investors been able to develop a very primitive, backcountry ski area.

Skiing was introduced to the Americas in the early-nineteenth century and would take several forms before the introduction of the resort age in 1936. Sun Valley reinvented the way that many Americans engaged in the sport, but a long tradition of skiing for pleasure already existed in many of the same mining areas that would soon be converted into ski resorts.

The long-boarders of the Sierra Nevada staged races to prove that the old methods of skiing still had value. Gould and Redstreak simultaneously demonstrated that skiing for sport and profit has a strictly American legacy independent of the Swiss. The Sierra Races, as well as those in Gunnison and throughout the Mountain West revolved around the societal work of fame and money. Speed and technology dominated the sport, not finesse and eloquence. The races, at the end of the day, were yet another rush for riches among the aspiring capitalists of the American outback.

42. Allen Nossaman, *Many More Mountains: Vol. 1* (Denver, Colo.: Sundance Publications, 1998) 225.

CHAPTER 4: INTERLUDE - THE HARRIMANS ON VACATION

On a June morning in 1899, a lavishly outfitted steamship named the George W. Elder pulled into the harbor near Skagway, Alaska. Unlike most of the boats in port that day, this particular ship had little to do with the Klondike Gold Rush. The steamer was designed to carry a select group of passengers in the utmost style and comfort. It commanded the attention of locals who streamed onto the ship to get a closer look. Soon, the crew had to push the crowd back on to the shores.

It wasn't just the shape of the steamship that attracted the boomtown bedraggled that day, it was also the rather unique group of passengers. On board were some of the most famous Americans of the age – entrepreneurs, scientists and artists. The disparate group had gathered because one man, Edward Henry Harriman, wanted to go on vacation.

It was an audacious trip, but Harriman was an audacious man. He was raised on Long Island and then began working at the age of fourteen, leaving school to run quotes. Eventually, he became a stockbroker and amassed enough funds and power to gain control of the Illinois Central Railroad. Around 1881, Harriman controlled significant railroad stock. The Recession of 1893 gave him an opportunity. He made his play for the Union Pacific and captured its Presidency, along with headlines across the United States. With this feat, Harriman had become a public figure and one of the most powerful men in

the country. The coup had taken a great deal of his energy and doctors recommended a vacation.⁴³

Harriman was a strong and savvy leader who would do battle, albeit remotely, with the likes of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. He would even butt heads with Theodore Roosevelt when his control of the rail system grew so absolute that many Americans believed it to be a monopoly. John Muir described him in his essay on the trip to Alaska.

In general appearance he was said to be under-sized, but though I knew him well I never noticed anything either short or tall in his stature. His head made the rest of his body all but invisible. His magnificent brow, high and broad and finely finished, oftentimes called to mind well-known portraits of Napoleon. Every feature of his countenance manifested power, especially his wonderful eyes, deep and frank yet piercing, inspiring confidence, thought likely at first sight to keep people at a distance.⁴⁴

At first, Harriman wanted to hunt for Kodiak bear, but friends convinced him to go in search of bigger prize. As the trip expanded to luxuriously accommodate his family and friends, it occurred to Harriman that he might go even a step further. He could transform the journey into a grand expedition worthy of the nineteenth century's most elite philanthropists and personalities.⁴⁵ The expedition could solidify his reputation as a great American and catapult him into the company of other prominent entrepreneurs who had become famous for their altruism. Because his pockets were deep he could aim high. This reasoning led Harriman to surround himself with some of the most notable artists and

43. Thomas Litwin, ed. *The Harriman Expedition Retraced: A Century of Change, 1899-2001* (Piscataway, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 13-14.

44. John Muir, *Edward Henry Harriman* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1912), 5.

45. William H. Goetzmann and Kay Sloan. *Looking far North: The Harriman Expedition to Alaska, 1899* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 5.

scientists in the United States including John Muir, Edward Sheriff Curtis, John Burroughs and George Bird Grinnell.

Also along for the ride was the elderly geologist William H. Brewer, the same man who had hired Clarence King decades earlier. Brewer's task for Harriman was ostensibly similar to his old responsibilities for the US Geological Survey. He and a small cadre of geologists would appraise and interpret the value of Alaska's natural resources. Harriman's motives, as it turned out, were not entirely scientific, he was also searching for opportunities among the fjords and glaciers.

Mining expert W.B. Devereux explained the operations they witnessed in Alaska, but mining was not the only valuable asset that drew Harriman's attention. Alaska's natural beauty and its unusual human history were both ripe for explosion in the relatively new field of tourism. Harriman had taken part in the early cruise age under the auspices of scientific reconnaissance. Just like the thousands of tourists who would eventually pour into Skagway over the following century, the Harriman Expedition visited the surreal encampment before loading onto a scenic train ride. The recently completed White Pass Railroad shuttled members of the Expedition into the Yukon Territory, saving them the harsh hike undertaken by many of the miners. The group watched in comfort as fortune-seekers hauled through the slush.

While Harriman likely understood that the burgeoning tourist industry could feed the coffers of the railroad, Muir looked upon both the miners and the tourists with the same sense of foreboding dread. Both groups, he reasoned, would exact a terrible toll on his beloved environments by changing them to suit their respective needs. "John Muir had sympathy for neither gold miners nor tourists; both groups, he feared, trampled his

cherished wilderness disrespectfully. He was a cynic about the growing tourist industry touted by Dall, and often grumbled about the streams of sightseers he had encountered on his numerous trips to the Alaska."⁴⁶

Ironically, Muir's travelogues drove the same tourism that he so feared. He had, however, turned down an offer to cover the trip for a San Francisco-based newspaper. Muir refused to partake in that degree of sensationalism. Taken together, members of the Expedition produced an avalanche of writing. Officially, they published 14 volumes of notes, observations, records and sketches. Many of their recordings would be the basis of studies on Alaska for years to come.

But, the legacy of the trip was also imprinted on the memories of one of the youngest voyagers. William Averell Harriman, Edward's son, went along on the trip at just nine years of age. In time, Averell would inherit his father's mantle at the Union Pacific. He would later use that position to institute a major revolution in the tourism industry, his experiences in Alaska doubtlessly influencing his creativity.

46. Goetzmann, *Looking Far North*, 66.

CHAPTER 5: INDUSTRIALIZING THE OUTDOORS EXPERIENCE - MOUNTAINEERING IN BANFF

A climbing accident changes the face of mountaineering tourism in Canada and North America.

Phillip Stanley Abbot wanted to reach the summit of Mount Lefroy, a particularly dangerous peak in the Canadian Rockies. Along with his Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) cohorts, he tried and failed to reach the top of the mountain in 1895, but thought he had some ideas for another approach the following year. After returning to his home in Boston and thinking on the climb for a year, Abbot took the train back to Canada with a new route in mind. He planned to take the "Death Trap Col" this time around.

At twenty-eight years of age, Abbot had both the experience and the bravado to support his confidence in the attempt. He already had numerous trips to the Alps under his belt. While there, he earned his mettle on some of Europe's toughest peaks. He also distinguished himself in his daily life. Abbot was a prominent lawyer born of a well-to-do Boston family. His climbing partners on Mount Lefroy, all AMC members, could claim similarly impressive backgrounds. George Little and Charles E. Fay both held doctorates. Charles Thompson had traveled and climbed widely. With their combined experience and education they recognized that the trail would be treacherous. Yet still, they agreed to allow Abbot to blaze the path up the Death-Trap Col.¹

Abbot described the geographic features of his chosen route in an article before he

1. George Herbert Palmer, "Phillip Stanley Abbot," *Appalachia* 8, no. 1 (1898): 155.

left on earlier expedition.

The Death-Trap, so named from the ice avalanches which fall from the cliffs of Mt. Green on the south, is the narrow snow pass which separates Mt. Green from Mt. Lefroy on the north. It has never been crossed... Whether the plateau can be reached from the Death-Trap col can only be learned by trying; it is worth the experiment, and the route would have this advantage, - that it could be taken late in the season, as the couloir route cannot. It should be said that both Mr. Allen and Professor Fay are doubtful as to the traverse.²

No one in Abbot's party, it seems, was confident that the Death-Trap approach would work or be safe. Still, their collective experience gave them enough reassurance that they could at least give it a try safely.

Abbot, Thompson and Little made the first ascent of nearby Mount Rogers a few days before their scheduled attempt of Lefroy. So, everyone but Fay had some momentum when they rose at five in the morning on 3 August, 1896 to attack Mount Lefroy. They were greeted that morning with layers of fog and the vision of a snowy Lefroy towering thousands of feet above them. The company made their way over water and moraine before roping up just below the couloir. Their aneroid, a primitive altimeter, read 7,450 feet. They had 4,000 more vertical feet to travel.³

The path ahead was littered with the debris of avalanches and crosscut with crevasses. Above the AMC mountaineers, a bluish glacier cleaved with seracs loomed. They resolved to cut through the ice fields up a ridge they called Mount Green, to a little saddle upon which they might head toward the summit, steering clear of the calving glaciers. The climbers progressed rapidly, pausing here and there to listen to the occasional avalanche. The bulk of their ascent was packed into a mile-long glacial gorge

2. Charles E. Fay, "The Casualty on Mount Lefroy," *Appalachia* 8, no. 1 (1898): 127.

3. *Ibid.*, 136.

that ticked upward at a sharp slope. After a few hours the men had reached the saddle at nearly 10,000 feet of altitude. They rested a thousand feet below the summit. Abbot was nearly giddy with excitement. The men dropped their bags and prepared for a quick final push – a lightning ascent. This method would make the steep climb easier because they would not be burdened by the weight of much gear.

In a matter of hours the little group stood just feet from the top of the peak, but something unexpected happened. They found a 75-foot wall directly in their way. Locating a cut along the side, Abbot, venturing ahead of the group, edged along hoping to get around and find a clear path to the summit. The maneuver was exceptionally dangerous and risky, but Abbot continued to be sure of his abilities. Not far behind him, his fellow climbers Fay and Little had no unusual causes for concern.

Then something went wrong. Little and Fay watched in horror as an indistinguishable mass ahead of them fell rapidly downhill. At first, they could not quite make out the object, in detail, but soon enough they realized what had happened. They looked on as their friend transformed from climber into a human spool gathering rope around his limp form. He rolled down hundreds of feet of snow and rock to finally come to rest just above a cliff's edge.

Fay began the long descent to get to Abbot, even though it was not clear if Abbot was alive. Fay used his ice axe to cut his way down, all the while glancing down below him to the crumpled form of his friend. Occasionally, Fay would stop to anchor himself with his axes and then begin again down the slope. It took him three hours to reach Abbot. To Fay's surprise, the fallen climber was still breathing. Giving Fay reason for

optimism, Abbot had come to rest just feet from the rucksacks they dropped earlier in the day. They would be able to survive a bivouac for the night.⁴

What slim chance of survival Abbot possessed, now rested solely in the hope that his friends could rush down the mountain to get help. The AMC members hurried to find Tom Wilson, a guide originally hired to take the group up Lefroy. Although, the AMC expedition changed their minds at the last minute and decided to go it alone. Wilson was now one of the few men they believed could bring medical aid. Or, if the worst should happen, they knew Wilson was strong enough carry the body down the mountain. When they finally reached Wilson, the AMC members were soaked and ragged from the descent. It took the guide a moment to realize that they were the same men who had recently hired him. When the adventurers told Wilson what happened, the Canadian guide must have wondered if he could have prevented Abbot's fall.⁵

Through the Rockies

Before the train took tourists to the scenic heart of the Canadian Rockies, it played an intricate part in the creation of the Canadian nation itself. The promise of independence from Great Britain carried with it a demand for unification by rail, so the provinces could be connected, mobilized, and more easily governed. Eastern Provinces needed a route to the more populated and central cities of Ontario and Quebec. Each province joining the confederation over the next several years requested that it linked by rail. For the far western British Columbia, a transnational railway would be essential to

4. Ibid., 147.

5. E.J. Hart, *Diamond Hitch: The Pioneer Guides and Outfitters of Banff and Jasper*, (Banff, Canada: EJH Literary Enterprises Ltd., 2001), 57.

their sustainability. Isolated Manitoba made the same demand for an artery to the rest of the country, supplying lifeblood to the region. The CPR joined Canada long before it coupled it.

Canada is a geographically large and diverse country, and the railway project proved difficult from the beginning. It took a decade for Canadian politicians to agree on the method and machination behind tracks. Even after a corporation was put in place to finance the railroad problems persisted. The Canadian Pacific Railway finally organized in 1881 with Scottish financing. The new corporation completed less than 150 miles of track in its inaugural season. The lack of progress prompted another change in leadership. The collective hired Cornelius Van Horne, an established railroad mogul, to take charge of their flailing system.

Van Horne made his name by turning around the troubled St. Louis, Kansas City and Northern Rail, after which he went on to become the superintendent of the Chicago and Alton Rail. Under Van Horne, the Chicago rail blossomed. There were few better railroad men in North America. George Stephen, who took charge of the plagued CPR as president, knew that Van Horne could cure their ailments as a general manager. Van Horne received an unusually high salary to take command of the impossible. Unfortunately for Van Horne, he also rubbed many of the employees of the CPR badly. They disliked him for his brash attitude and his penchant for hiring Americans. In fact, the other Canadians disliked him because he was American. Van Horne, however, knew that experienced American railroaders could help with the task ahead.⁶

6. Valerie Knowles, *From Telegrapher to Titan* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 122.

Van Horne promised to build 500 miles of track in a year, some of which would have to cover uneven terrain. Foul weather slowed the construction almost immediately and made their target in Calgary seem much farther away. The rail reached only 417 miles across some of the flattest sections of Canada in the first year. This was a disappointment, but successful enough to continue the flow of government subsidies that financed the construction. With the government funds, Van Horne commanded enough capital to finance the construction through the Canadian Rockies and into the West.⁷

As the tracks headed west, they passed a series of opportunities for entrepreneurial expansion. The plains possessed plenty of land, upon which there would be an eventual rush. The railroad dealt in land rights and water management. It also had ample opportunity become involved in mineral claims such as coal, silver and gold, all of which appeared along the mainline across the continent. This was especially true of the mountains that bordered Calgary, which offered a plethora of mineral resources. The railroad employed, and deployed, a number of surveyors to locate the best routes through these mountains and to catalog the valuable assets available in the area.

The mountains in question – the expanse of the Canadian Rockies - connect a series of peaks that jut thousands of feet above valley floors and neighboring high plains. The railways could only travel up five-degree slopes. Crossing these mountains was a tremendous challenge. The expected capital in precious metals, as well as the desire to breach the Rockies and enable cross-continental railway travel, convinced the CPR to find an appropriate thoroughfare regardless of the cost. The leadership of the CPR settled on a route which would use Kicking Horse Pass as an access point to the Pacific, and

7. Ibid., 133.

which ran past a number of locales that seemed ideal for mining; including several spots near present-day Banff, Alberta. The CPR anticipated a huge rush to these spots and a great boom in the country's mineral output. It was a short-lived dream, but for a time boom towns sprang up among the Rockies just as they had in the Sierra.

Among the boomtowns was a spot high in the Canadian Rockies, known for its silver. The camp was originally called Castle Gate for the vertical turrets of a nearby peak that would later be dubbed Silver City. Oddly, the town had very little of the precious metal for which it was named. The deposits around Silver City were filled with copper, and there was relatively little even of that semi-precious metal. The city arose in 1881 but, by 1884 nearly all of the 1,500 inhabitants had moved on to more promising prospects. "Silver City was a famous mining village in the years 1883-1884. It was a remarkable for many things, but perhaps the most remarkable thing about it was that in spite of its name no silver was ever mined there. It was situated nineteen miles west of Banff. "⁸

The neighboring Selkirk and Kootenay Mountain Ranges west of Calgary were marginally better endowed with deposits. As with the Rockies, it was expected that once the railroads began to blast their way through the mountains, mineral deposits would be found and capitalized upon. The railroads found these mountains especially difficult to breach, and a sort of race emerged for the first company to penetrate the range. American lines in Washington and Montana initially controlled the railroad freight coming out of the mines. The CPR desperately wanted part of that trade. Van Horne wanted to push through the mountains at a pass called Crow's Nest. Although the economic downturn of

8. Harriet Thomas, *Unpublished Article*, Jun. 16, 1933, Tom Wilson Collection, Archives and Library, Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, Banff, Canada.

1893 slowed him a bit, Van Horne eventually got his team to complete the line through these mountain ranges and into Calgary. The rail ran through a pass called Crow's Nest, and then connected to a north running rail. Thus, the CPR brought the train into ranges filled with possibilities and mysteries from the North to the South.⁹

It was always Van Horne's intention to look for tourist sites along the rail lines. The mines had a limited lifespan, but the Rockies, and pockets of Canada's West, possessed other valuable attributes. The surveyors who planned the route for the CPR were therefore also on the look-out for scenic locations and hot springs. One of them happened across a sprawling lake with blue waters, which he would later claim to have discovered. Prospectors recognized immediately that the value of the hot springs and the natural beauty of the region might soon eclipse the potential of the diggings. These alternative resources fit Van Horne's plans to build a tourist industry alongside the railroad tracks. He ordered several hotels built along the line as resting spots for riders.. The next step was to construct a more grandiose lodge that functioned as a true destination in its own right. The natural wonders in the Rockies could provide the incentive for tourists to stay longer than a whistle-stop.

Van Horne realized early on that the CPR could benefit from the growth of the Victorian trade in travel. He had already witnessed the burgeoning of the privileged class on the rails in the United States, and it only made sense that he could entice the same demographic to Canada's dramatic scenery. Van Horne purportedly said that he had to import travelers because he could not export views.¹⁰ But, this wasn't entirely true. Van

9. John A. Eagle, *The Canadian Pacific Railway and the Development of Western Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University, 1989), 33.

10. Knowles, *From Telegrapher to Titan*, 222.

Horne actually could export views. The railroad magnate was something of an aspiring artist with a keen eye for graphic design. He and the CPR contracted talented artists to create posters romanticizing the geography along the tracks; all part of a genius, graphic-marketing campaign meant to lure tourists to the Canadian wilderness.¹¹

Banff, in particular, was a literal hotspot. While searching for silver, prospectors came across sulphur, a tell-tale sign of geologic activity, and hot springs. The nearby Lake Louise is crystal clear, and the greater region shares a visual aesthetic with the Alps, filled with sharp peaks and small valleys. These features looked even better on the posters that Van Horne personally commissioned and reviewed. The hot springs became so popular that a massive hotel was built to house all the travelers who took the rail to the region. The Banff Springs Hotel became the crown jewel of the CPR. It featured 250 rooms and an elegant design by an architect handpicked by Van Horne. American Bruce Price won the post and brought the Victorian stylings he used in Tuxedo Park, New York with him to Canada. He spared no grandeur in the design of the Banff Springs Hotel. The CPR built other hotels along the line, but none could match the Banff Springs Hotel for style, size or elegance.

If the success of the mines had disappointed, the popularity of Banff pleasantly surprised. Van Horne's plans for tourism succeeded. So many people came across the rail lines to Banff, that ancillary industries developed around the tourist draws. Guiding services, in particular, became popular. The vendors who provided such services, tied to the rail industry, needed to have a certain set of skills and experience. Getting around the

11. E.J. Hart, *The Selling of Canada: The CPR and the Beginnings of Canadian Tourism* (Banff, Canada: Altitude Publishing Ltd., 1983), 73

mountainous region could be dangerous even in the summer. Many of these tourists looked to Tom Wilson to take them through the area safely.

Unofficially, Wilson had trained for this career his whole life. Born into a farming family in 1859, and raised near Barrie, Ontario, Wilson fell for the lure of the West. Rejecting his parents' wishes for him to attend university, Wilson instead hit the trail. He travelled through the midwestern United States, making stops in Detroit, Chicago and Iowa before returning to Canada to enlist in the Volunteer Militia, Ontario Field Battery in 1878. After a brief stint as a volunteer, he joined the Northwest Mounted Police.¹²

The "Mounties" assigned Wilson to a fort in the grasslands of the Saskatchewan. At this station, Wilson was charged with surveying a population of Sioux Indians, including the famed Hunkpapa Medicine Man Sitting Bull, who was in the midst of self-imposed exile from the United States. Although the situation was tense, life at the fort failed to match Wilson's romantic images of the West and could not contend with his continuing wanderlust. Yet again he took to the road. Through his travels he found a little success in the odd jobs he took, both in the United States and in Canada, but nothing captured his interest for long. These wanderings took Wilson across the Canadian wilds several times over, giving him an intimate knowledge of the Canadian outback.

When the call came for surveyors committed to finding a route through the Rockies for the ambitious CPR, Wilson lined up for the job. In the position, Wilson quickly distinguished himself. He had a talent for trailblazing and he made use of it. Wilson went on to "discover" Lake Louise and numerous other features in the Rockies, all in the search for a passable route for the rail. (In all likelihood, others passed by these

12. Alexander Fraser, *A History of Ontario: Its Resources and Development, Volume 1* (Toronto, Ontario: The Canada History Company, 1907), 495

landmarks long prior to Wilson. He received the credit and the consequent fame for finding them.) Along the way, Wilson committed to memory many of the geographical features that he encountered in case he might return to them.

Although he did not have a great deal of experience in mining, Wilson took note of locations that had mineral resources. He prospected around Silver City and through the heart of the Rockies, not wanting to let a possible opportunity pass him by. Wilson, however, had little luck turning a profit in mining, and abandoned the practice after only one season. While prospecting, Wilson fell for a woman who operated a boarding house near Silver City, so the enterprise was not a total loss. Unfortunately, when the town evaporated, the two were left with an empty house and no income.

The couple moved closer to Banff, which was a sleepy little encampment of railroad surveyors and miners when Wilson had last seen it. After the rail came through, however, the town grew raucous and crowded with people who flocked to the hot springs. The sight of the changed village must have shocked Wilson. Still, he was known to the CPR officials who managed the area and was quickly called upon to help them explore the area for further development. The CPR asked Wilson to lead them to a boat launching site on Lake Louise, and soon afterwards, they asked him to scout for an ideal spot to erect Van Horne's crowning jewel, the Banff Springs Hotel. The railroad developer hoped that the hotel would be no less than the most hyped and magnetic accommodation in North America. They wasted no time in advertising the CPR's new developments to London. It quickly became apparent to Wilson that the CPR could not fully deliver on its promises to tourists. The CPR advertised widely across North America

and in Europe. In one published pamphlet, targeted to lure wealthy Brits across 'the Pond' the CPR spared little hyperbole.

May I now tempt you, kind reader, to leave England for a few short weeks and journey with me across that broad land, the beauties and glories of which have so recently been brought within our reach? There will be no hardships to endure, no difficulties to overcome, and no dangers or annoyances whatever.

