

The cat who climbed the Matterhorn

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There were two immediate public reactions to the accident. One was the declaration that mountaineering was a very rash business, this view arising from the fact that the general public then knew little about the sport.

The other reaction was a scurrilous campaign carried out on the Continent by sensational newspapers alleging that Whymper had "cut the rope." They did not explain how he could have done so in the circumstances, even had he wished to.

These stories, seen to be without foundation by all who considered the facts, gradually died down.

Certain points were commented on during the following years, however. One was that Whymper gave up serious mountaineering in the Alps immediately after the accident. The report of the interrogation of the Taugwalders, carried out as a matter of course by the Swiss authorities just after the accident, was kept secret until 1920, eight years after Whymper's death.

Most curious thing of all was that the rope linking Lord Alfred Douglas with elder Taugwalder—the rope that broke—was the weakest of three used by the party.

Many of the Zermatt guides accused Taugwalder of responsibility for the accident, though in what was never clearly indicated. It was felt by many members of the climbing fraternity that Whymper had not told all he knew about the accident. The danger of creating an "international incident" was generally accepted as most likely reason for his reticence.

For more than 80 years men who climb mountains have talked of the Matterhorn disaster, even after the mountain lost much of its old terror and was being climbed by dozens of people every day in the summer.

Three films were made about the accident, books were written around it, but when Edward Whymper died in 1912 it seemed unlikely that any further light would ever be shed on the disaster.

Then, in 1932, Lord Conway of Allington, one of the great climbers of the later Victorian age and a man who had known Whymper well, published his autobiography, "Episodes in a Varied Life," a book which began the Matterhorn argument over again.

For in it Lord Conway said of Whymper: "He always told the story in exactly the same words, whether in his letter to 'The Times,' in his lectures and his book. That story was very carefully written and revised.

"The late Dr. G. F. Browne, once Bishop of Bristol, who in his turn became President of the Alpine Club, told me not many years ago that he was the only living man who knew the truth about the accident and that the knowledge would perish with him, as it has perished"—Bishop Browne having died in 1930.

"It appears that he was at Zermatt at the time of the accident," Lord Conway said. "Whymper came to him for advice as to how much of the story he should tell."

So here, nearly 70 years after the accident, was the first authoritative statement that the full story had not appeared in the published records.

But Conway went further. After suggestion that two or three strands of the rope might have been severed beforehand without anyone's knowledge, he added: "The end of the rope engraved in 'Scrambles' (Whymper's 'Scrambles in the Alps') is not the one where the breakage occurred. It is the right rope, but not the broken end."

So Conway, it appears, believed that one of the Taugwalders had in fact tampered with the rope.

Now, in a book published in Switzerland and written by Charles Gos, the well-known Alpine historian, there has appeared yet another footnote to the Matterhorn disaster.

Gos says that, shortly before he died, Whymper went to the Rev. W. A. B. Coolidge, the Oxford don who became the greatest Alpine historian of all time, and told him the full story of the accident. When such a meeting took place—if it ever took place—we do not know.

But anyone who follows up the story of the Matterhorn disaster will find a curious letter sent by Whymper to Coolidge as early as 1883.

That letter is in Switzerland and, so far as I know, has never been published. It is interesting for it holds a number of implications which might solve some of the queer questions that the Matterhorn disaster still raises.

"Many thanks for your frank and manly letter," Whymper wrote. "It has grieved me much to think how gravely I must have been misunderstood by you whom I always respected and have grown to look upon with a warm feeling of regard.

"My trouble now is the thought of the pain it must have cost you to write to me on the subject. Let me remove the sting of it at once by saying that as I never had the least mistrust in you and was wholly ignorant of your mistrust in me I heartily rejoice that this mistake has been rectified and earnestly hope that ours may be a life of friendship."

Coolidge was then editor of "The Alpine Journal," and it seems that he may have learned the full story of the broken rope, possibly from his acquaintances at Zermatt, possibly from Bishop Browne.

It would probably have appeared to him that Whymper had been gravely negligent and he may have written, in his blunt way, to ask what Whymper's position was. Whymper evidently explained and "the fiery lamb," as Coolidge was sometimes called, was forced to reply in his "frank and manly letter."

What seems certain is that the full story of the Matterhorn disaster has not even yet been told.

—"Yorkshire Evening News."

THE CAT WHO CLIMBED THE MATTERHORN

The exploit of Mitza, the cat who climbed the Matterhorn by accident, is still being discussed by tough Alpine climbers on both sides of the mountains. Mitza, who is seven months old, belongs to Josephine, who works as a cook in a hotel at the foot of the Matterhorn.

"The hotel," explained David de Krassel in a talk in "The Eye Witness," "which is the last outpost of civilisation at the foot of the Matterhorn, is the usual starting point for parties attempting to climb the mountain. Thus the kitten has watched many dawn departures from her hotel home, and has heard many queer stories of mountain adventures from the guides who never fail to visit Josephine in her kitchen when their employers stop at the Belvedere. Thus perhaps it is not surprising that Mitza decided one day to see for herself where it was that all her human friends went, and who knows what dreams she may have had of a mouse El Dorado as she set out one morning following the footsteps of her favourite young guide, Edward Biner, who was taking a party of climbers up the mountain.

