1928

Exploration

Myron H. Avery
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A Circuit of the "Katahdinauguoh."—In August, 1928, Dr. J. F. Schairer of the Carnegie Geophysical Laboratory, Washington, D. C., and I made a two weeks excursion to a rather remote section of the Katahdin region. In particular it was our purpose to visit the Northwest Basin and to traverse the L-shaped range which extends from Katahdin west to Sourdnahunk Stream and then north to Trout Brook. With Katahdin, the lower portion of this range—the "Katahdinauguoh"—encloses the

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1 "Katahdinauguoh" is an Indian term of ancient use. Moses Greenleaf, in his "Survey of Maine," written in 1829, states:

"On the north-west and north (of Katahdin), a cluster, termed by the Indians Katahdinauguoh, extends to a considerable distance, and is connected with or separated only by small and narrow ravines and valleys from a succession of mountains and ridges which form the Aroostook and Allagash range, and the whole collectively may be appropriately denominated the Katahdin range."

A more detailed narrative of this trip will be published under the title of "Katahdinauguoh" in *In the Maine Woods* (Bangor and Aroostook R. R. publication), for 1929.
Klondike. It was the route of one of the trails suggested by the 1925 A. M. C. party and designated on H. R. Buck's map.3

The first day we utilized to tote our provisions in, under a tug line, from Beaver Brook on the Millinocket-Sandy Stream tote-road. We made use of the G. N. P. Camp at Basin Pond as a supply base.

The next morning we climbed Pamola by the A. M. C. trail, much obscured on the lower end by cuttings, and made the circuit of Katahdin. At the first of the Northern Peaks we turned down into the scrub to enter the Northwest Basin. At length, from the faintest suggestion of a medial ridge, we had our first outlook into the Basin, and a quarter of a mile below us lay Harvey Ridge, a seemingly level, smooth ridge about a quarter of a mile long, rising abruptly some 300 yards from the floor of a shelf on which we could see three ponds. We went halfway out on Harvey Ridge, then down its steep side to the shore of Davis Pond, and on to the outlet of Lake Cowles, where we camped that night. Here we found the monument and the surveyor's stake which Mr. Witherle had seen in 1885, and which may have been a part of the monument erected by Edwin Rose in 1835 when the Monument Line was run over Katahdin and the Northwest Basin discovered.4

The next morning we proceeded to examine the basin's features in detail. We visited the pond whose disappearance had been predicted by Professor Harvey, but which is still a quite substantial body of water. It lies between Lake Cowles and Davis Pond and empties into the latter. The fourth pond is under the abrupt end of Harvey Ridge and receives in turn the outlet of Davis Pond. (Mr. Witherle writes of still another pond further down on this outlet.) The inlet of Davis Pond is a beautiful waterfall, dropping sheer down the bare mountain cliff. There are two prominent roches moutonnées, or sheep backs, so called from their curiously rounded, dome-like shape, produced by the movement of the glacier. The smaller one is on the east side of the Davis Pond outlet. The second is a long, rounded, longitudinal ridge which extends from the west end of that outlet to the outlet of Lake Cowles, and a game trail along its heath-covered top affords an easy road between the two ponds.

We made our exit from the Basin in the same manner as Professor Harvey, by going down the waterfall which forms the outlet of Lake Cowles. At the conspicuous wash where the outlet comes into Northwest Basin Brook, opposite a projection of the north wall suggestive of El Capitan in the Yosemite, we picked up Draper's much obscured old logging road and followed it to Mountain Camp on the Middle Branch of the Wassataquoik. Last year Henry R. Buck and I, searching for the Northwest Basin, had followed Northwest Basin Brook, east of Harvey Ridge, in a fog up through the scrub to the bare rock. Except for the gleaming rock of the outlet falls of Lake Cowles, high up among the spruces, one would not suspect the existence of this shelf, which is in many ways a peer of the South Basin.