You shall see mighty rivers, vast forests, boundless plains, stupendous mountains and wonders innumerable, and you shall see all in comfort, nay, in luxury. If you are a jaded tourist, sick of Old World scenes and smells, you will find everything here fresh and novel. If you are a sportsman, you will meet with unlimited opportunities and endless variety, and no one shall deny.¹³

Such pamphlets as this one, targeted the Victorian elite who lived in an increasingly industrialized and polluted environment. The pamphlet played to this demographic's desire to see the unspoiled places of the world and to view safely a world that was previously known to be too uncivilized and unsafe to visit. The "New World" was still a novelty to the wealthy English whose knowledge of the place came from exaggerated news reports and highly staged fair exhibits. Whatever the reason, the advertising worked, and tourists from England travelled to the Canadian West.

Once the English had arrived, however, the CPR didn't know what to do with them. Someone had to show them around the mountains. Even the large Lake Louise could be challenging to find for visitors with no local geographical knowledge. Wilson was the perfect choice for a guide. Few people knew the area as well as he, and the CPR now trusted the adventurer with its most important tasks. When they arrived, Wilson showed the Brits around the area. They saw granite spires and fuming hot springs..

13. Bart Robinson, *Banff Springs: The Story of a Hotel* (Banff, Canada: Summerthought Publishing, 2007), 9.

Better yet for Wilson, his skills as a surveyor were in demand once again. He summited several peaks for the Department of the Interior; climbs which would prove to be an invaluable experience when the mountaineering clubs began to arrive a few years later. The surveying job was really only a temporary interlude from what would become Wilson's more regular career as a guide to tourists. The CPR reached out to Wilson frequently over the next few years. He became the choice guide in the Banff region. Initially, he spent most of his time on fairly simple day tasks for average guests. These sightseers rode the rails and viewed nature from the relative comfort of their cabins and hotel, but there were visitors to the region who sought more difficult climbs.

This was, after all, the closing few years of the Silver Age of mountaineering. Edward Whymper and his cohorts made international news in the middle of the nineteenth century. Two decades later, the sport entered a second surge of popularity and maturity. Most of the notable European peaks were conquered between these two climbing epochs. To burnish their reputations, climbers were forced to find new peaks to scale in other parts of the world. The American continent fell under the microscope, especially the mountains in Canada. Therefore the Canadian Rockies held another intrinsic value that matched a growing tourist need in North America. The mountains in the range are technical and challenging to scale, but accessible by rail. They also resemble the Alps enough that the skills European climbers developed scaling those high peaks could be used here.

Fortunately for the CPR, many of the same climbers who needed to make their name by scaling these peaks were also those who had the disposable income to travel to the remote Canadian Rockies. The mountain clubs made the ideal target market. They

were filled with educated and wealthy climbers from urban areas. The clubs were also proliferating across the United States. And the far-flung groups of the United States' Eastern Seaboard could access the Canadian outback after a mere several days of travel. Compared to the trip to the Swiss Alps or the Himalaya, this trip was a bargain.

American mountaineering clubs formed along the guidelines created by the British just years earlier. The first club, formed in London in 1857, called itself simply the Alpine Club. In some ways, the club was an inevitability long before it formed. The popularity and growth of the sport among the British demanded an infrastructure to service its rampant ascent. The founding member of the Alpine Club, William Matthews, noticed the opportunity.

Matthews was trained at Cambridge and educated in the Alps. He came from a wealthy family of climbers and was perfectly situated to charter a club. Matthews and his fellow early members decided that others would have to qualify for the group through "peak bagging" in the Alps. The mountains in Central Europe literally determined one's value as a climber for the first half-century of mountaineering's organized life.

The club met for the first time in December of 1857 near London's Covent Garden. Several of the sport's most noted and notorious climbers joined. But, the club swung its doors open over the next several years and expanded to more than 150 members, despite the very rigorous requirements for entry. Like Matthews, most of the outdoorsmen in the club matriculated from elite universities and held gainful employment in the law, government or in the academy. These apparently were the people most able and most willing to reach the Alps for their own pride and pleasure.

Other groups in continental Europe soon followed suit. Clubs that closely resembled their British counterparts arose in Italy, Germany and France. For the most part, these outfits were dedicated to the Alps. The sport was originally dubbed Alpinism for good reason. The sport was born in the Alps and legitimacy for climbers still came from the slopes of that range. Even in the United States, the Appalachian Mountain Club, the earliest sustained group in the country, sent many of its members across the Atlantic to earn their stripes. The Alps was the proving ground for many eager mountaineers.

The first outdoors club in the United States, however, had a different objective and followed a slightly different prerogative. The Williams Outing Club, created in 1862, was dedicated to more leisurely sport at first – mostly country walking. The club was also directly tied to the transcendental movement and the beginnings of conservationism. It was also, of course, tied to Williams University, the organization under which the club was formed. Demographically speaking, this club bore some resemblance to the Alpine Club, but the cohort was generally younger and untested, and the participants were gaining expertise as they went, rather than having been asked to prove it as a qualification for entry; no Williams student was asked to climb Mont Blanc prior to joining.

The nearby Appalachian Mountain Club succeeded the Williams Outing Club by more than a decade, but more closely resembled its European counterparts. The group attracted some of the most accomplished and successful members of the Boston community, drawing heavily from the Harvard alumni group. Their aspirations outpaced those of the Williams Outing Club by far. While the Outing Club spent most of its time on local excursions, the Appalachian Mountain Club planned and led trips to some of the most marquee peaks in the world.

Edward Charles Pickering founded the AMC in 1876 after a hike in the White Mountains led him to the conclusion that more could be done to perpetuate interest in the New England high country. Pickering was an educated physicist from a privileged Boston family who saw the mountains as grounds for recreation and research. "Mr. Pickering was fortunate in his heritage. Of a family always prominent in New England history, he was heir neither to riches nor to poverty, but to splendid opportunity, which he eagerly grasped," wrote Solon Bailey an astronomer and friend of Pickering's.¹⁴ He grabbed the opportunity to bring a mountain club to Boston based on preexisting exemplars. Maine already had such an organization, so it only made sense that Boston should have one of its own. Almost immediately after the inspiration struck him, Pickering thought of 30 friends who might be similarly interested and sent them letters.

Pickering's friends hailed from some of Boston's most accomplished and wealthy families. "And, so things went with the scientific and erudite leadership of the AMC largely headquartered at the then Boston campus of MIT, providing a worldwide presence for American mountaineering," wrote Charles Earnest Fay, an early member of the AMC.¹⁵ Pickering himself received his PhD from Harvard in Physics and went on to a prolific career as an astronomer and a chair at MIT. At first, Pickering could not disentangle his training from his interest in the mountains. He and some of the other charter members of the club considered focusing the group around conducting geographical surveys, dedicated to the mapping of mountains. Unlike the beacon of

14. Solon I. Bailey, "Biographical Memoir Of Edward Charles Pickering 1846-1919," *National Academy of Sciences of The United States of America Biographical Memoirs* 15, no. 5 (1932), 169.

15. Charles E. Fay, et. al., *A Century of American Alpinism: 2002* (Boulder, Colo.: American Alpine Club, 2002), 51.

associations in London or the earlier clubs in New England, the AMC might have been a purely investigatory body.

The members of the AMC eventually settled on a format similar to the Alpine Club in London. They dedicated themselves to climbing and weekend adventure as opposed to research. The club built a number of huts in the backcountry for weekend explorers to use as rest shelters while on long hiking trips. Their system of wilderness camps is still in place and forms an important element of New England hiking culture today. Other outdoors clubs in North America would use similar guiding principles. Some would dedicate themselves to the preservation and conservation of wilderness. Regardless of their mission, many of these groups were based in urban areas and had to travel significant distances to reach their outdoor playground.

Mountaineers in AMC made their names in the Alps. Here, they took a page from the Alpine Club and from the Golden Age of Mountaineering. Although crossing the channel might always be a challenge, the members of the Alpine Club travelled only some 800 miles, through widely inhabited and civilized areas, to reach the Alps for their sport. Since the AMC members did not have the proximity to the Alps that the Alpine Club enjoyed such proximity to this seminal mountain range, they had to find alternatives on their adventure map. Due to the standards set by clubs in Europe, one could reach climbing legitimacy only in the Alps. No other mountain range could grant status to fledgling mountaineers in to world-recognized athletes. Similarly, by these standards, the founding member of the AMC would not even have been admitted to the Alpine Club, having never been to the Alps. Pickering especially would not have met the Alpine Club's standards, having climbed for the first time just three years prior to founding the AMC.

As a result, the AMC went in search of a North American "Alps" where they could prove their legitimacy as mountaineers.

The men of the AMC joined a larger movement of upper-class men in the latter-twentieth century who saw the wilderness as a proving ground for their masculinity. Members of the AMC had the good sense just to visit, but aristocrats from Europe moved into the West to emulate the manufactured wilderness tradition. "Frontier stories offered a set of cultural tools that enabled upper-class men to make sense of the rise of a new, democratic, industrial society to create meaning in their lives."¹⁶ While the Europeans did their best impression of Buffalo Bill and glad themselves in tassels and hides, the Bostonians proved their manliness by conquering new peaks in previously untrammelled parts of North America.

Peaks that could be reached by train within continental North America became attractive spots. The United States West offered a host of alternatives to Europe, but the Canadian Rockies were both more accessible and in some ways, more difficult, thanks to colder weather and more stable ice. Abbot, who was an early addition to the AMC, and knew Pickering, specifically wanted to use the Canadian Rockies as a training ground for members of the AMC. "Abbot urged the formation of an 'Alpine Section' within the AMC, of which the expressed object was 'to encourage expert climbing of distinctly alpine character,'" Abbot wrote to Professor Fay. Abbot continued in his letter to Fay, "Such experience as would enable one to become a member of the party in the Canadian

16. Monica Rico, *Nature's Noblemen Transatlantic Masculinities and the Nineteenth Century American West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 4

Rocky Mountains which should climb without guides and do original work of medium difficulty.'" ¹⁷

Fay agreed with Abbot, as he counted himself among the Americans who were most impressed with the Canadian Rockies. He took an active interest in the region and promoted it as a climbing destination with mountains worth conquering. Fay had much to do with the decision to make the first and second trips to Mount Lefroy to attempt the summit.

Return to Mount Lefroy

Fay's fascination with the region, however, did little to compel his good judgment during the climb. Fay and his fellow mountaineers could not move Abbot in time to save the young man after the fall. Abbott received a number of head wounds on the tumble down the mountain and there was probably nothing that could be done to repair his fractured skull.

Fay and Little unspooled Abbot from his tangle of rope as the injured climber labored with his final breaths. They attempted to tie him up and drag him slowly down the mountain. Fay could only haul the young man to a nearby cliff before Abbot gave in to his injuries. The young lawyer died on the mountain before his 30th birthday. Eventually, Wilson and the other members of the expedition returned to carry the body down the mountain.

The shocked Wilson was left to wonder what would have happened if he had joined the climb as previously discussed. Wilson now had good reason to worry about the

17. Ibid., 52.

future of his business. Even though he was not actually on the mountain at the time of Abbot's death, Wilson was the CPR's best-known guide and intimately tied to tourism in the area. Even if his name remained unsullied, climbing would be far less attractive once American newspapers had reported on the death and discouraged others from making the trip. For Wilson, the tragedy was total. His business would have to subsist on fishing and hunting in the future.

Abbot's death changed the geography of climbing in North America. The tragedy inspired interest among potential climbers across the continent. Members of the AMC were temporarily dissuaded from Alpinism by the disaster, but they soon changed their minds. In 1898, the AMC created the Alpine Section that Abbot had initially desired. The Section was chartered for the explicit purpose of conquering North American mountains using European techniques.¹⁸ The AMC was not alone in this endeavor. Mountaineers from other clubs were inspired to hazard the peaks that had proved too much for one of America's marquee climbers. His death was nearly a piece of propaganda for the AMC.

Following Abbot's members of death, the AMC mourned, but they did not give up their quest to scale higher mountains. The club elegized Abbot eloquently and then began to make plans to return to Canada.¹⁹ In fact, Abbot's father requested that the club exculpate his son's death by proving his route valid. This time, the AMC decided to bring in some additional help including experienced European climbers Norman Collie and Harold Dixon, both of whom had conquered the Alps. In turn, Dixon hired his former Alpine guide Peter Sarbach. Ironically, Sarbach had once guided Abbot in the Alps.

18. Ibid., 53.

19. Chic Scott, *Pushing the Limits: The Story of American Mountaineering* (Calgary, Alberta: Rocky Mountain Books, Ltd., 2000), 47.

Abbot described meeting Sarbach, "The moment you see him you feel an utter and instinctive confidence in him, a confidence which experience does not diminish."²⁰

Abbot's colleagues felt the same way about Sarbach. With his help, they had the confidence to attempt Mount Lefroy yet again. "It was on August red, the anniversary of Abbot's death, that we started from the chalet at Lake Louise to climb Mount Lefroy," wrote Collie. "From the top of the cliff a little arête of snow led upwards at a gentler slope to the corniced ridge of the mountain, and at 11 a.m. we clambered on to one of the two rocky prominences (some fifty yards apart) which form the highest points Mount Lefroy."²¹ Members of the club honored Abbot's memory by summiting the mountain that claimed the young lawyer's life.

The CPR took note of the AMC's success with Sarbach and decided to emulate it. The CPR had good reason to look to the Alps for a model of mountaineering tourism. The Canadians were already comparing their mountains to the Alps and marketed these peaks as a closer version of the European range. It only made sense that they would hire guides from the Alps to protect their clients in Canada. So, Van Horne and his contemporaries rebranded the mountains as European peaks by stationing very visible Swiss men to guide tourists through the high country. It is no wonder that Fay was a little disgusted with the campaign. He had traveled to the actual Alps and had come to appreciate Canada for what it was. Fay must have been offended that the CPR

20. Appalachian Mountain Club, *Philip Stanley Abbot. Addresses At A Memorial Meeting Of The Appalachian Mountain Club, October 21, 1896, And Other Papers [Reprinted From "Appalachia."]* (Boston: Appalachian Mountain Club, 1900), 66.

21. J. Norman Collie, and Hugh E.M. Stutfield, *Climbs & Explorations in the Canadian Rockies* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1903), 17-20.

transformed him in to a stereotypical tourist. However, the good sense of building on the Swiss tradition – and even poaching from it – could not be denied.

Guiding began in the Alps the moment that Balmat hoisted Paccard up Mont Blanc. Balmat's descendants would make the practice an industry. In 1821, French and Swiss climbers founded the Chamonix Company of Guides. Their goal was to profit from the growing interest in the Mont Blanc region and the rest of the European Alps. They kept busy shepherding tourists from England up the mountain and in so doing they became the most elite collection of for-hire mountaineers in the world. The CPR invited two Swiss guides from Interlaken. Poaching from this group of well-trained guides, the CPR elected to bring Christian Haesler and Edward Feuz for the 1899 season and stationed them along one of the stops. Both would return for years to come and later establish residences in the area for the 1912 season.²² Some of these climbers, especially Conrad Kain, went on to international fame. Kain logged first ascents across the globe during a career that spanned multiple decades. The small town of Golden, where many of these guides lived, eventually resembled a Swiss village.

The CPR went so far as to attract the greatest living Alpinist to their mountains. Whymper made a visit in 1901. Of course, an Alpine guide, Christian Klucker, hosted him. Klucker was none too impressed by Whymper and the purpose of the trip. "It became gradually apparent to us that Whymper was merely there by way of propaganda for the Canada Pacific Railway, because we were never more than two good days' march

22. Major F.V. Flagstaff, "The Story of the Swiss Guides in Canada," *Canadian Alpine Journal* (1906): 190.

from the railway line," wrote Klucker.²³ In fact, Klucker never believed the CPR's rhetoric in the slightest. "Montreal is no Paris, any more than the Rocky Mountains are like our Alps. We now knew that Mr. Whympner undertook the expedition directly or indirectly at the request of the Canadian Pacific Railway Company."²⁴

Despite the fact that Fay had a hand in popularizing the Swiss guides, he also took note of the CPR attempt to transform their mountains into a poor man's version of the Alps.

First and most important the Canadian Pacific Railway as if to force upon the apprehension of a slow witted public the fact that their line traverses real Alps as real as those of Switzerland itself had imported three guides from the base of the Jungfrau two of whom were stationed all summer long at Glacier Next an almost equally important item since guides seldom take the initiative as explorers it was essential that some one should appear with heart set on this special enterprise and with time at his disposal to await the favorable conjunction of circumstances.²⁵

And, Fay was absolutely correct. The CPR engaged these guides to transform the experience of visiting the Canadian mountains into something akin to travelling to Switzerland; they knew it was a tried and true tourism model.

The loser in this major shift was Wilson, at least initially. After a few seasons, Wilson fully recovered his reputation and watched as the interest in mountaineering in the Canadian Rockies soared. Members of the AMC learned their lesson and returned to Wilson for help and instruction. They asked him how to tackle some of the most difficult mountains in the region. Wilson worked with the AMC and other CPR-hosted

23. Christian Klucker, *Adventures of an Alpine Guide*, trans. H.E.G. Tyndale (London: John Murray, 1932), 179.

24. Ibid., 175.

25. Charles E. Fay, "The First Ascent of Mt. Dawson" *Appalachia* 9, no. 1 (1899), 259.

mountaineers for years after Abbot's accident. The introduction and popularization of the Swiss guides, however, weakened Wilson's business. Their image would become a permanent stain on the Canadian Rockies.

Wilson guided in Banff until World War I when a pause in traffic caused him to enter law enforcement and move to Vancouver. This profession did not suit the mountain man, however, and he found himself pulled back to Banff by the lure of the mountains. On his return, he spent most of his time telling stories and entertaining visitors, defending his legacy as the trailblazer of the Canadian Rockies. The advent of the automobile in the Rockies nearly erased the need for CPR-tied guides at a certain point, but Wilson worked out of the Banff Springs Hotel for the CPR until his death in 1933. Wilson was the last of his breed.²⁶

As a local guide, Wilson slowly faded from style after the arrival of the Swiss twenty years earlier. The Swiss, after all, could gain local knowledge of the mountains and add a bit of European flair to the journey, while Wilson could never become Swiss or adopt a vaguely European accent. Wilson was left to watch as more Swiss guides with higher and higher profiles took up residence near Banff. They became synonymous with Canada's mountains, pushing out the hardened, American frontiersmen like Wilson, in favor of a softer, more novel, tourist appeal.

26. Hart, *Diamond Hitch*, 251.

CHAPTER 6: INTERLUDE - A NEEDED LIFT

Mining at altitude led to a consistent problem. Any ore and refuse pulled from the digs often required transportation to lower lying stamp mills or dumps. There, this raw material could be processed for smelting or placed out of the way. The ore could be hauled down hill by rail or burro, but neither was efficient. The mines experimented with aerial tramways to move stone down steep vertical declines. Typically, these trams featured ore buckets towed along single or double cables. A full system could stretch as far as four miles. The innovation made mining in the Mountain West far more efficient.

Andrew Smith Hallidie developed the first successful tramway for use in the United States West. Hallidie immigrated to San Francisco during the Gold Rush from the United Kingdom. He had little luck at the mines and decided to diversify his business interests. Hallidie recognized the need for better transportation of ore and also saw an opportunity when metal wire became available to replace weaker hemp rope. Hallidie went into business manufacturing the wire. Despite his success, he was not satisfied with this career and began tinkering with a suspended tramway. The trams worked and Hallidie advertised them immediately. He claimed that the tramway would operate under almost any weather conditions. The tramway could even carry passengers.¹

Other tramways rapidly followed over the next five decades. The trams were made significantly faster and more efficient with the perfection of the double-cable

1. Robert A. Trennert, *Riding the High Wire: Aerial Mine Tramways in the West* (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2001), 11.

system that allowed for a continuous loop and higher weight clearance. These trams were installed all over the West, including British Columbia, where a mining engineer named Byron C. Riblet oversaw their installation. Riblet went to the Noble Five Mining Company in Sandon, British Columbia after working for a handful of railroads and earning his degree at the University of Minnesota. Riblet found that he possessed a knack for aerial tramways and built them in a number of far-flung locations. Altogether, he installed thirty of the aerial tramways. His tramway at Sandon was modified to carry miners to the dig. A few of them brought skis to the top of the mountain so that they could use gravity to get home.²

Riblet continued to build tramways after he returned to Spokane. The business did well enough that Riblet found he could expand. He brought in his brother and a young engineer named Carl Hansen. Royal Riblet took the proceeds from their business and built one of the famous homes in the Pacific Northwest, complete with a tramway lift, of course. For his part, Hansen set his sights more on the future than on fashionable home building.³ The Depression presented an opportunity to diversify the Riblet Tramway Company.

The Works Progress Administration (WPA) planned to make the Timberline Lodge on Mt. Hood a worthy destination complete with a modern ski area. Just miles from Portland, Oregon, the mountain offered snow and views. To make the area competitive and modern, however, the WPA had to make a number of improvements. Sun Valley had redefined expectations for contemporary sport and the WPA aimed to

2. Sakeus Bankson, "The Henry Ford of Skiing: Riblet Tramway Company and the Birth of the American Ski Industry," *Ski Journal* 7, no. 4.

3. Morten Lund and Jean Vives, "The Way it Was," *Ski* 43, no. 6 (Feb. 1979), 112.

emulate at least part of the experience. Mt. Hood needed a chairlift. Because only a few of the devices existed anywhere in the world, it made good sense for them to contract a company with similar experience.

Byron Riblet had a few concerns about the project, but he took the assignment after winning the bid. The Riblet Tramway Company improved the design used at Sun Valley, by mostly ignoring it. Instead, they brought over many of the techniques used in constructing their ore tramways. The Riblet Tramway Company designed and built a long chairlift that they called the "Miracle Mile" because it ran longer than that distance. The final product was a grander sight than any of the preexisting lifts in the United States. It became something of an icon of the form.

The Riblet Tramway Company survived the war to become the premier American manufacturer of ski lifts. The company operated for another sixty years and supplied lifts to many of the American West's ski resorts. The company built the lifts to ship in pieces. The machines could then be easily erected at the ski sites. For the most part, installation was so simple that Riblet only had to send a representative of the company for a final few days of inspection. The company remained dominant in the United States until the 1990s, when their refusal to integrate the faster "detachable" styles of lift took them out of competition. The company folded in 2003.

From the social use of tramways in Plumas County to the reintegration of supports for the lift at Alta, the mechanization of mining in the West provided the foundation for the automation of skiing in the United States. The Riblet Tramway Company was virtually synonymous with the rise of the ski resort, taking the effect of the tramways much further in the ski industry.

