

In Memoriam

OLIVER PERRY-SMITH

1884-1969

Our Honorary Member, Oliver Perry-Smith, died quickly and peacefully at his son's home in Denver, Colorado on May 13. He was originally a Philadelphian, of distinguished ancestry, but from 1902 until the outbreak of World War I he lived in Dresden, Germany, devoting his life to mountaineering and skiing, in both fields excelling most of his contemporaries. His father had died during the Spanish-American War, and his mother, remarrying in 1902, went to Dresden, where her son soon joined her.

Young Oliver's interest in climbing was aroused by his grandmother, who had travelled extensively and had watched by telescope various ascents of Mont Blanc and other peaks. As a schoolboy of 18, he found companionship with Dresden climbers who were making history on the towers of nearby Saxon Switzerland and were developing under the inspiration and guidance of Rudolf Fehrmann, the brain and leader of the early climbers of that area. They went to the Alps together on the several occasions, and Oliver found a friend in the young guide, Josef Knubel. He led on the Grépon when Geoffrey Young was of the party, and with the latter and Knubel did the north face of the Weisshorn, both in 1909. Fehrmann wrote: "Perry-Smith was the strongest individual personality I have ever known." Young called him "one of the finest transatlantic climbers."

From 1909 until 1914 he competed in skiing, being the first American to threaten Norwegian supremacy. This is not the place to outline his record, which has been fully set forth elsewhere.¹

Perry-Smith made more than 90 ascents in Saxon Switzerland, 33 of which are rated VI or above; there were 32 first ascents, 13 solo climbs and 36 additional ones on which he led. In the Alps his repeated ascents include the following: Weisshorn (5), Matterhorn (3), Dent Blanche (3), Zinal

¹*American Alpine Journal*, 1964, 14:1, pp. 99 to 120. On page 116 it states that 1910 was Perry-Smith's last climbing season in the High Alps. Since this paper was written we have seen a card from him dated 12 August, 1913, saying: "Wir haben den schwersten Gipfel der Schweiz – Dent Blanche – in 34 Stunden von Zermatt bestiegen."

Rothorn (2), Wellenkuppe (2), Obergabelhorn (2), Giulia de Brenta (2), Kleine Zinne (2).

His son, Crosby, also a member of our Club, writes of his father: "I feel it wouldn't be out of order to say he had a special brand of leadership marked 'not transferable.' As we found out, each person must develop his own leadership; it cannot be bought or inherited, and certainly can't be passed on by any process of succession."

J. MONROE THORINGTON

JOHN R. HUDSON

1946-1969

I first got to know Hudson driving across the country in June, 1966. He had hitchhiked to my place with his entire gear in his Kelty, and we went West as fast as we could in a doubtful auto — we had to get to Yosemite before the hot weather. Driving toward the sunset beyond the desert, John sang, "When you're lost in the rain in Juárez, and it's Eastertime too." Sitting on a curb eating trashburgers in Carson City, it was summertime again too!

John was already a great mountaineer with many fine new routes, usually done with Art Gran, and he did much pulling on the rope on the climbs we did together. John could be annoying to follow, because he was so natural, it was hard to believe he was so good. If he did a lead with no protection and shouted down from the top, "What a great pitch!", you could expect trouble. But if he paused before a move, did it singing, "O Mama, can this really be the end, to be stuck inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues again," and then said, "Sorry I took so long, it wasn't that bad!", you knew you had little hope.

We went to the Bugaboos, where John, Ants Leemets and Dick Williams did the first ascent of the south face of Snowpatch, while four more of us did the standard route. We had a joyful reunion on the summit, with cavorting and handstands. Later, seated in a row, the seven of us glissaded from the Bugaboo-Snowpatch col.

1967 was a great summer. Al DeMaria and I met John in Jasper after his return from Mount Deborah in Alaska, one in a long series of fiascos. To speak of someone's debacles might seem unkind, but John's record was such that he could afford a few. To avoid their mention would be to omit something dear to him. Hudson delighted in fiascos, talked of fiascos, imagined greater fiascos and made the word part of our vocabularies. His successes have been well recorded; it is unfortunate that the only real account of a fiasco is found in the pages of this *Journal* (Fitz Roy).

Whether this love of the debacle hid the disappointment of failure or bespoke a joy of just being in the mountains, win or lose, I could not say.

We went to Robson and failed to find the Wishbone Arête. John and I did do the Kinney Lake route on the fourth of five cloudless days, with much step-chopping and a bivouac in a bergschrund. Four hours in the sun on a ledge above the icefall the morning after, eating, planning and dreaming, are among my happiest. After a rainy day of indecision in a coffee house in Jasper, we went to the Ramparts and made the first ascent of the west ridge of Geikie. John made 16 miles of packing through swamps a pleasure. Rainbows, a bivouac in a hailstorm, in the early morning traversing a knife-edged ridge on an island above the clouds, getting lost on the descent — what a great life it was. Then, how good that Calgary stock ale tasted in Banff. Later we returned to Yosemite and did the Snake Dike on Half Dome, the accidental first ascent of Gollum, a one-pitch pile of rocks at the base of El Capitan, and the Chouinard-Herbert route on Sentinel. No matter what he was on, he never treated a route as “just another climb.” Returning from two days on Sentinel, John and I discovered we had 43 cents between us. What a splendid time we had deciding to buy a pint of ice cream, a trash pie and a candy bar.

In January 1968 John went on a cruise on an oceanographic research ship, but we wrote and planned fiascos. He recommended the east face of Bugaboo, of which he and Pete Geiser had made the second ascent. When I climbed it, high on the face we found a set of ledges, one of which was 8 by 2 feet, flat, with a vertical drop of 1000 feet on two sides, and a foot-wide ledge just above with a perfect crack — in short, an ideal bivouac ledge. I could image John's joy at discovering this ledge and humming to himself, rolling rocks and watching the storm clouds go by. This was the perfect place for one who was more a part of the mountains than anyone I have known, one whose greatest gift was to teach us how great the mountains are to live in.

