

DIO

FIRST ACCOUNT OF CONQUERING MT. MCKINLEY
Special to the New York Times

Thomas Lloyd, Leader of the Successful Expedition, Tells How He and His Comrades Planted the Stars and Stripes on the Heretofore Baffling Peak, the Highest Point on the American Continent.

By W. E. Thompson.

After months of preparation and months of arduous travel, the expedition led by Thomas Lloyd, of the Alaska-Territory Mounted Infantry, has returned to its base at Fairbanks, Alaska.

The expedition, which set out from Fairbanks on August 15, 1905, with the purpose of conquering Mt. McKinley, the highest peak in North America, has returned with the American flag planted on the summit of the mountain.

The expedition was composed of four men, including Lloyd, and a pack of dogs. They traveled over the rugged and snow-covered mountains of Alaska, and after a long and difficult journey, they reached the summit of Mt. McKinley on May 26, 1906.

Lloyd, who is a member of the Alaska-Territory Mounted Infantry, is the leader of the expedition. He is a man of great courage and determination, and his leadership was the key to the success of the expedition.

The expedition was a remarkable feat of endurance and courage, and it has opened the way for further exploration of the mountains of Alaska.

THE PACK OF DOGS OF THE EXPEDITION
 These dogs and the men were the only ones who reached the summit of the mountain.

THE "PINKIE" CAMP ON MOUNT FAIR BANKS

DRAMATIC STORY OF THOMAS LLOYD
 He Reinforces His Struggle Narrative of the Remarkable Climb with His Diary of Each Day's Journey.

When the expedition set out from Fairbanks, Alaska, on August 15, 1905, the men and their pack of dogs were the only ones who would attempt to conquer Mt. McKinley, the highest peak in North America.

The expedition was a remarkable feat of endurance and courage, and it has opened the way for further exploration of the mountains of Alaska.

The Sourdoughs

Could four Alaskan Miners with nil climbing experience have actually summited the third tallest peak in North America? — or is their widely accepted story just one of the tallest of tales?



Standing (L. to R.): Charles McGonagall, P. Anderson, W. R. Taylor. Seated: T. Lloyd.

The four Sourdoughs.

Download *DIO 23*, www.dioi.org/jn00.pdf.

The Strange Saga of the Sourdoughs: Alaskan Musher's Myths, Legends, & Lies?

by
Robert M. Bryce

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*Some truth there was, but dash'd and brew'd with lies,
To please the fool, and puzzle all the wise.
Succeeding times did equal folly call,
Believing nothing, or believing all.*
— John Dryden

1 Introduction

1A In my lengthy examination of the dispute between Frederick Cook and Robert Peary over who first reached the North Pole [*Cook & Peary, the Polar Controversy, Resolved*, Stackpole, 1997, hereinafter C&P], I also examined the motives of the proponents who kept the dispute alive for nearly a century, and of some who still insist it is not settled.

1B “There will be a ‘Cook party’ to the end of time,” one editor declared.¹ “no matter how strong the evidence brought against him in the future, no matter if he made public confession to fraud. . . . This sentiment of personal devotion and championship once aroused is one of the most powerful and indestructable of human motives.” [C&P:944] I added that once one’s credibility is bound up with something controversial, for most people, there is no further interest in Truth. “To these,” I wrote, “preservation of their own ego or their own fantasy is preferable to the restoration of truth.” [C&P:945]

1C This was one of the main reasons I took the time to write my book, and it was the reason it took over a thousand pages to arrive at its conclusions. The phenomenon of the persistence of legends and cherished wishes over hard evidence and cold logic is a complex subject. Legends and wishes die hard, and only exhaustive examination of them can lead to approximate truth. The confrontation between the two polar explorers and the world-wide interest and arguments it provoked seem to be a perfect case study for examination of the foundations of human belief and its all too common preference for desire over facts.

1D Although the Cook-Peary dispute is one of the grandest examples, it is hardly the only one. Even within the story of this dispute can be found many others, including the strange story of four Alaskan miners who claimed to have accomplished a feat far more fantastic in its details than anything Frederick Cook ever claimed to have done — one that has never been duplicated to this day, despite the light years of advancement in mountaineering technique and equipment in the past century. Yet, while Cook is universally and deservedly branded as a fraud in his two major exploration claims, these mens’ story — or at least a portion of it — is embraced, yea, cherished by a majority of the members of the mountaineering community, the persons who, through hard experience in similar feats, should be in the best position to make a sober evaluation of it.

1E One such is Jonathan Waterman, an award-winning author of nine books and an outdoorsman with several summits of Denali [as Mt.McKinley as now called] under his crampons. Because my 1997 book not only dealt with the dispute over the North Pole, but also with the major sub-dispute over Cook’s claim to have been the first to reach the summit of that mountain in 1906, a dispute that has raged just as long as the polar one and has been a topic of longtime interest among mountain climbers, I asked my book’s editor to send a copy for review to *The American Alpine Journal* [AAJ].

2 Read the Book — THEN Review It.

2A Jonathan Waterman was selected as its reviewer, and the review appeared in the 1998 number of *The American Alpine Journal*²

¹*Independent* 1909/12/30 pp.1513-1524. (See www.dioi.org/j737.pdf = DIO 7.2 ¶7 §H4.)

²The complete review can be found at:

<http://publications.americanalpineclub.org/articles/12199837900/Cook-Peary-The-Polar-Controversy-Resolved>.

2B Waterman’s review precipitated a letter to the AAJ’s Editor, Christian Beckwith, on October 8th of that year, in which I objected to the reviewer’s “irresponsible insinuations and total misrepresentation of my conclusions”, and advised him that to leave them uncorrected would undermine the credibility of the journal. To set matters right, I asked the Editor to print a detailed rebuttal of Waterman’s review, which I enclosed with my objecting letter.

2C On October 26, I received this somewhat obsequious reply:

2D

Dear Mr.Bryce,

My heavens. It seems we have indeed got ourselves into a thicket. I have just opened and read your letter, and am quite taken aback. I will begin the process of rectification immediately, but, since it will undoubtedly take some time to get the word out to [the Reviews Editor] and John [*sic*] Waterman, I thought I should take this moment and tell you that we are all concerned about putting things aright.

When matters have progressed further I will let you know. In the meantime, I apologize on behalf of *The American Alpine Journal* for any pain this has caused you. Rest assured, we will do what we need to do to rectify this completely.

Sincerely
Christian Beckwith
Editor

2E The meantime was — far above the appropriate mean. So, finally, hearing nothing, I wrote AAJ again, asking what the disposition of my request was. In return I was sent a copy of the AAJ’s idea of complete rectification, which was this notice [emphasis added] printed in 1999 number of the AAJ:

2F Last year, *Cook & Peary, the Polar Controversy, Resolved* by Robert M. Bryce was reviewed in these pages. Another massive volume, this book is meticulously and exhaustively researched and should be of great interest to any reader of polar exploration. In his review, Jonathan Waterman implied a conclusion to Mr.Bryce’s book that, in fact, Mr.Bryce did not reach. Although **Mr.Waterman stands by his review**, we wish to apologize to Mr.Bryce and to any of our readers who may have been influenced by this misrepresentation.

2G That’s it. No matter that the “misrepresentation” was that my book was an advocacy of Cook’s claim to have summited Denali in 1906 (and it was hardly “implied”), rather than a detailed refutation of that claim, including seminal new evidence that absolutely disproved it. This evidence included the recovery of Cook’s climbing partner Ed Barrill’s original 1906 diary, which Bradford Washburn, Mt.McKinley authority and chief Cook antagonist, had pleaded in the pages of AAJ for someone to recover [“Barrill’s Mount McKinley Affidavit.”AAJ, vol.31, 1989, p.113: “Neither the original affidavit nor Barrill’s diary has been located. We would appreciate any information our readers would have to locate them. H. Bradford Washburn”], along with several crucial photographs taken by Cook in 1906 that contradicted his account of the alleged climb.

2H Chief among these was an uncropped, unretouched copy of what has been called “the most controversial photograph in the history of exploration,” that of Edward Barrill standing on top of the “summit” of the mountain holding an American flag. Washburn had been railing for years, in&out of print, that this photo was a fraud and had gone to great lengths and expense to try to prove that it was. He had publicly lamented on more than one occasion that no original negative or clear print of it had been found, because he was sure such a picture would bring out the details in it that would show that it had been taken on mountaineer Belmore Browne’s so-called Fake Peak, 19.42 miles distant from and

15,000 feet lower than Denali's summit. [See *DIO* vol.7 #2-#3, December 1997 pp.68-69 (centerfold) for the 1st publication of this picture.] These, along with an analysis of Cook's 1906 expedition diary, which Washburn had looked at briefly at the Library of Congress in 1989, but was unable to decipher because of Cook's idiosyncratic handwriting, was also included.

2I When I had sent Beckwith my objecting letter, I enclosed one I had received from Washburn which included this statement: "No, I didn't see Jon Waterman's review of your book, which I thought terrific in every way — its only problem was that you didn't ask me for illustrations. I'll write and set him straight. . . ." [Letter, Bradford Washburn to the author, dated October 6, 1998, possession of author.]

2J I never asked Washburn for illustrations because, up to its publication, he was hostile to what he thought, like Waterman, was a book intended to be a vindication of Cook and his controversial claims. I had correspondence and conversations with him during the course of my research, however, and Washburn was often dismissive of my efforts, until I uncovered evidence that was counter to Cook's claim. Despite my not asking for them, he then did send me a number of his photographs on which he made various points. If these matters were of such critical interest to Washburn, they should have been at least of some interest to other readers in the mountaineering community served by *AAJ*. It's a moot question, at this point, how many sales in that community Waterman's review cost me.

3 Giving Due Credit

3A Later, probably due to the negligence of Washburn's "co-author" of his *The Dishonorable Dr. Cook* [The Mountaineers, 2001], Peter Cheric, Washburn's publisher was forced by me to settle a claim of plagiarism out of court. In addition to a monetary settlement, the publisher was required to insert in all remaining copies of that title, an acknowledgement which read in part:

The Mountaineers Books and the authors would like to gratefully acknowledge the valuable work of Robert M. Bryce in Cook & Peary: the Polar Controversy Resolved, Stackpole Books, Mechanicsburg, PA (1997; 1,133 pages). . . . The authors relied on this seminal reference for important factual information not previously published about Dr. Cook's early life and his subsequent claims to have climbed Mt.McKinley. We regret the omission of proper credit and citation in the original bibliography for The Dishonorable Dr. Cook.

[For more on what led up to this settlement, see the *Washington Post* February 4, 2002 story:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/2002/02/04/plagiarism-or-a-case-of-something-less-duplicious/8cc4186d-57f1-4a3e-9161-72c606e83976/>]

3B Yet even after the settlement, Washburn was cordial and friendly, and remained so up until his death in 2007. Later, I obtained an uncorrected proof of *The Dishonorable Dr. Cook*, and found that my book was actually cited in its bibliography. When and why it was removed in the one for the published book is anyone's guess, but even had it been included there, that would not justify the wholesale use and paraphrasing of major sections of my book that it displayed as if it were Cheric's original research and writing.

4 Rebutting the Review

4A Since *AAJ* never published my rebuttal, I take this opportunity to do so now. Dear Editor,

4B An attempt on the summit of an unclimbed mountain is an arduous feat. It requires prior experience, endurance, patience, attention to the smallest details and the clarity and alertness of mind to read the clues that define a route to the top and to avoid the pitfalls of mental confusion imposed by great

heights and the fatigue brought on by a long struggle against the treacherous conditions encountered along the way. But only those who persist to the very summit are rewarded by an unobstructed view. They alone can see the whole of the mountain in all its intricacy and its relation to all that surrounds it.