CHAPTER 7: CLAIMS AND CLIMBS IN KANTISHNA, ALASKA

A group of miners challenge explorer Frederick Cook to summit America's tallest mountain.

Named for a solitary sandstone spire standing cross-canyon from a sheer butte, Castle Gate in Carbon County, Utah was a sleepy mining community in 1897. A handful of clapboard buildings nestled into a small canyon and bisected by the railroad, Castle Gate rarely saw busy days. But on the 21st of April, miners, supervisors, administrators and two horses awaited the noon train southbound from Salt Lake City choking Castle Gate with congestion. Payday was hectic, but routine.¹

Mining paymaster E.L. Carpenter had not even bothered to remove his slippers to pick up the miners' wages that day. He sauntered down the stairs from the company offices and over to the train stop, ignoring the crowd. It was just a few feet between the company offices and the depot, taking Carpenter very little time. As he returned, a cowboy who had been sitting at the foot of the office stairs caught his attention.

"I'll take that bag," the cowboy said. And before Carpenter could react, the cowboy had grabbed the cash and sprinted to a waiting horse. As Carpenter watched the bandit run away, it took a few moments to realize he had just become a victim of Butch Cassidy and Elzy Lay's latest scheme. But there was little Carpenter could do except scream and point.

1. Pearl Baker, *The Wild Bunch at Robber's Roost* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 201.

Laden with \$7,000 dollars in gold and silver coin, Cassidy struggled to mount his horse, but lucky for them, Carpenter was helpless. No lawman was present in the city and by the time Carpenter managed to hitch a ride on the train, they were already on their way to "Robber's Roost."²

Robber's Roost is a labyrinthine system of canyons in Southern Utah seemingly designed by nature to be impassible, confusing, and deadly. The narrow canyons and slots made mounted travel difficult, threatening both horse and rider with extreme heat and hidden, dusty arroyos. The canyons scared the average pioneer, but attracted criminals, who had learned how to use the cover of the red sandstone like armies used foxholes. For the most part, the only people foolhardy enough to enter Robber's Roost were crooks looking to hide and possess seeking them.

The Canyonlands of Southern Utah still present great dangers to the most experienced travelers. In 2003, a veteran American climber and mountaineer walked into the canyons not far from Robber's Roost and left five days later having amputated his own arm. Aron Ralston's story of survival was both international news and a bleak reminder of Southern Utah's treacherous times.³

Only a few men volunteered to posse up and chase after Cassidy and Lay. At least one group of pursuers had already failed and the residents of Carbon County were in search of another group of brave, intrepid souls. The man who soon volunteered to lead the new posse was at once a likely and a strange candidate. Thomas Lloyd had recently retired as Carbon County's Sheriff and would soon be on his way to the state capital.

2. Ibid., 203.

3. Aron Ralston, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* (New York: Atria Books, 2005).

Lloyd was a roughneck of the highest order. A Welsh immigrant who had followed the mineral trail to Utah, Lloyd shifted from prospector to lawman and then cut his teeth against men like Cassidy and Lay. To stay alive he had to hone his horsemanship, his navigation skill and his gunplay. In the harsh environment of Southern Utah, Lloyd was an even harsher man.⁴

Fortunately, Lloyd knew other men who were just as tough. With no time to waste on Cassidy's trail, he reached out to several of these frontiersmen to put his posse together. A friend of his, a hulking Swedish immigrant named Pete Anderson, would help lead the charge. Together, the two rode toward the Canyonlands where they would surely find Cassidy and Lay in wait.

Lloyd's posse disappeared for nearly two weeks.

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The chase for Cassidy made local news, but it paled in comparison to Dr. Frederick Cook's exploits in the Antarctic. Dr. Cook, by 1897, had built a solid résumé of extreme expeditions in Greenland, but the call to join the Belgian survey of the Antarctic was a whole new challenge. As photographer and in-house physician for the *Belgica*, Cook would have numerous responsibilities on an extremely dangerous mission. The Belgian boat would sail into freezing waters, past fields of glaciers and potentially hostile peoples.

The ship took a slow route to the bottom of the world, calling at too many South American ports along the way. They reached the last continent in the dead of winter and paid the price when ice encroached upon the ship. The crew found their ship moored in

4. 'The Robber's Roost Gang,' *Salt Lake Tribune*, May 8, 1897.

every direction, stuck solid. Sailors attempted to chip at it only to discover that subzero weather would refreeze the water just as fast the men could break the ice apart. The ship was supplied with rations and the men found food to eat, but long nights and precipitously falling temperatures had taken a toll. A few men had already died and Cook knew that more would follow.

Cook devised an ingenious escape route. Using two-man teams rotating every few minutes, the sailors could saw a passageway through the ice into the ocean. If they cut in triangular patterns, Cook discovered, the ice would naturally cleave and fracture. The men carved two separate canals before finally breaking the ship from its frozen anchor. As Cook had predicted, the final stretch of ice shattered on its own, completing the canal. They dragged the ship to open water. After a year of chipping a living off the frozen surfaces of Antarctica, the Belgian explorers were set free.⁵

Relatively unscathed, Cook returned home to New York as a celebrity. If Americans had not heard of his heroic act, pulling the *Belgica* from the frozen pole, Cook's journal published in the *New York Herald* told them. Cook lectured around the United States and Europe to growing audiences, building his own legend. He became one of the most marquee explorers in the world, Cook was only eclipsed in achievement and reputation by his occasional partner and sometime rival – Robert Peary.

Possibly the first man to reach the North Pole, Peary was a highly decorated navigator and anthropologist who received multiple honors from both the Royal Geographical Society and the American Explorers' Club. Like Cook, his achievements drew skepticism and ignited debate. Not everyone subscribed to his success in the North

5. Robert M. Bryce, *Cook & Peary: The Polar Controversy Resolved* (Mecanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 1997), 163.

Pole or elsewhere. Peary and Cook were in constant competition, each debasing the other's feats. Neither could have guessed that their next great challenger would be an out-of-shape old miner best known for hunting Butch Cassidy.

Cook and Lloyd were opposites in virtually every sense. Cook was born to a life of relative security and comfort. He attended New York University and sold the family business only after it became clear that he could be more successful as a physician. Little is known about Lloyd's early life save that he was born in Wales in 1861. He came of age just as the slate mining industry in Wales boomed. Lloyd's skill in that business suggests that he labored in the pits before leaving for the United States. Like so many others, he immigrated to the United States in the years preceding the Civil War to look for riches in the Western mines.⁶

The competition that raged between the two men between 1903 and 1909 was an informal, but charged battle for America's tallest mountain. Perhaps their race was about more than simply climbing a mountain. Both men would make attempts on McKinley and both would ultimately exaggerate their achievements, but the real goal was a claim on the land. The climb established rights of visitation for altitude. Did the most rugged patch of earth in the United States belong to a wealthy Eastern doctor or to an experienced miner who scraped his living out of the dirt at the foot of the mountain?

Lloyd rode out of the desert in 1897 with bad news. He, Anderson and the rest of the posse could not capture Cassidy or Lay. Anderson and Lloyd had run into a few desperados taking refuge in Robber's Roost, but found little trouble otherwise. Cassidy and Lay remained at large, and they would soon commit more robberies, taking large

6. Cole, *The Sourdough Expedition*, 11.

sums of cash from trains throughout the Southwest. Lloyd, too, moved on to bigger things keeping his employment under the territorial government of Utah.⁷

After four years as Carbon County's first Sheriff, Lloyd became the state's first Coal Mine Inspector, stepping into that office in 1897 and holding it for seven years. Using his experiences in Carbon County, Lloyd was charged with supervising the growing coal mines around the new state. Lloyd avoided any major accidents during his tenure, but just two decades after his retirement, Lloyd's former home at Castle Gate literally exploded. One-hundred and seventy-two men were killed in 1924 as coal dust ignited, transforming the mine into a massive blast furnace. Most of the bodies were so badly charred they could only be identified by clothing or possessions.

Lloyd missed that Castle Gate headline. Around 1902, he chose to pursue mineral wealth in Alaska, where prominent veins of gold had attracted miners for the past five years. Using his connections, Lloyd raised funds and investors both in Salt Lake City and around Carbon County. These men would pay for the trip, but Lloyd was expected to bring back the gold. Lloyd brought with him an old friend who had once joined him on the chase for Cassidy and Lay. Pete Anderson, often called "The Swede," was by all reports an impressive man known for superior strength and toughness – perfect company for Alaska.⁸

It did not take Lloyd long to adjust to life in Alaska. Winters on the tundra were far more extreme than the cold in Utah, but Lloyd was not bothered. In 1902, the *Eastern Utah Advocate* newspaper reported that Lloyd had surfaced in Buffalo, New York. The

7. "Town and County," *Eastern Utah Advocate*, January 12, 1911.

8. Cole, *The Sourdough Expedition*, 17.

former Sheriff had come under arrest for refusing to wear an overcoat. Accustomed to the Alaskan weather, Lloyd strolled through Buffalo without a coat. In the heart of the Northeastern snow belt, he looked strange, even insane. Eyebrows in Buffalo only arched higher when a search revealed thousands of dollars in gold and coin on Lloyd's person. The Buffalo Police were baffled when they took Lloyd into custody, but they released him without charge.⁹

The mining life was filled with booms and busts and Lloyd's coffers ebbed and flowed. Like other miners in the Kantishna region, he spent much of his time searching for the next rich deposit along the slopes of Mt. McKinley. But while relaxing he chose a diversion all too typical for men of the era – he headed to the saloons in Fairbanks. At one of those bars, or maybe around the diggings, someone handed Lloyd a copy of *To the Top of the Continent* by Dr. Frederick Cook. The book described Cook's heroic journey to the top of McKinley and it piqued Lloyd's interest. When Lloyd read it in 1908 or 1909, Cook was the talk of Alaska. Soon he would have a rival.¹⁰

Cook enjoyed his celebrity status after returning from Antarctica. Prior to the trip, he had struggled to raise funds for his adventures, but afterwards he found new following and new financiers. In 1901, Cook received royal honors from the Belgian court and that same year he also took a commission from the Peary Arctic Club to help the other navigator on the way to the North Pole. Cook, though, was anxious to headline his own trips. He set his sights on Alaska.

9. "Tom Lloyd in Buffalo," *Eastern Utah Advocate*, January 16, 1902.

10. Frederick Albert Cook, *To the Top of the Continent: Discovery, Exploration and Adventure in Sub-Arctic Alaska : The First Ascent of Mt. McKinley, 1903-1906* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1908).

Distant Alaska occupied a central place in American conversations towards the end of the nineteenth century. For purchasing the massive chunk of land in 1867, Henry Seward, the U.S. Secretary of State, received tremendous backlash. Radical Republicans and newspapers took to calling the sale "Seward's Folly" as they all decried Alaska as worthless ice infested land with difficult indigenes. But thirty years later, headlines and opinions turned on a dime with the discovery of gold in the Yukon. More gold was soon located in the foothills of Mt. McKinley and Alaska was transformed from despised tundra to an imaginative frontier.

In his novels, Jack London painted a vivid picture of a white Alaska. This was the land of rugged men and ragged mountains. *White Fang*, *The Call of the Wild* and numerous short stories glorified the harsh landscape of the last frontier and its unbelievable characters. The novels sold quickly, placing London in an elite company of contemporary writers that included Willa Cather and Owen Wister. Americans' fascination with Alaska was in full flood.

Aside from valuable gold, the summit of McKinley was one of the greatest prizes available in Alaska. A couple of prospectors mining in the region in 1896 put the mountain in perspective, guessing, accurately, that the mountain stood at 20,000 feet. Then, almost as a joke, one of those prospectors named the mountain after the "free silver" candidate in that year's presidential election. William McKinley, ultimately to be assassinated in office, campaigned for the presidency largely on an inflation platform. By replacing the gold standard for currency with free silver, the value of money would decrease, helping the desperate American farmer. Driving up the demand for silver and

dropping the need for gold, though, did little good for Alaskans. Local deposits largely held gold.¹¹

By geological standards, McKinley is a relatively recent formation rising from the earth just fifty-six million years ago. The meeting of tectonic plates just below the mountain resulted in the uplift of crust and the spewing of magma. The process, still not over, created one of the single largest granitic landmasses in the world. McKinley still adds to its sheer granite spires and cliffs at a pace of roughly one millimeter per year.¹²

Already the highest peak in North America at 20,300 feet tall, McKinley is cut down by glaciers faster than it rises from the earth. Acting like great knife blades scraping across McKinley's skin and depositing fields of boulders in their wake, glaciers dominate the mountain and its surroundings. In a region where average highs in the summer rarely reach above 60° and average lows linger well below zero, McKinley's glaciers thrive in the subarctic environment. They also add to the mountain's treachery by filling already steep slopes and walls with even more sheer crevasses and difficult-to-pass moraines.¹³

The geologic drama around McKinley has given rise to a hardscrabble ecosystem. Much of the area around the mountain is a treeless frozen environment called tundra. The taiga, scraggly forests filled with spruce trees, occupies the rest of the geography around

11. Tom Walker, *Kantishna: Mushers, Miners and Mountaineers; The Story Behind Mt. McKinley National Park* (Missoula, Mont.: Pictorial Histories Publishing Co., 2006), 4-5.

12. R.J. Secor, *Denali Climbing Guide* (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books 1998), 44.

13. Fred Beckey, *Mount McKinley Icy Crown of North America* (Seattle: The Mountaineers Books, 1998). 98-110

McKinley. Both ecosystems must contend with permafrost and stagnant waters to support communities of low-lying berries, birches, loons, hawks, shrews, voles, caribou, moose, grizzly bear and abundant mosquitoes. Local Athabascan Indians left the occasional human footprint in the area.¹⁴

McKinley represented the most visible challenge in American mountaineering. This was the last great-unconquered landmass in the United States and Americans were ready to make their mark. Summit attempts began in earnest in 1903 on the heels of a National Geographic study. The Society published a report of suggested routes to the top of McKinley. The article's author, impressed by the mountain's conditions, also recommended that a serious mountaineer be in command of such an attempt.

Judge James Wickersham tried to climb the mountain in 1903, but came up short. Cook, inspired by the National Geographic report, decided to make an attempt shortly thereafter. He ignored, however, the call for an experienced climber. Cook had logged more than his fair share of time under extreme conditions, but altitude and mountainous hazards would be relatively new to him. His lack of qualifications, though, did little to discourage him.

Cook used the National Geographic article to plan his expedition and outline his shopping list and expenses. All in all, he tallied the cost at \$5,000 to cover travel and supplies for a ten-person trip. He sought funding from Peary who had stepped in as president of the American Explorer's Club. Peary refused to contribute and Cook paid for

14. Bill Sherwonit, *Denali: The Complete Guide* (Anchorage, Ala.: Alaska Northwest Publishing Co., 2002), 21-22.

the trip through piecemeal funds, buying equipment and paying for travel as he went.

Cook even asked other members of the expedition to fundraise independently.¹⁵

Cook and company left Tyonek, a small native town of twenty residents along the banks of the Susitna River, on June 25, bringing with them fourteen horses, each strapped down by 150 pounds in gear. They rafted along rivers when possible, but largely trudged the 200 or more miles through bogs and glaciers to the McKinley foothills. Mosquitoes and horseflies were their constant companions, clinging to man and beast in thick layers. When they stripped the bugs off, the horses were left hairless and bleeding from oozing sores.¹⁶

Frequent rains and occasional earthquakes did little to ease tensions. Already volatile men, many of whom had joined the expedition at the last minute, the expedition members came to distrust each other. Cook, constantly adjusting his plans, found his leadership under question. Had it not been for curious caribou wandering into camp just minutes before dinner, the men may have come to blows.

His expedition rapidly disintegrating, Cook was forced to retreat when he spotted an insurmountable obstacle at 11,000 feet. "Here where the black ridge leading to the top of the pink cliffs should have flattened, all was absolutely sheer, and a hanging glacier, bearded and dripping with bergschunds, filled the angle between." On August 25th, Cook turned his men around and then, unexpectedly, told them to press forward. They would not go up, they would go around. Their rations nearly gone, their feet swollen and their

15. Bryce, *Cook & Peary*, 251.

16. Belmore Browne, Frederick Cook and Hudson Stuck, *Denali: Deception, Defeat & Triumph*, ed., Bill Sherwonit (Seattle: The Mountaineers Press, 2001), 166.

morale dangerously low; they pressed to round the largest mountain and landmass in Alaska.¹⁷

Just as their horses could go no farther and their meat rotted, the expedition met with a navigable river. Using large cottonwood trees under Cook's incessant directions, the men built two rafts to float the river back to civilization. Even though winter was setting in, they still found glacial melt water in which to launch their haphazard rafts. Down canyons and rapids, the loosely constructed rigs were constantly jammed in boulders and loosening their ropes. Not all the men could swim, so the frigid run-off was terrifying. Nonetheless, on September 23rd they floated quietly into Tyonek Station. The local miners did not even bother to ask if they had made it to the summit.

One member of Cook's expedition, though, was still fuming that the doctor had turned them around. A geologist and writer, Robert Dunn published his account of the 1903 Cook Expedition in the appropriately entitled *The Shameless Diary of an Explorer: A Story of Failure on Mt. McKinley* released in 1907. Dunn went against all adventure log conventions, using the book as a humorous sort of self-deprecation. In a less-than-veiled attack on Cook and his cohorts, Dunn wrote: "Exactly this honesty explorers to-day do *not* attempt. From their stories I get in my mouth a horrid taste of varnish. Modestly they derogate all heroism or cowardice in the outer places." ¹⁸

As Dunn's book reached shelves, Cook had already planned another expedition to Denali. A mere three years after the first expedition, he decided to make another push for McKinley's summit. He chose a different group of men to accompany him this time, but

17. Robert Dunn, *The Shameless Diary of an Explorer: A Story of Failure on Mt. McKinley* (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 229.

18. Dunn, *The Shameless Diary of an Explorer*, 5.

they quickly came to the same conclusions about the mountain as those who had attempted it three years earlier. They decided that the mountain was still impossible to climb. Cook's determination did not waiver.

Cook knew that a southern approach up the mountain would work and he steadfastly wanted to try. He was able to convince Robert "Ed" Barrill to accompany him on the way up, while other members of the expedition begged off. The two began on the Ruth Glacier just 1,000 feet above sea level. The glacier proved fragile and was crossed with crevasses. From time to time, Barrill and Cook heard avalanches crashing around them. In the face of these difficult conditions, the two explorers made thirty-five miles in just three days, ultimately reaching a passable moraine. Their challenge, though, still lay ahead.¹⁹

Never accustomed to crampons, Cook chose to cut steps into the snow with his ice axe as he traveled to an estimated 14,000 feet. The long push to that altitude came at a great cost - Cook and Barrill were trapped. Using their axes as stakes, the two tied themselves and their gear into the steep slope. The sleepless night left the two explorers exhausted and half-frozen, but they battled upward. Temperatures dropped to 16° below zero. The altitude caused nosebleeds. Cook's legs tightened, and still they went forward. "The last few hundred feet of the ascent so reduced our physical powers that we dropped on to the snow, completely exhausted, gasping for breath. We had gone so near the limit of human endurance that we did not appreciate the proud moment of the hard-earned success," Cook later wrote. And, then, "AT LAST! The soul-stirring task was crowned with victory; the top of the continent was under our feet... We felt like shouting but we

19. Bryce, *Cook & Peary*, 427.

had not the breath to spare." Cook and Barrill had reached the top on the morning of 16 September 1906.²⁰

Just four days later, Cook was greeted at the bottom, not with excitement, but with a lawsuit. Bill Hughes, one of the men whose services were supposed to be used for the expedition had never been paid. Cook was forced to stay in Alaska for weeks after the trip. He used that time to complete his writing for *Harper's Monthly Magazine*. Cook settled the lawsuit for \$600 and departed Alaska on 25 October heading south toward Seattle. Hughes, however, was not the only man left slighted by Cook. A group of Cook detractors was slowly growing both in Alaska and in the lower forty-eight states.²¹

In Seattle, though, he received the hero's welcome he desired. Oregon's Mazamas Mountain Club arranged for him to speak and Cook did not let down his adoring crowd. He thrilled them with a fantastic narrative and nearly lyrical descriptions of the trip. In his *Harper's* article, he described their final approach: "here, under our feet, was the top of the continent the north pole of our ambitions." The crowd delighted in every word, both in Seattle and later in New York.²²

Cook spoke to virtually every major exploration club. He addressed the American Alpine Club, the Association of American Geographers and the Arctic Club. Of course, he also spoke to his Explorer's Club. Cook was even invited to attend a banquet for the Italian aristocrat and climber the Duke of Abruzzi, but he couldn't attend. These events could pay thousands of dollars.

20. Browne, et. al, *Denali*, 103.

21. Bryce, *Cook & Peary*, 251.

22. Browne, et. al, *Denali*, 186.

Searching for a wider audience and capitalizing on the colorful writing skills Cook used to publish in *Harper's* he wrote a full-length account of his expedition entitled *To the Top of The Continent*. The book rehashed Cook's adventures in both 1903 and 1906 reaching a crescendo as Cook made it to the summit. Unfortunately for Cook, the book also featured the photograph previously used in the *Harper's* article, but this one had a different caption. While the pictures themselves were identical, the captions indicated that they were taken at radically different elevations.

Cook's McKinley trouble, though, started at the North Pole. In April of 1909, Cook boasted victory at the top of the globe. Unfortunately for Cook, so did Robert Peary. Finishing their journeys just days apart, each man hoped to ordain himself as prince of the North, but only one could appreciably wear the crown. To win, Peary would have to discredit his former ally and prove that Cook's North Pole trip had failed. Peary and his supporters set about gathering evidence and attacking Cook's reputation.

Peary lined up an impressive team of backers in his fight against Cook including Civil War General Thomas Hubbard and newspaper magnate Herbert Bridgman. As members of the Peary Arctic Club, they stood to be embarrassed if Peary lost the race to the Pole. The two men anchored their campaign against Cook through exposing the 1906 McKinley expedition, already fraught with the possibility of hoax. The Peary fans began by reaching out to former members of Cook's expedition.

Barrill, perhaps the most important of Cook's hired hands, proved unreliable. At first he swore that the infamous photo in which he waved the American flag atop a peak was indeed taken at the summit of McKinley. Later he recanted that statement saying that the photo was an impostor and was shot much below the actual summit. This omission

alone, though, was not enough proof. Somewhere along the line Barrill managed to discredit himself by revising his story. As a consequence, Peary supporters searched for another, more reliable source. They turned to another former Cook collaborator on McKinley. Belmore Browne once spoke flatteringly of Cook, but soon changed his opinion. As a decrier, Herschel Parker joined Browne.²³

On at least three occasions, they attempted to climb McKinley making progress up the mountain, but failing to reach the summit. Browne and Parker undertook their trip with the explicit intentions of disproving Cook's climb and, as it turns out, they did not even need to leave the foothills to get their evidence. Seventeen miles away and 15,000 feet below the true summit of McKinley, Browne and Parker found a peak identical to the one on which Barrill had posed hoisting an American flag. The jagged geology was identical, save that Cook's photo must have been retouched to make the skyline appear more majestic. Already convinced that Cook was a phony, Browne and Parker could now close the case, at least in their own minds.