"But she was not able to keep pace with the men and was soon left behind. At about midnight, Mitza gave another guide quite a nasty fright, for he took her at first for the ghost cat which is said to guard the treasure which lies hidden in the Lake of Schwarzsee at the foot of the Matterhorn. Meanwhile Josephine, the cook, realising that her beloved Mitza was missing, had sounded the alarm; and as the cook at the last outpost of civilisation is a very important personage, there was no lack of helpers. The first report came from the caretaker at the Solway Hut, 12,500 feet up the mountain, who informed the cook that Mitza had reached his hut.

"Of course nobody expected the cat to go any further, so no special precautions were taken to keep her at the Solway. But before the caretaker was up the following morning Mitza had set out again and climbed still higher. When night fell she bivouacked in a couloir above the shoulder. Next day she was seen by a group of climbers from Italy, who passed her, convinced that her climbing skill, if not her spirit, would be defeated by the difficult rope slabs and the roof. But they were wrong! And some hours later the kitten reached the 14,780-foot-high summit of the Matterhorn, where she joined the incredulous mountaineers, who had passed her by in the rope slabs. With her tail up, and miauling with delight, or possibly hunger, she ran to the party, who naturally gave her a royal welcome. After all, nothing is too good for the first cat to climb the Matterhorn.

"The guide, who was an Italian, and was taking his party down the Italian side of the Matterhorn, did not want to abandon the kitten on top of the mountain, so took her in his rucksack, and brought her down to the first inhabited outpost on his side of the frontier. And Mitza is still there, happily fattening on mice. The other day she was recognised by a Swiss guide from Zermatt, who wanted to take her back with him, but the Italians refused to let her go. So it looks as if Josephine, the cook, will have to make the journey over the Matterhorn in person to claim her property, for there are not many people around the Matterhorn, be they Swiss or Italian, who can resist Josephine."

MY EXPERIENCES AND FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF NEW ZEALAND

By OTTO BOXLER, Auckland.

It was just my birthday, February 12th, when we approached the northshore of my future "land of adoption," after a long and somewhat tiresome journey of 12 weeks, including 10 days' stopover in Sydney. Early in the morning of the 13th February we landed safely in Auckland. Some superstitious people might think it was an unlucky date to arrive; I did not! Although the weather wasn't bright, I was given a hearty and friendly welcome by all. The customs officer was very kind and didn't even examine one of my cases or trunks. My friends waited for me at the wharf and drove me to their home. I must say it was a good help for me, as I could stay with them, especially due to the difficult housing problem prevailing here.

Many things appear strange, even funny, to a newcomer. For instance, the slang widely used; the left-hand traffic; the tram cars with female conductors; the business boards; the telephone cabins; the letter boxes, etc. The whole way of living, including working time, meals, etc., are entirely different from those in our homeland. In the evenings one can notice badly illuminated streets, doubtless due to the shortage of electric power. Then also the food in restaurants, hotels and homes are very different, the variety is not approaching anything as we are used to in Switzerland. At first it appeared "Spanish" to me how much tea the New Zealanders are drinking, but now I like it already myself. We Europeans miss good music and the merry community life, which gives such a happy and homelike atmosphere. The general working conditions and wages seem very good in this country and one can say without exaggeration that New Zealand is the workers' paradise with its 40 hours' working week. In the social point of view it is undoubtedly the most progressive, with its marvellous social security system, and the founder, the Rt. Hon. Prime Minister Joseph Savage, merits all praise for this noble accomplishment.

There are many opportunities to spend one's time of leisure in various sport activities, such as tennis, Rugby, football, cricket, sailing, fishing, motor car tours, etc., etc. In Cornwall Park and at Devonport I visited also the Archery Clubs, where men and women participated. This sport reminded me of our national hero William Tell.

Some weeks ago I went with a Yugoslav to the radio theatre and to my surprise heard a singer trying to yodel. Although he made a great effort, it did not sound anywhere as genuine to me as the natural yodel of our alpine boys. On September 28th I attended a Maori Concert in the Town Hall, which I greatly enjoyed. Next to me sat a Maori woman with her son and when I told her that I came from Switzerland, she was delighted and said, "that's where they have the moral rearmament." She, of course, referred to the world's conference which recently took place in Caux/Montreux. She also thought that our country must be wonderful, as we never had any wars and if she had the money she certainly would go there.

An excursion to Rotorua and Orakei-Korako has impressed me very much, especially the great many hot springs and geysers. I also took the opportunity of visiting the Maori village there, which was most interesting to me.

The large areas of unpopulated and unimproved land I have seen in various parts of New Zealand convinced me that there is plenty of space and opportunity for further migrants.

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