4C Reading my book, *Cook & Peary, the Polar Controversy, Resolved* is something like that. Only those who persist to the end and who are not deceived by the distractions along the way will be rewarded with the unobstructed view, the truth about the greatest geographical controversy of all time and perhaps even a glimpse of the nature of Truth itself, like some nebulous iceblink off on the far horizon. The quest for truth is also an arduous journey, and Jonathan Waterman is clearly not up to the task. That is the only way to explain his inexplicably mixed review of my book (*AAJ* 1998, pages 379-81) and his totally erroneous representation of its conclusions.

4D His review reminds me in many ways of the narratives of my protagonists. Up to the point they actually reached, their reports are sensible and can be verified by future travelers in the same region. Beyond the place they turned back remains *terra incognita* to them, and they are reduced to a combination of educated guesses and pure fantasy to describe what lies there. Every future visitor to my pages will be able to define the place where Waterman abandoned the quest.

4E Waterman tells us that he was "initially compelled by the story"; "initially" he felt that "the author seems to be an objective biographer" to the point that he found my portrait of Frederick A. Cook's personality, "in a word, was irresistible." Initially — until he arrived at page 802. Then all was changed when he began to read my chapter examining the claim of Dr. Cook to have climbed Mount McKinley in 1906. In other words, when I arrived on the ground that he cares most about, and about which he has unshakable opinions, he didn't like the trend he thought I was developing and, unwilling to have his opinions challenged, put the book aside.

4F "By page 802," Waterman tells us, "my suspicions had been sufficiently aroused to turn to the Acknowledgments, pages 977-78. Sure enough, the first person acknowledged is a staff person of the Frederick A. Cook Society." It is painfully clear from what ensues in Waterman's review that after this epiphany, precious little of the pages between 802 and 977 were even skimmed, much less read. Had Waterman read them, most of the "omissions" he complains of would have been filled, and he certainly would not have come to the ludicrous conclusion that "like thousands of other Cook supporters, Robert M. Bryce, for all of his erudition, cannot help himself from buying, then selling Cook's snake oil." And because I had the simple decency to acknowledge a few good-hearted members of the society that bears Cook's name, who literally made it possible to publish the mass of sensational unpublished material it contains that utterly destroys Dr. Cook's claim to not only Mount McKinley but to the North Pole, he paranoically insinuates that I am in cahoots with Cook's most vehement partisans. . . .

4G But once his "suspicions had been sufficiently aroused," and he has jumped to this ridiculous conclusion, all objectivity is abandoned, and Waterman finds nothing but fault with a book that he "initially" claims to feel is "the most painstakingly researched of all the voluminous polar exploration titles." What good is painstaking research that, if you believe Waterman, nevertheless reaches the wrong conclusions? The answer to that question is, of course, "no good at all." Waterman will be pained to learn that this is

exactly the official judgment of my book's worth by the Frederick A. Cook Society with which he imagines me to be in league. Of course, the Society does not condemn the book because it contains "absurd pro-Cook theories" supporting Cook's claim to have climbed Mount McKinley in 1906 as truth, as Waterman does. The Cook Society's members may be deluded about many things, but at least they read enough of my book to know that Cook's 1906 McKinley climb is very firmly rejected by it.

4H Had Waterman only turned to page 837 of *Cook & Peary* he would have read: "Cook failed to provide anything in his own support beyond his variously interpretable word [that he had climbed McKinley]. He produced no photograph and, perhaps more important, no drawing of any feature above the place where Edward Barrill [Cook's climbing partner] swore he turned back. He provided no verifiable scientific data that he could not have learned by observation or deduction. His equipment and timetable appear to have been inadequate, and his photographs are falsely labeled. But the most convincing evidence of all comes from his own hand in the form of a diary that is more like Barrill's diary than his own finished narrative, and whose 'mixup in dates,' changes of dates, and separate and different entries for the very same dates seem to support Barrill's contention that Cook's diary and his own were doctored and forged." My conclusion about Cook's 1906 climb follows directly: "Cook's description of his climb of Mount McKinley appears to be a clever fake conceived and carried out by a most individual and brilliant mentality." Having written that, I have not been quick to ask for favorable references from the Frederick A. Cook Society, though I still do not hesitate to thank them for giving me blanket permission to quote from the unpublished writings of Dr. Cook, over which they hold absolute control, which allowed me to document this conclusion. And they did so without once asking me what my conclusion would be.

4I So where are all my "absurd pro-Cook theories"? Only in the mind of Jonathan Waterman, that's where. As Cook and Peary found out, you really shouldn't pretend to describe places you have never been and things you haven't done, and Waterman should have realized that he shouldn't have presumed to expound upon the content of pages he hadn't read and a book he had so little idea of that he has no idea of one of its most basic conclusions.

4J If the incredible blunder of declaring the book's conclusions about Mount McKinley pro-Cook were not embarrassing enough, Waterman will be further embarrassed to learn that nearly every other supposition he made about that *terra incognita* encompassed by pages 803-977 will be shown to be false by everyone who bothers to explore my complete text. He also will not be pleased to learn that his various criticisms of my book sound eerily like the ones made of it by the Frederick A. Cook Society, but of course for exactly the opposite reasons. For example, he says I "[dismiss] most of the respected sources in Denali history in order to keep Cook's claim afloat." Russell Gibbons, executive director of the Cook Society says my book "shows a pattern of seeding doubt about the intentions and work of [pro-Cook] writers and scholars . . . whose conclusions are at variance with his [that Cook's claims were frauds]."

4K Many other things Waterman says I say are absolutely false. For instance, he says I claim that the East Buttress was Cook's probable route to the summit. I actually say Cook turned back at the Gateway of the Ruth Glacier and never set foot on any part of Denali in 1906. He says I "elevate" men like Walt Gonnason, who he describes as "one of the few Denali climbers

who actually believes that Cook made the summit." He then cuts Gonnason down to size by adding off-handedly that "Gonnason summited once on a well-traveled Denali route" then links him with the Frederick A. Cook Society to further diminish him, as he attempts to diminish me by the same association. In contrast, he says, I give "the vastly more experienced pioneer, Bradford Washburn," "short shrift." That's what Waterman says, but what are the facts?

4L When Gonnason summited McKinley in 1948, the route he took was hardly "well-traveled." He was a part of only the fifth party ever to summit McKinley, and every one of those parties traveled exactly the same route that Hudson Stuck had pioneered in 1913. In 1948 "the vastly more experienced pioneer, Bradford Washburn," had summited the mountain twice, in 1942 and 1947, by the very same route as Gonnason each time. Of course Washburn went on to bigger and better things with the Boston Museum of Science, and Gonnason, according to Waterman, joined the Frederick A. Cook Society (actually he has had a long career as a mining engineer). As Waterman says, Gonnason has held a life-long belief in Cook's climb. This is the reason Gonnason was "elevated" in my book, in Waterman's mind. His lesser position is not because of his relative achievements on Denali to Washburn's as of 1948, but because of his lifetime of heretical beliefs concerning Cook's climb.

4M During the writing of my book, Dr. Washburn and I had some stormy moments (and I had a few stormy moments with Gonnason as well), as I refused to make a final judgment on Cook's claim until I had thoroughly examined the important new documentary evidence about it that I had discovered. As a result, I was the first to do an objective analysis of his virtually unknown 1906 Alaskan diary, showing that the description of the climb it contains is a fabrication. I uncovered Ed Barrill's equally fabulous diary, that no one had been able to find in 84 years. I recovered the full original image of Cook's summit photo, proving, absolutely, that it was indeed taken at Fake Peak. I retrieved a pile of other unpublished photographs and original negatives taken by Cook in 1906, which proved that, just as all of his 1906 photographs misrepresented his climb in *To the Top of the Continent*, the drawings it contained were drawn from photographs of places other than what they claim to represent. That is why, in the end, rather than being dismissed by Bradford Washburn for my "absurd pro-Cook theories," Dr. Washburn helped me a great deal, once he felt my findings would hurt Cook. Although he may not have been pleased with some of the details presented in *Cook & Peary*, after its publication Washburn called me to personally express his delight with its overall conclusions, and he has recently written to me to congratulate me for my recent article on my discovery of Cook's original Fake Peak photograph, which publishes it for the first time, and which contains my comparative analysis of the Cook and Barrill diaries. [DIO Vol.7 #2-3]

4N Waterman also implies that I diminish other respectable pioneers by questioning the Sourdoughs' honesty, Belmore Browne's memory, and "alleging" Hudson Stuck had pedophilic tendencies. None of these are done without justification, however. The leader of the Sourdough climb is universally acknowledged to be a liar in the details of his published "diary" of the climb, and all of his expedition partners swore out a false affidavit about the climb in 1910. Belmore Browne, himself, confessed in writing that he had "a poor memory for dates and details," and if Waterman goes to Texas he will discover Hudson Stuck's pedophilic tendencies not just alleged, but written

in his own hand on page after page of his personal diaries. To say that I reveal “more negativities about the nay-sayers of Cook in the Source Notes than [I] do about Cook in the text,” only proves that Waterman paid more attention to the Source Notes than he did the text. I don’t believe anyone who actually reads my whole book could possibly agree with that. After all, the Frederick A. Cook Society says my book “vilifies” their hero and is a prime example of “character assassination.”

4O Waterman sinks so low as to imply that I am “an amateur” who doesn’t even know mountain gear by splitting hairs over terminology. He says I refer to crampons as “ice-creepers.” Apparently, Waterman is an amateur in the primary sources of the pioneer climbs, and does not know that “ice-creepers” is by far the more common term used by early climbers, with “ice irons” coming in second over “crampons.” Belmore Browne and Herschel Parker used “ice-creepers,” as did Claude Rusk. The Sourdoughs called them “ice irons.” I was simply trying to keep the reader in the time he was reading about by using contemporary terminology, as I did without exception throughout the book. Any reader will notice that I never say an expedition was a “team” or that anyone “summitted” anything. Such modern terminology has no place in a historical narrative.

4P Waterman didn’t even get my thesis on the North Pole correct. He says my conclusion was that “Cook did not make the Pole; Peary might have made it.” Wrong again. My book says of Peary’s claim on page 881: “Peary’s claim to have reached the North Pole on April 6, 1909 [was] a hoax.” I don’t see how I could be much more explicit than that. After spending hundreds and hundreds of hours reading Peary’s expedition papers in Washington, as I did, no one could entertain any belief in Peary’s claim, whatsoever.

4Q Obviously, Waterman not only never finished my book, he never even read the other reviews of it, every one of which [that states my conclusions] states them accurately. . . . Even the brief review by the *New York Times Book Review* [published in February 1997] unequivocally said that Cook’s 1906 climb was “definitively refuted by Mr. Bryce’s meticulous scrutiny of Cook’s bogus ‘summit’ photographs.”

4R So what made Waterman stop reading and postulate his own “absurd theories”? His comments about my book post-page 802 are wonderful examples of one of the most interesting facets of the Polar Controversy: the paranoia that Frederick A. Cook can still raise in his enemies. Fifty-eight years after his death, not only are “flowers, condolences and donations” still being accepted, but “gold bricks” are still being hurled at him. Once someone like Jonathan Waterman imagines he has detected a Cookite, the mind closes along with the book and the inquisition begins. Unfortunately for his reputation as an honest and fair-minded reviewer (which, like Cook’s once-admired reputation as a legitimate explorer, is now gone forever), once Waterman had mistaken my attempt to be scrupulously fair for “absurd pro-Cook theories,” he felt there was simply no need to read further. At that point he simply unloaded all the personal psychic baggage he had brought with him to this much disputed subject on my doorstep, proving he never had any objectivity on the matter to begin with. Instead of a fair judgment of the worth of my actual conclusions, once he had assumed what they would be, he simply trotted out all of his preconceived answers to the standard spiel of peddlers of “Dr. Cook’s snake oil” that have become almost a reflex to Cook-haters.