During one of their climbs, Browne and Parker met with the Mazamas Club expedition. The group had left Oregon intending to confirm Cook's claim, but their trip had soon gone awry. Led by Portland-lawyer, C.E. Rusk, the expedition suffered from spotty leadership and poor planning. Despite the fact that Rusk possessed climbing experience as a veteran of numerous trips up Mt. Adams in Washington state, he failed to inspire faith in the two men accompanying him.

Over the course of the night, one of the men, an outdoorsman named A.L. Cool, snuck into Rusk's tent, grabbed a snowshoe and took a swing at Rusk. The two men then

23. Bryce, *Cook & Peary*, 444.

struggled to the edge of a crevasse. At the brink, Cook lost his resolve and fell to his knee, while an injured and dazed Rusk put himself back together and pushed on the path up Ruth Glacier.

The Mazamas, not surprisingly, did not reach the summit, but concluded, like Parker and Browne, that Cook could not have done so either. Rusk still admired the doctor. Before the expedition, he had actually sent a letter to Cook asking to join the expedition. He later wrote of Cook, "Of his courage and his resolution there can be no doubt. He is described as absolutely fearless. He was also considered as always willing to do his share and as an all-round good fellow to be out with."²⁴

Browne and Parker, however, were quicker to condemn Cook. Their findings circulated throughout the small world of climbers and explorers. Cook's reputation was under siege. The doctor's feat lost credibility as this evidence surfaced, especially among Alaskans.

Definitive proof of Cook's deception, however, was still needed. The photographic evidence proved part of the story false, but did not entirely rule out the possibility that Cook had made it to the summit. Perhaps he had climbed the mountain then circulated a false but more attractive photograph. Someone had to get to the summit and snap an actual picture, thereby making Cook's chicanery obvious. So, as Thomas Lloyd sat in a Fairbanks saloon one day in November of 1909 discussing Cook's debacle with the bartender, Bill McPhee, their conversation drifted toward the difficulty of a McKinley ascent. Egging Lloyd on, the bartender wagered that he could not make it to the top. Out of shape and more than 50 years old, Lloyd seemed to have little chance of

24. Charles E. Rusk, "On the Trail of Dr. Cook," *Pacific Monthly* 25 (January 1911): 58.

success, despite his insistence that he had recently ventured up much of the mountain. Still, Lloyd took the bet. He would risk his life for a matter of pride and a gamble of two cents, although some \$1,500 would later be collected from McPhee and others to fund the trip.

Lloyd's bravado drew great kudos from his fellow Alaskans. In the subarctic boomtowns of early twentieth century Alaska, there was little else to cheer. Gold had been found in Kantishna, a few days trek out of Fairbanks, just years before, but optimism for gold powder quickly turned to dust. The series of small villages that had popped up, carving plots for log buildings and tents into muddy flood plains, had just as quickly vanished. Archdeacon Hudson Stuck, later to climb McKinley, described Kantishna on one of his frequent visits: "Town after town was built...all with elaborate saloons and gambling places, one, at least equipped with electric lights...Gold there was and is yet, but in small quantities. The "cities" are (now) mere collections of tumble-down huts amongst which the moose roam at will."²⁵

Some miners, like Lloyd, had stuck, around still clinging to their claims staked when they had driven four wooden posts into the ground. Lloyd actually had plans to bring hard-rock mining techniques to Kantishna, dragging equipment hundreds of miles over tundra to the foothills of McKinley. Many of the others though, had given up and returned to Fairbanks or Anchorage. Only a few had the fortune to tap into rich deposits of gold lying as silt in the drainages at the foot of McKinley.

Kantishna and Fairbanks were tiny, insular communities. Lloyd knew whom to search out as he assembled the finest group of local mountain men he could find. Cook

25. Browne, et. al, *Denali*, 505.

had his selection of elite contemporary explorers but Lloyd chose a crew of hardened, local miners; men who were accustomed to the Alaskan woods, but not to high-altitude exploration. Only one of the three miners whom Lloyd convinced to accompany him was under the age of 40. Billy Taylor, the youngest in the group, was twenty-seven. The others, Charley McGonagall and Pete Anderson, were forty and forty-two years old, respectively. Such old mining vets, especially those who had worked in the lower forty-eight states, were known as "Sourdoughs" for the famous bread baked in California. Thirty years after the climb, when asked why Lloyd chose these men to accompany him, Taylor said: "He just knew fellers who were pretty *skookum*."²⁶

What the miners lacked in physical ability, they made up for in local knowledge. Each of Lloyd's compatriots had years of experience in mines around McKinley, so they felt confident they could handle the unforgiving terrain and the freezing conditions of the mountain. They also had practice hunting and dogsledding in the Alaskan tundra—skills that would aid them on the long approach.

Accordingly, the four Sourdoughs packed and prepared with remarkable insight, or, perhaps, with foolish arrogance. They packed only the bare essentials on their dog sleds, including dried fruits, dried meats, coffee and, of course, doughnuts. They also brought a dearth of rudimentary climbing gear. On their feet, they wore creepers, hand-rigged crampons, which they strapped to moccasins made of caribou and moose hides. As a sort of gaiter the men used insulated rubber wrap-arounds. Long underwear, a bib and parka kept the rest of them warm throughout the cold climb. None of the Sourdoughs packed rope – a decision they never regretted in spite of multiple opportunities.

26. Cole, *The Sourdough Expedition*, 51.

They might have been light, quick and unencumbered save for one thing: a fourteen-foot wooden pole tying the American flag they hoped to carry to the summit and erect as a marker of victory. The weight of the spruce pole contradicted all logic, but the Sourdoughs needed an emphatic declaration of success. When placed at the summit, the flag would be visible to friends and doubters alike, rendering all other forms of evidence unnecessary. The flag was actually the donation of a local hardware store that used the climb as an inventive advertising scheme. In local papers, the store ran a posting proudly crying that the Sourdough flag still flew over McKinley.

Supplied and rationed, the four men chose the dead of winter to begin their trek, probably hoping to capitalize on the stable conditions of the ice and snow. The other seasons, while more temperate, can also cause movement among the glaciers and ice fields making travel more dangerous. They rushed out of Fairbanks and into the foothills of Mt. McKinley on February 10th for a journey that lasted nearly four months. Lloyd and Anderson were as tough as Western men got, but the journey up to McKinley was fatally dangerous.

They began their trip not by heading into the unknown, but by returning to their homes. They rushed to their claims at Glen Creek in the Kantishna on February 16 where they camped for the next few days battling gales, blizzards and low visibility before they could move their camp. When the weather finally cleared, they brought their camp to 2,900 feet. They were still more than 17,000 feet below the summit and already the temperatures had plummeted to 32 below zero.

From this "Willows Camp" the men got a look at the challenge ahead. The Muldrow Glacier, a massive sheet of ice settled into an expanding vault, was now visible.

A later climber would describe the crevasses in the glacier as being large enough to hold a freight train. The Sourdoughs, though, were more impressed by the sheer outcroppings of rock along its side. They named the glacier for these stark, tall spires, recalling the only place in the world where they knew of such monoliths abutting so flat a field – Wall Street.²⁷

Wall Street glacier frightened Lloyd. Occasionally, great chunks of ice would break and fall around them. The snow where they pitched their tents would settle and sink in the night. Lloyd remarked that when he had the courage to peer down into a crevasse, he imagined that they had no end. In the middle of the night, as the climbers slept, temperatures approaching zero warmed the ice and caused a sudden cleave beneath the tents. A sound like "the report of a great gun" frightened Lloyd, but hardly stirred Anderson.

The Muldrow Glacier is an active piece of ice that still threatens climbers. Along the twenty-mile route to their next camp, the Sourdoughs were exposed to the constant possibility of avalanches, snows and fog. At night they bedded down in caribou or goat furs, often piling snow on the sides of their tents to keep the shelters still as the winds pounded them. Trudging onwards at the break of dawn each day, the men brought poles with them as a measure of protection against the crevasses. On March 18th, they reached their final camp that Lloyd mistakenly estimated to be 15,000 feet high, but actually stood at only 11,000. Lloyd would go no farther, staying behind to convalesce or to look after the dogs.

27. Ibid., 26.

From Tunnel Camp, the Sourdoughs still had more than 8,000 feet of vertical ice and rock to scale before they could make it to the top. Along their route, they either faced sharp seracs or overhanging glaciers likely to calve and crush them at any given moment, and, this was just the approach to the dangerous part of their route. Karsten's Ridge is a long stretch of knife-edge pitched steeply up the mountain at forty-five-degree angles and layered with a constant patina of ice. The ridge empties onto yet another massive glacier called Harper's, which after traversing, leads to an additional steep climb on the Sourdough Couloir. Yet again, Taylor, Anderson and McGonagall would have to contend with forty-degree slopes and 2,000 feet of vertical ascension, all with the ever-present spruce pole strapped to them.²⁸

The day before their ascent, Anderson and McGonagall had cut some steps into the snow, but by all evidence, the men roared through those 8,000 feet in a single day with no preparations. The total elevation change alone could have encapsulated any peak in the contiguous United States. Nonetheless, the three men pushed onwards, ultimately spending two hours atop at the summit despite the extreme cold. Their impossible ascent took no longer than 22 hours, just four hours longer than the record. That 18-hour climb was made nearly a century later and reached the south summit by a considerably easier route.

Following his departure from Fairbanks, Alaska, in December 1909, Lloyd had sent only one communication out of the frigid Alaskan interior. The short message, delivered by a fellow miner sometime later, conveyed only the simple message that Lloyd had lost some weight and that his expedition was in fine shape. When Lloyd himself

28. Bill Sherwonit, *To the Top Of Denali: Climbing Adventures on North America's Highest Peak* (Anchorage, Ala.: Alaska Northwest, 2000), 25-41.

finally emerged from the woods in April of the following year, he was greeted with great enthusiasm and even greater curiosity. The people of Fairbanks, their patience exhausted, wanted to know if he had reached the top of America's greatest peak. In answer to their questions, Lloyd told them a tale so fantastic that it was difficult to believe. Despite the cold and heights, he claimed, his team had reached the top and planted the spruce pole complete with a flag.

But the trouble was that nobody could see the pole even with the aid of a strong telescope. Browne and Parker had come just feet from the South Summit and strained to see the pole on the North, but they could not. Another expedition led by a Fairbanks newspaperman failed as well. This lack of evidence coupled with Lloyd's outlandish claim to newspapers that the team had ascended both McKinley's North and South summits seemed suspicious. Lloyd went on to say that he would gladly climb the peak again for a guiding fee of \$5,000. Better yet, he would also line their route with wooden bridges and handrails for an additional \$45,000 so that any tourist with the means to get to Alaska could also get the top of the mountain. Even some of Lloyd's friends began to doubt these outrageous statements. McKinley is a massive mountain and it would require superhuman endurance to attain both of its summits in a single ascent, as Lloyd claimed to have done in an article published in *The New York Times*. Now, the well-paunched Lloyd said he was ready to climb the mountain with even more heavy timber and construction equipment.²⁹

Lloyd's story came under fire, and in short order, multiple renditions of the Sourdough Expedition circulated through Fairbanks. Lloyd may have admitted pointedly

29. Terris Moore, *Mt. McKinley: The Pioneer Climbs* (College, Ala.: University of Alaska Press, 1967), 72.

to friends that he stayed at 11,000 feet to nurse a cold, while Taylor and Anderson had made it to the North Summit. If that was, in fact, the case, the Sourdoughs would have reached the shorter summit just 800 feet below the top of Alaska. For their part; Taylor, McGonagall and Anderson remained silent due to a prior pact between the men. Those three, probably recognizing Lloyd's role as organizer and his hunger for attention, allowed the older Lloyd to do the talking. The entire party signed an affidavit swearing that they climbed the mountain, but some did not reiterate that boast elsewhere. McGonagall would go on to say that he had only come close to the top. Taylor and Anderson perhaps could have convinced friends of their success more easily – both men looked strong and capable, unlike the deteriorating Lloyd.

Even if the North Summit seemed plausible, Lloyd had still lost his credibility among his peers due to his vanity and exaggerations. Just as Alaskans dismissed the stories by Dr. Cook, they soon counted Lloyd's reports as another piece of unlikely fiction. Taylor, McGonagall and Anderson even went so far as to retrace part of the climb to take more photographs; the first prints were indecipherable because no one on the expedition could use the new Kodak. It was too late, for the greatest mountaineering feat yet achieved by some of America's toughest laborers had become little but a fanciful yarn to most Alaskans.

Lloyd himself went to his deathbed claiming that members of his Sourdough Expedition reached the top of McKinley and planted a flagpole to prove it. Even after it became patently obvious that Lloyd had lied regarding his own achievements on the mountain, he continued to believe in the team's great accomplishment. Over time, the other members of the group told conflicting stories to friends and writers. They admitted

that only Taylor and Anderson reached the North Summit and that none of them reached the South Summit, but they fervently maintained that they had conquered the tallest peak in the United States. McGonagall would even go so far as to say that he too could have reached the North summit, but he opted to wait below, as it was not his turn to carry the pole. In later interviews the men also insisted that they had selected the lower summit only because that peak was more demanding and more visible from Fairbanks.³⁰

Hudson Stuck, however, would soon overshadow the Sourdough's stories and their innumerable conversations. A trusted figure in Alaska, Stuck climbed McKinley and gave the Sourdoughs credit not only for beating him to the North Summit, but also for discovering the route to both of the mountain's highest points. When Stuck published his thoughts, Sourdough supporters found a banner behind which to rally. Not everyone, though, put as much faith in Lloyd and his ragtag bunch.

Archdeacon Hudson Stuck arrived in Alaska in 1904, after spending years as a deacon in Texas, where he practiced a militant sort of Christianity at his Dallas church. Later called to Alaska, Archdeacon Stuck oversaw 250,000 acres of both tundra and unconverted souls. He also kept an eye on fellow explorers as they braved McKinley's slopes. Stuck had fostered an interest in mountaineering since his youth, much of which had been spent in Great Britain's Lake Country. In Alaska, his duties as Deacon kept him busy, but when Cook's boasts made news, Stuck was stirred to action. At first, Stuck merely kept a weary eye on Cook. But when the Sourdough attempt devolved into controversy, Stuck decided to conquer McKinley and resolve these lingering debates. He took a year to prepare, conducting much of his research during his rare moments of spare

30. Cole, *The Sourdough Expedition*, 11.

time. Stuck spoke at length with the Sourdoughs, gleaning details on their route and methods. Fiercely loyal to his fellow Alaskans, Stuck not only believed the Sourdoughs, he thought that he could verify their claim.

In 1913, Stuck made the first undisputed summit of McKinley. He had watched Cook on his well-publicized climb and later observed the Sourdoughs as well. Stuck went in search of the great wooden clue left behind by the Sourdoughs. At least one member of Stuck's party actually spotted the flagpole Lloyd claimed to have erected from a vantage point along their route to the South Summit. Although he failed to capture the pole on film, Stuck wrote in a log of his expedition: "Taylor and Anderson reached the top (about twenty thousand feet above the sea) and firmly planted the flagstaff, which is there yet." Stuck continued to call the Sourdough Expedition the "most extraordinary feat, unique...in all the annals of mountaineering."³¹

While Stuck convinced others of his own success on McKinley, he could not do the same for the Sourdoughs. For a time though, the mountain was fallow of climbers. Someone had made it to the top and McKinley was removed from the international mountaineer to-do list. No one attempted to summit McKinley for another nineteen years. Other peaks in Alaska remained unclimbed and despite McKinley's dominant height, prestige lay in discovery not replication. The next two expeditions up McKinley's slopes were significant in that they pioneered new methods for the climb. The Lindley-Liek team used skis on the approach, while the Carpe expedition airlifted up to the Muldrow Glacier at nearly 6,000 feet. The Sourdough's route to the top remained the walking path

31. Browne, et. al, *Denali*, 123.

of choice although neither of those later expeditions could find any trace of the spruce pole.

Among the Alaskan climbers who felt no sense of urgency to climb the peak after the Stuck, Carpe and Lindley-Liek expeditions, was Bradford Washburn. The father of modern Alaskan climbing, Washburn, made numerous first ascents, but felt little impulse to conquer McKinley. The American Army, however, challenged his indifference, when they asked him to use a climb up McKinley as an opportunity to test newly developed gear. Although it was not his primary objective, Washburn summited. It was the beginning of a lifelong fascination with the mountain.³²

Washburn went on to reconstruct the Sourdough Expedition through both aerial photography and on-the-ground exploration. He photographed the complete Sourdough Expedition route from small props flown by intrepid bush pilots. Sleuthing the Sourdoughs and Dr. Cook, Washburn dedicated the compilation of these efforts into a book that readily reveals his sentiments. *The Dishonorable Dr. Cook* added substantive evidence to the avalanche of materials proving Cook's claims false.³³ Not coincidentally, Washburn dedicated the book to his friend Belmore Browne who had also sought to prove Cook's infamy. Washburn also became the first climber to top both the North and South Summits of the mountain, bringing into reality an outlandish claim Lloyd had once made.³⁴

32. David Roberts and Bradford Washburn, *Mount McKinley: The Conquest of Denali* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1991), 135.

33. Peter Cherici and Bradford Washburn, *The Dishonorable Dr. Cook: Debunking the Notorious Mount McKinley Hoax* (Seattle: The Mountaineers Books, 2001).

34. David Roberts, *The Last of His Kind* (New York: Harper, 2009), 195.

Terris Moore, one of Washburn's frequent collaborators and his occasional pilot, wrote extensively about the Sourdough Expedition in his 1967 *Mt. McKinley: The Pioneer Climbs*, published after he retired from the presidency of the University of Alaska. Moore found some common ground with the Sourdoughs and gave them credit both for their climb and their influence upon later mountaineers. As an accomplished climber, Moore saw enough truth in the Sourdough accounts to support their growing legend.

Once the Mazamas Club of Oregon had gone to great risks and expenses to prove Cook's success, but in 1950, Francis Farquhar, the editor of the Sierra Club's bulletin, reviewed the history of McKinley's climbs and gave the Sourdoughs credit for pioneering their route and for reaching at least 18,000 feet if not the outright North Summit. Grant Pearson, the Superintendent of Denali National Park was no less fascinated with the Sourdoughs. He tracked down surviving members to interview them, even befriending Billy Taylor and Pete Anderson.³⁵

The Sourdough's authority grew as time went on, although neither scholars nor climbers could definitively prove or disprove the success of the Sourdough expedition, leaving the issue continually open to debate. Cook's achievements were refuted and later trounced by the revelation of his fabricated North Pole adventure in 1908, leaving the Sourdoughs on a precipice of veracity all their own. As Cook's credibility vanished, Lloyd's has remained in constant question.

From their separate worlds, Cook and Lloyd came to McKinley with similar inspirations. Each wanted to take America's summit. As it turned out, both men were far

35. Bill Sherwonit, *Alaska Ascents: World Class Mountaineers Tell Their Stories* (Anchorage, Ala.: Alaska Northwest Books, 1996), 131-140.

more talented claimers than climbers. Cook learned to fashion both his reputation and career among a competitive group of elitist adventurers who dominated the early age of exploring. Lloyd, to the contrary, had learned to survive in tough-scrabble mining towns where exploration took men only as far as the next cache of minerals. Both Cook and Lloyd, however, were veterans of the early twentieth century spin machines. Cook published a best-selling memoir of McKinley while Lloyd managed to put himself in the international headlines. Both men zealously guarded their status well past the point of logic, each concocting fabrications embellishing their achievements. Either man could likely have rested on his true accomplishments and still found his way into history.

Cook, whose fan club actually attempted to recreate his McKinley route under ill-fated climber Scott Fisher in 1994, has been largely maligned as a fraud and charlatan. Lloyd, to the contrary, has seen his stock rise over the years. In an era of "rugged individualism" as manhood veered to rougher extremes and Jack London hit his stride; Lloyd proved his grit by climbing 20,000 feet into the frigid Alaskan interior aided mostly by his buddies and some coffee. In the American Frontier, Lloyd knew how best to fashion a hero in popular imagination, while Cook failed even to convince his fellow New Yorkers.

While Cook has suffered from the judgment of both historians and climbers, the Sourdoughs have received something of a pass. After all, both Cook and Lloyd had tenuous claims at best, but Lloyd appears a sympathetic prankster while Cook is tagged as "dishonorable." In that way, it hardly matters if Lloyd reached the summit. His goal was to keep McKinley tied to Alaskans, and over the century since his climb, his legacy has done just that.

CHAPTER 8: INTERLUDE: WHITE CARNIVALS

In 1844, a party of Iowans tempted fate and struck out for California over the Sierra Nevada. The mountains were dangerous and the passes were untested by white emigrants. Dr. John Townsend, Martin Murphy and Elisha Stephens deemed the risk manageable and led fifty people in eleven wagons down the Oregon Trail and into the Sierra. With luck, they hoped to reach John Sutter and his fort near present-day Sacramento.

The party received a fortunate turn when a local Paiute came to their aid. Members of the Stephens-Townsend-Murphy Party called the man Chief Truckee. He showed the party a safe route through the Sierra along a river that the group named Truckee in the Chief's honor. The river led to a small valley and an alpine lake, that they also named Truckee. Most importantly, the river led to a pass that put the rest of California in sight. The little valley where the party camped by the lake would soon become a convenient stop for others who took the emigrant path on the Truckee Route of the California Trail.¹

The California Trail lasted only a few years, but the spot that would become Truckee received a second-life as a logging town and a way station for miners headed to Virginia City, Nevada. The Central Pacific Railroad completed a line from Sacramento to Truckee. With this improvement, the trip from the mountains to the San Francisco Bay

1. Francis P. Farquhar, *History of the Sierra Nevada* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), 44.

became fast enough that ice could be milled in Truckee and shipped to the coast. The train, however, was also important for what it could bring into the mountains – tourists.

Truckee was not strictly a mining town, but it was intricately tied to the diggings. As the mines suffered, so did Truckee. The ice business was not enough to keep the town solvent. Fortunately, Truckee could get by on its good looks. A tradition of sightseeing arose almost immediately after the Central Pacific Railroad reached Truckee. Passengers from Sacramento would take the trip for a day or two solely to play in the mountains and in the snow. The ride, albeit dangerous in poor weather, struck the passengers with awe. Better yet, they enjoyed the opportunity to skate and sled.