4 After Witherle had rediscovered the "West" Basin on seeing it in 1885 from the North Brother opposite, Professor L. H. Harvey in 1892 visited the Basin, gave it its present name, and has left a very detailed account of its features. See "An Ecological Excursion to Mount Ktaadn," RHODORA, Vol. 5, page 41.
From Mountain Camp we followed the old Wassataquoik tote-road to the site of Bell Dam and then took the trail cut by Will Tracey in 1924 along the South Branch of the Wassataquoik to Sandy Stream Pond.

The next morning we went into the North Basin and reached the tableland by climbing up through the vegetated U-shaped ravine at the basin’s head. We commend to other climbers the view of the expanse of Katahdin which is revealed from the northern slope of this basin. We descended a slide into the Little North Basin and made our way back to Basin Ponds through the 1923 burn.

We left Chimney Pond Cabin at 5:30 the next morning, carrying Bergans-Meis packs with provisions for a week, and fishing tackle, the whole weighing 29 pounds. Where the Hunt Trail approaches to within a few rods of Witherle Ravine we turned west to make a fifteen hundred foot descent, at first over huge boulders and then along the brook of this enormous gulch. At the junction of the two branches of Katahdin Brook we started up the wooded slope of The Owl, having as our objective the conspicuous grass-grown ravine near the top. This ravine is a prominent feature of The Owl and will be recalled by those who have examined the mountain from its southern side. Mr. Witherle in 1884 described it as “a piece of bare pasture set up at a sharp angle.” Very much exposed and flattened by the wind, the scrub on The Owl was—for its duration—as difficult as any we were to encounter. We reached the peak at 9.50, but an hour and a half later the low driving rain clouds, covering the entire ridge, forced us to camp near an open bog on the divide between The Owl and Barren Mountain. The next morning we continued up the long slope of Barren Mountain and reached the second peak at nine o’clock. This is a rocky knob, about 3600 feet high, with a small cairn on it. (The wooded first peak of Barren is 3681 feet and The Owl is 3714.) On the gradual slope of O-J-I we encountered the first stretch of the blowdowns which were later to give so much trouble. We passed the summit and traversed the O-J-I ridge to a point abreast the V-shaped slide on the southern slope of Mt. Coe. This slide forms the route for two-thirds of the ascent. We turned north down the north slope of O-J-I at a quarter of twelve and an hour later reached the open summit of Mt. Coe, the most southern of three uniformly rounded peaks, known as The Brothers. The eroded rocks were quite distinguishable on the western end of the O-J-I ridge, as well as the steep slope of Doubletop, conspicuously seamed with slides. From Coe we followed along a rock axis extending toward South Brother over an open, fern-grown divide and up through the inevitable scrub on to this latter mountain. Its summit, 3951 feet, is covered with large boulders, quite free from scrub, and it too has a small cairn. West of The Brothers, and running at right angles to the main ridge, is a series of five wooded peaks, best termed the “Cross Range,” which reaches from Sourdnahunk Stream to a point in the divide between South Brother and North Brother. The most easterly peak of this range is indicated

4 At this time this peak was known as Abol Mountain. The usage, “Owl’s Head,” and later “The Owl,” came in after the 1923 A. M. C. camp.
on the Geological Survey map, while seen from the west, its westerly end, appearing in the background between Doubletop and O-J-I, seems to block Sourndahunk Stream.

We camped the second night at four o’clock at the junction of the two streams which head high upon the divide between South Brother and North Brother. Fog prevented us from resuming our journey until eleven the next morning. Increasing windfalls and difficult scrub characterized the climb toward North Brother. We reached open rock on the eastern end of the exposed axis of North Brother (which Mr. Witherle had termed “The Stone Wall”) and thence gained the summit at noon. Both in size and in height (4143 feet) North Brother is the dominating peak of the range. It has a very extensive northwest ridge and, in the same axis, a ridge extending toward the far reaching Northwest Plateau. In his ascent, Mr. Witherle had found between South Brother and one of the lower mountains “a narrow valley shut in by precipitous walls in which there was a brook and pretty little pond.” We did not see this pond.

