

## 5 Early Tourism



In the early part of the 1900s, visitors from around the world were travelling aboard Canadian Pacific Railway trains to Banff National Park. They would stay at the newly built mountain resort hotels, often for the entire summer, and explore the wilderness, climb mountains, and kill big game for trophies. Generally, this new breed of tourists was wealthy and more than happy to pay well for guiding and outfitting services. It was into this environment that, by the time the first passenger trains began rolling into Fitzhugh in 1912, a number of guides and outfitters had already established businesses in anticipation of a similar tourism boom.

The Moberly brothers, born in the Athabasca River Valley, were among the earliest guides actually based in Jasper Forest Park. Only a handful of guides based their outfitting businesses within the park (most others worked between Jasper and Banff) and those who did—the Moberlys, the Brewsters, the Hargreaves, the Ottos, and Curly Phillips—played an important role in Jasper's development as a tourist destination. They combined a love of adventure with a flair for business, sensing the park's potential as an opportunity to do business with those who were looking for adventure in the Canadian Rockies.

One of Jasper's best-known outfitters was Frederick Archibald Brewster, who was born in Kildonan, Manitoba, in 1884. His parents, John and Isabella Brewster, moved west from Manitoba in 1888 and established a dairy to provide milk for the Banff Springs Hotel. After earning an engineering degree from Queen's University in Ontario, Fred and his younger brother, Jack, arrived in the Athabasca River valley in the spring of 1911. After spending a year working as a freighter on the GTP rail line, which was being constructed through the valley, the two brothers had enough money to start their own guiding business. Along with their brother-in-law, Phil Moore, Fred and Jack established Brewster and Moore's in 1912. Fred was a voracious reader of early literature regarding the Canadian Rockies, which made him a favourite with scientific expeditions looking for knowledgeable locals; he also guided big game hunters and wealthy tourists who arrived on the newly



*Fred Brewster served with distinction in World War I.*

## Azalea Adams

Azalea Adams grew up in New York during the early years of the last century and enjoyed a childhood of wealth and privilege. In the early 1920s, she was swept off her feet by handsome Canadian soldier Fred Brewster, who had recently returned from World War I and was visiting New York on business. Disenfranchised with New York's high society, she returned to Jasper with Brewster in 1924. According to an article in a 1926 edition of *Canadian National Railway Magazine*, the young socialite adapted well to the remote Canadian Rockies—Brewster built her an impressive log home in downtown Jasper, showed her how to cook on the trail, and taught her wilderness survival skills.

In 1928, however, in her mid-30s and after living in Jasper for only a few years, Adams was diagnosed with a bipolar disorder. It was an era when mental disorders and depression were not widely discussed, so little is known about her later years except that she passed away in 1961 at a psychiatric hospital in Quebec. Brewster brought her body back to Jasper so she could be buried in Jasper Cemetery. The couple did not have any children, and Brewster never remarried.



*Azalea is buried in the Jasper cemetery.*

completed railway. During this time, he visited Maligne Lake a number of times and travelled along a rough trail running up the Rocky River and through the Colin Range via Jacques Lake.

Before the onset of World War I, Fred Brewster and a crew of local men were contracted by the government to clear a wagon road up the Maligne Valley as far as Medicine Lake. It ran along the base of Old Fort Point and between Lakes Edith and Annette before switchbacking up to the top of Maligne Canyon.

Brewster subsequently established tent camps at the south end of Medicine Lake and the north end of Maligne Lake. Guests travelled by horseback from the Athabasca River valley up the Maligne Valley on the wagon road and then along Medicine Lake to a junction with an old trail that led down from Jacques

Lake. Arriving at the south end of Medicine Lake, tourists were accommodated in primitive tent cabins, which comprised a planked floor and a wooden frame covered with canvas. Two tents were set up for sleeping and a third for dining. From Medicine Lake, it was a full day's horseback ride to Maligne Lake, where a similar cluster of tent cabins overlooked the north end of the lake. The first guests—Josephine Rathbone, a well-travelled librarian from New York, and a young man from the Curtis Publishing Company and his wife—arrived at Brewster's Maligne Lake camp in 1914. At this time, the camp hosted a maximum of four guests at any one time, plus two camp attendants. The raft left behind by Schäffer in 1911 was used to take guests out onto the lake.