Beginning in 1892, Truckee residents made an earnest effort to augment their spectacular surroundings. A local entrepreneur named Charles McGlashan built an ice palace with a rink for skating. It fascinated visitors. Over the next few years, Truckee residents built bigger and bigger palaces and complemented them with long toboggan tracks. The event drew attention, but it did not generate the revenue needed to make it sustainable. The town, however, would not give up on the event.²

In 1910, people of the town installed a very basic rope tow for toboggans and primitive skis. A few years later, guests at the carnival and local children busied themselves learning the styles of contemporary European skiing.³ The sport did not take an instant hold, however. It took two decades for skiing to capture the imagination of Truckee's residents. Of course, locals formed a ski club to organize the promotion of the sport and their competitions. In 1929, they rallied for the Winter Olympics to come to the

2. McLaughlin, *From Longboard to Olympics*, 56.

3. *Ibid.*, 57.

Sierra, but lost the bid to Lake Placid. It didn't matter. The drive for skiing in California was gaining speed. Within a few more years, the resort age would begin. The winter carnival at Truckee had inspired the birth of a sporting form.

Truckee was not alone on its staging of winter carnivals. Nearby Auburn, California had a tow. Even Yosemite National Park sported both a rope tow and ice-skating. The State of California threw its weight behind these events, marketing them in the early 1930s. The state campaign succeeded in nearly doubling the number of winter carnival attendees in only a few years.⁴ The carnivals paved the way for downhill ski resorts across the State of California.

In Colorado, a similar tradition of winter spectacles blossomed in the mountains near Denver. Among the ski jumping performers was Carl Howelsen, the Flying Dutchman. He was actually from Norway, where he learned to ski both on the ground and in the air. He took his barnstorming act to mountain towns throughout Colorado. The events drew curious crowds. These onlookers not only watched as Howelsen executed incredible tricks, they also participated in skiing events of their own. The Colorado Mountain Club joined the act and led trips to Estes Park near Rocky Mountain National Park for similar fetes.⁵

Park City followed the act with its own version of a winter carnival at Deer Valley. The Works Progress Administration pitched in by constructing a toboggan lift. Most importantly, the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad promoted the event and transported

4. Ingrid P. Wicken, *Lost Ski Areas of Southern California* (Charleston, S.C.: The History Press, 2012), 13.

5. Coleman, *Ski Style*, 33.

some 500 snowbirds up the mountain from Salt Lake City. They held the events for two decades, some years drew big crowds, while others only attracted a handful of people.

Although the winter carnivals brought audiences for only a handful of years, they demonstrated that the joys of winter could easily attract travelers. Tourism, even in the coldest conditions could work. The events also proved that the railroad could be the best sleigh to the mountains. Finally, the events worked to spread the gospel of skiing across the United States West. Through viewership and through sampling the sports for themselves, urbanites had the opportunity to try skiing and observe it at its highest level.

CHAPTER 9: SUN VALLEY ALSO RISES

The Union Pacific Railroad experiments with commercial skiing in a former mining town, forever changing the face of American sport.

In 1852, Elias Davidson Pierce took a break from his work for the State of California and his difficulties as a miner in the Sierra Nevada to visit the Nez Perce on the Snake River. They made camp in the same spot where Lewis and Clark had stayed five decades earlier. Unlike the explorers, Pierce and company had a simpler goal. They wanted only to trade furs and then return California. But, Pierce also had other ideas. He hoped to find gold. He did. Unfortunately for Pierce, the Nez Perce controlled the region and had no reason to allow mines in their territory.¹

Pierce continued his interest in Idaho despite the fact that existing treaties forbade such mining. He returned in the middle of winter in 1860 to search for the gold, once again knowing full well that the trip was illicit. The trip yielded results encouraging to Pierce, so he took a larger group back to the area a year later. This time, Pierce returned with a small party to build an encampment in a town that would bear his name. His team spent months building log cabins and sluices. They also accrued private stockpiles of their own findings, which would be valueless without a sales market.²

1. Bill Gulick, *Snake River Country* (Lincoln, Neb.: Caxton River Press, 1971), 93.

2. Ibid.

I.C. Smith lost his patience with the long winter and decided to travel to Walla Walla, Washington despite the deep snows that blocked the path. Someone in Washington would surely covet the hundreds of dollars' worth of gold dust that he had accumulated. Fortunately for Smith, he carried with him a pair of snowshoes similar to those in use in the Sierra Nevada of California. He used them to get back to Walla Walla. "In doing so, Smith glided his way into history. Not only did he carry the first substantial amount of gold out of Idaho, but he also went into history as one of the first persons recorded to have used skis in Idaho," wrote Ron Watters.³

The message on skiing would spread on its own throughout the American West, but Smith fanned the interest in mining on the Snake River. Soon, the future state of Idaho was inundated with miners on snowshoes, almost all of them homemade and nearly identical to those in California, save the dope mix so important to the California racers. The snowshoes were so prevalent that one miner described an informal sharing program common to the camps. Travellers would abandon their snowshoes on the side of the trail only to reclaim someone else's planks later.⁴ Snowshoes were also used to deliver the mail, and, of course, to race and tour. Reports of skiing for fun emanated from several of the camps. At least one of the races in a place called Silver City offered a substantial purse to the victor.⁵

Idahoans, however, were supposed to make their money in the mines. A number of big strikes followed Pierce's initial digging. Among the largest of them was a

3. Ron Watters, *Ski Trails and Old Timers' Tales in Idaho and Montana* (Moscow, Idaho: Solstice Press, 1978), 11.

4. Ibid., 16.

5. Ibid., 19.

discovery of galena along the Wood River Valley. The silver rich-ore caught the eye of many prospectors, but the Bannock and Sheepeater Tribes fought to keep the area free of these encampments. By 1879, that effort had failed and the Oregon Short Line railroad would soon connect the area to Salt Lake City. This new infrastructure manifested in the opening of the Minnie Moore Mine and a subsequent explosion of population the Wood River Valley.

Blaine County was organized in 1890 to contain the Wood River Valley, its mineral deposits and railroad access. Thus the county line contains an odd, fingerlike projection to the south into the Snake River Valley so that the tax proceeds and control of the rail could remain within Blaine County. The rail and the later road through the valley parallel the Wood River itself. The river, and its tributary the Little Wood River, flows out of the bordering Pioneer Mountains and the Smoky Mountains, both of which are part of the Sawtooth Mountain Range. These peaks are topped by sedimentary formations, but their hearts are made of igneous intrusions with a variety of valuable mineral deposits.⁶ The editor of the *The Wood River Times* described the potential for mining along the rivers, "...a number of mines of high grade ore are being developed. On the east, just below the town of Ketchum, comes Trail Creek, a good-sized stream. It heads near Lost River," wrote T.E. Picote. "It is a wild and turbulent system noted for its grand scenery."⁷

Townships at Hailey, Muldoon, Doniphan and Ketchum arose. In 1883, the rail arrived as scheduled into nearby Shoshone, just a handful of miles south. A decade later,

6. P.K. Link, "Geologic Map of Blaine County," *Digital Atlas of Idaho* (entry), *Idaho Museum of Natural History*, Sept. 2002, <http://imnh.isu.edu/digitalatlas/counties/blaine/geomap.htm>.

7. T.E. Picote, "Wood River!" *The Wood River Times*, Sec. 1, June 15, 1881.

the population of the area hovered around 5,000 people. Residents had access to a telephone, telegraph and a smelter to process the ore retrieved from the mines. The towns, although quickly built, were organized and humming with activity including baseball, bands and skiing. Jay Gould paid a visit. Homer Pound, raised his son, Ezra, in Hailey.

The lifestyle and the income could not last. The erosion of the silver market in 1893 changed the Wood River Valley. Several of the camps disappeared entirely. Some investors looked to a far less showy or wealthy industry. Sheep herding became a major business on the same mountainsides that once hosted scores of prospectors. The year 1893 marked the first of the Idaho Wool Grower's Association. The two businesses soldiered along together for the next four decades. The mines, although far less productive and profitable in the recessions, they still operated, churning out limited amounts of silver. The sheep herding business fared much better and eventually grew into the dominant business in the area. The year 1920 recorded Hailey as one of the top wool producing towns in the United States.

This was the Hailey and Ketchum that Count Felix Schaffgotsch visited in the snowy winter of 1935. The mines still struggled along in much depleted form. The wool ranchers were hit hard by the Depression. The town generally had the feeling of a place that had crested decades before, so Schaffgotsch made quite an impression when he sauntered into town.

Schaffgotsch was a member of the lesser Austrian royalty, and something of a playboy. Born in Enns, Austria in 1904, Schaffgotsch came to the United States in 1930, listing his employment as an apprentice banker for his friend, William Averill Harriman. Just a decade later, he would perish on the Eastern Front fighting for the Nazis. It seems,

though, that Schaffgotsch thoroughly enjoyed himself until his early demise. He spent more than his fair share of time skiing in the Alps and chasing women. Fortunately, he did not really have to excel at either of those pastimes to take a plumb assignment that would change the fate of American skiing. He searched for the perfect spot for an Alpine-like ski resort in North America. The spot that he chose would become the first of its kind anywhere outside of the Alps.

The mission came at the behest of an old friend, but it proved difficult and Schaffgotsch nearly gave up without locating a proper spot. He had exhausted much of the West in his search when he finally reached Boise, Idaho in 1935. William J. Hynes, a Union Pacific area administrator for passengers and freight, introduced Schaffgotsch to Jackson Hole in Wyoming. The two were unimpressed by the distance between the potential slopes and the railway. Schaffgotsch abandoned Idaho and went back to Denver to have a second look at the mountains outside of that city. Denver was the obvious choice for a ski attraction. The local ski train functioned between the downtown area and Beaver Creek, bringing consistent ridership. The city also had a substantial population from which to draw more skiers. Denver, however, did not possess the qualities that Schaffgotsch sought. His return trip was equally disappointing.

For his part, Hynes went back to his typical routine, ready to dismiss Schaffgotsch and skiing as a bit of folly that would soon be forgotten. Hynes discussed the fool's errand with a friend who casually mentioned that Hynes and Schaffgotsch might take a look at the mining and wool hamlet of Ketchum. The idea struck Hynes as a good one. He acted immediately. Hynes sent a telegram to Schaffgotsch, who returned immediately,

meeting Hynes at Shoshone about fifty miles down the valley from Ketchum. The two pushed through the snow to reach the peaks.⁸

Schaffgotsch liked what he saw. Gentle mountain slopes, some cleared by years of mining and sheep raising, surrounded the town. Snow covered the hillsides, but not so much that Schaffgotsch seriously had to fear blizzards and snowed in conditions. Better yet, the valley had blue skies and mountain vistas. It was also properly inconvenient. The slopes had to be accessible by rail, but not sufficiently close that tourists could make a short trip and leave after a single day on the slopes. These mountains had to be a destination because they would lure a unique group of skiers -people able to spend a significant amount of money on sport and travel. The resort had to entice a dedicated leisure class in the middle of the Depression. At first glance, Schaffgotsch could see the geography met the requirements exactly. These were promising conditions.

Schaffgotsch and Hynes asked around town for someone on skis who could guide the Austrian through the mountains. The two were directed to the Griffith Grocery Store. Founded by the descendants of miners, the store was a town fixture and a local business in every sense. The patrons and staff inside had likely never seen an Austrian Count. The grocer knew skiing, though, and volunteered a young man known for his skills on the mountainside. The kid showed up lugging two long wooden planks with a swatch of canvas at their centers. Schaffgotsch had never seen anything of the kind. He asked the kid what he had brought. The mysterious objects were, of course, the young man's long

8. Doug Oppenheimer and Jim Poore, *Sun Valley: A Biography* (Boise: Idaho: Beatty Books, 1976), 23-26.

boards. These types of skis were common in the West, but not prevalent in Europe.

Schaffgotsch was accustomed to smaller skis with a front bevel and metal cage for feet.⁹

Schaffgotsch accepted the surprise and went out to the mountains with the boys. The two skiers spent four days gliding around the Ketchum area. Even on his antiquated boards, the young man kept up with Schaffgotsch. They explored the nearby peaks and slopes. Schaffgotsch liked what he saw and decided to stay a little longer. After four days, he had seen enough. Schaffgotsch sent a message to his employer – William Averell Harriman, the man who had sent him on this strange quest.

Averell Harriman was born into the railroad legacy created by his father, E.H.. The elder Harriman began acquiring railroads in 1881, and took advantage of the 1893 recession to take complete control of the Union Pacific Railroad. His son inherited a great deal of wealth and power, but just as many expectations. Averell would distinguish himself in a number of fields throughout a long career. He worked in shipping, investment banking, served as the governor of New York and as the Ambassador to the USSR. He also competed internationally in polo. Harriman was accustomed to winning.

It thus surprised him that his attempt to take control of and manage the Aviation Company in the 1930's met with such poor results. Harriman had investment funds from his banking corporation and believed that flying could bring him significant proceeds. Instead, his Aviation Company became the target of a hostile takeover and the resulting debacle embarrassed Harriman. He was fortunate that the Union Pacific Railroad voted him into the position of Chairman of the Board, just as his hopes of salvaging the Aviation Company were disappearing. Trains, however, would present just as many

9. Oppenheimer and Poore, *Sun Valley: A Biography*, 28.

troubles as airplanes. For the Union Pacific, Harriman turned to his interest in the wilderness for a solution to their difficulties.¹⁰

Harriman had the outdoors in his blood. He had worked on the tracks as a teenager in Idaho, toiling long hours in the backcountry preparing the way for the railroad. Harriman had also spent a great deal of time vacationing at a large plot of land that his family kept as a vacation property also in Idaho. Young Harriman also had the incredible fortune to join his father on the trip to Alaska. Time spent with Muir and Curtis, doubtlessly left an enduring impression on Averill. He knew from a relatively early age that the outdoors and business could be combined, perhaps to the benefit of both. "And I thought we'd make an asset out of a liability – in other words, the snow. And the more I thought of it, the more I thought we could start a new industry in the West," said Harriman.¹¹

The merger between nature and enterprise had to please Harriman's sensibilities. He issued Schaffgotsch simple orders months before the Austrian reached Ketchum. He was to find European-style slopes within spur distance to the Union Pacific mainline. Schaffgotsch went on a tour of ski resorts that did not yet exist. He visited Squaw Valley, Aspen and Alta. His event stopped at Yosemite before settling on Ketchum. The wild goose chase held purpose for Harriman. "I had become interested in skiing. I was Chairman of the Board of the Union Pacific. I was trying to develop an interest in the West, which would not only promote traffic for the railroad, but promote the territory as well," said Harriman. He went on to explain:

10. Rudy Abramson, *Spanning the Century: The Life of W. Averell Harriman, 1891-1986*, (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1992), 204.

11. Oppenheimer and Poore, *Sun Valley: A Biography*, 19.

I was a banker, and travelled in Europe, and I found that my banker friends went off skiing in the wintertime to places like St. Moritz, and in Austria in the mountains. There was no ski resort in the West; there were lots of people skiing, but there was no resort in the sense of having a St. Moritz, or places with hotels and people owning property nearby. I thought that was something we should develop in the West.¹²

St. Moritz inspired Harriman and it was perhaps his best-known example of a downhill skiing attraction, but the Swiss had not invented the model entirely at that Alpine village. Rather, St. Moritz grew to fame only after the British popularized trips to nearby Davos in the middle of the Golden Age of Mountaineering. They made the trip both for the sport and for the curative possibilities of altitude. The dry air was thought to help relieve the symptoms of tuberculosis. Advances in the understanding of altitude as it affects human physiology advanced much of the interest in mountainous health. The patients were so tempted by the possibilities of winter that a summer spa was rejiggered into the first winter resort in the Alps.

It would take some additional time for skiing to become a permanent fixture in these winter resorts. Although the sport grew significantly since the first races in the Sierra Nevada and in Norway, it lagged behind mountaineering in structure and organization. The sport suffered from both crude technology and rudimentary technique, but the British had demonstrated an interest. Only at the end of the century did rudimentary lifts and funiculars truly create the skiing infrastructure. The popularity of racing events during the same period spurred ski schools to adopt a nearly universal downhill technique. The ski school gospel instructed potential skiers across the globe

12. W. Averell Harriman, *Oral History Interview, November 7, 1983 by Deanne Thompson* Oral History Collection 2 [OH HEI 0082], Regional History Room, Sun Valley Community Library.

how best to get downhill. The sport gained followers from Switzerland to Japan from Chile to Canada.

The UPR collected some factoids on the rise of the sport in the United States. One of their representatives looked into the expansion of skiing in the Pacific Northwest. They found the growth rate to be astonishing. "In the Seattle area alone it is estimated that there are not less than 15,000 pairs of skis owned and regularly used as compared with less than 500 in the year 1930, and the total number of people who are participating in these sports is estimated at 25,000," wrote H.M. West to A.S. Edmonds. The news got even better than that. "There are in Seattle approximately twenty ski clubs, including High Schools and the University of Washington. The total membership of these clubs is in excess of 3,000," West continued. Perhaps most importantly, some forty specialty shops catered to this growing group of skiers. There was clearly a sales market for the sport.¹³

While Harriman credited the Alps for the germ of Sun Valley, he also looked closer to home for inspiration. The ski trains on both American coasts provided something of a model. In 1936, the UPR commissioned a report on services to ski hills throughout the East Coast. The New York Central Railroad, for instance, had service to Lake Placid, recent home of the Olympic Winter Games. The report also examined fares and destinations for trains in Pennsylvania, Massachusetts and the beacon of St. Moritz in Switzerland.¹⁴ Quite separately, Harriman had become aware of another train service a little farther north. These were more germane to the UPR efforts. The Canadian Pacific

13. H.M. West, *Letter to AS Edmonds, 27 February 1936* [Box 744, Folder T], W. Averell Harriman Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

14. *New York Central Railroad Report* [Box 740, Folder C], W. Averell Harriman Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Railway beat Harriman to the punch in a very similar feat by transforming Banff into a hot springs destination, a mountaineering mainstay and then a ski resort. The CPR had also marketed their Canadian Rockies with particular efficacy. His neighboring competition to the north showed him the way.

The Canadians, however, did more than climb. The CPR had also proved that skiing could exist with railroads. In 1910, not long after Abbot met his untimely end and the Canadians turned to the Swiss to create a new image of mountains, a ski hill opened just feet from the Banff Springs Hotel. Although it lacked the mechanization that would later make the resorts and Sun Valley less strenuous for guests, the skiing experience at Banff was still a catered and posh one. Skiers took rides from and to the hill in carriages and assistance to the top of the slopes. The skiing at Banff was very much the American equivalent of Davos. Sun Valley would later redefine that model for both continents.

Quite separately in Banff, the Appalachian Mountain Club continued to make their pilgrimages to the Canadian Rockies. They expanded their adventures routine from mountaineering to ski-mountaineering. This was a far more demanding activity than resort skiing. Members of the AMC had to hire European guides to ascend some of the steepest mountains in the Rockies before sliding down as carefully as possible. Their new method of skiing, however, was not commercial competition for the resorts of Switzerland and Canada.¹⁵

That was the market that interested Harriman. The trick was to build access to a beautiful place with a worthy attraction and then advertise it with aplomb. Harriman wasted little time garnering media interest in Sun Valley. When he received word from

15. Allen, *The Culture and Sport of Skiing*, 235

Schaffgotsch that Sun Valley had great potential, he immediately reached out to his old friend William S. Paley. Harriman described the potential of the Wood River Valley in a later letter to Paley:

After thorough investigation it was decided that the opening up of this country could afford infinite variety of ski running under ideal conditions and with almost unlimited possibilities for further development. My associates and I believing that the recent growth of winter sport activity in this country is a wonderful and healthy activity, wish to contribute toward this growth.¹⁶

The chief of the Columbia Broadcasting System could be just the man to tell Harriman if he could sell Sun Valley, or even if the average American would have any interest in trekking across the country to slide down an isolated mountain. Paley was a media mogul and an avid skier. Harriman, however, had seen enough and he knew that Wood River Valley would be the right place to enact his ambitious plans¹⁷

A lot of work remained to transform Ketchum into the Switzerland of the Northwest. Schaffgotsch had to select a piece of land to develop at a fair price. Roberta Brass Garretson returned to Ketchum from a sojourn in California just as Schaffgotsch was narrowing his search for land. Garretson and her sister Marjorie Brass joined Schaffgotsch for another tour of Ketchum on skis. The Brass sisters rode on snowshoes and used pitchforks to brake. They showed Schaffgotsch a piece of land their family used to raise sheep. One spot in particular was snowy but warm and the sheep gravitated to it. Garretson thought Schaffgotsch might respond to the little valley, and he did. Schaffgotsch told Harriman of his find. The UPR moved quickly.

16. W. Averell Harriman, *Letter to William Paley, (Undated)* [Box 737, Folder A], W. Averell Harriman Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

17. Oppenheimer and Poore, *Sun Valley: A Biography*, 31.

Ernest Brass signed 3,400 acres over to the Union Pacific for just over one dollar each. The grazing land was effective, but in the middle of the Great Depression, Brass must have felt like he possessed few options. The UPR facilitated the decision by sending their lawyers to help Brass along with the paperwork. Brass probably had no idea that he just sold the skiing equivalent of Manhattan to the Dutch. *The Hailey Times* heralded the purchase as "the first definite move toward making of Ketchum the center of winter sports of the highest type attracting professional experts from far and wide, and in addition great crowds to enjoy the sport."¹⁸

The UPR and Harriman wanted to open the ski area in time for the following season. A fundamental question loomed large in front of them: would they build a basic lodge big enough to accommodate clubs and races? Or, would they stretch the limit much further and move in the direction of Banff and the Alps? Harriman conducted research on the ski clubs around the nation and found good cause to think that clubs would be the future of skiing. The sport, to that point, belonged largely to ski jumpers who met in barnstorming events at a handful of locations. Non-professional clubs had grown in popularity as well, continuing a tradition started during the Gold Rush.

The UPR founded their own club, albeit indirectly. "Though the SVSC (Sun Valley Ski Club) has no official connection with the Union Pacific Railroad or the 'Sun Valley Lodge', Mr. Averell Harriman, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Union Pacific, has expressed his willingness to act as Chairman of the Board of Governors,"¹⁹ wrote John E.P Morgan in a letter. Son of the famed banker J.P. Morgan, John was tied to

18. *The Hailey Times* (Hailey, Idaho), May 14, 1936.

19. John Morgan, *Letter to Louis Hill, 18 November 1936* [Box 738, Folder B], W. Averell Harriman Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

the UPR and took an active interest in the development of skiing. The club, for its part, had the express intent of supporting the brand new ski resort. Morgan served as their secretary.

