

The Dead Adventurers Club Presents...

**MOUNT
NORFOLK
(13,016 FT)**

Part of the Dead Adventurers Tales.

The Dead Adventurers Club

**Mount Norfolk
(13,016ft)**

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Prologue.

September 2nd 1894. Mr. Wilcox, Mr. Bryant and their guide, Peyto, attempt the mountain from the west side. From observation it seems to offer the most direct route, via a small, tempting gully created by a waterfall which dried a millennium ago.

Within two days they reach a height of nine thousand feet and onto a graphite crag which forms a boundless citadel of razor-sharp ramparts. The heavens open, turning the already treacherous narrow paths on which they step into flowing rapids. Attempt after attempt is made to move onwards, but they are forced to make camp where they stand. Two days later and the rain shows no sign of giving up on its attack. It reinforces itself with ear-piercing winds. Exhausted, defeated, they sound the retreat and begin to descend.

May 4th 1895. Christian Hasler and Christian Bowen (led by Captain M. Dent) spend their first day in the exact footsteps of Peyto's team. At four thousand five hundred feet, instead of continuing upwards, they spend a day traversing east to the south face, which is rich in vegetation, and I'm told, abundant with wildlife, especially game. They make good speed.

At a little over ten thousand feet they came across an obstacle they name "The Hour Glass". Two overhangs stand either side of a steep talus slope, some one hundred and fifty foot in height. This obstacle would prove to be fatal to Christian Bowen. Whilst laying a line he misjudges his hold when the mountain launched a sudden volley of rocks at him. As his rope pulled tight, it snags and snaps his neck. Demoralised, the remaining two ended their climb.

These are the only two attempts worthy of mention. In the summer of ninety-five there would be six more, including a joint effort between Peyto and Captain Dent, and one by the Boston Appalachian Mountaineering club. All of these would pass without merit, with one ending in fatality for all those involved. Their bodies, yet to be recovered, await on the mountain in some macabre pose.

June 7th 1896. Alone, and a little after five pm, like a matador and a bull in their final dance, I drive my ice pick into the peak. This is my story.

Whilst previous attempts had all been conducted from the west and south sides, I would take mine from the north west. There was good reason this route had not been tried before, for whilst the west and south sides can easily be reached from the Bow valley, west-by-north-west is where the Norfolk joins its smaller sisters on the Settle Range. Now, I'm sure as future climbers familiarise and map this range, they may take this crossing down to three or even possibly two days. I would take five, as my focus was on the Norfolk. I did not want to risk any unnecessary injury or strain before I had even started.

This did raise the question and the practicalities of the amount of supplies I would need to carry. So I undertook this route with the aforementioned Christian Hasler, with whom I had been a friend for several seasons.

We had first made acquaintance in a public house in the city of Liverpool. The steamer, the *SS Royal*, which was to be our passage across the Atlantic, had taken a small blow from one of the many tugs in the harbour. The captain, being one of cautious mind, had taken the precaution of delaying its departure to allow for a full inspection of the hull.

For us passengers, this meant having to find ways of passing the time in the city itself. Normally in such circumstances as this I would have looked for somewhere with a gentleman's lounge. But in the spirit of adventure I headed into one of the rowdier houses along the quayside called The Baltic Fleet, and what turned out to be an absolute hoot of a night.

I had not been alone in my thinking, and was met with the company of some Bavarian and Swiss climbers, of whom Christian was one. It turned out in conversation that we had both had the misfortune of sharing a railway carriage with a most obnoxious Irish drunk by the name of Tiberius O'Donnell - him in Switzerland, myself in France.

But I digress!

We arrived in the town of Banff during the last days of May, having travelled down from Montreal in the well-equipped and Herculean steam train *The Imperial Limited*. Where most of the passengers had turned left at the station exit to take up in the likes of the Banff Spring Hotel, or one of the many chalets that adjoin the low hills, myself and Christian, led with out instructions from our feet, turned right, and then a sharp left, down a buffalo trail that dissects the railway tracks. In less than an hour the town of Banff has vanished from our view and we strolled across a prairie which gave way to the beauty and expanse of the shores of Lake Minnewanka. The Lake stretches far into the horizon, where it is met by a body of senatorial pines which have their emperor Mount Inglismaldie (9,752ft) standing high and far over their shoulders.