4S Waterman complains that my “endless postulations might make fine filler for a historical novel, but not for a historical biography.” My book

is divided into two distinct parts. The first part is the only one containing the “historical biography,” and there are no postulations whatever in it. The second part is analytical, which, by its nature, requires postulates to be tested. Had he read on, Waterman would have found that nearly every one of the pro-Cook postulations failed an evidentiary test. Though they may have seemed endless, that is only because the Polar Controversy has been endless. Most ironically, had he read on, and endorsed my actual anti-Cook conclusions, which he apparently shares in every minute respect, Waterman might have hastened an end.

4T Unfortunately, his unwarranted accusations about what my book contains, his negative implications about my methods and motives, and his total misrepresentation of my actual conclusions may have turned many of your readers away from reading my book and thus the Polar Controversy’s resolution. These are exactly the techniques currently being employed by the Frederick A. Cook Society in an attempt to destroy my credibility and diminish readership so as to perpetuate the controversy! Congratulations, Mr. Waterman, for doing such a favor for the Frederick A. Cook Society! Perhaps you will soon be receiving word that you have been elected a lifetime honorary member.

4U Had Waterman just pushed on a few more pages, he would have seen that there is an end to all those postulations on page 837, where I said, “except for a considerable amount of hearsay evidence, which is interesting but useless to argue over, all the major arguments both for and against Cook’s [McKinley] claim have now been considered.” Had I not considered them all, I would have been open to the criticism Waterman himself makes of “omissions or short treatments” of his pet anti-Cook subjects (again the same complaint is made by the Cook Society, except *they* say I left out crucial pro-Cook evidence — and call my book a “triumph of selective Mount McKinley and Polar Research.”). But even these shortcomings are illusionary, and after all the major arguments had been considered, I pronounced Cook’s 1906 climb a hoax.

4V Nevertheless, having just complained of there being no place for my “endless postulations,” Waterman goes on to expound on specific “omissions” in my text, all of which are actually covered in full in the pages he did not read. I devote five full pages to Cook’s “theft” of the Yaghan dictionary (and found no credible evidence that he stole it). This is a “short treatment”? In the case of my treatment of Cook’s “purported Eskimo mistresses and children,” my treatment was necessarily short. “Purported” is the key word; I read at least a million pages in research for my book and found no documentary evidence whatever of any Cook mistresses, and the Eskimos themselves confirmed that Cook never had any Eskimo offspring, nor are there any descendents of his in Greenland today. I was not “leery of sexual scandals throughout” as Waterman claims, I simply did not find any evidence of any beyond Peary’s and Henson’s infidelities. Though such details might have boosted sales, even if they existed, the nineteenth century was much more circumspect about keeping quiet any evidence of such things than today. At least I found no trace of them.

4W Apparently, however, Waterman craves more details of this sort, including those of Cook’s divorce after being caught in a Fort Worth hotel room in a compromising position. Scant as they are, my book reports absolutely everything that was published in the Fort Worth newspapers on this matter. His divorce was uncontested, did not go to trial, and so existing court records

contain neither grounds nor details, lurid or otherwise. In all these cases, Waterman simply wishes to know about the unknowable. Someone once said biographers were “artists under oath.” I subscribe to that notion, so I could not just make things up. It’s too bad Waterman doesn’t hold himself to that same standard as a reviewer.

4X But of all of the fantasies about my book in Waterman’s review, none are more absurd than his saying that among the hundreds of documents it quotes, there is only “one precious loadstone in which the biographer actually holds up the mirror to Cook’s face” and that “Bryce dismisses Peary to the extent that we don’t get to know him, and Cook is revealed only by sifting through Bryce’s considerable research tailing piles.” Peary is revealed through the numerous quotations from his personal papers as never before; anyone who reads my book will know Peary, and those who thought he was the single-mind[ed], self-sacrificing and daring hero his biographers have made him out to be, will never think of Peary that way again. And had he ever read Chapter 30, Waterman would have found that it is almost entirely devoted to holding up the mirror not only to Cook’s face, but to his soul, revealing Cook’s character and thereby his motives, as much as they are ever likely to be revealed.

4Y No wonder Waterman is so puzzled by what he conceives of as my completely pedestrian resolution to the Polar Controversy. No one who stops short of my last chapter could possibly hope to understand the character of Frederick A. Cook. That is the summit of this mountain. If you do not understand that, you cannot resolve the Polar Controversy. You see, Mr. Waterman, I saved the true resolution for the end, but you didn’t get there. The true resolution is not just the pedestrian answer to who did what in the frozen North (if that was all there was to it, I wouldn’t have wasted eight years of my life writing a thousand page book) but, rather, why they did what they did; that is a good deal more complex. To understand that, and why “the Cook saga lives on” despite my massive tome, you must understand the true character of this man who can still raise rapturous love and loyalty in his followers and venomous hatred and paranoid suspicion in his detractors. It is Cook’s character that is what the Polar Controversy is all about. To understand Cook is to gain the key to the resolution of the Polar Controversy.

4Z So read on, Mr. Waterman, this time to the end. Put aside your years of anti-Cook indoctrination and allow the evidence alone to determine approximate truth, since absolute truth in this, as in all other things, does not really exist. When you stand at the summit of Chapter 30, you may be surprised how many of the clouds clear away, and how much you could have seen clearly had you just pressed on to the end on your first attempt.

Sincerely yours,
Robert M. Bryce,
Author of *Cook & Peary, the Polar Controversy, Resolved*

Yet even after being given my rebuttal, Waterman “stands by his review,” probably because, like my book, he didn’t read that either. If he had, to take such a stance, having read it, only would make him look even more ridiculous. And this is where the legend of the Sourdoughs comes in and ties in to the theme of this essay: legends v. logic, desire to believe v. everything else, and the role human belief and prejudice plays in them.

5 New Book, Similar Shortcomings

5A Waterman’s new book is entitled *Chasing Denali: The Sourdoughs, Cheechakos³ and frauds behind the most unbelievable feat in mountaineering*. [hereinafter CD] It’s a recounting of the details of the fantastic claims of four Alaskan “Pioneers” to have summited Denali in 1910 woven around a “going of age” story of the author’s final attempt to summit it himself at the age of 60. The tie-in between this “hook” and “history” is that the story of the Sourdoughs served as an early inspiration for Waterman to accomplish big things on big mountains; as he says in his Prologue, “So this is an investigatory tale of the flagpole-carrying Sourdough heroes — Billy Taylor, Pete Anderson, Charlie McGonagall, and Tom Lloyd — whom I once revered.” [CD:xii] Unfortunately, the book is consistent with many of the same prejudices and deficits of Waterman’s approach to reviewing my book, though in the end he may have pointed out the key clue to solving the controversy over just what happened the 3rd of April, 1910, on the Sourdoughs’ fabled attempt.

5B As for Waterman’s subplot, even I can relate to that on a far more minuscule scale. Eleven years ago my wife and I went to New England to hike Mt. Washington and Katahdin back to back. Washington was no problem on a fine, sunny day, but bad weather kept us from scaling Katahdin.

5C The year after that we happened to win Baxter State Park’s out-of-state lottery through which it allocates the few cabins on Katahdin Lake reserved for persons other than Mainers, so we went back up for another try. My wife repeatedly hiked up Sugarloaf’s summit trail and we did Shenandoah National Park’s White Oak Canyon at least three times to get the up and down muscles in shape, beforehand.

5D But once back in Maine, when we reached the ladders above the treeline on the AT, I learned that I was at least one year too old for Katahdin. I was pretty sure I could have made the summit, but remembering the last time I climbed it, I wasn’t so certain I could make it back down. My wife had never climbed it, so she went on, succeeded in making it up and back to where I was feeding the black flies. But she can’t prove she made the summit. I forgot to give her the camera, so like the Sourdoughs, she has no pictures, and she didn’t pack a flagpole, either.

5E It’s not surprising that there is some doubt over that more famous climb; the claims are extraordinary, and the testimony of the participants contradictory and incomplete. So is Waterman’s creative writing.

5F He gets off to a bad start in his Preface, where the image of the spruce tree that was to become a famous flagpole is the metaphor that both begins and ends the book. Although Waterman says so, the tree most certainly was not cut down from the forest below before they made their climb of Denali, as he claims in this imaginative interlude. Two of the four climbers in the party described it as either “dry spruce” or “seasoned spruce” §§14H&12F. Spruce wood takes 4-6 summer months to dry. No doubt they hauled the dry wood pole with them from Kantishna or even Fairbanks. In fact, they took along a number of spruce poles with them out of which they made hundreds of spruce stakes to mark their trail [NYT]. This is just the first instance of many of the same shortcomings apparent in Waterman’s review of my book; his inability to report evidence correctly and his failure to keep his facts straight.

5G As bad a start as that is, the rest of his book is based on one fatal assumption — that the Sourdough Climb took place in just the way it has been mythologized. Even if the Sourdoughs actually scaled the North Peak, he leaves no room for any variance from the accepted story, even for possibilities that would make it more acceptable to those who know the history and who know the mountain, but who still doubt it. In recounting that story, Waterman gives plenty of reasons to doubt it by those who know neither.

³Note: “cheechakos” which is alternately spelled cheechacos, is a Chinook word meaning “new-comers.”

6 How a Bar Bet became a Sacred Quest, then a Legend

6A The story goes something like this (the testimony was sometimes conflicting). It all started in Bill McPhee's saloon in Fairbanks in October 1909. The doubts raised about Cook's 1906 climb were in headlines all across the country. His lone climbing partner had just signed an affidavit saying they had never been anywhere near the top of the mountain and that Cook's published picture of him standing on the summit holding a flag was a fake taken at little more than 6,000 feet and many miles from the mountain itself. Many Alaskans had disbelieved Cook's story from the start; after all, he was an "Easterner" from "Outside," that is, anywhere but Alaska. Tom Lloyd declared that for 2 cents he would show what a real Alaskan Pioneer could do. He'd climb McKinley and plant a flag on the summit that could be seen in Fairbanks and, incidentally, prove that Cook never saw the top of the mountain. Tom said he wanted to "give the Cheechacos 'the laugh'" by proving that what the Easterner brags about and writes about in the magazines and which to the Easterner is impossible, the sourdough⁴ Alaskan performs as a part of "the day's work." [NYT]

6B This boast gave McPhee a laugh all right — at Tom Lloyd, who at 53 and portly, he said, wasn't much better than the average Easterner. Indeed, Lloyd had once been stung by the ultimate Alaskan insult: "Why, he can't even kill his own moose meat!" But when Tom insisted he could do it, McPhee put up \$500 to bankroll an attempt. By then Lloyd's boast had become a test of manhood, maybe even a Sacred Quest. Two other merchants matched McPhee's stake, and to sweeten the pot, the saloon keeper made a forfeit bet of \$5,000 (some say it was only \$500) that one of Lloyd's men, if not Tom himself, would reach the summit before the Fourth of July 1910. To prove it, a merchant from Chena, E.W.Griffin, offered to give Tom a big flag, and Lloyd promised him, "If you . . . put your name on that flag, your name will fly on that flag from the summit." [NYT]

6C Lloyd selected his mining partner and two tough miners they had working their claims in Kantishna to do the heavy labor, and a professional surveyor and one other to take care of the "scientific" measurements and do the photography. Suitably provisioned, the group set out for the mountain from Fairbanks to great fanfare on December 22, 1909.