Shortly after the opening season at Sun Valley, Harriman tasked the Assistant to the President of Publicity, E.C. Schmidt to create a national, ground level campaign to drum up business among the clubs. Schmidt was to send R.K. Tompkins coast-to-coast with a slide presentation detailing the merits of Sun Valley to every ski club that would listen. These skiers were located in Salt Lake City, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Truckee, Reno, Denver, Kansas City, Portland, Seattle and a number of smaller towns in between. Tompkins stuck to a strict script during his many speeches. He announced that Sun Valley was created to give skiers a new and progressive location to push the sport in America forward. He then asked the clubs to consider joining them.

In the belief, then, that good was being done by the railroad, a group of amateur skiers, with the help of Mr. W.A. Harriman, formed the Sun Valley Ski Club, with the purpose of allying more closely Sun Valley with the great body of skiers everywhere. In pursuit of this aim the club is trying to provide ski clubs throughout the country a glimpse of what Sun Valley is.²⁰

Tompkins would go on to show them the train to Shoshone and the bus that connected it to Sun Valley. He also showed them the unique terrain on the mountains and the hotel. Tompkins even had a picture of Schaffgotsch.

Sun Valley was designed with lower income visitors partially in mind. The UPR built a second lodge with fewer amenities and décor than the main structure and dubbed it the Challenger Inn. For a time, Harriman thought that the club tradition in the United

20. E.C. Schmidt, *Letter to W. Averell Harriman, 22 October 1937* [Box 741, Folder C], W. Averell Harriman Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

States might have greatly benefited his gamble in the mountains; hence the long trip taken by Tompkins along with his many meetings. The realization came sooner or later; however, the clubs did not offer the consistent stream of tourists Harriman wanted. Worse yet, members of these clubs would be happily served skiing closer to their homes. Harriman had to build incentive to attract skiers to travel such a distance. Sun Valley had to be a national attraction and a national brand. The UPR brought on board marketing guru Steve Hannagan and he pushed them toward a grander plan.

Hannagan grew up in Indiana and worked briefly as a reporter before stepping into a career in public relations. He cut his teeth selling the women of Miami Beach to the public in the late 1920s. The tanned bodies in bathing suits made the swampy shores of Miami look appealing. He was just the man to turn Sun Valley into a commodity. Once again, Hannagan turned to the glorified body. Shirtless pictures of skiers transformed Sun Valley into a beach on the slopes.

Beach imagery could only take the resort so far. Harriman and Hannagan agreed that the next goal should be to change the little mining hamlet into an American version of the Alps. Harriman explained the decision in a later interview:

I had Steve Hannagan, who was the publicity-man for the Union Pacific. He was a professional public advisor, and he said there will be no publicity in starting a lodge, a fifty-room lodge in the mountains. It's something everybody does. But you build a million-dollar hotel and I'll guarantee you a lot of publicity. So I took it up with the Board of Directors and they finally agreed that we should go ahead with it. Although it was a lot of money, and the directors were not skiers.²¹

The resort, of course, had to be as attractive as the mountains surrounding it. They planned a massive concrete structure designed to look like the classic Tyrolean buildings

21. W. Averell Harriman, *Transcript of Oral History Interview, November 7, 1983 by Deanne Thompson*, Oral History Collection 4 [OH HEI 0082], Regional History Room, Sun Valley Community Library.

popular in the resorts at Switzerland. The risk paid off when it came to publicity, the lodge could certainly grab headlines. The cost, however, was substantial and it would keep Sun Valley from making a profit for years to come. Even with those dangers in mind, the founders of Sun Valley pushed forward quickly.

Delegates from the UPR visited Ketchum just two weeks after the sale of the Brass Ranch was announced. The survey party included architects, engineers and a general contractor. Rumors swirled through town as to the scope of the UPR project. Ketchum locals knew that 120 rooms would be built, but the rest was guesswork. The local electrical company reported that the construction and finalized resort would draw 575 combined horsepower. But, that energy might have been dedicated to tobogganing. Only the size of the resort was clear.²²

Construction progressed at a rapid clip despite Ketchum's relative isolation. Some 150 men worked for a collected \$5,000 a week. Many of them came from the nearby wool and mining industries. Together, they toiled to erect the million-dollar lodge. The builders made no secret of the fact that the hotel would be fashioned of concrete and stucco, but that that all the appointments on the inside would be "Class A" and sourced from premier designers in New York.²³ True to their word, the UPR gave the lodge European styling not limited to one nation or one regional dialect of design. The Lodge at Sun Valley looks pan-Alp, a stew of aesthetics.

22. "Start Made on Project for Ketchum," *The Hailey Times* (Hailey, Idaho), May 28, 1936.

23. "Fine Hotel at Ketchum Goes Ahead," *The Hailey Times* (Hailey, Idaho), July 9, 1936.

The most important piece of accouterment had little to do with décor. Hannagan suggested a functional and comfortable method of transporting the masses to the top of the ski runs. The idea itself was not revolutionary. Examples of automated ski slopes already existed. Funiculars and primitive bar lifts had appeared all over the world. In the American West, community ski areas used J-bar tows rigged from cables and old auto engines. Even Yosemite sported a toboggan lift that hauled weekend riders up the hillside. But, Sun Valley needed an innovation - a completely full-service method of reaching the crest. The result became the most important American contribution to worldwide downhill skiing.

Their design almost missed. After Hannagan proposed the lift, the UPR assigned a junior engineer named Jim Curran to the project. After years of working in Latin America, Curran drew his inspiration from a transport belt used to take bananas off cargo ships. The system grabbed the bunch by their stems and then dropped them at an incline. Curran thought he could replicate the conveyor for people on skis. His superiors rejected the plan as dangerous and the idea went to the scrapheap until Charles Proctor spotted it. Proctor came to Sun Valley as a ski consultant, one of the most accomplished competitors in the United States. He saw the potential of the chair lift.

One of Sun Valley's employees remembers a slightly different origin of the chairlift. In Alf Engen's version, the history of the mining community was essential to the future of skiing:

And I knew a little bit about that, because it was the same type of lift as they were, shipping ore, you know, they were trying to get new ore out. See, the first lift had a double cable. Not a single cable like it is now. It was a double like the buckets would be in, soon. So that's how come the first lifts were at Sun Valley. And also we copied that at Alta in (1938). It was a single chair lift, but a double cable. So

you can visualize a bucket in between there, and now you have some seats in there.²⁴

If Engen was correct, the double cable may have been the only element of the lifts borrowed from the mines. The rest of the design came from a bar system used in New Hampshire. That lift, in turn, was spun out of European technology. None of these early uphill carriers took skiers off the ground, with the exception of contained, aerial trams.

Proctor pushed the plan to Harriman who accepted it, despite the apparent risk. The thought of paying tourists hanging off cable wires must have scared the leadership of the UPR, but they overcame their reservations. The engineers wasted little time creating a prototype. They installed it at the UPR headquarters in Omaha and used J.P. Morgan, Jr as a guinea pig to test the cable system. It worked. They upped the speed of the system in just days. It could transport skiers at a revolutionary 450 feet per minute over elevated ground.²⁵ Once installed, the chairlift would bring the red carpet experience out of the hotel and onto the slopes.

By December of 1936, a mere six months after the deal for the land exchange had become official, the lodge at Sun Valley opened for business. The final product matched the grandiose plans imagined by Harriman and Hannagan. Unfortunately, they had not anticipated the lack of snow. Very little powder covered the slopes in the opening season at Sun Valley. After the tremendous lengths that the UPR went to in order finish the resort, they could hardly have pictured a more disappointing natural turn.

24. Alf Engen, *Transcript of Oral History Interview, February 5, 1986 by Ginger Piotter*, Oral History Collection 22 [OH ENG 0067], Regional History Room, Sun Valley Community Library.

25. Oppenheimer and Poore, *Sun Valley: A Biography*, 60.

The weather, however, could not stop the marketing machine at Sun Valley. Aside from the chair lift, marketing was the greatest innovation pushed by the UPR on to skiing. Hannagan's campaign accelerated after the resort opened. He doubled up on his sales of the body and sex. Sun Valley became the vacation choice of Hollywood and the UPR baited as many stars to their flagship resort as possible. In the first several seasons the resort played host to Clark Gable, Gary Cooper, Claudette Colbert, Loretta Young and Ernest Hemingway. The author moved to the area and eventually took his own life just miles from the slopes.

Harriman realized that the lofty advertising efforts dreamed up by Hannagan could not guarantee enough clientele to make Sun Valley solvent for the entire season. The resort also sponsored a series of ski races designed to make the resort attractive to both the serious skier and the casual observer. These races succeeded in putting the resort at the center of America's skiing culture, at least among the fairly select number of skiing initiates throughout the nation. Sun Valley also invited ski jumpers to put on exhibitions on their mountains. They built a ramp to make this spectacle more permanent.

Appealing to the greater tourist market, however, never became easy for the UPR. The resort lost money for much of their early run. Eventually, it sold to a third party and by World War II, it was transformed into a nursing home for the duration of the conflagration. As expensive and creative as Sun Valley was, it could do little to guarantee that the UPR would have a profitable future. Sun Valley's defeat did not last very long. Much as Harriman predicted, the resort set off a new land rush in the former boomtown of Ketchum. Just months after the lodge was completed, the local papers covered land

sale after land sale. Early conjecture even rightly guessed that summer would bring new opportunities for outdoors adventure.

Sun Valley also had an effect on the greater state of Idaho. Although some studies prior to the arrival of skiing promised that the state could host and make money from sports in the wild, Sun Valley proved that the industry could attract tourists and make money. State reports issued in the years just after Sun Valley opened made careful note of all the other outdoors sports that could bring business to the region,

The resort reinvented the Wood River Valley almost overnight. Mining and wool continued as viable industries, but real estate became the prize industry in Sun Valley, just as Harriman had predicted. The opening year witnessed a slew of property deals as speculation ramped up about the future of the resort. As the ancillary industry to skiing, real estate came of age when Sun Valley opened. Commercial resorts that followed the Idaho example had property sales in their directives. Years later, the market for second homes in ski towns would come to define these places and their part-time resident populations.

Harriman and Hannagan, of course, understood the ramifications of what they had created. The two took a small sheep and silver town and transformed it into a beacon of industrial tourism. Thanks to the advent of the chair lift, the engineers at Sun Valley succeeded even in automating the very act of skiing. Vacationers did not even have to scurry up a hill in the snow to enjoy the gravity-aided ride down. The UPR successfully commoditized and modernized the ski industry.

Sun Valley created an artificial and synthetic slice of European sport and culture in a place where it did not belong. Harriman took the example of Swiss guides in Canada

and went even further. He flirted with other models and other possibilities, but this style of resort was the best commoditized and most likely to become the marquee and cash cow that the UPR so desperately needed. The desire to reinvent the landscape came straight from Europe. "But the Alps were also synthetic in another sense: they constituted a fabricated space – a cultural landscape – that moderns invented and elaborated. Alpine skiers sought to cope with modernity not by fleeing from it entirely but by developing a more humane and nuanced form of modernity in the blank canvas of the Alpine winter."²⁶ The United States version of the Alps, however, lacked even the originality of their false predecessors.

The shadow of Sun Valley would be felt most after the Second World War. Many of the founders of these post-War ski boomtowns had visited or worked for Sun Valley in the early days of the UPR's experiments. Harriman's disciples, in other words, spread across the American West with this vision of skiing. Fortunately, not every single one of the chair-lift-enabled ski areas in Sun Valley's wake chose to follow their lead precisely. Others chose to market their destinations to local skiers and to design their hills after the remnants of preexisting cultures.

Either way, the resort age heralded major changes for the land and for property. The opening of Sun Valley was met with great enthusiasm initially in Ketchum and Hailey, but for some that excitement faded after corporatization came to the ski area. Marjorie Brass Heiss, one of the young women who accompanied Schaffgotsch through the mountains and helped broker the sale of her father's sheep ranch to the UPR.

I was delighted that it was going to become a resort area. Because I thought 'Oh how wonderful! Other people can enjoy it now equally as much as I have.' Now, I

26. Denning, *Skiing into Modernity*, 108.

retained that until about – I felt that way about it the whole time until about 1970, after Janss bought in '65 and the started all the development and selling off, and not having the wide open spaces. We still have a lot, but we still have an awful lot of conglomerates here too, and after Elkhorn developed and all, and they don't stop – they're still so many...I became – I have become disillusioned about the growth. I think that they have allowed too much, as all the developers have come into Sun Valley."²⁷

27. Marjorie Brass Heiss, *Oral History Interview on November 9, 1983 by Deanne Thompson*, Oral History Collection 29 [OH HEI 0082], Regional History Room, Sun Valley Community Library.

CHAPTER 10: NEW HEIGHTS AT ALTA

A struggling miner transforms his claims into a ski resort to escape his debt.

Professional freestyle-skier Tanner Hall lost too much speed as he approached the lip of Chad's Gap in March 2005. He did not have the velocity to clear the 120-foot space between the mountainside and the man-made hill opposite and Hall shorted the landing. As he caught the edge of the down ramp, he heard a sickening pop. Both of his ankles shattered before Hall helicoptered his way down the decline. Hall immediately began to scream in pain. The words "my ankles are broken" were very clear amid the shrieks. His crew called for help and, eventually, Ski Patrol arrived to drag Hall to safety.¹

Weeks later, personnel from Utah's Alta Ski Resort returned in an attempt to destroy the Gap. They set and ignited dynamite above the ski jump and waited for an avalanche to completely cover the mounds of earth and snow, erasing both of the ramps and the slot between them. It failed. The Gap survived and remains a popular ski jump. It attracts a constant stream of daredevils who make frequent pilgrimages to the spot, despite the fact that it is not really marked on any map.²

1. *Teddybear Crisis*, directed by Directed by Henrik Rostrup, Kris Ostness and Howie Arnstad. (2005; Seattle: Wind-Up Films, 2005), DVD.

2. John Symms, "Chad About You," *X-Games* (blog), *ESPN Go*, June 16, 2010, <http://xgames.espn.go.com/skiing/article/4624805/chad-you>. Steve Rozendal, "How Chad's Gap Became Skiing's Most Iconic Jump Spot," *Freeskier Magazine* (June 2012).

Salt Lake City ski bum Chad Zurinkas first braved the jump that bares his name in the early-2000s. The feature, by that time, was occasionally used as two separate and smaller launch pads for tricksters to make leaps. Zurinkas united the mounds, but could not make the distance. Shortly thereafter, French skier Candide Thovex made the full jump. He opened the Gap to other skiers. Thovex's followers executed more and more complex aerial maneuvers while crossing the gap. Among extreme sport enthusiasts the landmark became famous.

If the high profile and high-relief mound from which the gap was carved seems like a strange feature for a ski area that would be because the mound was built for an entirely different industry. Chad's Gap is actually an old dump formed during the height of the Alta silver mining boom. A year before the founding of the Alta ski resort, miners had pulled rock and dirt out of the mountainsides and piled up the refuse. "Who knew that a couple mine tailing piles could be so fun?" asks the caption of an ESPN photo retrospective on the jump.³

Even more people have enjoyed the privilege of skiing over Alta's former boot hill - the cemetery used to hold the remains of the local miners. Adventure seekers are not deterred by this macabre piece of history directly under their feet. "Alta boasts one of the few 'skied upon cemeteries' in the United States. The 'boots on cemetery,' used during the mining period, but abandoned now, is located in the center of one of the main ski runs. Panic was created at Alta eight or ten years ago when a flood washed out several remains," wrote Robert Marvin in his history of Alta.⁴

3. Ibid.

4. Robert Marvin, "Alta: 1916," Skis and Skiing Clippings Folder, Salt Lake City Public Library.

The cemetery and the Gap are only two of the most visible leftovers from the mining period in the winter, but plenty of the mining apparatus remains in the area. During the summer when the snow has melted, even more detritus of the mining period can be seen dotting the resort and its environs. Mountain slopes are littered with old trucks, ore carts and pipes. Alta wears its past on its sleeve, a resort anxious not to allow development to detract from the skiing experience. Rather than build over their past and compete aesthetically with other ski resorts, Alta integrated the mining infrastructure.

Alta's haphazard landscape reveals something of the quick transition made from failing mine to lively ski center. It took very little time for the ski apparatus to cover up decades of mining turmoil and work. Both industries had relatively little lag time between planning and building. Perhaps both could be characterized as boom businesses and they were both intricately tied together in this unique location. Alta, as Utah's first dedicated and public ski resort would not have been created were it not for the mining past at Alta.

Geographically, Salt Lake City is positioned well for both skiing and mining. The Wasatch Mountains create a semi-circle around the state's capital city and the Great Salt Lake borders on the West. The tallest of the neighboring peaks reach some 11,000 feet in altitude. Many of these peaks provide potential ski slopes and mineral deposits. The lake provides an effect that is instrumental in creating the light, fluffy powder snow prized among skiers. Despite the water and peaks, Salt Lake City is accessible by both trail and ultimately rail.

Brigham Young did not have those advantages in mind when he declared, "this is the place" and settled the area in 1847 with his Mormon refugees. They sought isolation and found they it. The mountains and the lake, failing all else, provided natural barriers to

the outside world. Unfortunately, the area was difficult to farm and the Mormons struggled to feed themselves. They solved the problem with help from the local seagulls, but the Mormons were left with a reminder of the difficulty of desert living.

Young discouraged his Mormon pioneers from actively prospecting in the impressive mountains that surrounded their new Zion. Young feared that any potential mineral wealth would be a great distraction from the day-to-day chores the Mormons were assigned. Young knew that they had little chance of survival if they had any additional struggles to raise crops. While the Mormons profited off the California Gold Rush by selling goods, wares and services to the flood of people pouring west, they made no further major entrees into mining. That changed when the tide reversed and Californians came east.

During the Civil War, a regiment of the Third California Infantry was assigned to keep watch over Salt Lake City. The Union was concerned that the Mormons might take advantage of the confusion caused by the Civil War and take up arms in a campaign to extend their land holdings. Command was issued for the infantry to take a position overlooking the town and stand sentry until the war came to an end. The conscripts for this particular unit came partially from the Sierra Nevada of California. Volunteers hailed from boom towns like Oroville, Pedro's Bar, Marysville, Copperopolis and Downieville. Many of these soldiers were likely exposed to skiing. All of them knew something about mining.⁵

5. US Department of War, *Muster in Rolls 3rd infantry Regiment. Inventory of the Military Department*, Civil War Volunteers Records, 1861-1867, California State Archives.

Colonel Patrick Edward Connor led the infantry with a very particular frame of mind. He took it as his personal mission to disrupt the Mormon establishment and undermine Young's leadership. "I have sought, by every proper means in my power, to arrest its progress and prevent its spread," explained Connor. "I desire to inform the department commander that I have considered the discovery of gold, silver, and other valuable materials in the Territory of the highest importance, and as presenting the only prospect of bringing hither such a population as is desirable or possible."⁶ Through prospecting, Connor could do serious damage to Young and even bolster the American economy in the process. Perhaps this was not a direct part of his assignment in Utah, but Connor took his personal directives seriously.

Connor encouraged his infantrymen to use their free time to prospect the mountains surrounding Salt Lake City. The soldiers quickly located a number of deposits. Prominent among them, a rich vein of silver in one of two canyons that cut deep into the Wasatch Mountains just outside of town, respectively named Big and Little Cottonwood Canyons for the trees that line the steep walls. Will Bowman described them in his history of Alta "The canyon constitutes a symmetrical, U-shaped trough, thirteen miles in length. Near its head, the canyon broadens out into a large, catchment basin some two and one-half miles long and over one mile wide. At the mouth of the canyon, the ridges form nearly perpendicular walls."⁷

6. Adjutant General's Office, *Records of California Men in the War of the Rebellion, 1861 to 1867*, rev. by Brig-Gen. Richard H. Orton (Sacramento, Calif.: State Office, 1890), 514.

7. Anthony Will Bowman, "From Silver to Skis: A History of Alta, Utah, and Little Cottonwood Canyon, 1847-1966" (master's thesis, Utah State University, 1967), 4.

The Californians were not the first to trek into the canyon. The Mormons used those same mountainsides for timber and soon thereafter as a quarry for granite. A mill began operation in the Canyons in 1851 and four years later granite was quarried from the location for use in the construction of the temple at the heart of Salt Lake City. Because wood and rock were in short supply and high demand, the Mormon establishment supported these operations.⁸ The quarry drew a small population to the canyons. Small towns popped up on the mountain slopes and at the valley intersection. But, these villages were sleepy and calm compared to the boomtowns that arrived with the discovery of silver.

Members of the Infantry agreed to split the land into mining districts. They sent these new plans to the United States Department of the Interior which ratified the zoning. Bylaws were created for the Mountain Lake Mining District and the path was logistically paved for official claims and work in Utah. Little Cottonwood Canyon was prepared for business. The New York and Utah Prospecting and Mining Company staked the first official claim in 1865. Afterward, a handful of camps arose along the steep sides of the narrow chasm. Once production began, these small cities unearthed a great deal of precious metal. At least one report showed that Little Cottonwood accounted for three-quarters of Utah's silver ore.⁹

The prospectors were also enabled by the recently arrived railroad. The completion of the transcontinental rail at Promontory Point, just north of Salt Lake, meant that people could be transported into the Salt Lake Valley and ore could be

8. Ibid., 10.

9. Lawrence James, Little Cottonwood Canyon History Collection, Ms 632 [Slide 212], Special Collections and Archives, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah.

transported out. Some of the ore was shipped to San Francisco for smelting. Although the camps in Little Cottonwood would continue to be isolated from much of Utah, the rail was close enough that the miners could market the raw silver they retrieved. Eventually, smelters would be built near the canyon so that silver could be retrieved and processed entirely in Salt Lake City. This addition made the silver industry operations far more profitable by reducing costs.

Alta City arose as one of the easternmost boomtowns in the canyon just 850 yards from the nearby Central City. Central City was perched precariously on the mountain slopes and many of its services moved to the more stable Alta. At its height, Alta stretched out on eleven streets over 116 blocks of Little Cottonwood land. Nearly 200 buildings varying from shacks and tents to the courthouse occupied the streets. At least 25 saloons with colorful names like "The Bucket o' Blood" and "Goldminer's Daughter" kept Alta busy at all hours. The local newspaper reported more than a few brawls after frequent late-night drinking sessions.¹⁰

The 5,000 people that called Alta home engaged in more than drinking. "Occupations listed by the United States census taker include: Miner, housekeeper, assayer, doctor, shoemaker, carpenter, druggist, brewer, preacher, photographer, printer..."¹¹ but, all of these other services were created to support the mines. Silver made the money. Much of the populace at Alta was seasonal workers, but some decided to stay for the year. Those who suffered through the winter dealt with deep snows and

10. Mike Korologos, "George H. Watson," *Alta Powder News* (Spring, 1994): 1.

11. Ruth Winder Robertson, *This is Alta* (Alta, Utah: Alta Historical Society, 1972): 13.

freezing conditions, making subterranean work almost impossible. The spring brought snowmelt and water that flooded the mines. The work was never easy in the mountains.