We found the north slope of North Brother quite free from scrub and in three quarters of an hour arrived at the western end of the next peak in the range. This is quite flat, 3900 feet in height, almost half a mile long on top and, except for a stretch of 250 yards in its center, free from scrub. We crossed to its eastern end, which afforded a very intimate view of the Northwest Basin and the north end of Katahdin. Right below us appeared the sluices used in E. B. Draper’s lumber operations in 1910–1914 for dumping pulp wood, cut high on Tip-Top, into the Wassataquoik below. Back of the flowage of the dam on the Middle Branch of the Wassataquoik and at the end of one of the sluices was the little artificial pond, formed by splicing two streams together, into which the sluices dumped.

I think that the view of this level, flat-topped ridge has solved what, for me, had been a Katahdin mystery. Charles Turner, Jr., the Scituate Surveyor, whose narrative of his ascent of Katahdin in 1894 is our first known record of an entire ascent, wrote:

> Amongst the collection of mountains near the Catardin, is one laying N. N. W., called by the English, Fort Mountain, from its shape, its base being an oblong square or parallelogram, extending N. E. and S. W. and ascending at the sides and ends in the angle of about 45 degrees to a sharp ridge; which ridge is about one mile in length and is covered with verdure.

Returning to the west end of “Fort Mountain” at a quarter to two, we followed a long ridge down to the head of the broad Annis Brook Valley—with its bog-pond and the Annis Camps—and then made our way up the seemingly exposed western ridge of Mullen Mountain. This is the white-tipped peak, its whiteness due to a recent fire, which is so conspicuous from Katahdin. We reached the summit, 3450 feet in height, at 3.30. Extending north from Mullen is a curving, flat-topped ridge which reaches to the base of the lower, wooded Wassataquoik Mountain. Both Mullen and Wassataquoik have long eastern ridges extending toward Katahdin,
O-J-I, Mt. Coe, and South Brother
From Barren Mountain
(Doubletop in Background)

South Brother, North Brother, and "Fort Mountain"
Looking North from Mt. Coe
North Ridge of the Traveler and Upper South Branch Pond
From South Peak of South Branch Mountains

Wassataquoik Lake and Mountain
From the Foot of the Lake
which are quite marked to one traveling up the Middle Branch of the Wassataquoik into the Klondike. The western ridge of Mullen culminates in a low, rounded, burnt dome known as Bald Mountain. We found the north slope of Mullen Mountain a virgin spruce forest, in delightful contrast to the succession of lumbering slash, blowdown barricades, burnt timber, and scrub which characterized the south slope. We camped at 5 p.m., the third night, at the end of the old haul road on the shore of Mullen Brook Pond. This pond is almost encircled by the north slope of Mullen Mountain, together with the steep Wassataquoik Ridge on the west and north. Only the country to the east, over the Penobscot East Branch, between The Traveler and Turner, lay open before us.

The next morning at 6.45 we climbed to Wassataquoik Ridge from the north side of Mullen Brook Pond and then there commenced a struggle to the base of Wassataquoik Mountain that lasted for a mile and a half, over a blowdown barricade quite the equal of that on Mullen Mountain. Wassataquoik Mountain is entirely wooded and affords no outlook. It has a very extensive east and west axis, and sheer cliffs on its northern side. At 8.30 we started down the north slope of Wassataquoik for the shore of Wassataquoik Lake, which we reached at 9.50 at a point opposite the highest cliff on Pogy. Wassataquoik Lake, hemmed in by the sheer cliffs of South Pogy and Wassataquoik Mountains, has, like the South Branch Ponds, one of the most spectacular settings of any body of water in the state. The water in the lake was low and we made our way west along the south shore, under the rhyolite cliffs of Wassataquoik Mountain, past the notch at the head of the lake, and up Draper's trestled haul road by Little Wassataquoik Lake into the old Pogy Road. For the first time since leaving Katahdin we were on a trail, and in the region through which Henry R. Buck and I traveled last year. We stayed, that night, in the patrolman's camp in the abandoned Stubbs lumber camps on the north slope of North Pogy.