The banks themselves gently slope down from green grassland to an expanse of white stone and sand, which is where we set up camp for the night. The air was thick with that sweet strong smell of pine mixed in with dashes and pours of flora. The temperature was pleasant enough for us to

forego lighting our fire till quite late. Whilst our intentions had been to discuss our upcoming route, the talk turned quickly to swapping yarns, a crime that all of us adventurers must stand up and be counted guilty for, when presented with the warmth of a camp fire and good companionship.

Starting out early the next morning, we made our way around the banks of the lake and northwards along Simpson's path, which is a well-trod trail that skirts what is the first of Canada's great national parks. It was established just over ten years ago, based on the concepts similar to those employed by the Americans in Yellowstone Park. The Park sets out to conserve two hundred and sixty square miles for public use and recreation, not just for this generation, but at least a thousand more. An act I commend and praise in my loudest voice!

The park itself is a most wonderfully curious affair with the South and especially Mount Rundle (9,762ft) much favoured by the Swiss. On a Sunday morning one can find on its foothills many a dictatorial dad looking up to his offspring and filling the air with shouts of, "Keep that bow line tight!" and, "What have I told you about keeping your leg straight!"

Then way, way high above their heads, and on its glacial peak, there are old masters revisiting a favourite canvas in a leisurely stride.

To the west was a place that you would not find in books by writers such as Coleman and Schäffer. But rather in books by authors who seem nameless and their titles interchangeable.

Day Walks in the Rockies.

Climbs Without Ropes.

Day Walks and Climbs.

Here along the peaks such as Tunnel Mountain (5,552ft), discarded bottles give a clue to the joyful exaggerations and boasts that would fill university dorms in the autumn, and I say good on them! Let them cheer out loud! Let us hope that in a hundred years a future generation of young gentlemen can cry the same.

There is plenty of leisure or even laziness to be found in this place, and even for us more skilled climbers, challenges aplenty can still be found. And danger too. Back in Montreal I had dinner with Professor Charles Fay, president of the American Alpine Club, who some weeks earlier had been on a first ascent attempt on Mount Lefroy (11,230 ft) . On this try, a Mr. P. S. Abbot, an established climber who held the first ascent Honour on Mount Hector (11,136ft), fell, sadly earning him the decoration of being the first climber to die in the national park.

By our third day, and with the park far behind us, we headed northwards along Spray Valley, which also began to mark the start of a gentle ascent. The valley itself stood shoulder-packed with regimented pines, occasionally broken by cascading falls. As was demanded by anyone who

took this trail, lunchtime was spent in the hot springs that are to be found where the valley begins to twist and turn as it continues its rise.

Nature had decided to paint this cove with a horizontal strata of reds and yellows, which against the backdrop of the green of the trees, the black and white of the mountains, topped off with the blue of the sky, truly gave weight to the belief that God himself is an artist. Much banter was exchanged and we headed off much vitalised and with a fresh step in our advance.

In the afternoon our conversation became more sombre as talk turned to the Norfolk itself. I pumped Christian for every scrap of information he had gained.

"How did the air feel at three thousand feet?"

"What is the rock type at five thousand feet?"

"Did the terrain change gradually or suddenly at six?"

Let no man tell you different. A mountain is a living thing, as unique and beautiful as ourselves. And as such, it should be treated in the proper manner, and not of that attitude reserved for beasts. Sometimes the smallest of details can make the difference between life and death.

That night, near the end of Spray Valley, as the stars began to appear in the evening sky, we made camp in a profusion of large fallen trees which created an almost fort-like structure around us. It brought an immense feeling of safety and calm.

The fourth day began with a most entertaining fast descent. For the valley stepped onto a cliff that gave way to the Columbian ice fields. If one was to come here in the winter, due to its orientation and the movements of winds across the ice, they would find they were standing on a sparkling white pillow of soft snow.

Those of us with experience know well to steer clear of such features, for underneath, the ice is stacked in slanted slabs. The slightest disturbance can cause it to slide, and then you have an avalanche to contend with.