6D On April 11, Tom Lloyd alone returned to Fairbanks with the news that he and three of his party had reached the summit and there had attempted to plant Griffin's flag tied to a 14-foot dry spruce pole they had hauled up with them for that purpose. But there was nothing but ice and snow on the true summit, so they climbed the lower North Peak for good measure and there erected the flag on the last rocky outcrop near the top. He said he had photographs taken during the climb at various heights and that the scenery "on the upper reaches of the mountain is appalling in its grandeur." He also said he had positive proof that Cook was a fraud, because they had taken Cook's route and could "determine beyond peradventure that the doctor never reached beyond a certain point." [Fairbanks Daily Times, April 12, 1910]

6E With the help of the Editor of the *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, W.F.Thompson, Lloyd dickered with Outside newspapers to get the best price for his exclusive account. It finally appeared as a three-page illustrated spread in the *New York Times Sunday Magazine* section on June 5, enhanced by 18 photographs and drawings, and included a transcript of Tom Lloyd's diary kept during the climb. Soon after publication, criticisms began to appear and shortcomings started to be pointed out.

6F After a disagreement (some said it was a fist fight, but Lloyd said it was because of a bad knee) the professional surveyor quit and the photographer went with him. The Sourdoughs lost their barometer and so had no instrument capable of making a reliable measurement of the height of any of their camps, let alone the summit, which Lloyd estimated at 21,000 feet. None of the photos published in the *NYTimes* article showed

⁴The term "Sourdough" is thought to have originated during the Yukon Gold Rush due to the habit of prospectors carrying a bag of sourdough starter (a fermented mixture of flour and water) under their parkas to keep it from freezing.

anything above the level of the head of the Muldrow Glacier. Indeed, it was rumored that Tom had admitted in private that he, himself, had not accompanied the others to the summit, but had stayed at their high camp, which was at about 11,000 feet.

6G On June 9, a story appeared in the *Fairbanks Daily Times* saying that Lloyd had sought to remedy his lack of convincing pictures by sending a note to Kantishna for his boys to reascend the mountain to get some more, especially of the flag. The article said they had done as Lloyd asked and again reached the summit on May 17. They said they had done this in three days without camping and had found the flag intact, but wrapped around the pole.

6H Despite the widespread doubts, when Lloyd's three miners finally emerged from the back country, they refused to contradict Lloyd, at least in some respects. All three, along with Lloyd, swore out an affidavit on June 11, 1910, saying that on April 3, all four had unfurled the flag on the northern summit of Mount McKinley. Even so, considering Lloyd's lack of proof and contradictory private statements that he had not been with the other three on this occasion, caused many Alaskans to put it down to just more of Tom Lloyd's big bragging. Tom Lloyd not only had a lot of crow to eat if he did not make good, but there was a financial incentive as well: that big forfeit bet. As he admitted while claiming victory after his return, "Of course, after the papers got hold of the story we hated the idea of ever coming back here defeated." [NYT]

6I By August, W.F.Thompson found the market for stories of climbs of the mountain exhausted, and the pictures from the second climb never emerged. As he put it, "You couldn't get the price of a meal ticket from any newspaper or magazine on earth for carrying a grand piano to the summit of McKinley and then telling the story of the feat." [quoted in Cole:9].

6J There's no record of whether anyone collected on the forfeit bet, as without anyone seeing the flagpole by then, no one could definitely say which side won, but most Alaskans doubted Lloyd's story. It isn't even known how much Lloyd was paid by the *New York Times* for his account. All that is known is that he paid back some of the stake money to his three backers, some said a few hundred dollars. And so the matter stood until 1913.

7 A Lloyd-Cook Comparison

7A All in all, the story is certainly an unbelievable tale that doesn't even hold up well when compared with Cook's now universally discredited 1906 account. In my book, I compared the two

7B [The Sourdoughs] lost their only barometer; the rest of their "scientific" equipment consisted of one thermometer, a \$5 Kodak and a watch. They carried no tent and no sleeping bags above 11,000 feet but remembered to take a hammer, nails and some boards to make a sign [they said they nailed a sign to the base of the flagpole recording the date and each of their names along with the names of their backers; since writing this, the author has learned that they did not take a hammer but used the flat end of a small hatchet to hammer the nails]. They took no fuel and, for food, had six doughnuts and a thermos of hot chocolate each during the entire climb from that level. They did have crude ice irons but carried only long pikes instead of ice axes — another "must" according to today's guidebook [for prospective climbers of Denali]; they claimed to have dug their steps in the ice with a common coal shovel. They had no rope other than to guy the 14-foot spruce flagpole they carried with them, but they never used it as a lifeline while climbing. Yet, so equipped, they are credited with an ascent of 8,470 vertical feet to the summit of the North Peak and a return to camp at 11,000 feet in just 18 hours. Of this distance a 2,200-foot stretch was on inclines of 40 to 55 degrees.

7C Surely, if one believes their story, there is room for belief that Dr. Cook's equipment was adequate to his enterprise, despite its shortcomings.

7D Next, compare the Sourdoughs' climbing experience with Cook's. Their success has been attributed solely to their being hard-bitten pioneers with amazing grit and determination bred from a rugged outdoor life, which had taught them cold-weather survival techniques. . . . Undoubtedly, except for portly Tom Lloyd, the Sourdoughs were in superb physical condition, though only one was under 40. But none had any technical mountaineering experience — not even so much as could be conceded to Dr. Cook. . . .

7E The case for their accomplishment is nearly parallel with Dr. Cook's, however. They brought back no photographic evidence from any high altitude on the mountain and no summit picture; neither did Cook. The account said to be taken from the diary of the expedition's leader embodies a narrative that, if not entirely false, contains highly questionable elements and suspicious inconsistencies; so did Cook's. They claimed to have accomplished a physical feat that seems beyond the powers of human endurance, despite little mountaineering experience and inadequate equipment; so did Cook. They provided no observations or physical evidence that can be verified as confirming their story; neither did Cook. They swore an affidavit that included material statements now believed utterly false; so did Cook. The details of the story of the climb were disputed by other members of the expedition's own party, some of whom said those details were untrue; so it was with Cook's. The record they said they left at the summit has never been recovered; neither has Cook's. No one has ever been able to duplicate their feat to this day; the same applies to Cook's.

7F Although the accuracy of Dr. Cook's descriptions [of physical features observed during his climb] has given hope to his supporters and baffled his critics, the Sourdoughs' descriptions are not even close. They said the summits were three miles apart; they are two miles apart, as Cook said they were. Billy Taylor, who claimed to have stood on the North Peak, said he didn't climb to the true summit on the South Peak because "it looked the same height" as the North Peak; actually it is more than 800 feet higher, a fact that has always been obvious to everyone else who was ever there. Tom Lloyd estimated the height of the mountain at 21,000 feet, an estimate 610 feet worse than Dr. Cook's.

7G The Sourdoughs went the doctor one better, however. They claimed that because their pictures from the April climb did not come out, they ascended the mountain a second time, reaching the summit on May 17, 1910. They did this, they said, from the mountain's base in three days without camping once. No pictures from that even more marvelous second ascent have ever been seen, either.

7H The sole piece of evidence by which the Sourdoughs' climb is credited is the Stuck party's sighting of their flagpole on the North Peak in 1913, when opposite it at [about] 17,000 feet. Yet the year before, Parker and Browne [who came within a few hundred feet of the South Peak summit] had dismissed the Sourdoughs' claims when they failed to see any trace of it from the same position. Stuck explained this by saying, "It would never be seen with the naked eye save by those who were intently searching for it." But Parker and Browne said they searched "each pinnacle" of the North Peak's summit ridge with their "powerful binoculars," and that the flagpole was not there. [DR: With 7x binoculars at 1.75 mi, the 4" wide pole's angular width would be $(3438'/\text{rad}) \times 7 \times 4''/(1.75\text{mi} \times 5280\text{ft}/\text{mi} \times 12''/\text{ft}) = 0'.9$, possibly visible.]

7I Of the flagpole Tom Lloyd said, "We tamped it in, and filled in with rocks and built rocks up around it in a substantial, time-enduring monument to a height of fifteen inches above the surface, so that the flagpole is anchored in thirty inches of solid rock."

7J Yet no one has ever found a sliver of wood, a shred of guy rope or a trace of the "time-enduring monument" they erected that the newspapers said would be "plainly noticeable for centuries to come." Could Stuck have been mistaken? Certainly, a 14-foot flagpole wouldn't be easy to spot from several miles off, even with binoculars. Or did he lie to make the conquest of McKinley "all Alaskan"? After all, he had no designs on the North Peak, so perhaps he was willing to confirm their incredible story of scaling it. But he denied them the South, even though they said they had climbed it twice, thereby reserving for himself the glory of being first to ascent the higher of McKinley's two peaks. [C&P:806-807; 840-842]

7K Even Waterman agrees that "The similarities to Cook — widely dismissed for his summit claim by Denali climbers over the last century — are startling." [CD:91]

8 Considering the Considerer

8A Because Stuck's 1913 sighting during the first verified ascent of Denali is the crucial confirmatory evidence, we need to look at it in detail, and since the flagpole is the key to the Waterman book's claims, we need to consider those in detail as well. But first something needs to be said about his book in general, as in doing so we might gather some measure of the ability of the author to find and analyze the evidence on which he relies.

8B In his Prologue, Waterman harkens back to the Sourdough Climb as one of his early inspirations to seek adventure on the mountain, and he decided to research an article and come to some kind of closure on the truth of their fantastic tale, of which he claims, over his years of experience as a mountaineer and guide, to have become a doubter.

8C "But it wasn't enough to write about it like a research librarian. I had to return and spent [*sic*] a few weeks up high — maybe even reach the summit and find my own equivalent of the now passé pole planting and flag raising ritual." [CD:xvii] In other words, he needed a hook. In the exhilarating success of this, his last attempt to make the summit, apparently, the projected magazine article expanded into the present slim book, which promises on its back cover "astounding conclusions" about "one of the greatest mysteries in mountaineering."

8D On reading this, I couldn't help but feel the reference was to me. "Research Librarian" was the exact, yet inaccurate, description of my occupation at the time I wrote *Cook & Peary*, given on the back flap of my book's jacket. "Much can be learned about Cook through his books and even more tomes written about him," Waterman goes on to say. [CD:11]. But even with my "tome" in front of him, he apparently didn't have the discipline or organization to cite the actual facts of events he chose from it.⁵

⁵I know he had my book in front of him for this reason alone: On page 16 he says, "At four years old, "Freddy" lost his father to illness, then a sister." That Cook had an older sibling who died in infancy was discovered only by my reading of obscure Cook family correspondence, and my book was the first to mention it. To the best of my knowledge, this fact has been mentioned in no other subsequent source. So, it must have come directly from C&P p.3 and its extensive note on the Cook family's birth order. But he gets much of the rest of it wrong: I didn't identify the sex of the child because it's unknown, so we don't know if it was his "sister," and Waterman's statement that "[Cook] grew up as the youngest of three siblings in Brooklyn, New York," is totally false. [CD:11] Cook had two older brothers, Theodore and William, an older sister, Lillian, and a younger brother, August, who died after they moved to Brooklyn.

8E Don't get me wrong. I'm not objecting to Waterman using my book; that's what I wrote it for: to help future writers about Frederick Cook to get the facts straight about his complex and often confusing claims. It's very disappointing that even in the case of indisputable biographical facts, it didn't help Waterman at all.

8F As I read the mangling of such simple facts and, later, the misstatement or misrepresentation of facts about Cook's exploratory career, his attempts to climb Denali and of the Polar Controversy between him and Robert Peary, it was clear Waterman could have sorely used the assistance of someone like a "research librarian," even though he had a veritable encyclopedia of all these subjects right there before him.

