



The Story So Far



Where Lord Francis lies, no one knows

Newsletter

MATTERHORN 2015

Post 9 – Thursday July 20th 1865
from Zermatt

The Aftermath of Tragedy

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 scribbles 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?



A spectacular season for mountaineering turned to tragedy when four of the first men to reach the summit of the Matterhorn fell to their deaths on the descent. Edward Whymper and the Zermatt guides, Peter Taugwalder father and son, returned to Zermatt. The remains of British

climbers Charles Hudson and Douglas Hadow and French guide Michel Croz, were buried in snow close to where their fall came to its end. The body of Lord Francis Douglas has not been found. Quickly, rumours about the cause of the accident started to fly around the town and beyond.

The Aftermath of Tragedy

The fine weather broke and the wind they call the Bies set in, bringing with it heavy rain which is snow on the peaks, and a wind that gnaws to the soul. I stay in Zermatt, although the mood here is sombre like the clime, and will endeavour to peel back the layers of supposition that are so quickly building up around the tragedy of the Matterhorn. There will be an official Enquiry, they say, but when, we do not know.

The sad business of informing the relatives of the victims began. Mr Robertson sent a lock of Charles Hudson's hair to his widow. Mr Whymper is guarding Michel Croz' crucifix to give to the brother of the deceased. Mr Whymper assures us that a boot found at the scene of carnage that was burial ground for the victims

belonged to Lord Francis. There is no chance that he still lives, stranded somewhere on those doom laden crags. Hope must die.

The Zermatt Commune went against the decision to bury the deceased where they lay in the snow and has sent a large contingent of strong guides to retrieve the bodies. Funerals will be held tomorrow morning.

Word Travels

I must correct an erroneous report that appeared in the Journal de Genève, which claims it was Lord Francis Douglas who slipped and brought down the other men. Mr Whymper and both Taugwalders concur – it was poor Douglas Hadow who slipped.



The Matterhorn, from the Summit of the Theodule Pass



Jean-Antoine Carrel

The Second Ascent

On Monday, Jean-Antoine Carrel with fellow guide Jean Baptiste Bich reached the summit of the Matterhorn from Breuil. Now that both routes up this mountain have succeeded, maybe we need see no more blood staining its rocks. ■

Reverend McCormick has written to The Times.

Mr McCormick has written to The Times with the intention of silencing those voices that clamour with uninformed opinions on the matter. It is an unadorned account, in which I understand Mr Whympier to have been careful to spare the feelings of the relatives left behind. This concerns me. It leaves gaps in the story of what occurred on that mountain, and my experience of this world has demonstrated that where gaps remain wild speculation will quickly fill them. Myth becomes fact.

The rope that broke

It seems that the rope connecting Old Peter Taugwalder to Lord Francis was of a lesser grade, of insufficient strength

to hold four men, free-falling. Questions concerning its use are circulating, embroidered, of course, with innuendo, citing either wilful choice of a weak rope or lack of enough of the stronger variety. But the town has closed up, I cannot find the basis for these rumours.

What were Hudson's plans?

There has been surprise expressed at the inclusion of Mr Douglas Hadow on so ambitious an expedition. A strong and willing youth, he was nonetheless terribly inexperienced. My discussions with Mr McCormick reveal that Mr Hudson's plan was to wait for the arrivals of Messrs Kennedy and McCormick, and then to attack the Matterhorn with the special ladder and wire rope. Perhaps that these



J. B. Bich

were left behind and Mr Hadow included indicates that Mr Hudson viewed this excursion as a reconnaissance. We shall never know for sure.

More Sorrow

These vengeful mountains have claimed another victim. Yesterday, the body of William Knyvet Wilson, who travelled with Messrs Robertson and Phillpotts all of them masters at Rugby School, was found at the foot of the Riffelhorn.



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Design

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