On the other hand, it was summer, and spread in front of me was a most tempting ramp to the field below.

"Hoi!" I shouted.

Forgetting all our combined years of knowledge, precaution and sensibilities, I charged down the slope and Christian followed. Like two schoolchildren we began to chase each other down.

In a combination of what can only be described as controlled falling and rolling, we collapsed into a pile of twisted limbs on the ice, having done an impressive eight hundred feet in a little

less than twenty minutes. So much for my precautionary approach! Thankfully we ended up with nothing more serious than a hearty belly-full of laughs.

As we got deeper into the ice field, this solitude land became brilliantly white. It is a place I always imagine a cartographer might come to rest his head. By midday the crampons were out, and by two pm we were on ropes. In the late afternoon Mount Norfolk came into sight, and we were now at the base of one its sisters, Mount Menai (6,753ft) .

I believe it is named after some celebration of Victorian engineering sixty-or-something years ago, by an unimaginative clerk in an office some four-and-a-half thousand miles away. Whilst not a challenging climb for us in the summer, in the winter the ice joins this ridge (and many others) to the ice field, creating a frozen amphitheatre big enough for an emperor colossus to be entertained in. It was here that six months earlier, when in the tier reserved for the plebs, I had first contemplated my plan.

Whilst the last few days had been spent in a jovial manner, the climb over Menai was a rather quiet affair, with the exchange of conversation mainly consisting of asking for rope or confirming a hold. We were still those two schoolchildren who had run down the cliff, but now we were in a classroom with Mount Norfolk looming over us like an old maths master, looking for a reason to wrap our knuckles with his cane.

The next morning Christian and I would part. After his two previous attempts he had resigned any future ambitions for this mountain. He pitched up on the Menai, where he would await my return, happy to have played his part in carrying the extra supplies I had needed. When we parted he handed gave me the late Christian Bowen's Kodak. No words were exchanged. None were needed.

A short distance away I stopped and looked at what was the second reason the mountain had not been attempted from this face before. A ravine, three thousand foot deep, stood between me and the Norfolk itself, and whilst unnamed, and after having crossed it, I can think of several that would not be polite to say in the company of ladies.

Being in the shadow of both the Norfolk and the Settle ridge, little, if any, light hits the ravine floor. I had estimated on my original survey that it would take about twenty hours to cross. No matter what time of the day I started, I would be in complete darkness at some crucial point. My only hope was that by planning my dates so my crossing fell under a full moon, just enough light might reach me when I needed it most.

There was also the question of what made up the ravine floor itself. The best case would be it was frozen solid and I could easily cross. The worst, a fast running rapid which I would spend much time trying to surpass.

The descent into the ravine began with ease, but this was not to last. I came to an arrest. I instantly sank up to my knees, for the surface was a thick brown slush that was not frozen enough for me to make use of my ice shoes, nor wet enough for gaiters to help.

Every footstep became a pull, getting heavier and heavier as my trousers began to absorb this sickly pulp. Several times I ended facedown. I'm sure most sane men would have given in after an hour. Whilst rationale is the one thing that keeps us explorers alive, when it comes to sanity, lock us up with the rest of the lunatics and throw away the key.

Back at the club they used to joke I had one leg shorter than the other, and they were surprised that I didn't end up going around in circles. For a while I had a horrible thought they might be right, as nothing down in this darkness gave me any navigation at all. It was a jungle of nondescript silhouettes and shapes. Branches would scratch my face that seem to belong to no tree. I would feel my height rise and fall with no explanation. I felt like one who had gone into the labyrinth long before Theseus had arrived to slay the minotaur.

Then there was the smell.

There were no buzzards, coyotes or even the humble maggots to clear the bones of whatever cursed animals had fallen in. That, mixed in with the unmeasurable amount of many a season's rotting vegetation, gave off a truly hellish stench that raked at the back of my throat and caused me constantly to wrench.

That was not the only thing in the air down here. For though my face was covered, there were small black gritty alkaline particles that seemed to hang in the air and worm their way through the fibres. When I reached for my canteen, the short time between unscrewing the cap and lifting it to my lips was sufficient for the water to become awash with them.

Fuelled by anger I became an automated machine.