9 Crushing Cook

9A On page 17 he quotes from Cook's posthumously published *Return from the Pole*, when the quote is actually from his 1911 book, *My Attainment of the Pole* [p.26]. On the same page he claims that in 1901 "Cook returned to the Arctic and rescued Peary, suffering from scurvy and heart issues," when actually in that year, although Cook accompanied a relief expedition to resupply Peary, Peary remained in the Arctic until 1902; incidentally, Peary never suffered from any "heart issues." He then tells us "within a year of docking back in Brooklyn [after returning from serving as surgeon on Robert E. Peary's North Greenland Expedition of 1891-92], Cook signed on again as a ship surgeon" with the Belgian Antarctic Expedition. [CD:17] Peary's expedition returned to Philadelphia, not Brooklyn, and that was in 1892; the Belgian expedition left for Antarctica in 1897. On page 18 we learn one of the crew of the Belgian expedition "abandoned the ship and set off across the sea ice, planning to walk back home, never to be seen again." Actually there were only two deaths on the expedition: one crew member fell overboard and was lost at sea, and the magnetician died over the winter of complications of a congenital heart condition. Everyone else returned safely from Antarctica.

9B Indeed, it would be extremely tedious for the reader to have all the errors of fact about Frederick Cook and his career in *Chasing Denali* pointed out that are correctly stated in *Cook & Peary*. So let's just say there are scores of them. But to prove the point, I need only analyze two consecutive paragraphs on CD:53-54 to show how thick they are on its pages; my comments on the text as it appears are in brackets:

9C After telling his readers about a meeting between Robert Dunn and Frederick Cook that supposedly took place in New York City (at a time when Cook wasn't even in the United States), he writes: "Peary received a pension from the US Navy and a congressional-presidential degree for being first to reach the North Pole. [Peary received the Thanks of Congress for "reaching the North Pole"; he was never officially recognized by the government for being "first" or discovering the North Pole.] Cook — once cheered by tens of thousands on his return from the pole in 1909 — tried to rally support through his lecture tours. Then he disappeared. [C&P p.525]"

9D "He reemerged in the west, working as a geologist in Wyoming, then as a promoter of oil lands in Texas. [These statements are a confused compression of the facts. Cook "disappeared" in November 1909, and reemerged in December 1910, when he returned to New York City from Europe. He then embarked on a very successful series of Chautauqua lectures and vaudeville appearances between 1911 and 1915. Cook then traveled completely around the world, attempted to climb Mt. Everest, and only went to Wyoming in 1917, when the Great War made his lectures unprofitable; C&P, Chapters 18-21]. Since the lands he sold through the mail were initially deemed worthless, in 1923, he was convicted for mail fraud and sentenced to five years in Leavenworth. [Cook never sold "lands" through the mail; he made *representations* about the worth of the properties his company held to sell shares of stock in his oil company, The Petroleum Producers Association, that were deemed fraudulent. Upon conviction, his sentence was 14 years, 9 months and a fine of \$12000; C&P Chapters 22-23]. He served an additional two years while trying to appeal

the conviction." [Cook spent two years in the Tarrant County Jail in Fort Worth, TX while appealing his case; he then went to Leavenworth, where he served another 5 years, when he was released on parole on March 9, 1930; his total time served was about 7 years; C&P 673 and Chapter 23].

9E And so it goes. But even his inability to get the facts straight is not the most important of Waterman's faults. It is his insinuations and misuse of mangled facts to denigrate Frederick Cook.

9F As I said in my rebuttal, Waterman's treatment of Cook's career is a classic example of "the paranoia that Frederick A. Cook can still raise in his enemies." [§4R] In his bungled review of my book, Waterman had already revealed his strong prejudices. He hates Cook, and chooses incidents, some true, some distorted, with the result of gratuitously diminishing him in giving the background to the main event, his account and analysis of the Sourdough Climb. Gratuitously, because Cook's history is irrelevant to the Sourdough Climb except for the fact it was Alaskans' prideful desire to prove that someone from "Outside" couldn't possibly have come from the effete East and done what only a true Alaskan Pioneer was capable of that led to Tom Lloyd's big boast. However, in the evaluation of any historical topic, whether it be the life and career of Dr. Frederick A. Cook, or seeking the facts and making sound judgments about the Sourdoughs' claims, which are as conflicting as the known evidence outlined above, and in some ways even more incredible than anything Cook claimed [see §7], those prejudices must be taken into account. If a researcher can't report known facts accurately, if he uses "facts" that are known to be false to serve those prejudices, how can readers trust that when he presents "astounding conclusions" about something as controversial as the Sourdough Climb, he has based them on a sound analysis of evidence that is being correctly reported and analyzed without prejudice, especially when it applies to the claims of men he admits he once considered his inspirations and heroes?

9G In preparation for presenting the evidence for and against the 1910 climb, he goes into the history of the previous attempts to climb the tallest mountain in North America, reviewing government geologist Alfred Brooks's pathfinding geological expedition to the Alaska Range in 1902, which yielded an article entitled "A Plan for Climbing Mt. McKinley" that inspired Judge James Wickersham of Fairbanks to attempt a climb the next year. It was a desultory attempt, and when he ran up against the great uplift on the Northwest Buttress of the mountain that now bears the name, Wickersham Wall, he headed back home after reaching an altitude of perhaps 8,100 feet.

9H Waterman then takes up the two expeditions of Dr. Frederick A. Cook. But every time he strays into the facts of Cook's life, as before, Waterman, as Christian Beckwith would say, gets "into a thicket."

9I Before he recounts Cook's failed attempt on Denali in 1903, he immediately claims Cook suffered from Asperger's Syndrome [CD:11]. His armchair psychoanalysis is strictly pop-culture in its arguments, however, and shows no more depth of knowledge of autism than of Cook's biography. He cites a list of Cook's "classic symptoms" in an attempt to paint him as a person incapable of leadership or sound judgment. He claims he had impaired social interactions, repetitive project obsessions, intense focus on himself, speech impairments, and implies he was mentally deranged. "To wit, Cook mixed awkwardly with others," he tells his readers, "he became obsessed with exploration and ethnology, he was a loner, and he had a lisp He looked like he was trying to connect the untethered dots in his head." Again, given the facts, he couldn't be more wrong.

9J Asperger's, at base, is characterized by inability to interact socially, and persons with the disorder often have trouble even making eye contact. Cook, on the contrary, rather than looking to others "untethered," was always described as having a very direct gaze and a frank look in his clear blue eyes, whether engaged in friendly conversation or answering reporters' hostile questions. Rather than being unable to read social cues, Cook had an amazing insight into human psychology in general and the individual psychologies of persons he met. In other words, he had the attributes most useful to the professional

conman that many people today regard him. Conman or not, these attributes allowed him to be so convincing and to carry out his audacious frauds that gained him unprecedented honors and to be, as Waterman says, “cheered by tens of thousands on his return from the pole in 1909.” I discuss these and many other aspects of Cook’s personality and psychology in Chapter 30 of C&P. But, of course, that’s way beyond where Waterman stopped reading my book. [§4F]

9K The obsessions of Asperger’s are not the same as the methodical, scholarly study Cook did of polar conditions, polar history or primitive peoples, but more like obsessions with details and repetitive daily routines. Actually, Cook’s interests were not obsessively narrow; on the contrary, they were very broad. Anyone who has read the wide breadth of topics he addressed in the hundreds of articles he wrote for Leavenworth’s prison newspaper, as I have, would not for a single moment consider that this was a symptom Cook had.

9L The speech difficulties of Asperger’s manifest themselves as speech patterns that can sound flat, monotonous, unusually slow or fast, or of inappropriate volume for the situation. It is true that Cook had a very slight lisp, but he had no inability to speak in a normal pattern. A lisp is due to physical problems, not mental ones, involving abnormal tongue placement habits, usually set at an early age, or physical abnormalities of the mouth that impair clear articulation.

9M Asperger’s sufferers have difficulty making and keeping friends and interacting with others. Cook was a university-trained medical doctor who was beloved by his patients, whether in the Antarctic or back home in Brooklyn, because of his sympathetic “bedside manner.” He made and kept lifelong friends, who loyally supported him even when he was accused of (even exposed at) monstrous lies, and he was a member of numerous clubs and social organizations, including being a founding member of the American Alpine Club and the Explorers Club. Rather than being focused on himself, he was described as “reserved,” and one who never talked about himself.

9N Asperger’s is also characterized by a lack of imagination and extreme difficulty with public speaking, yet Cook is the author of two of the most circumstantial book-length exploration frauds ever attempted, one involving the narrative of a wholly imaginative journey to the North Pole, and he made his living for five years after his fall from grace as a public speaker of compelling power, speaking to hundreds of thousands of eager auditors. I doubt anyone who reads my book and then consults the criteria of diagnosing Asperger’s in the DSM-4 would believe Waterman’s preposterous claims. [To do so, go to:

https://iancommunity.org/cs/about_asds/about_asds_dsm_iv_criteria_for_aspergers_syndrome]

You can’t look at DSM-5 because Asperger’s is no longer recognized as a distinct syndrome, but as a manifestation on the Autism Spectrum.]

9O Rather than being a genuine analysis, I felt Waterman’s side trip into the thicket of the Autism Spectrum was entirely aimed at diminishing Cook as a leader of large enterprises, and therefore unworthy of any credit for any of his genuine accomplishments in Alaska. Once these are denied him, he awards them to others instead, just as all but two of the names of scores of geological features he discovered and named in Alaska have now been renamed. Waterman’s extreme prejudice against Cook can be seen in a number of statements he makes concerning Cook’s accomplishments, both large and small.

9P He says it was the horsepacker Fred Printz who cut the steps on the way up to the highest point achieved by Cook on the Northwest Buttress in 1903: “. . . led by the burly, step-chopping arm of Printz, using the latest ice axes. . . .” they made their highest climb [CD:14], adding, “Since [Robert] Dunn lacked an ice axe, he used a willow tent pole as a cane.” And again on p.43 he says that Cook “followed his horse packer’s chopped steps a few thousand feet up McKinley.” Not true. And 11,000 feet is more than “a few.”

9Q Although Waterman, like many other Cook-haters before him, uses Robert Dunn’s hypercritical, tell-all account of that trip to disparage Cook’s abilities as a leader, in Dunn’s own account of this climb he says, “Doctor was in the lead. It was my turn to cut, but he did not seem inclined to take the tent pole and give me the ax. . . . ‘It’s all ice here.

Look out,’ he would say calmly between most deliberate steps; and stopping to hack a little deeper. . . . ‘God! I admire the way you take this slope,’ I’d exclaim. And, by heaven, with all these mean pages behind, I still do.” [Dunn, Robert, “Highest on Mt. McKinley,” *Outing Magazine*, April 1904, pp.34-35]. And, by the way, Dunn’s “willow tent pole” was made of hickory.

9R Waterman also attempts to give credit for discovering a new pass across the Alaska Range to the Bull River, which Alfred Brooks called a greater contribution to the geology of Alaska than if Cook had reached the summit of the mountain, to “Cook’s team,” when it was Cook alone who discovered it. Actually, “Cook’s team” doubted to a man that there was such a pass, and refused to follow him after he instructed them to round up the horses and bring them up to the pass he’d discovered. They only did as he directed when they got tired of waiting for him to return. [C&P 259].

9S As noted, the use of Dunn’s *Shameless Diary of an Explorer* (which caused a major scandal and resulted in Dunn’s being expelled from the Arctic Club of America) to denigrate Cook and undermine his polar and McKinley claims is nothing new. But there is no longer any need to do that. Cook did not summit Denali; he did not reach the North Pole; my book proved he did neither. So why should the man be deprived of his considerable true accomplishments by questioning his mental capabilities and extolling the account of Dunn, who admitted his own cowardice during the climb of the Northwest Buttress and recorded his admiration of Cook’s own courage on the same attempt? [C&P:256]

9T Sadly, Waterman does no better in his account of the 1906 attempt than that of 1903. All of his numerous errors in both instances are correctly reported in C&P. [Chapters 11-12 and analyzed in Chapter 28]

9U But even the most confirmed Cook-hater realizes that he must come to grips with Cook’s sterling reputation made as surgeon to the Belgian Antarctic Expedition of 1897-99, when his crucial role in saving the entire expedition won the undying respect of its leader, Adrian de Gerlache, and Roald Amundsen, who served as the Belgica’s second officer.