Competing with the Brewster brothers was another set of siblings—Jack, Closson, and Bruce Otto. The Ottos had previously operated outfitting businesses along the CPR line in Field and Golden. The eldest of the Otto brothers, Jack, had been the first to arrive in the Canadian Rockies, moving west from the family home in Ontario around 1895. By the time Jack was joined by his teenaged brothers, he had been hired by famed Banff outfitter Tom Wilson. By 1907, the brothers formed their own guiding company and in 1909 they relocated to the Athabasca River Valley, two years before the Brewsters. In particular, it was their reputation for backcountry survival skills that made the Ottos the first choice of many explorers and mountaineers visiting the area. They guided Mary Schäffer (1911), Dr. Charles Walcott (1913), and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1914), as well as American author James Oliver Curwood, whose subsequent novels paid homage to the wild Canadian landscape. Curwood's tales told of bears, wild mountain men, and plucky women who dared to trade the safety of civilized society for the unruly wilds of nature. Curwood even immortalized Bruce Otto in one of his books, *The Grizzly King*. During the early years of the Alpine Club of Canada, the Otto brothers were listed as official club outfitters.

Another of the earliest guiding and outfitting businesses based in Jasper Forest Park was operated by Donald Nelson "Curly"

Phillips, nicknamed for his curly locks. He was born on April 15, 1884, in Dorset, Ontario. Curly's father, Daniel Alvin Phillips, was responsible for giving Curly an early start in outdoor education. By the age of 12, Curly was already managing his own trapline. He was also a master craftsman of boats, a skill he had learned under his father's guidance. It was a combination of these skills and his confidence that made Curly one of the park's most sought-after guides.

Like the Otto brothers, Curly arrived in the Athabasca River Valley in 1909, at the beginning of a new age of exploration. The timing was perfect on his part—the first thing a visitor required was a competent guide and someone to outfit him or her for the wilderness. Curly gained a reputation for being reliable, remaining calm in all types of unpredictable situations, and protecting his clients from wild animals. He also mastered the use of an axe—a prized quality in a road-less park with few trails. His skill was exceptional when it came to building canoes, cabins, and temporary bridges across rivers.

Curly's introduction to the Canadian Rockies was a chance encounter with the Reverend George Kinney, an avid climber who, like many others, devoted entire summers to climbing any and every elevated landform that crossed his path. The meeting took place in early 1909, when both Kinney and Curly had stopped at John Moberly's homestead, along the Athabasca River, to replenish supplies. At the time, Kinney knew that there was a feverish race to be the first to summit the highest peak in the Canadian Rockies, Mount Robson. There was talk that Arthur Wheeler was planning to attempt the feat at an upcoming Alpine Club of Canada camp. So Kinney, intent on being the first, did not think twice about asking the young man at Moberly's, who just happened to be sporting an Ontario Guides' Association badge, to be his guide and outfitter.

If Kinney had been a bit hasty in selecting his guide, then Phillips was equally hasty with his acceptance. Despite the treachery of record spring snow melts, Phillips and Kinney reached the



*Curly Phillips in the 1930s.*

Smokey River via Moose Pass and then passed Berg Lake before establishing a base camp under the gaze of Robson's impressive northwest face. At this time, in the shadow of such a mighty rock, Curly, a young man who had never climbed a mountain, must have realized that he and Kinney had underestimated a



*Alfred Ostheimer*

## Alfred Ostheimer

While the names of many early Jasper mountaineers are well known today, the names of others who achieved equally impressive climbing records are not. One such man is Alfred J. Ostheimer (1908–1983), an American who reached the summit of Mount Temple in Banff National Park at the tender age of 15. The following year, Ostheimer made successful first ascents of four mountains, including Mount Hooker with famed mountaineers J. Monroe Thorington and Hans Fuhrer.