Right foot down, and pole up and in. Left leg lift, left leg down, and pole up and in. Right foot lift...

My initial estimate of a day was woefully unrealistic. I don't remember when exactly night passed. A vague memory, a glimpse of a fire, an idea of trying to dry my boots with kindling fills that gap where tiredness and darkness seeped into one. Did I sleep? I honestly cannot tell.

When I finally made it to the other side of the ravine, I was confronted with a wall covered in vegetation, packed deep in ice. Barehanded, I swung my right fist. The icy wall was no more frozen than the ground beneath my feet. A second punch and I found the rock some eight inches in. Not ideal, but it *was* rock.

High above me, icy mountain streams poured over the edge of the ravine. I leaned back, filling my mouth with this taste from above. I hammered in the first piton, improvising with what I presumed to be a log to give me extra leverage in my reach. Using both arms I pulled myself out of the sludge. Cramp immediately kicked into my left leg, which is most distracting when one is concentrating on holding and balancing one's full body weight with one hand. Pressing myself up against the wall, whilst doing my best to keep my face clear, I punched my left hand in.

Nothing but ice.

I swung out and punched just to the right of my previous hole and found the rock, this thankfully only five inches from the ice. Confirmed by my fifth such intrusion, I concluded the rock underneath formed a dihedral, upon which I was on the inner left-hand side. I proceeded upwards. Gloriously, with each yard I ascended, it got that little bit warmer, that little bit drier and that little bit lighter.

Finally, I emerged onto one of the most beautiful sights my eyes had ever seen. A meadow alive and breathing with purple flowers of a hundred kinds! As I pulled myself over I let myself roll in this most heavenly carpet. I gulped down deep breaths of air, ridding my lungs of the stench of below. Next, I stripped off my soaked and contaminated clothes and leant back to bathe in the rays of our glorious sun.

As I laid there, a mountain eagle soared high above and gazed at this strange alien in his land. I was finally on the Mountain.

Across the meadow is a shallow crystal-blue lake, about an acre in size, which forms an almost tear-like shape. I named it "Eagle Lake", and near its banks is where I made my camp and set my things.

A small but fast-running stream feeds the lake from the east, and it is in these waters that I attempted to wash out the foul odour from my clothes, with somewhat moderate success. They still hold a slight alkaline smell which I will let nature take care of.

In my route log that night, I noted the usual distances, directions and angles of slopes. In the part I reserve for advice, I wrote about the ravine. "Bring a machete, bring torches, and plenty of snuff."

Dawn came, and the air was rich and sweet with the smell of lavender. The ravine now seemed an eternity ago. Over breakfast, after a morning dip in the lake, I looked up at the reason why I had chosen this route.

The south and south-west routes attempted by Peyto and others start with relative ease, then increase exponentially in difficulty. I know Peyto well, and he is well-famed for his "If we have got this far we can get to the top" attitude, which stems from his prize-fighting days. It is also a belief that has earned him some remarkable feats, such as crossing the Bow summit, and the countless mappings of what were thought to be previously impassable paths. He has made many a Swiss guide rewrite their books, and dare I say question their own skill. I do, however, feel that this was the wrong approach for the Norfolk.

My route, on the other hand, had a hard start and even harder end, but an easy mid section. My logic was I wanted to be able to cover the biggest distance with the least fuss possible, so I could conserve my energy for the top.

For in front of me were the next seven thousand feet, which would be nothing more than a gentle ramble through pleasant green woodland overflowing with verdure. It was made even easier by an escalating zig-zag of well-trampled animal paths. Both I and the mountain knew it was not to last. It was a hint of temptation, a taste of what it could give if it decided to be kind.

The wildlife I counted on my walk included mountain sheep, mule deer, moose, grouse and lynx. I pondered whether this band of woods continued all the way across the east side onto the south and joined up with where Captain M. Dent's team had walked. That question would, however, be one for another explorer to find out.

In the last afternoon light, the woodland began to give way to rock. Taking an aneroid reading, I saw the height was seven thousand and two hundred feet. A short distant in front of me would be my next two day's climbing. A four thousand foot, almost perfectly smooth, vertical glacier face. This is why I love to climb.