9V On page 13 Waterman calls Cook “the original space cadet,” yet five pages later he tells us that when the Belgian leader, Adrian de Gerlache, and the ship’s captain fell ill in the Antarctic, “Dr. Cook calmly diagnosed scurvy. He and the first mate [*sic*], the Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen, then took command of the ship.” Actually, the word “scurvy” doesn’t appear in Cook’s account, and it was de Gerlache’s designation of Jules Melaerts, the third officer, to succeed to command if he and the captain died, that caused Amundsen to formally resign, then and there, as second officer. [C&P 192]. Neither Cook nor Amundsen was ever in “command of the ship;” Waterman then goes on to tell how “Cook regularly and cheerfully treated crew members for various ailments, arguably saving a number of lives through his coolheaded management. Amundsen called him the most popular man on the ship,” and admired how Cook’s ingenious efforts to free the ship from the ice saved the entire expedition.

9W Waterman tries to justify the obvious incongruity between his imaginings about Cook and his “coolheaded management” by saying “As for Cook’s eccentricities and social skills . . . the language barrier between him and most of his Belgian shipmates, allowed him to get away with his weirdly aloof behavior.” [CD:19] He also fails to note that only one of the scientific staff and less than half of the crew were actually Belgian. But there had to be some way to undermine Cook’s sterling Antarctic performance (for which he was decorated by King Leopold II) — just like Peary’s cronies, who also concocted the story that Cook had tried to “steal a missionary’s life’s work.”

9X Waterman writes, “The first duplicity of his expedition career would begin on his way home,” and again cites Cook’s “theft of the Yahgan dictionary” that he trotted out in his review of my book. But as I say in my rebuttal [§4V] of Waterman’s review, I examined that question in detail and found the support for such allegations slim indeed. [C&P 783-786; for further details not in C&P see also: Bryce, Robert M., “Dr. Cook and the Yahgan Dictionary.” *Special supplement to Polar Priorities*, Vol.14 (1994), 12 pages.]

10 Beyond Biases

10A Beyond the errors and biases against Cook that were left to stand, the historical fact-checking on material related to the Sourdough Climb and other early Denali attempts after it are, mercifully, far better. The better accuracy of those sections is probably due to the efforts of Brian Okonek, the seasoned Denali guide who, according to the acknowledgments, “made corrections that no other reader, mountaineer, or historian would have caught.” [CD:139] Again, not entirely true; please see above.

10B Even so, the general editing is still sloppy, Alaska being referred to as a “state” even before it achieved territorial status in 1912 [CD:22&90], and sorry, there are no “cosmic light rays” in the known universe. [CD:90] On page 102 a 5’9” man is described as “a veritable giant for his time,” when the average height for men in 1912 was 5’8.25”. No editor is acknowledged, so in light of these and other extraordinary oversights, one must assume there was none. There are also some other bizarre features of the book. The first involves a mysterious interview.

10C On pages xvi and xvii Waterman goes into detail about going to Seattle to interview the prospective “elderly hero” of a magazine story he was writing, only to find out that he “was a fraud who never climbed the mountain.” He goes on to say that he initially believed “his incredible tale about the first ascent of the West Buttress route” in 1948, and says he eventually published two articles about his duplicity, which led him to his own questioning of the Sourdough Climb. I not only could find no reference to any such articles elsewhere, but also I couldn’t find any record of anyone claiming to have climbed the West Buttress route before Bradford Washburn’s ascent of it in 1951. The only party I could identify as climbing Denali in 1948 was a party of three University of Alaska students led by Walter Gonnason. [see above: §§4K-4L] I had dealings with Gonnason during my writing of C&P and knew he lived in Seattle, but Gonnason claimed to have climbed the peak via the Muldrow Glacier, not the West Buttress. Who was this if it wasn’t Gonnason, though? Waterman doesn’t say, and never says another word about it. Maybe Waterman just balled up his facts again, or perhaps he is also prejudiced against Gonnason, a life-long supporter of Dr. Cook’s 1906 claim. In any case, a list of all the attempts to climb either of the summits of Denali up through the early 1960s, which I obtained from Laura Wright of the National Park Service, had no indication of any climb such as Waterman mentions.

10D Then we have the curious division of the book into two “parts.” Part I is titled “April 1910.” That makes some sense, because the disputed Sourdough Climb took place in that month, even though all the past climbing history and erroneous details of Frederick Cook’s life and claims are included in this part as well. But Part II is entitled “January 1911.” It starts out by citing a *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner* headline to a one paragraph story of that month “TOM LLOYD IS HIKING TO EAST;” about a trip Lloyd never even made — and that’s the last mention of “January 1911” in the entire 37-page section. That makes no sense at all.

10E And the book designer didn’t do Waterman any favors by giving away the key piece of evidence he presents to buttress his “astounding conclusions” by placing it in an inserted picture section between the two “parts.” Waterman had attempted to maintain suspense as to what those conclusions might be by using equivocal language whenever he mentioned the Sourdoughs’ alleged achievements, but he wasn’t even too good at that. Although speaking of the Sourdoughs as early as p.xii as folks “whom I once revered,” by page 6 Waterman had already blown his cover by saying, “But now — aided by new research and modern technology — the veracity of their ascent and how they actually performed it can be teased out, explained, and, ultimately, revealed.” Right there he left little doubt in this reader’s mind about what side of the controversy he would come down on, yet his prevarications continued another 115 pages. The next page he goes so far as to say “right up until my deadline loomed, the [envisioned magazine] article remained myth-busting.” [CD:116] In other words, he hadn’t any evidence that proved the claim believable at that point, but just

in the nick of time, that all changed.

10F After viewing this new evidence, Waterman writes, “Without further ado, I revised my myth-busting magazine story into a celebration of the Sourdoughs. I felt relieved.” [CD:123] The cherished wish had been fulfilled; the Heroes of his Youth could now be enshrined on Mount Olympus, or in this case, the North Peak of Denali. Truth had happily coincided with Desire. “Ultimately” he’d decide the Sourdoughs did exactly as they said (but as we shall see, they never said they did what he thought they did). On page 121 Waterman discusses the evidence he says changed his myth-busting magazine article into the present Sourdough “celebration” book. But before popping the cork along with him, let’s examine what is actually known about the climb.

11 Comparing Primary Accounts

11A Even though Waterman’s book is only 126 pages of text, there is precious little proportionately about the Sourdough Climb itself in it. There’s actually more factual material about Hudson Stuck’s first ascent. That’s because there is precious little to be had on the subject. Practically all of the relevant primary sources on it were conveniently republished accurately in 1967, edited by Terrance Cole, under the title *The Sourdough Expedition*, in less than 32 pages of text, so even Waterman’s slim book contains a lot of “padding.” Fact checking *Chasing Denali* caused me to pull my extensive files on the Sourdough Climb and other relevant climbs of Denali. In rereading the sketchy accounts of the actual participants in the 1910 climb in the original sources, and those, like Hudson Stuck’s, who claimed to have interviewed all the participants except Lloyd, I was suddenly struck by the fact that not a single one of them even implied that they had reached the North Peak by way of the route that is universally attributed to them today.

11B When I was writing *Cook & Peary*, the Sourdough Climb was just a sideshow to the larger controversies the book sought to resolve. It seemed impossible on the face of it, so I never seriously put it to an exhaustive evidentiary test, as I did Cook’s 1906 summit claim. However, since I didn’t put it to that test, I didn’t dismiss it as an outright fake, either. In rereading the scanty evidence, the curious lack of mention of the consensus route ascribed to them, the most spectacular element of the claims made for them, caused me to do a comparative view of this evidence in detail. Each of the witnesses’ testimonies will be considered in turn.

11C Lloyd’s account that appeared in the *New York Times* has been ignored almost completely since shortly after its first appearance. This was because it quickly developed that some of Lloyd statements in the article conflicted with what he told intimate friends. But his notes, that witnesses said he kept in a small, vest pocket memo book and were reproduced in the *NYTimes* article, or at least expanded from them, made up the bulk of the account the paper printed. That account appears to be too circumstantial to be completely made up in the 55^d between Lloyd’s return to Fairbanks and his account’s publication as a record of the whole expedition. It contains trivial details and daily incidents of little consequence, which are the hallmarks of original diaries recording actual events. So, logically, if not absolutely true, at least some aspects of Lloyd’s story of the climb derived from these notes must be true. In any case, it is, by far, the most circumstantially complete account of the expedition left to us, so it can’t be put aside entirely.

11D Some of its details show direct experience with many of the geographical features along the claimed route, parts of which had never been described or even observed before. It correctly describes these within a reasonable degree of accuracy, as verified by subsequent climbers: [1] that Karstens Ridge is the only practical way to get past the stupendous ice fall coming from the Harper Glacier to the head of the Muldrow; [2] that a traverse to the western side of the Harper Glacier is necessary because the ridge is blocked there by what is now known as Browne Tower, and [3] that a traverse is needed to get around the lower ice fall that lies between it and further progress on the eastern side. The other Sourdough

accounts provide additional details that a serious attempt was made: that the western approach is best, assuming one is aiming for the North Peak and not the South, to get past the upper ice fall, and that there is a pass at the top of the glacier in going this way from which Mt. Foraker first comes into view once the head of it is reached. All of these were unknown in 1910, and even Lloyd's descriptions of the South Peak and the saddle lying between the two peaks is very accurate in most respects.⁶

11E According to his partners' statements (see below), Lloyd never participated in any climbs above "Tunnel Camp" at about 11,000 feet (actually more like 10,700, and so called because they erected their tent in a snow cave there). Even so, the accurate descriptions of the terrain and route, and the events of the climb Lloyd recorded must have come from the men who ventured higher, Pete Anderson, Billy Taylor and Charley McGonagall. Our task is to compare Lloyd's account to those of the climbers themselves to see what, if any, part of Lloyd's account holds up. In what follows, editorial comments are in square brackets; those statements in parentheses are actual parts of the texts as published.

12 Tom Lloyd

12A Because Lloyd was the organizer and wrote the only⁷ full account of the trip (with the assistance of W.F. Thompson, Editor of the *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*), we will consider Lloyd's account first. All quotations are from his story as published. [NYT] For those who wish to read his entire account, it is available online <http://www.sundaymagazine.org/wp-content/uploads/19100605-6-first.pdf> It is also reprinted in Cole, with some slight editing of spellings. After a very circumstantial account of their activities covering February 12 through March 25, we arrive at the critical part of Lloyd's notes. In the excerpts below, especially important points have been highlighted in bold print for future reference.

12B [1910] *March 23* — . . . Charley and Pete are trying out the final upraise to the summits, cutting steps and staking the way. . . . **We cut steps and took the flagpole up toward the summit this morning.** [It was necessary to climb the ridge next to the glacier to get around Harper Ice Fall.]