In 1927, aged just 19, he returned to Jasper. That summer, employing Curly Phillips as an outfitter, Hans Fuhrer as a guide, and Adam Joachim as a horse packer, he travelled to the Columbia Icefield and climbed over 30 mountains in just 63 days; incredibly, he made 27 first ascents during this expedition. At the time, Ostheimer was a geology student at Harvard University and used the mountaineering expedition as a credit for his studies. But after completing schooling, he entered the insurance business and did not return to the Canadian Rockies until 1977, 50 years after completing what famed American alpinist Henry Hall described as “perhaps the greatest tour de force ever accomplished in a single season in the Canadian Rockies.”

most formidable opponent. Over the next two weeks, Curly and Kinney made four attempts to reach the summit. They endured bad weather, a lack of ice climbing equipment, a shortage of food, and inadequate shelter. Their final attempt, on August 13, 1909, was literally a blind dash upwards as they attempted to get ahead of an approaching snowstorm. Amidst a whiteout, exhausted after 12 hours of difficult climbing and thin air, they reached what they thought to be the summit. Kinney quickly built a cairn to mark their success and then they began the even more difficult descent.

After returning to civilization, Kinney paid a visit to Wheeler to register his claim as the first to summit Mount Robson. Wheeler was immediately skeptical as Kinney had a reputation for embellishment. Kinney's claim was conspicuously omitted from the club's journal of first ascents that year. Kinney of course called Wheeler jealous, while Wheeler called Kinney's credibility into question. In 1911, in an attempt to make amends, Wheeler invited Kinney and Curly to attend the club's summer camp at Mount Robson, where hopefully another attempt would be made. According to one historian, it was during this camp that other climbers found Kinney's cairn below the true summit.

In regards to Kinney's summit attempt with Curly Phillips, renowned author and historian Chic Scott states that “they did not get to the top, but from where they were, they thought they were on the summit because of the mist and clouds. There was no malice, they just thought they were on the top.” At the time, however, the controversy over Kinney's claim was big news in the climbing community. Curly, however, only benefited from the notoriety of the expedition.

Soon after his summit attempt of Mount Robson, Curly was endorsed by the Alpine Club of Canada as one of its official outfitters, which was also a huge boost for business. In the summer of 1911, Curly outfitted a joint Alpine Club of Canada–Smithsonian Institution expedition to the Mount Robson region that included such luminaries as Austrian mountaineer Conrad Kain; surveyor Arthur O. Wheeler; and a group of scientists



Curly Phillips at his home on Geikie Street.

working under direction from palaeontologist Dr. Charles Walcott, who is credited with discovering the Burgess Shale in Yoho National Park.

At the conclusion of the 1924 summer guiding season, Curly married Grace Inkster, whom he had met at a skating party in Edmonton. Inkster was a member of a pioneering family who had homesteaded the King Edward Park area, southeast of downtown, as early as the 1870s. The couple had three children: Sam (born in 1928), Joy (1930), and Ivy (1932). They lived in a home at 315 Geikie Street that Curly built for his family.

Having completed a very expensive rail line, the GTP embarked on an aggressive publicity campaign and encouraged tourists to visit Jasper Forest Park—and to arrive by train, of course. The railway company and Jasper Park Collieries felt there was potential for the Pocahontas area, east of the divisional point, as a tourist destination. The nearby hot springs were a major attraction, Punchbowl Falls created a scenic diversion from the coal mining settlement, and people could have picnics along the many streams. In 1911, the GTP had Francis Rattenbury, the architect of Victoria's Empress Hotel, design a sprawling château-like hotel at the confluence of the Athabasca and Fiddle rivers. Rattenbury's

## Alpine Club of Canada

Although most Canadians were unfamiliar with the sport of mountain climbing at the beginning of the last century, it did not take long for adventurous locals to aspire to great heights. The impetus for a burgeoning popularity in the sport was set in motion when Arthur Oliver Wheeler, an avid mountaineer and also a renowned surveyor, joined forces with Elizabeth Parker, a journalist with the *Manitoba Free Press* who had a love for mountains, to form the Alpine Club of Canada (ACC) in 1906.