The next day, after helping the patrolman extinguish a fire in the neighborhood of Snub Pitch on the east slope of South Pogy, we returned over the old Pogy Road to near the site of the Draper Camps and the "old well," and then traveled north half a mile to the summit of South Pogy. Here there had been a wooden lookout tower, which was discontinued when the steel tower was erected on Center Mountain. Pogy was burned over in 1915, as a result of the careless dropping of a match on a hay hill by an old French toter, and presents an appalling picture of devastation. The Pogys—South and North—are expansive, forming an immense plateau. This plateau was virgin spruce until lumber operations in 1910–1914. A sixteen hundred foot sluice dropped pulpwood into Wassataquoik Lake over the Pogy Cliffs. There are lumbering trestles, snub hills, snubbing posts, an old well on the summit, and a sort of "Telos Cut," in that one branch of Hathorn Brook was diverted to flow into Little Wassataquoik Lake.

From South Pogy we returned to the old Pogy Road and continued west and north to the fire warden's cabin on Burnt Mountain, where we spent the night. The next morning we went up into the tower on Burnt
Mountain. Extending east from Burnt Mountain to The Traveler there is a series of five peaks, rising one above the other, thus: Burnt, Squirt Dam, Black Brook, Black Cat, and the North and South Peaks of the South Branch Mountains. There had been some confusion on the Club map with respect to the three eastern mountains and we had wished to visit them to rectify the error. We retraced our course of the day before up the Pogy Road to the “elbow” of Hathorn Brook and then traveled northeast through a burned, gently rising upland country, strongly suggestive of an abandoned New England pasture, until we reached the rocky eminence of Black Cat. We passed, on the way, to the north of a ridge ending in a prominent rounded bare dome, known as Sable Mountain. From here we continued east, crossing the deep Gifford valley, to climb the high North Peak of the South Branch Mountains. Here we were at the end of the range, on the northernmost peak of the “Katahdinauguoh.” Before us stretched the flat plain of Trout Brook and the Penobscot East Branch, with the hills on the Aroostook waters showing on the skyline. Sheer below us lay the beautiful South Branch Ponds and to the east rose the massive cliffs and cirques of The Traveler. We returned to the Pogy Camp over the lower but more open South Peak and then over a two-mile stretch of rough country, passing by Mahar Pond under the dominating slope of North Pogy.

The next day we traveled from the Pogy Camp back to Basin Pond Camp. Our route was over the old Pogy Road to Snub Pitch, then south to New City, following in part Draper’s Old Pack Horse Trail. From New City we turned up the old Wassataquoik tote-road to follow the trail cut out in 1927 by Will Tracey over the north end of Katahdin. On its lower end this trail follows up a brook in the ravine between the “Black Hills,” as the two northern extremities of Katahdin were known to the first spruce loggers; while on its upper end the new trail utilizes the old “Tracey and Love Trail,” cut out in 1885 and the oldest trail still extant at Katahdin. We reached the camp at Basin Pond at 5.30, having been gone just a week.

With favoring weather and light packs, one could make the circuit of the “Katahdinauguoh,” from a camp at Chimney Pond to a camp at North Pogy, in three days. Except for the Pogy Road, no trails will be encountered. Apart from its own glorious outlooks, the circuit reveals a Katahdin of which the casual climb to Monument Peak does not afford the slightest suggestion.

Myron H. Avery

[Following Mr. Avery’s proposal the Committee on Nomenclature has recommended that the name “Fort Mountain” be adopted, in accordance with the old usage, for the mountain described on page 177, above.—Ed.]