12C *March 26* — . . . We are going to make our final effort to ascend the summit within the next few days. **We have cut steps and put stakes along up to the 19,000 foot elevation.** [In Cole a note at this point says: "According to Bradford Washburn, the dean of McKinley explorers and scientists, this statement of Lloyd's is "ridiculous!" "In 1947, I talked to Charlie McGonagall at length. **He only cut steps as far as Karstens Ridge, which is at 14,600 feet elevation.** Actually, he cut steps with a coal shovel to make about a 4,000 foot staircase as there is little ice on that ridge. This staircase was kept clear until the day of the climb." [This may be so, but Washburn didn't notice that Lloyd always overestimated his elevations. He places his 11,000 foot camp at 15,000 feet, for instance. So, if his estimate of 19,000 feet is off by the same amount, the elevation would be 15,000 feet; that changes Lloyd's statement

⁶ The directional references in the various accounts refer to the right side of the Harper Glacier, looking up it, as the "west" side, and the left side as the "east." Although the glacier actually runs more east-west by far than north-south, this nomenclature has been preserved to avoid needless confusion. So for "west" read right; for "east" read left.

⁷ Why did none of the others write an account? That's an unanswerable question at this point. Perhaps the answer is no more than the fact that Lloyd, who was the "boss," was already in print by the time the others reached Fairbanks and they didn't want to jeopardize their jobs by showing him up. Two out of three of them worked for Lloyd.

from "ridiculous" to quite reasonable. The top of Karstens Ridge being only 400 feet short of that.]

12D *March 27* — While the boys above us are cutting the final steps to the summits today, Taylor and I go back to Willow Camp for wood. It is a fine day. . . . [As this part of the narrative begins, Lloyd is at what they called Willow Camp, where they gathered wood for fuel at the last timber. Willow camp is said to have been at 2,900 feet elevation.]

12E *April 1* — I started this morning for the summit to join the other boys for the climb. It is getting foggy. I left notices in case anybody should come along the pass. **It snowed a little last night**, and it was as foggy as it could be this morning, but I pulled out so as to leave enough wood here for our use when we return from the summit. This evening I joined the boys in the Tunnel Camp, but it was pretty late in the evening.

12F *April 2* — We left Tunnel Camp at daylight to make the high ridge toward the Coast Summit [South Peak], along which we intended to proceed to the summit. (Note — **There are two summits to Mount McKinley, apparently of equal height, and connected by a "saddle." We climbed them both.**) I might say that **from below at the Tunnel Camp, the summit toward the coast looked to be higher**, and we decided to stick the flag on top of that summit. [Washburn objects that from the position of the Tunnel Camp the South Peak would be invisible. Only at Browne Tower, at the top of Karstens Ridge, are both summits visible, and from there, the North Peak looks higher. However, this is not a strong point because Lloyd goes on to say] **Pete and Charley had been out on the saddle previously, cutting steps and staking the trail and preparing the way so that the flagpole might be dragged to the summit and erected there.** When I reached the Coast Summit, I couldn't find any rocks or any formation in which the flagpole could be placed permanently. **From that summit** it looked as though the North Summit was equally as high as it and **we could see the mountain wall on its right-hand side and a reef of rocks that crossed right over it (the North Summit.)** So we determined that on the morrow we would make our last climb, reach the North Summit, and plant the flag there. [For a view similar to what Lloyd describes, see Fig.1.]

It took us (to reach the South Summit) from daylight until about 3 p.m. and we covered six or seven miles to make that distance of a thousand feet up. [The actual elevation from Tunnel Camp to the South Peak is about 9,000 feet; Lloyd estimated the height of the mountain at 21,000 feet, so "a thousand" seems, therefore, to be a misprint. Perhaps it should have said "ten thousand." The distance from Tunnel Camp to the South Summit is between 7-8 miles, assuming they went up the west side of Harper Glacier. That's a rate of travel of about .66 mph.]

12G *April 3* — This morning **before daylight we climbed to the saddle between McKinley's two peaks**, dragging the flagpole with us. **We had little difficulty in reaching the saddle, as the boys had been there previously and had cut steps, which made the ascent easier. Once there we proceeded to cross the Glacier between the two summits, to the North Summit, where the rocks were.** [This statement is consistent with Lloyd's previous statement that Washburn calls ridiculous, that is, that the prepared trail went farther up than the end of Karstens Ridge.] **The distance from the left, or Coast Summit, to the right or North Summit (zigzagging as we had to go), must be about three miles**, but it is a hard matter to estimate distances up



Figure 1: Denali's North Peak as seen from the summit ridge of the South Peak

in that air. . . . [This is reasonably accurate; the summits are two miles apart in an air line, but Lloyd is talking about actual travel distance on the route they chose.] **When we reached the northern summit we found plenty of rocks there and we erected a monument that will endure as long as the top of the mountain does,** although the rocks were hard for us to dig out in that altitude. **The snow filled in between the rocks, and they were frozen together, but we dug down 15 inches into the rocks until we had found a solid spot,** where there will be no question but that the flagpole will stand, and into it we stuck that flagpole. We tamped it in, and filled in with rocks and built rocks up around it in a substantial, time-enduring monument to a height of fifteen inches above the surface, so that the **flagpole is anchored in thirty inches of solid rock. The flagpole is a straight, seasoned spruce sapling full four inches at the butt and tapering symmetrically to full two and a half inches at the top, and is full fourteen feet long.** The flag attached to it is 6 by 12 feet in size, is an American flag erected by four Americans of Welsh, Scotch, Canadian and Swedish descent, and on the flag written thereon in ink, is the name "E.W. Griffin." To the flagpole we attached four guy ropes, each anchored in the rocks. **The flag was raised at 3.25 p.m. April 3, 1910. A picture of the flag and pole, with Pete Anderson standing by them, was then taken.** (Note - The boys in taking the picture did not pull the slide far enough, being unfamiliar with taking pictures, and it looks as though the picture was taken in a storm, but it was clear on the summit at that time.) On the summit we also left a board from a candle box, and on the board is written: "Lloyd Party, Pioneers of Alaska. [the "Pioneers of Alaska" was a fraternal organization to which Lloyd, McPhee and Peterson belonged] William H. McPhee, Gust Peterson, Pete Anderson, Charles McGonagall,

W.R. Taylor, T.Lloyd." And on the corner of the board, "Date, April 3, 1910." and "Ascended April 3, 1910." Over the face of this board, to protect the writing from the elements, we nailed another board and said, in writing upon it: "Open and look inside. Lloyd party." We nailed those boards to the flagpole. That is the story of the climb.

12H Lloyd made some other statements of possible significance in his rambling account after the end of his notes. He says that they left the summit "in the afternoon"; that they got back from the summit about 10 p.m.; that they placed 100 stakes along the route from Tunnel Camp to the summit and that even though they all wore snow glasses, the glare of the sun off the ice made it very hard on their eyes.

12I Now we will examine the testimony of each of the other three men in Lloyd's party to see what they have to say relevant to the climb. First it must be noted that those three, along with Lloyd, signed an affidavit in Fairbanks on June 11, 1910, in which they swore that all four of them had unfurled the flag on the northern summit of the mountain on April 3, 1910. It said nothing about climbing the taller South Peak.

13 Pete Anderson

13A Pete Anderson can be dispatched quickly. Anderson was one of the men who is credited with raising the flag on the summit of the North Peak. The taciturn Swede made no comments for the record about the climb, though everyone who knew him considered him up to the exploit Lloyd called him "a world's wonder, . . . his endurance seems limitless." According to McGonagall, Anderson carried the butt end of the flagpole the entire distance, with he and Taylor taking turns carrying the tapered end. [see the letter from Francis Farquhar to Terris Moore, in Moore:188]. When asked about it, Anderson just said "better stick to mining," and that was it.

13B Norman Bright, who interviewed Billy Taylor, added in a note that having talked to him and Charley McGonagall, that he "would not be satisfied until I can get over to Nenana to find what Pete Anderson has to say." But apparently, he never did.

14 Billy Taylor

14A The other man said to have reached the summit, Billy Taylor, gave the most extensive interview of any of the three to Norman Bright in 1937. Again, important points from this interview will be highlighted in bold print. Only questions of relevance about the climb are given here, among others of lesser interest. [The entire interview can be read in Bright, Norman, "Billy Taylor, Sourdough," *American Alpine Journal*, 1939, pp.274-286]

14B *What sort was [Lloyd]? He was fine in his way, but he was lookin' for too much fame. He conflicted his stories by telling his intimate friends he didn't climb it and told others he was at the top. We didn't get out till June and, then, they didn't believe any of us had climbed it. . . .* He was the head of the party and we never dreamed he wouldn't give a straight story.

14C *Did you have any special high altitude rations?* No. Just bacon and beans. Had doughnuts on the highest. **That's all we took up with us — and hot chocolate — a thermos bottle apiece. Just took a half a dozen doughnuts in a sack and started out. I had three left when I got back. That is, from the 11,000 ft. level.** Of course up to that time we used caribou meat from the country. ["doughnuts" were a standard Alaskan high energy trail food. They contained a lot of sugar, even more grease, and for trail use often included "extras" like dried fruit, nuts and chunks of cooked meat. They resisted freezing and could be munched on the move.]

14D *Did you, like Stuck, make pemmican?* No, we just had steaks and stews. **They took two weeks on the trip that we made in eighteen hours. No, a month, I think. Well, we made it all in one day, by God! Just breaking day, a little after three, when we started, and I know it was dark — getting dusk — when we got back. I know it was an even eighteen hours.** I don't know the exact time. We never paid no attention to that. [Later in the interview Taylor said "We made the descent down to 11,000 ft. in 18 hours," but he must have meant the ascent *and* the descent, which would be consistent with the answer to this question, because he adds "and on the day of the fourth came down to where Lloyd was camped — the Willow Camp."]

14E *What kind of mountaineering and personal equipment did you take along?* Gumshoes. **We put on moccasins when we put on our creepers . . . and took our climbing poles and creepers and walked right over everything and forgot about steps.** Carried knapsacks, but we had nothing to pack but a little grub, thermos bottle, rope, candles, camera.

14F *What do you consider the toughest part of the climb?* **From the bottom to the Grand Basin to the top of the North Peak. You come to places like a knife blade and you can see down for thousands of feet below you. It's a steep climb from 11,000 feet, too, but you haven't that steep ridge to contend with.** [The Grand Basin was a name applied to the Harper Glacier before it was named for Walter Harper. The logical inference is that "bottom" refers to the bottom of the prepared staircase, or Tunnel Camp.]

14G *Why didn't you use climbing ropes?* **Didn't need 'em.**

14H *What did you leave at the top?* **A 14-ft. pole 4 inches at the top end — dry spruce. We packed it and pulled it up. Where we couldn't pack it, we pulled it up on a line. And a little piece of box-board, about 8 inches square, and we put all the names of the party on it. . . .** (Billy told me they chose the Northern Summit to put the flagpole on because the coast [south] summit could not be seen from Fairbanks.) [McGonagall said they left their coal shovel on the top. [see below: §16K]]

14I *Did you write anything else?* **Yes, the date of the ascent.** [Notice this all agrees very closely with Lloyd, except that he says the flagpole was 4 inches at the bottom. [§12G]]

14J *What was there on top?* Little pinnacles of rock from four to six inches high. But **generally speaking, it was just a mass of ice.** [Lloyd says there were plenty of rocks on the top. [§12G]]

14K *Did you build a cairn?* **Oh, yes, we dug down in the ice with a little axe we had and built a pyramid of 15 inches high and we dug down in the ice so the pole had a support of about 30 inches and it was held by four guy-lines — just cotton ropes. We fastened the guy-lines to little spurs of rocks.** [This agrees almost exactly with Lloyd's account. The close agreement might be explained, however, by the fact that Billy Taylor was known to have a copy of the *Times* story in his cabin.]

14L *How long did you stay on the top?* **Between two and two and a half hours, if I remember rightly.**

14M *Did you recognize any points?* No. At first it was fine and you could see streaks of timber and the creeks and rivers. **But on the first trip — April 1st — we had to stop four hours from the top. Had to turn back — saw a storm coming. Stormed all that night and all the next day.** [Notice

that Lloyd says it just snowed a little April 1st. In Lloyd's account [§12F], they climbed the South Peak on the next day, April 2.]