A list of early club members reads like a Who's Who of the Canadian Rockies—Morrison Bridgland, Conrad Kain, Bill Peyto, Tom Wilson, Byron Harmon, Mary Schäffer—names familiar to anyone who spends time in the region.

Much of the club's early attention was focused around Banff National Park and British Columbia's Selkirk Mountains. But after Jasper Forest Park was established in 1907, a whole new world of mountains was opened.

Today, like similar clubs in the United States and Great Britain, the ACC is a nonprofit mountaineering organization whose objectives include encouraging mountaineering through educational programs, exploring and studying alpine and glacial regions, and preserving mountain flora and fauna. The club's ongoing projects include operating the Canadian Alpine Centre (Lake Louise Hostel), maintaining a system of huts throughout the backcountry of the Canadian Rockies, and publishing the annual *Canadian Alpine Journal*.



Curly Phillips (2nd from left) was a popular ACC guide.



*The first bathhouse at Miette Hot Springs was completed in 1913.*



Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (back; 2nd from left) on a picnic with his family and guides beside the Athabasca River.

sketches, along with plans for a townsite and a proposed carriage road up to the hot springs, were approved by the government. Although the hotel was never built due to financial difficulties faced by the GTP, a Dominion Land Survey party laid out the route for a carriage road leading up to the hot springs from the Athabasca River Valley that passed by Punchbowl Falls. The road was completed in 1913, and a small log bathhouse was constructed at what had become known as Miette Hot Springs.

The highlight of the GTP publicity campaign was the summer of 1914, when the GTP invited Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, world-famous author of the beloved detective series *Sherlock Holmes*, to take a tour on Canada's newest transcontinental rail line. The railway company ensured that Doyle's journey was well documented by the media—in Canada, the United States, and even Europe.

Unlike the CPR, the GTP did not build grandiose hotels upon completion of its track, which left Jasper without suitable accommodations for a traveller of Doyle's social stature. So the GTP offered Doyle its executive train for travel and accommodation. The train provided luxurious sleeping quarters, a dining car, and a lounging car. It was also equipped with an experienced crew that included porters and a chef.

After departing Edmonton on June 11, 1914, Doyle and his wife, Lady Jean Doyle, and their three children, were greeted at the Jasper Railway Station by Colonel Samuel Maynard Rogers, Jasper's first resident superintendent, whom Doyle had previously met in Africa during the Boer War. The two old friends set out on horseback along the trails around Jasper along with park warden Alex McDougall and Edmonton photographer William James Topley, who ensured every aspect of Doyle's journey was recorded.

On one of their adventures, they travelled by horseback along the Athabasca River guided by Closson Otto and Jimmie Rootes, who was married to Jasper's first school teacher, Lillian Taylor. While stopping for lunch, Doyle was inspired to compose a poem titled *The Athabasca Trail*. In his poem, Doyle extolled the virtue of the noble horse packer. Although no one knows exactly which one of the guides Doyle immortalized, perhaps the diplomatic poet honoured both men by leaving the packer unnamed.

Doyle and his party also visited Pyramid Lake while travelling along a newly constructed trail that could easily accommodate a horse-drawn carriage. Doyle had been asked by the government to lay out a nine-hole golf course between the town and the lake that had been surveyed and divided into lots. Two months after Doyle's visit, however, World War I was declared and all plans for development in the park were put on hold, including Doyle's golf course.

## Doyle Returns

Sherlock Holmes creator Arthur Conan Doyle first visited Jasper in 1914, and although his original trip was more business than pleasure, he was affected by the park's beauty and returned for a second visit in 1923. Doyle and his family stayed at the Jasper Park Lodge, and he left this well-read anecdote in the guest book:

"A New York man reached Heaven and as he passed the gate, Peter said, 'I am sure you will like it.' A Pittsburgh man followed, and Peter said, 'It will be a very great change for you.' Finally there came a man from Jasper Park. 'I am afraid,' said Peter, 'that you will be disappointed.'"