



# Newsletter

MATTERHORN 2015

Post 8 — Sunday July 16<sup>th</sup> 1865  
from Zermatt

## Tragedy on the Matterhorn

# 150 Years Ago — First Ascent of the Matterhorn

## It is Summer 1865

**And how many un-climbed Alpine peaks will have been conquered by the time the cool damp air of Autumn returns?**

Mountaineers, many of them British, are planning their routes and engaging their favourite local guides to assist. So I, whose scribblings usually cover London society events and gossip, have packed my notebooks and pens with my climbing ropes and nailed boots. I will follow those intrepid climbers,

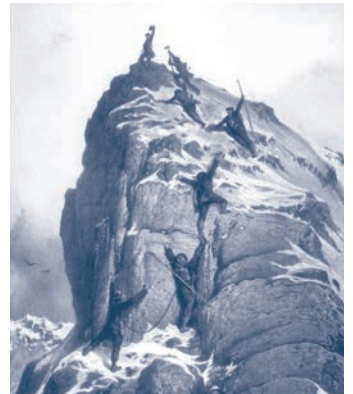
witness their achievements and post back my reports. Many of the summits of Europe have been conquered over the last fifty years, those left must rank as among the most challenging. Grandes Jorasses, Aiguille Verte, Matterhorn – who will be the first to set foot on your proud peaks?



## The Story So Far

### Two attempts on the Matterhorn!

Jean-Antoine Carrel set off first but his speed was impeded by the equipment he needs to facilitate a victory for the Italian Alpine Club and by new snow. A haphazard sequence of events led to Edward Whymper teaming up with Lord Francis Douglas and Charles Hudson to make a bid from the Swiss side. Yesterday, victory was claimed for the Swiss route up the East Face, and Edward Whymper, Michel Croz, Lord Francis Douglas, Charles Hudson, Douglas



Reaching the summit

Hadow and Peter Taugwalder father and son were the first men to stand on the top of the Matterhorn.

## Tragedy on the Matterhorn

**O**ur celebrations turned to mourning, our joy to grief. Three brave Englishmen and a highly regarded French mountain guide lost their lives on that stubborn Matterhorn. Adamant in impregnability, the mountain took its revenge on those who trespassed to its summit.

Only Edward Whymper and the two Swiss guides returned and not until the day after their victorious ascent. The Reverend Charles Hudson, Lord Francis Douglas, Mr Douglas Hadow and Michel Croz all perished.

As yet, I can not write exactly what happened. All I know is that the climbers were roped up for the descent when something occurred that resulted in the four leading men falling to their deaths. The men behind were saved because of a break in



The Fall

the connecting rope. I will endeavour to find out more.

### The aftermath of the tragedy is in official hands

Mr Whymper spoke to Herr Seiler when first he arrived



A split second, the rope breaks, four men perish

possessions of all the victims, including a pair of gloves, a belt and a boot that had belonged to Lord Francis, were strewn around the scene of carnage. But the body of Lord Francis Douglas, snatched from us so cruelly in the flowering of youth, was nowhere to be seen. He must lie, poor fellow, somewhere higher on those brutal rocks.

## The Making of Myth

I say I do not yet have exact information about the tragedy, and neither, I believe, does anyone. This has not prevented a veritable explosion of babble through the streets of Zermatt. I have no idea what Old Peter Taugwalder has done in this town that has given rise to stories about rope cutting. Is it a reasonable response to his position on the rope, or is it ignorance, envy or mischief? There is much to discover. ■

back in town. Herr Seiler went to the President of the Zermatt Commune, Herr Welschen, who immediately organised a party to search for bodies. Twenty guides set out and saw the remains of men although only at a distance, it being too dangerous to venture further.

**Mr Whymper, distraught, prefers to speak to no one, and keeps mainly to his room.**

### Three Corpses Found

Mr Whymper wanted to set out in the night, before the sun should warm the séracs. The Zermatt guides were unable to accompany him because of the requirement to be at Mass early on Sunday. So he, the Reverend McCormick and two other English gentlemen climbers, Messrs Robertson and Phillpotts, went with guides from Chamonix, St Niklaus and Saas. The Zermatt authorities, I hear, are seriously unhappy at this unofficial enterprise.

They found the bodies. Mr McCormick described the scene to me – Mr Whymper, distraught, prefers to speak to no one, and keeps mainly to his room. I will spare my readers the details of the condition of the bodies, which is deeply disturbing. Three corpses lay together. Reverend McCormick read from Charles Hudson's prayer book, which was miraculously preserved intact in his pocket, and the mortal remains were buried in the snow. Personal



The stadeln of Zermatt overlooking the river Vispa



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**Experience the 1<sup>st</sup> Ascent of the Matterhorn "live" on the web.**

#### Imprint

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When they found the maimed bodies on the glacier, the search party was bombarded by stones falling from above

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