Excited about what lay ahead, I set up camp with it in view, and that night watched as the stars and moon presented me with a most fantastic light show on the ice. Jupiter led by making its entrance first, from over the ridge of Mount Menai, followed by a chorus of constellations which created a shimmer of blues and whites as random as the waves in the oceans. The wind took the part of the orchestra, gently shimmering the trees in time and whispering over the rocks. Occasionally a gust would bring the cold air down into my lungs, giving me a taste of what was to come. It was truly marvellous. I stood, applauded and cried, "Bravo!" to my entertainer.

In the first light of the morning I packed my ice gear, and just the supplies I would need for the next three days, leaving the rest suspended in the branches of a nearby tree so as not to tempt scavengers. Optimistically, I also set a couple of traps, but truth be told, I'm a far better climber than hunter.

The ice at the base was packed hard. It took six, seven and even eight swings with the axe to make my first holds. Even though my knees were well packed with oilskins, having them touch the side for more than a moment felt deadly.

I proceeded in a zig-zag manner, slow and cautious at first, until I got a feel for the ice and an understanding of its sounds. At around three in the afternoon I felt myself begin to lean inwards as the ice began to slowly concave, and after another hour, I had found myself beginning to lean everso slightly outwards. This feature had been invisible from below due to the light, and it now forced me to traverse to the right.

After two more hours of making no progress upwards, the concavity began to form a horizontal overhang above my head. I stopped at the point where it had become four foot deep. I was also now much further west than I had intended, forced onto a buttress that leaned over a rocky valley that was devoid of any soul.

As a test, I swung an axe into the small ceiling above me, which only took two swings. I debated if I could somehow curve-throw something from my current position to see how thick this hang was. But then I decided no, for that would provide limited information at best. I hammered a Canadian Pacific railway spike into the ice to secure myself as I took time to consider the next move.

There are many formulas I have come to know that I use in my writing and recording of routes, of which many involve the analysing and definitions of slopes. There is one unrelated formula, which at this moment I really wished I did not know. That was:

$$V=32.2 \text{ ft/s}^2$$

Or, as I foolishly worked out in my head, about twenty-two seconds before I would end up on the rocks below.

I eased some of my rope off the spike, allowing myself just enough movement to grab the axe above my head. Slowly I placed one hand, and then the other, onto its handle, keeping my feet in their holds. I then cautiously freed the left, then slowly rocked out my right.

A creak began to sound above my head and I quickly replaced my feet and eased my weight.

Decision time.

I could have continued traversing, hoping that the overhang would get less, or even break, but there was the danger of getting stuck on the ice in the dark, or of the weather turning in.

I could also surrender one of my three ropes to use as a safety line, which would be of use if the lip was tall. But if it was thin I was in danger of it breaking under my weight and being pulled down. I also hated the idea of getting near the top and not being able to attain it due to lack of rope.

I looked at my axes. The one that was currently in the overhang I had had since the start of this season, purchased from a fine outfitters in Alberta. The other in my right had been with me on

several successful first ascents, as well as many other climbs. This would be the one I needed to get in with one strike. This would be the one to hold my weight as my body hung with nothing but air below it, as I freed my left axe to bring it up and over the chin. I paused, ran my fingers down its spine, and then placed it back into the loop in my belt.

I then untied and recovered my rope and went to remove the left axe. My fingers curled around its handle, and in a flash my right hand unconsciously reached back down to my right axe and swung it hard and upwards.

It was almost as if the whole mountain held its breath as the axe sliced its way into the overhang. In less than a second I freed my left and began to swing out and over. The swing did not quite make it to the crest, landing six inches short and cracking the ice. Adrenalin kicked in and I windmilled my arms, my heart stopping for a moment when both axes were out of the ice and I was held by nothing but air. My body whipped violently as my right once again took hold in the ice, followed quickly by my left.

Success! With my feet dangling I looked up to see I was once again on a vertical face.

By about seven pm I was at a height of just over nine thousand feet. Whilst the mountain had not let Peyto's team go any further, it had decided to offer me a secluded ridge to rest on.