Typical, and infamous, among the silver-producing digs at Alta was the Emma Mine. Robert B. Chisholm and J.F. Woodman discovered the deposit in 1868. The two made tenuous deals in an attempt to raise enough funds to make it through the first season. They found partners, but not money. They failed to attain adequate investments for one season. Then, they found backers from Salt Lake City and got their operations underway. Unfortunately, one of their early promoters returned to recover his percentage in the mine. James Lyon won his suit and another pair of investors got involved. But, the controversy for the Emma was just beginning as its reputation was growing. The Emma had a following as far away as London and that is where newly minted promoter Albert Grant pitched stock for this silver behemoth. His prospectus did not concern itself with the truth. As director and pipeline to the British, Grant brought on board Robert C. Schenck who had served in the Civil War and gone on to a career as an ambassador. Although he admitted some reservations about the morality of it, Schenck helped sell speculated stock to England at an inflated price.

Trouble at the mine itself made international news. The drifts flooded, dropping the productivity of the mines down significantly. Operating expenses went up accordingly, making the mine even less profitable. Even with damage, the mines should have produced something. Stockholders began to suspect that they had become the victim of a con job. They demanded to inspect the tunnels themselves, but the board of the company would not allow it. The United States Congress held hearings into the possible fraud at the Emma. Congress mostly succeeded at generating suspicion in American

mines and business as the proceedings grabbed international headlines. The hearings exonerated Schenck, but the damage was done.¹²

Even with diminished foreign capital, the mines in Utah pushed forward. The Emma, after all its troubles, yielded more silver from a spur tunnel. Many of the mines required deeper digging to access the valuable ore as the more accessible silver came out of the ground first. As a result, the tons of ore pulled from the mines during the 1880's were approximately a sixth of the amount extracted in prior decade and the value of the silver and gold pulled from that ore was worth just over a million dollars, twelve million less than the value of the metals found in the 1870s. The unstable conditions of the mines made a difficult living for the miners even worse.¹³

Alta stood isolated and unstable. Downtown Salt Lake City was twenty-eight miles distance, so dry goods and food could be difficult and expensive to procure. A mule cart traversed slopes for nine miles to the valley floor. Sometimes, the ore from the mines would be hauled by sleigh. A telegraph line also ran down the canyon for those uninterested in making the journey. In the winter a ski-bound postman delivered the mail much as it was in the Sierra Nevada in California.

The snowshoeing mail deliverers were not the only people on skis in Alta. A substantial population of Scandinavians who moved to the area had skiing knowledge and used smaller Norwegian skates as a means of transportation. Some of their skis more closely resembled those in the Sierra Nevada. Robert Marvin described the snowshoes:

12. Robertson, *This is Alta*, 45.

13. Bowman, "From Silver to Skis," 36.

When the skis came they were hickory, thick and heavy and exactly eleven feet long. The thinking was that the longer the skis were the better; they would ride at the snow and not skiing in. I was about the only person in camp long-legged enough to make a kick turn with them, and it was an effort like a high kickin' chorus girl's. Ski poles we had none; they were to us unknown. Instead, we had a birch because the park was smoot.¹⁴

Races on these long snowshoes were recorded in 1884.¹⁵ The sport; however, never reached the cultural prevalence it had achieved in the Sierras. It remained a largely utilitarian tradition in Alta and throughout the greater Salt Lake region.

Alta grew cyclically in true boom and bust revolutions. Miners scraped out the easily retrievable silver over the 1870s and '80s, making the land at the end of Little Cottonwood Canyon worthless without significant investment in machinery. The unstable silver market deterred the organized capital needed to change Alta's fortune. Both the town and the value of its claims eroded. The decline continued until 1900, when a small hiccup of prosperity hit the area. The good times were not to last. Alta was in an unstable condition when a young man from Michigan arrived in the area and fashioned himself into one of the most important miners in Utah.

George Watson came from an immigrant family that moved to Hancock, Michigan after the Civil War. His father joined the ranks of the many experienced mining operators to bring their skills from England to the United States to work in the copper mines. It did not take long for the young Watson to be exposed to the family trade. Watson told a journalist about his youth:

He became a hard-rock miner at five years and four months, when he was given a hammer and chisel and lowered by rope into the upper workings of a local mine and shown how to whack off" specimens of native copper and silver ore, by

14. Marvin, "Alta, 1916," 1.

15. Bowman, "From Silver to Skis," 66.

candlelight, for the tourist trade. This work, carried on later during school vacations, gave him spending money and taught him most of what there is to know about mining.¹⁶

Watson later eschewed his formal education during his teens to join his father in the copper business. Young Watson took to the family trade so quickly, that he decided to try his luck far from home. At the age of nineteen, Watson moved to Utah in the hopes of plying his skills.

At first, Watson returned to familiar confines in Utah. He went straight to the copper mines in Salt Lake. Watson switched to silver after several years near Alta, perhaps hoping for higher returns in an unstable market. He organized his own brokerage company and followed that by developing a silver claim at Alta. Ownership of the brokerage and the South Hecla Mine made Watson among the most prominent names in Utah mining. Watson and his company had a banner year in 1917 as the South Hecla yielded significant silver. Like the previous boom at Alta, this period of riches did not last long.¹⁷

Watson knew only mining and would not let go of his career or his hopes that Alta could recover. He accrued additional claims garnering more than eighty before the mid-1930s. The claims all came with great risk because the mines had yielded relatively little over the preceding years. To defray the costs, corporate mining became the norm in the canyon. Ownership of most of the mines consolidated under a small handful of

16. Jim Marshall, "His Hard-Rock Honor." *Colliers Magazine*, October 19, 1947: 113-116.

17. Noble Warrum, *Utah Since Statehood*, ed. by Charles W. Morse and W. Brown Ewing (Chicago: SJ Clarke Publishing Co., 1920), 117.

conglomerates.¹⁸ Especially after the crash in 1929, the land prices lowered yet again giving Watson even more chances to increase his holdings. This aggressive purchasing, however, left Watson holding a large handful of nearly worthless land. Watson slaved to attract investors and generate revenue.

The enterprising Watson took creative measures to obtain a cash flow. He sent member cards to friends and potential investors for the Order of the Great American Prospector's Association. "This card is a pearl without price...guard it as you would your flask. It entitles you to enter the sacred portals of the Great American Prospectors Association. Flash it if in distress, solemnly saying the mysterious password, "There's No Alta-tude like Alta," it read. His sense of humor, Watson believed, would help make his corporation more attractive. He also pushed the stock in his company by offering potential holders a variable investment scheme with stepped returns. Other promotional items pushed the limits of practicality and practical jokes. Watson also sold "confusilite" which he billed as the raw material the Feds could use to create red tape. In retrospect, it is difficult to tell if Watson accepted the failings of the mines and made light of it, or if he honestly believed that his outlandish jokes and schemes would garner funding.¹⁹

Perhaps, not coincidentally, Watson had his own red tape to cut. The Great Depression left him with an abundance of land, debt and little reason to expect profits in the near future. Worse yet, was the possibility Watson might have to pay for the reclamation costs of mitigating six decades of mining activity. He could not even divest himself of his land without costly consequences. Watson had few options. He was not,

18. Bowman, "From Silver to Skis," 41.

19. "George H. Watson," *Alta Powder News: Historical Edition* (Early Winter, 2007): 8.

however, a man who let the odds or the numbers dictate his actions.

In 1930, Watson was one of the last people still enduring the isolated and cold conditions by living at Alta. Perhaps as a way to pass the time, Watson decided to hold an election for town mayor. Only one vote for one candidate was cast, because Watson had become the sole resident of the waning boomtown. The nickname "Mayor of 'Romantic' Alta" stuck. The "romantic" tag came from Watson's imagination as well. The fact that he spent the winter entirely alone probably meant that the romance came from the beautiful landscape and not his company. Watson was also always keen to promote himself and his property, even if there was no audience.

By the 1930's Watson had plenty of promotional experience in mining, fundraising and even tourism. Watson began to sell Romantic Alta to tourists after a unique opportunity presented itself. In 1919, an extension brought the railroad to Alta to haul ore replacing the much-slower mule cart that had previously towed the line. The train was built to take ore to the smelter, but the mines unearthed very little that year. Watson spotted a chance to diversify his business and hurried to convert a railroad car into a mobile viewing gallery. The Denver and Rio Grande extension took on a new name "The Alta Scenic Railway" and Watson built a special car for viewers. He called his contraption the "Jitney" and he marketed it to tourists as a sightseeing vessel. Watson even went so far as to build a very small lodge at the mouth of his South Hecla Mine. The tour also made a stop at the famed Emma Mine. Travelers and miners could bunk for the night before heading back down the canyon.²⁰

20. Bowman, "From Silver to Skis," 42. "George H. Watson," 9.

With the tourists gone and the mountains all but vacated, Watson found himself living in solitude. The snowy season gave Watson plenty of time to work on his elaborate schemes. He turned his mind from his designs for a two-toned jacket that would camouflage dandruff flakes to an equally strange plan to unload his debt and property like so much dirt into the back of a truck. Maybe he could ask the United States Forest Service to turn his flagging mines into a ski attraction. The sport caught his attention, but Watson did not fully believe that money could be made from an activity as drab as doing the laundry. Skiing transported miners across town, but it was not for enjoyment. Watson was accustomed to getting about Alta mounted on primitive skis and had probably encountered them not long after he first arrived.

In fact, skiing across the Wasatch had dropped seriously in popularity. "...in the whole Salt Lake Area only nine pairs of skis could be found; some of them were homemade. So eight pairs of skis were ordered direct from the factory in St. Louis, Missouri. It took a whole year for them to arrive so that the fellows from Salt Lake could use them," said one of the founding members of the Wasatch Mountain Club (WMC).²¹ Perhaps this was an exaggeration, but for a few years after the height of the mining period and prior to the renewed interest in skiing that arrived in the 1930s, the sport had become the domain of very specialized professionals.

These were the high-flying ski jumpers at Ecker Hill, not far from the junction to Park City from Salt Lake. The jumpers hosted national competitions and large crowds assembled to watch the spectacle, but the sport was reserved for only a few aerial

21. C.R. Stoney, *Interview*, Wasatch Mountain Club Records 1920-1998, Ms 0283 [Box 1], Special Collections and Archives, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah.

acrobats. Ski jumping was not for the masses. Watson had heard of the sport and probably understood that it was largely a spectator sport. His doubts in skiing were not allayed by the popularity of this sport. Someone had to confirm to Watson that skis could turn a profit as recreation. Watson sent letters of inquiry to 200 people asking basic questions about ski resorts and their typical components.²² He had to find out if resorts could draw tourists. Watson believed that he needed both.

There was some reason for the failing miner to be optimistic by the 1930s. A renewed interest in skiing put the sport into the hands of regular people, as opposed to simply European stunt artists. A new culture of skiing grew up in Utah after the heydays of the snowshoers at Alta and the surrounding mountain villages. Adventurers with economic mobility searched for fun in the snow. A ski train ran from Salt Lake City to Park City for weekend sport. The train did not survive more than a few years, but interest in skiing mounted in the area.

The WMC built a ski lodge at Brighton at the easternmost edge of Big Cottonwood Canyon. They spent nearly \$50,000 on construction for the difficult-to-reach ski shelter.²³ The lodge would eventually become a ski resort itself. Until it commercialized; however, Brighton only served the limited membership of the Wasatch Mountain Club. The Club hoped to swell its ranks and they met with similar organizations throughout the West. They advertised the sport and their club in a pamphlet:

22. Marshall, "His Hard-Rock Honor."

23. Wasatch Mountain Club, *Ledgers*, Wasatch Mountain Club Records [Box 2, Folder 3].

Skiing has become the King of Winter Sports in Utah during the past few years. The Wasatch Mountain Club is one of the major contributing factors to this recreational development, sponsoring ski trips and marking trails into the heart of the Wasatch Mountains; conducting classes in ski technique; and furnishing numerous newspaper articles.²⁴

Their efforts at growth did not stop with classes and construction. One member went to California to study their skiing outfits.²⁵ An expanded membership still meant a handful of experienced outdoorsmen who could access Brighton through backcountry trekking. In 1918, they took just such a trip, passing two future ski areas as they traversed from Park City to Alta.

The Wasatch Mountain Club was popular and growing, but they had serious limitations. In 1919, the club took eighteen trips and 247 people participated. Members went to Brighton, Big Cottonwood Canyon, Mt. Olympus and Mt Timpanogos, among other places. The members paid for the trips and provided a small stipend to the club for yearly operations. Despite their impressive achievements, they lacked the sort of numbers or capital needed to bring in the cash flow that Watson desired. The inspiration for major commercial skiing came from elsewhere.²⁶

The resort at Sun Valley and the critical mass interest in downhill skiing generated by the Olympics in 1932 created a demand for the sport in an accessible venue. The search was on around the nation and the West for the ideal slopes. Alta was, in fact, one of the locations Schaffgotsch visited on his grand tour of Western mountains before

24. Wasatch Mountain Club, *Brochure*, Wasatch Mountain Club Records [Box 2, Folder 2].

25. Wasatch Mountain Club, *Meeting Minutes*, Wasatch Mountain Club Records [Box 3, Folder 1].

26. Wasatch Mountain Club, *Financial Report*, Wasatch Mountain Club Records [Box 1, Folder 11].

he settled on Ketchum. Sun Valley made ripples and others wanted to follow suit. Utahns hoped to replicate the success in Idaho. Their Wasatch Range contained plenty of skiable slopes and the train could bring skiers mountainside.

The Forest Service approached a famed local skier and asked him to find a suitable spot for a new resort based on the Sun Valley model. Engen was the obvious choice for such an assignment. Engen was, in 1935, already skiing royalty. Born in Norway, Engen moved to the US at age ten and first visited Utah shortly thereafter. Engen became a dominant ski-jumper in his teens. He won eight national jumping championships during his career and then managed to master downhill skiing as an adult. His skills drew the attention of the Union Pacific Railroad that hired him to help bring ski jumping to their crown jewel in Sun Valley. Engen spent several seasons consulting at the first North American ski resort. He was asked to help build a ski jump less than a year after Sun Valley opened. Harriman was so impressed with Engen that he asked the Norwegian to go on a barnstorming tour to drum up interest in skiing. The tours took up only part of Engen's year. The rest of the year, Engen worked for the Forest Service and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC).²⁷

Engen worked out of a CCC camp at the bottom of Little Cottonwood Canyon and consequently knew the canyons well. The first time he surveyed Alta officially, Engen had reached the area in the summer by hiking over the nearby Catherine's Pass.²⁸ Later in life, Engen would claim he developed a long-distance skiing technique that made

27. Alf Engen, *For the Love of Skiing: A Visual History* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 1998), 93.

28. Alf Engen, "Alta: A Brief Historical Overview," Mike Korologos Papers 1958-2005, Accn 1824 [Box 24, Folder 1], Special Collections and Archives, University of Utah..

the sport at Alta possible, but his hiking trip in 1935 was enough to convince him that Alta would be ideal for the Forest Service's needs. The mountain valley, however, was far from pristine.

The Alta that Engen surveyed for the Forest Service had suffered from six decades of mining and was in a deeply depressed economy. Watson called the place home, as did a set of brothers named the Jacobsens, but few others still resided at Alta. The landscape was pocked with drifts and bumped with tailing piles. It was a particularly dangerous location for a ski resort. These deterrents meant little when compared to Alta's salient advantages. The railroad still ran into the center of a skiable bowl. It was also not publicly owned, so even if the Forest Service took an active interest in the area, their hands would be tied. They needed to have the land deeded to them at an affordable price. Fortunately, George Watson was just the man to make that arrangement for them. Watson had actually contacted Engen as early as 1933 with questions concerning the reality of a ski resort at Alta.²⁹

Watson understood that the Forest Service could reverse his fortunes if they purchased the surface rights for the claims that he had acquired over the past few decades, the Forest Service could help forgive his debts. Better yet, Watson would not be stuck with the significant costs of reclaiming the land and mitigating all the infrastructural and incidental changes made by the mines. "Watson could also see the benefits of a ski area at Alta and in 1936, he agreed to turn over the surface rights to 1,800 acres of land which he lovingly referred to as "Romantic Alta." In return, he received needed tax relief on

29. Robertson, *This is Alta*, 42.

properties he owned."³⁰ The town of Alta itself was donated through the Alta Mining and Development Company.

The deal possessed caveats that favored the miners. Instead of transferring the complete title to the land, they deeded only the surface rights to the Forest Service. Should mining become profitable again, Watson and his competition could begin operations. The deal also dictated that no further prospecting by other entities would be allowed in the rest of Forest Service's managed property in the region. Logically, the Forest Service would also be in charge of maintaining the road to Alta.

Almost overnight, Watson went from miner to ski marketer. He fell into this role with aplomb. He turned himself into a veritable tourist attraction. Ski journalist Mike Korologos wrote about visiting an older Watson years later when Watson had already become a local legend.

To be invited into Watson's Alta Cabin was a special treat, exceeded only by him serving you a "Pine Ball" cocktail, an elixir he concocted in secret. It looked innocent in appearance, being capped by a sprig of pine you could use as a stir stick. But its ingredients were another story. It is believed the recipe for Watson's "Pine Ball" died with him, but those who imbibed claim its potency tended to make even the most timid sole brazen enough to want to hike up High Rustler for non-stop skin back down...in the middle of the night. When the bottles of the main ingredient became empty, Watson would not toss them away, but instead mount them with wire and nails to the walls and ceiling support of his abode.³¹

Eventually, Watson hoped to create a wall out of these bottles. Watson spent more and more time in his hovel as he got older.

30. Alf Engen, "A Comprehensive Time-Line of Alta History," Mike Korologos Papers 1958-2005, Accn 1824 [Box 1, Folder 24], Special Collections and Archives, University of Utah.

31. Mike Korologos, "George H. Watson," *Alta Powder News* (Springs, 1994).

Alta itself made an equally seamless transition. The area was already accessible by rail from Salt Lake City. But, additional conveniences would be necessary to make the ski area attractive. Sun Valley was a full resort complete with a Swiss style chateau hotel, but Alta would have to settle with a mechanized ski lift to start. This was a relatively new technology. Scores of local ski hills incorporated homemade rope tows that used old car engines and very simple wire spools to pull people up hills. But, only Sun Valley had a major chair lift in the United States. The backers at Alta wanted a similar lift to run over steep terrain at a relatively low price.

Mining detritus had been the solution once before at Alta and so it would be again. "In 1938, the Winter Sports Association made an agreement with the Michigan-Utah Mines to purchase the aerial tramway which carried ore from Alta to Tanner's Flat," wrote Engen of their creative solution. They could rejigger an old mining device and transform it into the height of skiing modernity. The builders could also use timbers from the shafts to support the new lift. This project fell under the purview of the recently created Winter Sports Association (WSA).

The WSA was a new outfit in Utah. "In 1938 they formed the Salt Lake City Winter Sports Association, predecessor of the Alta Ski Lifts Company. Charter investors were S.J. Quinney, E.D. Nordquist, Paul Keyser, Steward Cosgriff, Bartlett Wicks, W.J. O'Connor, Lincoln Ure, Percy Kittle, B.R. Parkinson."³² Quinney was one of the primary forces in the arrangement. He was a successful Salt Lake City lawyer whose daughters convinced him that skiing could be the next great fad. He also judged the occasional ski

32. "Fifty Years at Alta 1938-1988," Jean and Wilburn Pickett Papers, Accn 1573 [Box 1, Folder 2], Special Collections and Archives, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah.

jumping contest.³³ Two members of the group had a tangential involvement with Sun Valley and at least one of them was involved in brokering the deal between the mines and the emerging ski area. They raised money with an initial stock offering of \$25 a share and then applied the funds to the initial purchase of the tramway for \$1,500. They then spent \$3,000 more moving the apparatus and arranging a series of new anchors and electricity points. Bill O'Connor took the initial lead in running the chair lift because it was based on his design.³⁴

They named the retrofitted chairlift after entrepreneur Charles H. Collins who hit a silver vein in 1900 near Alta.³⁵ Collins went on to sell his stakes to other miners in Park City, but his reputation succeeded him. The chair, however, was far more grandiose in theory than in practice. The system proved erratic almost from the start. Alta hired yet another engineer to keep his eye on the failing ski lift. By 1939, they had ironed out the problems and found a way to make the lift run smoothly. It functioned for the next several decades.

Other preexisting structures at Alta made the transition from mining refuse to resort. Watson's tourist boarding house was used for visitors once again. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) took responsibility for restoring a building called the Rock Shelter. The sixty-year-old structure was used as a post office and a general store during Alta's first boom. The CCC kept much of the original structure when they converted it

33. Duane Shrontz, *Alta: A People's Story* (Salt Lake City: Alta Ski Lifts Corporation, 1989), 39.

34. *Ibid.*, 7.

35. Alan K. Engen. "The Collins Chair Lift - A Brief History," Alan K. Engen Papers 1840-2010, Accn1601 [Box 38, Folder 6], Special Collections and Archives, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah.

into a warming and break room for skiers. The building was renamed the Snowpine Lodge and is still in use.

Even the Emma Mine, once so famous for its corrupt ownership and international scandal, was integrated into the new skiing apparatus. The water that flooded the drifts, upping the operating cost of the mines, became the supply used for cooking in several of the lodges. The entrance to the mine became a foundation for a later lodge built just above the vaulted pass. The Forest Service also engaged in some basic terraforming at the resort. They leveled out old mine dumps and filled in exposed shafts. It had to be ready and safe for skiing. Even with this substantial work, much of the old mining apparatus is still in place at Alta and guests saw these remnants of the old landscape when the ski area opened officially on January 15, 1938.

Alta offered one chairlift and charged \$1.50 per day or .25 cents for a single ride. The ski area enjoyed enough success that the Denver and Rio Grande invested \$25,000 in a new lodge. The Winter Sports Association also invested in expansion. They commissioned a structure to be built up the slopes and named for George Watson. This shelter was designed to be a refuge for cold skiers in need of a place to escape the elements. It was the second chair-style lift in the county and a major part of differentiating Alta from social ski areas run by community members as opposed to a professional organization.

It was a fitting honor. Watson himself barely left the mountainside for the rest of his life. He lived in a small cabin near the present day base of Alta Ski Resort. During the winter, when snows were deep, visitors had to crawl into Watson's house for a pine ball

special. A sign above this entrance read, "This is the place – but watch your first step." ³⁶

Watson frequently exited his cabin to entertain guests and to drop in on the nearby ski school. When Watson died in 1952, his body had to be hauled out of the canyon on a snowmobile because an avalanche blocked the road.