I had meant to talk to John about the bivouac ledge when I next saw him, but the opportunity never came. Word from Peru reached the Valley in September that John had been killed when snow collapsed while he and Roman Laba were scouting a new route on Huascarán. What a great time he and Roman must have had in Patagonia, Bolivia and Peru prior to the accident!

The reality of John's death hit me when I was looking at Sentinel, even if Sentinel still did look the same. Of course there will be more summers in the mountains, and the trashburgers and Calgary Stock will taste as good, but somehow everything will be older and more serious.

JOSEPH KELSEY

OSCAR R. HOUSTON

1883-1969

On December 19, 1970, The American Alpine Club lost one of its older and most distinguished members with the death of Oscar Houston. Though a lifelong outdoorsman and conservationist, and a famous fisherman, he did not begin serious climbing until middle age, when he had already become internationally known as a maritime lawyer. Prior to this time he had moved from Logan, Ohio, where he was born in 1883, graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Columbia, and become editor of the Law Review at Columbia. His brilliant law career continued as a partner of Bigham, Englar, Jones and Houston, where he was principal counsel for cargo interests in the maritime disasters of the *Titanic*, *Lusitania*, *Morro Castle*, *Normandie* and *Andrea Doria*. He served both as president of the Maritime Law Association of the United States and the International Law Association, and for many years headed the Adirondack League Club.

Oscar Houston married Nelly S. MacDonald in 1912. Their three children are Barbara (Mrs. Grose), Janet (Mrs. Beal) and Dr. Charles S. Houston, whose mountaineering record is internationally known. Father and son shared a love for mountaineering, and many expeditions were proposed, assembled and sent off from their hospitable home in Great Neck, Long Island.

Oscar Houston contributed to American mountaineering in many ways. He encouraged young climbers, helped to develop and support climbing, and with his son organized the party that in 1934 made the first ascent of Mount Foraker in Mount McKinley National Park. In 1937 he led an expedition to Mount Hayes in the Alaska Range. Even more important to climbers, however, was his part in bringing about the successful ascent of Mount Everest, for in 1950, when he was 68 years old, he somehow (even his son doesn't know how) broke the political barrier that prevented climbers from entering Nepal, and he, his son, H. W. Tilman, Anderson Bakewell and Mrs. Elizabeth Cowles penetrated to Thangboche Lamasery. Charles Houston and Tilman a day later reached a point where they could see into the Khumbu Icefall, and so discovered the potential for the only route by which Everest has yet been climbed. Oscar Houston's imagination and resourcefulness were clearly responsible for the disclosure of the Khumbu route. And so at the age of 68 he changed the world of mountaineering!

Had he not been so modest, at the end of his life this admirable fellow member of ours could have quoted from *Ulysses*,

*Much have I seen and known – cities of men
And manners, climates, councils, governments,
Myself not least – but honored of them all –*

ROBERT H. BATES

GARETH H. HEMMING

1934-1969

Gary Hemming's death has ended the career of a climber widely believed in Europe to have been among the best in the world. Less well known here – all his important climbs were in Europe – he had close to the same reputation in the community of American climbers. Although not a member of the AAC, his great record makes it appropriate to publish this obituary here.

He started climbing in the early 1950's at Tahquitz Rock while living in Southern California. He soon met John Harlin, then at Stanford, and, while working in the San Francisco Bay Area, began climbing with him and others from the Stanford Alpine Club in Yosemite. He and I first met on a trip to Mount Rainier in 1957 that included John and Hobey DeStaebler, that was designed, in John's words, to teach us ice climbing techniques "suddenly," in preparation for a trip we made later that summer to the Battle Range in the Selkirks.

Gary was uneasy and unhappy in the United States and a trip to Europe was the start of a new life for him in an environment freer, for him, of the restraints he sensed so acutely. He climbed in England and then in the Alps, attended the University at Grenoble sporadically, and tried to complete the aspirante guide course in Chamonix in 1961, failing in this for his refusal to dispose of a magnificently unruly beard. He climbed from time to time with Americans and began to eye the very important climbs. He made an attempt on the Walker Spur in winter but was forced off by a particularly ugly storm. This was a climb he completed late in the summer of 1961, the first American ascent of the face. It was a route that fascinated him and several years later he spent some effort in planning a solo ascent to be completed in a single day. It was possibly beyond his powers and the attempts depressed him.

He introduced Yosemite climbing techniques to the Alps starting with a fine new route on the west face of the Petit Dru and, in 1963, with Harlin,

Tom Frost and Stuart Fulton, completed a route of great difficulty on the south face of the Fou that had turned back some of the best European climbers. He completed spectacular solo ice climbs on the Aiguille Verte — the Coutourier Couloir — and on the north face of the Triolet.

In the late summer of 1966 two Germans were trapped on a ledge on the standard route on the west face of the Dru. Gary stepped in to lead the rescue expedition and received enormous publicity for his skill in carrying out the rescue. It is not common for Americans to lead French rescue groups — it has happened perhaps just this once.

He climbed with strength and with style and, as his technique improved and his experience increased, he was able to carry out a succession of ascents that made him as well known as any American climber in Europe excepting only John Harlin. As the years passed however, the inner struggles that his friends observed surface from time to time in moody withdrawal or violent outbursts became increasingly intense and finally were too overwhelming to be controlled. When he died, in the Tetons, where some of his earliest climbing was done, it was by his own hand.

HENRY W. KENDALL