I devoured my rations, my muscles craving food to replenish the energy I had spent. Corned beef, cheese, Scotch broth and tinned apricots had never tasted so good. I ached all over. I lay awake in my bivouac, like a child looking forward to a Christmas morning. A hundred and one exciting possibilities of what awaited me ran through my head.

Before the first rays of sun were up, I was with my gear and back on the face. Unlike yesterday I was able to proceed with great speed, and by midday I had already done a thousand feet. It was at this altitude that a most wonderful silence filled the air; there was no wind, nor could I hear the sounds of my axes. I looked up. What was once pure white was turning into the black outline of the final arête that would lead me to the top.

Eleven thousand feet. I roped myself off and leaned out with both arms back. I could see clearly "The Hour Glass" below. My mind projected the events of the late Christian Bowen's fall onto the screen of grey rock. It was like the mountain was letting me know, and on devil's scales, it showed me a clear path for descent that would be my way down, just a short distance to the west, visible from my high vantage point.

As the ice began to give way to more and more rock, the gradient changed to a point where I could stand and walk. I was able to make good distance here, and for a while I could have been one of the many at leisure in the national parks, enjoying a trail laid out by what's-his-name in what's-his-book.

With two hundred and fifty feet to go, I saw the final climb to the peak, shaped like a soldier and standing proud. I scouted the base to the right and was saddened to see that from this angle, the veteran peak looked like an old man, hunched over and doubled in pain.

I felt it wrong to take advantage of this easier climb, and moved back to where it stood illustrious and grand. Back on the ropes I placed each piton with respect, paying attention to the details to make sure it would stand up to the scrutiny of parade. I let my ropes glide freely across the face, never arguing or pulling them with haste.

With sixty foot to go this soldier gave one last demonstration of its fight. For from its very crest a deluge of small rocks came flying down. Thirty foot I slipped before my rope pulled tight, my lip split and a gash across my eye.

I wiped the blood away, and with hands, spit and grit, I continued upwards. More rocks fell but this time I held tight. By the time I was near the top another gash was across my face, just above the brow, and my left hand was scraped and skinned of its glove. I paused before that final pull, and then swung my axe high into the air and hard down!

I pulled myself over, eyes down, and caught my breath. Slowly I lifted my head to reveal a sight no man had ever seen. Hidden by the vast mountain guards that protect it in all directions are three hundred miles of ranges, yet to be entered and explored. The sky was crystal clear, with no cloud or fog in sight, and I reached out my finger to trace the many contours of this virgin land. It was both celestial and Olympian, and I now know why the mountain protects it so.

I pulled the Kodak from my rucksack and fulfilled my unspoken duty, making good use of my upturned ice pick as a tripod. I put the camera back and made sure that the place into which I had driven my pick was the very highest point. I am not one for ceremony and flags; scratching my initials into the rock would do. I did, however, have my own personal ritual from my first ascent made six years ago.

I sat down and reached into my bag. From right at the bottom I produced a tin wrapped in paraffin paper and wax. Using the heat of my body to break the seal, I then proceeded to unwrap it, taking great care to keep it dry at all times. Inside it was my Vienna-made briar pipe, and a blend of tobacco I have specially mixed by G. Smiths & Sons of Charing Cross Road, London. The pipe would not stay alight long in this environment, but it was enough.

Enough for me to enjoy this moment, for having made this climb I now knew a bit about those who would follow. I pictured what their reactions would be upon emerging from the ravine. Some would rest in the meadow where I had; others would march on. I gave these future climbers names, and for those I placed in groups I added words to their lips. I could see their faces as they came onto the peak and were mesmerized by the vista, as I had been. I also knew that having completed the climb, they would come to know me. We would be well-acquainted friends, only separated by time.

But alas, you don't care do you?

You seemed to care more two days ago, but only about the contents of my rucksack which lays near where I first fell.

When you came back yesterday you were both frightened and amazed by the sparks from my axes as I tried to get a grip on the quartz- and iron-rich walls which now entomb me.

When I cried last night that I would never again see my wife, you at least sat there and bowed your head.

But as I tell you today of my last story, you just sit and stare into space!

It seems the smell of the gangrene in my leg this morning interested you more.

But I don't care.

This is my story and I have told it.

Even if it was only to you, my black, grizzly and last friend.

THE
END.

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