Alta was the veritable beginning of the ski industry in Utah. Of course the sport and the means of transportation had long established roots in the area, but this was something new. Unlike the ski jumps near Park City or the ski shelter at Brighton, Alta could serve the general vacationing populace. Unlike the ski train to Park City, Alta had a much longer run. Much as Schaffgotsch predicted, plenty of Utahns took the short train from the valley. Even the resort at Sun Valley, the American model for such areas, demanded an initial travel expenditure just to reach the isolated Ketchum area.

Within the next few decades, the maneuverings of Watson and the WSA would be repeated down the Little Cottonwood Canyon and in the nearby Big Cottonwood Canyon. After Alta proved their method of creating a ski resort could work, others could quickly take advantage of the same mountains and the same snow. Skiing destinations arose at places called Solitude, Snowbird and Brighton. Just over the pass, Park City would follow the Alta playbook and create their own ski resorts. At least one of them owed a serious debt to the mining past.

36. Although he probably didn't have it in mind, Watson had continued the mining tradition of undermining Brigham Young's leadership that Connor started decades earlier.

CHAPTER 11: CONCLUSION - A GUIDE FOR THE DRIFT

The mines give way to sport as commercial enterprise.

The Spiro Tunnel, a mile-and-a-half stretch of mine cut below 3,000 feet of cold and leaky granite, had not been worked in more than a decade. Over that time millions of gallons of water rushed through the tunnel ruining an old infrastructure once used to bring supplies to deep mine drifts and shafts operated by United Park City Mines in their on-going hunt for silver. At the opening of winter in 1965, the two miners who calmly checked their battery-powered lanterns and readjusted their leather belts before sitting in a four-car mining train, had no silver with them. After a 25-minute ride, these miners unloaded an even more unusual and valuable cargo – skiers.

At the beginning of the 1965 ski season, Parkites had reason for celebration. They had just created the world's first "Skier's Subway." Instead of transporting athletes to the 10,000 foot summit using revamped ore trams as chairlifts, Treasure Mountain Skiing had their guests wait in line underground until four yellow mine cars picked them up, taking them for a ride through the heart of the mountain. They then took an elevator that lifted them 1,300 feet. At the top of the elevator, skiers could take the chair lift to the nearby chalet or glide directly downhill. Once the kinks were worked out, the old mining cars took several hundred skiers a day on a ride that reminded some passengers of New York's subway.

At the helm of each train worked a real miner who had once carved silver from the many veins that ran through the mountains surrounding Park City, Utah. When asked what he thought about the new use of the retired tunnel, one of the drivers stroked the facial hair under his chin and said: "Well, it's not so different (from mining). A lot of the problems are the same as working a mine. We have to keep the trains running. We got to keep the tracks repaired and the timbers up. And it keeps us underground. We're mining people and we like it underground."¹

The underground was not as fond of them. The two drivers spoke about their unique job just two years after Bonanza Days. The parade celebrated the opening of the ski area in the middle of Park City United Mines land. That same plot was now called Treasure Mountain. Soon enough, it would be called Park City Mountain Resort and be owned by a conglomerate skiing corporation that would no longer make a practice of hiring miners, despite the fact that virtually all of its architecture was inherited from, or designed to match, the boomtown buildings that characterized the silver town.

To capitalize on the aesthetic, a small store opened in Park City called the "Miner's Find." It was a complete ski shop filled with recycled gear from the local mines. A wagon wheel, for instance, served as a clothing rack. Much of it was installed by men just like those who had worked the tunnels on the Skier's Subway – unemployed diggers who were looking for gigs in the new skiing industry.²

1. Grant V. Messerly, "Historic Spiro Tunnel at Park Now Route to Upper Ski Slopes," *The Park Record* (Park City, Utah), Jan. 11, 1965.

2. Mike Korologos, "Notes on Park City," Mike Korologos Papers 1958-2005, Accn 1824 [Box 1, Folder 31], Special Collections and Archives, University of Utah.

A half-century later, Park City still indulges in the same tradition of nineteenth century design. Now, however, the aesthetic rings false and insincere. As if the promoters in Park City fashioned this past out of the pages of magazines and constructed a town only to advertise itself. The stamp mills and machines shops that line the slopes of Park City Mountain Resort, however, are real and represent an actual past that witnessed the transition between industries and not a synthetic history created to sell condos.

Skiing in Park City came from a genuine tradition and a long series of attempts to integrate the sport into the economy and lifestyle of the mountain town. Miners snowshoed on the same mountains that would someday become resorts in the late-nineteenth century. In the 1920's, miners staged ski jumping contests similar to those run by European immigrants at the nearby Ecker Hill. The local newspaper covered an official contest during which local schoolboys started launching themselves off a tailing dump from one of the silver mines, prefiguring Tanner Hall's freestyling disaster by six decades. The social interest of young men in Park City mirrored an international explosion of fascination with ski jumping. Most of the spectators and athletes came from nearby Salt Lake City. The population at Park City dipped by the 1930s as activity at the mines slowed, but did not stop.³

The population of Park City and Summit County dropped so low that the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad nearly cancelled their service between the area and Salt Lake City. Instead, they compromised by changing the service into a ski train. The short ride from Salt Lake City took skiers to Deer Valley, which still borders Park City's downtown. The train had a mixed record of success. Some days witnessed high ridership while others

3. Martha Sonntag Bradley, David Hampshire and Allen Roberts, *A History of Summit County* (Salt Lake City: Utah State Historical Commission, 1998), 314.

brought only a few people on board. The attempt to transform the train from a commuting vessel for miners to skiers lasted a few decades, but did not survive into Park City's resort age.

The lines of causality, however, were clear. At Alta, Sun Valley and Park City, the decline of mining paved the way for the rise of skiing. Or, perhaps, more aptly laid the tracks for this new industry. Each of these hotspots also had a firm claim on the sport even before the surge of interest in resort skiing began after World War II.

The war brought a number of changes that enabled the growth of skiing as industrial tourism. Most importantly, the spread of the automobile enabled travelers to quickly and easily reach the resorts. Colorado's I-70 corridor exemplified this new trend. Vail, for instance, was designed specifically to be close to the highway. Prosperity after the war also gave Americans the free time and money needed for such trips. The publicity for Sun Valley had also succeeded in spreading the germ of interest in the sport, despite the fact that many Americans did not have the resources to reach Idaho during the Great Depression.⁴

A handful of clever World War II veterans recognized the need for mechanized skiing locations after the war and took vanguard positions in their development. Not coincidentally, many of these soldiers trained and fought with the 10th Mountain Division. The unit was created with the strict intention of preparing for combat at altitude in snowy and mountainous conditions. They recruited some of the best skiers in the United States, many of whom came from elite universities and proven ski clubs. The Division famously

4. William Philpott, *Vacationland: Tourism and Environment in the Colorado High Country* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013).

held camp in the Rockies not far the very spots that would soon become resorts. Their training was rigorous and included the latest techniques in mountaineering and skiing.

The unit saw action in the European theater where they engaged the same skills they had practiced mercilessly in Colorado. Upon their return, the veterans founded Vail, the National Outdoor Leadership School and even Nike Athletics. They also took the techniques they had learned and spread them to dozens of ski schools across the country. Other members built a system of ski huts with their own hands near their former training. At least one member, David Brower, became a prominent environmentalist after viewing the overdevelopment of the Alps. No other contemporary body had as much influence on mountaineering and skiing.

The war also catalyzed the invention of new technologies that would revolutionize these mountain sports. Speed, of course, was the most important thing that truly characterized the new world of skiing. Cars and airplanes could get skiers to the hill much faster than trains. The rudimentary chairlift invented for Sun Valley was rapidly improved upon. After World War II chairs could carry as many as four people and do it in half the time. Better yet, the ski itself came a long way from the rudimentary wooden slats used in the Sierra. Airplane technology from the war led to a laminated plastic design. The new skis integrated metal frames into layers of plastic and wood. They were lighter and more flexible than any of their predecessors. The laminate skis were also much more maneuverable and meshed well with the Arlberg technique that had been so instrumental in popularizing the Alpine styles of skiing. Cumulatively, these technologies brought skiing into its modern age.

Similarly, technology propelled mountaineering in new directions. World War II introduced the United States to better climbing boots and a surplus of them. New vibram soles made for surer grips on rock in dry conditions. In the snow, sharper and lighter crampons led to better travel in the winter. Mountaineers moved faster over more and more difficult peaks.

The greatest of the innovations in the post-War period was actually much smaller than either the boots or their attaching crampons. In California, metalworker John Salathe reengineered the piton. The traditional piton was a steel or iron nail with an eyelet at the end that could be used to attach a carabiner or run rope after the piton had been driven into the ground or rock. Salathe used a more flexible carbon steel. These new pitons fit into smaller gaps in the stone. The invention allowed for vertical climbing on steep walls as never before. Salathe used his new pitons to pioneer new routes up the granite at Yosemite National Park. Salathe and his friends practically created not just a new method of mountaineering, but nearly a new sport.

As Yosemite had attracted skiers and tobogganoers for its winter carnivals, now the park filled with climbers who turned the small valley into their version of a climbing resort. They didn't spend money like skiers did at Park City or Sun Valley, but they seemed content to borrow from the many Yosemite vacationers who did. Climbers gladly snuck into Yosemite's cafeteria and helped themselves to free crackers and butter. A few found that they could live on this diet alone for a little while. These men and women were the equivalent of ski bums, but on rock. Many of them would spend the 1950s in the park climbing the previously unassailable cliffs.

Travel became easier for climbers as well. Traditionally, adventurers had to plan for long approaches to their desired peak. The spread of small aircraft after the war made these trips faster and far less exhausting. Bradford Washburn, a key figure in American mountaineering after the War, made a name for himself as an aerial photographer. His pictures made route setting much easier for unexplored sections of mountain.

These innovations, however, did not launch climbing and mountaineering into the same stratosphere of popularity that skiing would ultimately gain. Climbing and mountaineering still belonged to a handful of daredevils and the clubs, a number of which rose to prominence in the interwar period. Groups in Oregon, California, Washington, Alaska and Massachusetts pushed for longer and more difficult climbs from ever-younger athletes. Washburn, for instance, was a Harvard graduate, who retraced and improved upon the expeditions of pioneers in Alaska. He even used his skills to debunk the achievements of Dr. Frederick Cook in Alaska.

In some senses mountaineering and climbing had the opposite reaction to innovation that skiing enjoyed. The prevalence of aiding technology detracted from the sport for many and a new canon of style emerged from Yosemite and elsewhere. These rules and markers for socially appropriate methodologies would eventually help place mountaineering and climbing into the same vogue as skiing. The mountains of North America, for all their difficulty, however, would take a back seat to the Himalayas, as they became the most marquee peaks in the world. Ski areas in the United States had enough fame to sustain the growth in skills and appetites of modern athletes, but America's peaks did not contain the most coveted routes.

The students of the Yosemite school graduated into fame with even faster ascents of the valley's famed granite walls. They made Yosemite into the Sun Valley of climbing by spreading images of attractive young men and women against the unmistakable backdrop of the Yosemite Valley. A few of these climbers would go on to use their experiences and celebrity as fodder for retail businesses. Yvon Chouinard and Royal Robbins created multi-million dollar companies that dealt primarily in clothing for the outdoors.

Mountaineering and climbing never grew into the same scale of infrastructure that skiing required. They still built cultural landscapes that impacted the nature of the mountains. Climbing routes in Yosemite frequently required a series of bolts carved into the rock. Popular routes on major peaks across the globe show serious human occupancy. Any climber who has visited Mt. Everest can attest to the sheer volume of garbage abandoned by the many who attempt the world's highest peak. Although it stands 10,000 feet lower, Denali has commanded a similar tourist industry. It will never be as showy as the ski apparatus, but mountaineering and climbing are dependent upon wilderness environments transformed into synthetic realms.

An inherent question of conflict arises from many of the more marquee studies of outdoor recreation. Does it make athletes hypocrites to enjoy the unspoiled wilderness by altering it for their own purposes and leaving substantial footprints behind them? Joseph Taylor writes that we should just "let go of a few fantasies and grow up a bit."⁵ He is right to question the false dichotomy between environmental protection and sport. Taylor

5. Taylor, *Pilgrims of the Vertical*, 277.

just refrains from taking the next step. The two are not opposite, because they arose from the same source.

Both sports advanced beyond exploration in the modern age. Mountaineers sought more and more difficult mountains to claim despite the fact that these peaks could yield only diminishing returns in geographical knowledge. Climbers sought social capital on these mountains, capital that could be claimed only by proving one's skill on first-time routes or peaks. Advancements gave an ever-growing body of climbers the chance to make initial ascents. Glory and reputation, then, came from displaying style by taking challenging routes and climbing them without certain types of aid.

Climbing and skiing, therefore, emerged out of modernity to incorporate artificial landscapes enabled by technological advances. Both became fodder for tourists thanks to these changes. Reaching the top of the mountain with guides and mechanical approaches is similar to skiing in a resort with the help of lifts. Although climbing still requires a greater degree of effort and physical stamina, the difference is as simple as one sport that goes up and another that goes down. Both had evolved, or perhaps, devolved into enterprises that facilitated moneymaking through tourism.

This process of development began when Jacques Balmat and Michel-Gabriel Paccard made their ascent of Mont Blanc. It is unlikely that they were the first to have ever reached the top of the Alp's crown jewel. Their arrival, however, opened up the peak for many others to follow in their footsteps. The climb also signified the beginning of mountaineering as a sport. When the path and summit of Mont Blanc became the goal of a glorified game and part of a cultural landscape. This game depended on certain rules

and yielded very distinct prizes – fame, profit and conditioning, chief among them. There was plenty to gain from conquering a peak.

Greater than the pay given to guides or the headlines given to climbers, was the promise of knowledge that extreme adventure could yield. Exploration gave way to fortunes the same way it yielded glory. Perhaps Cook and Peary could make their names by reaching the previously unknown and selling their adventures as books and lectures. Thomas Lloyd could have made even more by finding a new deposit of precious metals. The promise of a strike was not a guarantee, however. The work of extracting that wealth could take months or years.

One had to survive the mountain and then subjugate it to remove precious metals. Miners in the Mountain West were mountaineers almost by default. Even if they devoted their free time to outdoors sport, the exercise could simply be seen as conditioning to support their capitalistic endeavors. For many skiers, this meant that they could better cope with the physical demands of digging and the emotional strains of isolation. In good weather, most forms of forms of mining are extremely laborious. Placering, hydraulicking and drilling are physically rigorous and exhausting. This work is difficult because, at a fundamental level, mining is a struggle against natural forces, especially in the high country.

The same can be said of the early mountain sports. Skiers and mountaineers carved their survival out of rugged environments. For a time, these sports existed as a means of coping with harsh environments. They ultimately became vessels for adventurers to intentionally seek out adverse conditions and terrain not fit for any human being. After the explorers and recreationalists proved that they could survive extreme

climates, it only made sense to attempt the next step and turn the dangerous wild into the enjoyably tame. Ski resorts were built alongside or on top of mines because both were an effort to install an apparatus that proved human dominance over the wild and simultaneously draw monetary value from the mountain, either under the surface or from the very side of the peaks.

Ultimately, each of the towns that made the conversion from mining to skiing did so to reinvigorate their flagging economy. Park City, Alta and the Sierra also paid tribute to their own heritage and the unique qualities of their geography. Other former boomtowns made distinct and separate desperate attempts to salvage their livelihoods. Some towns turned to gambling. Like forms of outdoor recreation, gambling brought tourists who paid for transportation and lodging. Gambling could also prove fickle and susceptible to swings in the market. Like mining and skiing, the gambling economy was anything but consistent:

The examples of the Rocky Mountain towns, whose entire histories are characterized by boom and busts, demonstrate a transformation from mining and recreation communities that always encompassed gambling in some form to recreation sites defined almost entirely by gambling.⁶

The bet on blackjack or on white winters is not such a different one. The stakes are almost the same. Lose, and your community fizzles. Win and tourists will line up to fill hotels and spend on amenities.

Gambling, of course, has moral and legal implications. So too, do outdoor sports and their accompanying landscapes. The expansion of the ski resorts throughout the Mountain West in the 1960s brought ski resort developers into direct conflict with

6. Kathryn Jensen and Audie Blevins, *The Last Gamble: Betting on the Future in Four Rocky Mountain Mining Towns* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1998), 195.

mountain clubs over the treatment of wilderness areas. The Sierra Club famously did battle with Walt Disney over the media mogul's plans to build a resort near Sequoia National Park in the center of California. The Sierra Club lost their attempt to block the construction of the ski area in court, but the damage had been done. The bad publicity slowed down the construction of resorts nationwide.⁷

The building of secondary homes, however, only paused. Much as the backers for United Park City Mines had predicted, sub developments sprang up along the borders of ski resorts nationwide. The number of homes increased seemingly without concern for the impact on the environment. Hal Clifford in *Downhill Slide* blames the corporate ski industry for this unabated growth. He pulls few punches in his accusations that corporate greed has long overruled environmental custodianship for the resorts. Lincoln Bramwell made a similar study of the spreading second and first-home market at the frontier of wilderness and civilization. He calls these locales of subdevelopments close to nature "wilderburbs" and he makes the argument that these spots are consistently exposed to the threat of wildfires and changing geographies. Bramwell also notes that humans are instinctively drawn to these frontiers.⁸

This need to be in the wilderness and at altitude in the West represents a shift in Americans' perception about consuming nature. People are no longer content to visit national parks and other recreational sites a couple of times a year. Since the mid-twentieth century, Americans have increasingly wanted to purchase and live in these very environments.⁹

7. Childers, *Colorado Powder Keg*, 122.

8. Hal Clifford, *Downhill Slide: Why the Corporate Ski Industry is Bad for Skiing, Ski Towns, and the Environment* (San Francisco, California: Sierra Club Books, 2012).

⁹ Lincoln Bramwell, *Wilderburbs: Communities on Nature's Edge*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014), 219

Bramwell and Clifford agree that these homes marketed for their proximity to the mountain are dangerous. Clifford can assign fault to the builders and the contractors all he wants but the demand for the homes spurs their construction. The need comes from the continuation of marketing and advertising techniques used brilliantly by the CPR and the Union Pacific. The second homes draw upon the same basic human desire that spurred Americans to travel to the mountains a century before ski resorts became common. Living on top of a mountain even in a prefabricated home is a pleasing experience and yields something of a sense of accomplishment.

Although intimately inked, the trajectories of mining, skiing and mountaineering will continue their unharmonious connection. Each of these industries has a significant tourist presence and their proximity could well continue to lead to additional conflict. The rise of a strong gold market has prompted a number of Sierra Nevada communities to consider allowing the return of mines. In 2011, a reporter from *The New York Times* interviewed David Cochrane, Vice President of the Sutter Gold Mining Company. Cochrane and his company were engaged in reopening former Gold Rush mines. The town of Sutter Creek has dealt mostly in wine over the past several decades. The gold, however, never disappeared. "Sutter Gold estimates that there could be \$800 million or more in ore under the 3.6 mile stretch it owns in the Mother Lode," wrote reporter Jesse Mckinley. Yet another outfit is considering renewed operations at Grass Valley, California. The small town is now a tourist magnet.¹⁰

Although it has been years since the mines hummed on the slopes of Park City Mountain Resort or at Alta, the possibility lingers that these mines could be

10. Jesse McKinley, "In New California Gold Rush, Old Mines Reopen," *The New York Times*, Feb. 10, 2011.

reinvigorated. Especially as changing weather patterns diminish the amount of snowfall in the winter, the revenue of the resorts will decline. "Among the 19 cities that have hosted the winter Olympics—including Calgary, Chamonix, Nagano, and Oslo—the average February temperature is up to 46 degrees, up from 32 in the 1920s." Some of the ski resorts have looked toward summer tourism as a cure for the poor weather. Others, attempt to manufacture enough snow to make up for the lack of snowfall. Unfortunately for the resorts, even false snow is derived from real water. In a complete drought atmosphere, fake snow can be equally difficult to obtain. Worse yet, summer tourism cannot match the revenue created by the sale of lift tickets.¹¹

Summer sports, however, are not a permanent solution. The model created at Sun Valley and emulated throughout the Mountain West relies on a growing market of second homes. Without skiing, this market will be diminished. A weak skiing market and poor real estate sales could open the door for a return of the mines. These industries have flip-flopped once before. Perhaps, it could happen again. At Alta, George Watson had a clause built into his bill of sale that allowed him the opportunity to continue mining. It never happened.

These two seemingly opposite industries can exist and compete for the same land because they both take advantage of the same unique properties of geography offered by mountains. In turn, these mountains appeal to the human sense of adventure and need to create gain from the seemingly unconquerable. Cultural landscapes on the mountain are interchangeable because the mountain itself stands apart. Altitude impacts both the human body and imagination. It is therefore, no surprise that mountains have gone from

11. Evelyn Spence, "Fake Snow, Real Money: The High-Tech Fight to Save California Skiing," *Bloomberg Business News*, Mar. 6, 2015.

the home of dragons to the promised land for adventurers to the land of promised wealth. Perhaps, humans have proven that they can reengineer the mountains from time to time, but the mountain is still unique.

If these communities are, indeed, hybridized landscapes then that blending of cultural grounds is an unstable and dangerous one. In 2008, an old mining drift was discovered in a populace part of Park City. The mine, untouched for decades, was exposed due to natural changes in the surface of the mountain. Inside, a passerby discovered a cache of unused dynamite. The explosives were still volatile despite their age. A safety team was deployed to clean up the dynamite before anyone was hurt. The incident showed the fallacy of placing the mining landscape directly next to the grounds used for recreation and "wilderburbs."¹²

While surveying the Sierra Nevada, geologist Clarence King commented on the miners and the dangerous wreckage they left behind more than a century earlier.

Travelling to-day in foot-hill Sierras, one may see the old, rude scars of mining; trenches yawn, disordered heaps cumber the ground, yet they are no longer bare. Time, with friendly rain, and wind, and flood, slowly, surely, levels all, and a compassionate cover of innocent verdure weaves fresh and cool from mile to mile. While Nature thus gently heals the humble Earth, God, who is also Nature, moulds and changes Man.¹³

King's published adventures would inspire outdoor recreationalists for years to come.

While he condemned one rush to the mountains, he simultaneously instigated and promoted another.

12. "Experts Neutralize and Remove Explosives Found in Park City," *KSL*, accessed October 9, 2008. <http://www.ksl.com/?nid=148&sid=4484731>

13. King, *Mountaineering*, 378.

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