14N *Did you know the other summit was higher?* **Looking across the two of them, it didn't seem to have any more elevation, but they claim it is 300 ft. higher.** [The difference in the two summit heights is more like 850 feet; this is clearly discernible from the North Peak.]

14O *About how far is it between the two peaks?* **Between two and three miles somewhere.** [The air line distance is about two miles.]

14P *What was the reason that you did not climb the South Peak?* **We set out to climb the North Peak. That's the toughest peak to climb — the north.** [In the first account of the climb published in the *Fairbanks Daily Times* on April 12, 1910, Lloyd is quoted as saying both peaks were climbed and that "the journey over to the second one, across an immense glacier, was about the toughest part of the trip." Actually, it would be less of a journey over the same glacier than going to the South Peak.]

14Q *When did McGonagall and Lloyd learn of your success?* (Taylor says that only he and Pete Anderson reached the top. McGonagall was outdistanced around 18,000 or 19,000 ft. while Lloyd did not go beyond the 11,000-ft. level.) McGonagall was at the 11,000-ft. level the night of the 3rd. We saw Lloyd the next day — the 4th. [This indicates Lloyd was at the Willows Camp, two down from Tunnel Camp.]

15 Charley McGonagall

15A The last of the climbers, and the last to die, McGonagall, never gave a sit-down interview, but many people talked with him over the years and tried to draw him out on the famous climb, his former partner, Harry Karstens, among them. Probably the most successful was Francis P. Farquhar, Editor of the *Sierra Club Bulletin* and later, the *AAJ*. In 1948 he had a conversation with McGonagall at his home in Fairbanks, accompanied by Harry Karstens. Karstens said afterward that he had never known Charley to speak so freely about the climb, even to him. [These excerpts come from Farquhar's article "The Exploration and First Ascents of Mount McKinley," *Sierra Club Bulletin*, No.34 (June 1949), pp.105-106.] McGonagall's name is spelled various ways in the sources; it is standardized here in its most commonly related form. McGonagall's account:

15B Billy and Pete were skookum,⁸ and I was pretty good in those days. **Lloyd was too old and too fat — he never got above 11,000 feet.** The only reason we climbed the mountain was to prove Doc Cook hadn't done it and we could. By just looking at the mountain we knew he was a liar. We proved we climbed it by setting up the pole. **We wouldn't have gone to the other peak even if we'd known it was higher, because you couldn't have seen the pole if we'd put it on the South Peak. We put it on the North Peak because we thought it could be seen from Fairbanks. No, I didn't go clear to the top — why should I? I'd finished my turn carrying the pole before we got there.⁹ Taylor and Pete finished the job — I sat down and rested, then went back to camp. Sure, I could have gone up, but what for? The others had the pole and didn't need any help.**

⁸This is a Chinook word meaning Strong, Powerful or Brave.

⁹McGonagall was not always consistent in his remarks. For instance, he told Norman Bright he did go to the top.



Figure 2: McGonagall and Lloyd (right) in their climbing outfits

Farquhar continues:

15C Harry [Karstens] had told me that Anderson had made a second climb nearly to the summit after the party had come a long way down. We asked Charley about this.

15D “No,” he said, “that wasn’t it at all. It was this way. **After we had come down to our base camp and Lloyd had gone out, he sent word that most of the pictures we had taken were no good. So Pete and Billy and I went back up and took some more pictures at the place between the two peaks where you can look over to Foraker.**”

15E “Where did you camp?” I asked.

15F “**We didn’t camp — we just kept going for three days — it was light enough, and we were all skookum.**”

15G The following day I found in the *Fairbanks Daily Times* of June 9, 1910, corroboration of this second climb, an event that seems to have hitherto escaped notice. “**Lloyd had asked the boys to get as near the summit as necessary to get some good pictures,**” says the *Times*, “**and as they figured they could not get any nearer to the summit than the top, they just kept on climbing until there was no more mountain left to climb.**” It wasn’t exactly like that, according to McGonagall, **but the fact remains that all three did make a second climb and reached Denali Pass, 18,000 feet.** [The full published account from the newspaper can be found in Moore:74-75.]

15H In the letter to Terris Moore [§13A] Farquhar added some details from his interview with McGonagall and some further contradictions: “He said that Tom Lloyd never got beyond the ‘Willows.’ Billy Taylor and Anderson carried the pole up to the col below the North Peak. Charlie did not make the final climb because, as he said, it was not his turn to carry the pole. The Swede carried the big end all the way, and Charlie and Billy took turns carrying the other end. A little below the peak Charlie dropped out because ‘it was not my turn’, so Billy and the Swede were the only ones to go to the top. I said some of the stories were that you Charlie, were not feeling well. ‘That was not it at all. I was feeling perfectly OK, but it was not my turn, so why should I go up to the top just to say I’d been there.’ Continuing, I said, ‘The newspapers say there was a second trip up to the col and that you came down after three days. How did you carry your blankets and food all the way up and down in such a short time?’ ‘Why the hell would we take blankets? It was broad daylight, and we were skookum.’ I asked him if they climbed the other peak, and he said no.”

16 Bradford Washburn

16A Another account involving McGonagall should also be considered here briefly, that of the Sourdough Climb in Bradford Washburn’s book, *Mount McKinley, the Conquest of Denali*. [Abrams, 1991] It appeared in Chapter 5. He recounts the whole affair and says that his account is partially based on an interview he did with McGonagall “filled out by lengthy chats with Harry Karstens, who had heard the whole story firsthand from all the participants.” Unfortunately, while there are quoted remarks throughout, Washburn doesn’t say if the quotes come from McGonagall, himself, or if it is Karstens speaking or relating what McGonagall said to him. Also, remember, even though McGonagall had once been Karstens’ business partner, Karstens said McGonagall didn’t usually hold forth on details concerning the climb. [§15A]

16B Washburn had been associated with the mountain since he did the early aerial survey of the Alaska Range sponsored by the National Geographic Society in the mid-1930s. He climbed the mountain three times, in 1942 and 1947 by way of the Muldrow Glacier, the way Browne and Stuck approached it along the route pioneered by the Lloyd party. Washburn pioneered the first new route, up the West Buttress in 1951, which is now the standard route climbers follow today. He was considered the authority on all things Denali during his lifetime, but he was not infallible.

16C He was also a Frederick Cook hater; he congratulated me on my book which, in his words, “left Dr. Cook right where he belongs: at the gateway to Hell!!” [Note on letter from the author, dated June 18, 2004, and returned to me with this comment written on it. Possession of author.]

16D The year and place of his interview with McGonagall Washburn doesn’t state in his chapter, but it must be the one referred to above (§12C) as having occurred in 1947. In any case, I was unable to find any publication of any other part of the interview by Washburn in his voluminous published writings on the history of the mountain.

16E Washburn was fixated on Denali and steeped in its history. He once pointed out to me that he was born on the same day of the year that Hudson Stuck completed his climb of Denali (June 7), and just 2 actual days after Lloyd’s story appeared in the *N.Y.Times*.

16F Washburn states as facts that the three climbers left at 3 a.m., it took the three climbers 3 hours to reach the top of their staircase on Karstens Ridge from their 11,000 foot camp, that they traversed the lower plateau of the Harper Glacier at 15,000 feet and then went directly up the formidable Sourdough Gully to reach the ridgeline at 18,200 feet. He further claims that they came to the outcrop of rocks at 18,700 feet, or 770 vertical feet below the summit, but more than that in linear distance, and there all three helped erect the flagpole. Then Taylor and Anderson went on the last “several hundred yards” to the summit, while McGonagall stayed behind. When asked why he stayed behind, Washburn quotes him as saying, “My job was to haul the pole, and that was as far as it would go.

Why go farther?” But that’s not what he told Farquhar and Karstens, or Norman Bright (§§13B&15B).

16G Washburn goes on to say of their return, “That they descended the gully with no rope, no ice axes, and nothing but “creepers” on their rubber-soled “shoe-packs” was a miracle — but they returned safely to camp at nine o’clock that night, after eighteen hours on the trail.”

16H The timeline jibes closely with other testimony, but the Sourdoughs didn’t wear “shoe-packs” on the climb above Karstens Ridge — they wore moccasins when they put on their ice-irons (§§14E&17B). In any case, if only because of the distance of time, on an evidentiary basis, Washburn’s account can’t be considered¹⁰ on a par with Hudson Stuck’s (§§17B-17E below) as a third party account.

16I Considering the inconsistencies of McGonagall’s recorded statements, and their known variance with some verifiable details, like the shoe-packs, it’s possible that the Sourdough Gully route originated with Harry Karstens.

16J According to Waterman, “As for Karstens, no interviewer recorded why he climbed Denali [with Stuck], but his family, on down to his great grandson, believe that in addition to seeking a job with the [proposed Mt. McKinley National] park, Karstens went in order to salvage McGonagall’s reputation and take care of his friend. In other words, if the Seventy-Mile Kid [Karstens’s nickname] could spot the flagpole that his old-timer partner lugged up — the flagpole that the [Browne-Parker] expedition couldn’t find with all their highfalutin cameras and field glasses — the nosy newspapermen and Cheechako doubters of the world would stop impugning his friend’s honesty.” [CD:88] Perhaps that might have also been a motive to enlarge on his friend’s accomplishment by specifying such an impossible route as Sourdough Gully as the route of the climb. Although this is only speculation, I could find no one, not even Brian Okonek or the historian at Denali National Park, who had a clue about who first advocated this route or when it became mountaineering orthodoxy.

16K Finally, Hudson Stuck, after summiting Denali in 1913, said that McGonagall had told him that they had left their coal shovel on the summit of the North Peak, but didn’t mention the flagpole.

¹⁰Despite his reputation, Washburn was human and did make mistakes, some of them surprisingly elementary. On the photograph in this book that he uses to illustrate the Sourdough Climb [see Fig.3], he shows the point on the ridgeline he says the Sourdoughs reached after climbing the Sourdough Gully and assigns it an altitude of 19,300 feet, although in the written account he says it was 18,200 feet. On the same photo he identifies the place where he says they raised the flagpole, and labels the elevation there as 19,800 feet; in his text he puts it at 18,700. The summit is marked 19,470 feet, the Flag Rocks being given an elevation higher than the actual summit! The first two figures are clearly incorrect. Also, in Stuck’s account he says there were no rocks on the actual summit [§19C], as does Taylor [§14], and that the flagpole was raised in the last outcrop just below the summit because of this by only Taylor and Anderson. This is the reverse of Washburn’s version, in which the flagpole is raised first, then the summit is obtained, and he has all three men at the raising, when McGonagall, from whom he says this story came, made it clear that he stayed behind and did not reach the summit (except to Norman Bright!). [§§14Q&15B] This is illogical because the climbers wouldn’t have known the rocks Washburn identifies were “the outcrop closest to the summit” until they had been on the summit, and Lloyd, in his account, noted the “reef of rocks running right over the summit” which are much closer to the summit than the Flag Rocks. [§12F] The rocks Washburn identifies as those closest to the summit cannot be correct; they are only the last large outcrop of rocks closest to the summit on the eastern approach along Pioneer Ridge, the traditional route of the Sourdoughs. All of this is at variance to Washburn’s account. Authority though he was, Washburn made other unforced errors. In his last book, *The Dishonorable Dr. Cook*, he even misidentified the location of Dr. Cook’s so-called Fake Peak on one of his own photographs, something Dennis Rawlins caught and corrected with Washburn’s admirably ready assent. [See www.dioi.org/j936.pdf = DIO 9.3 p.142.]

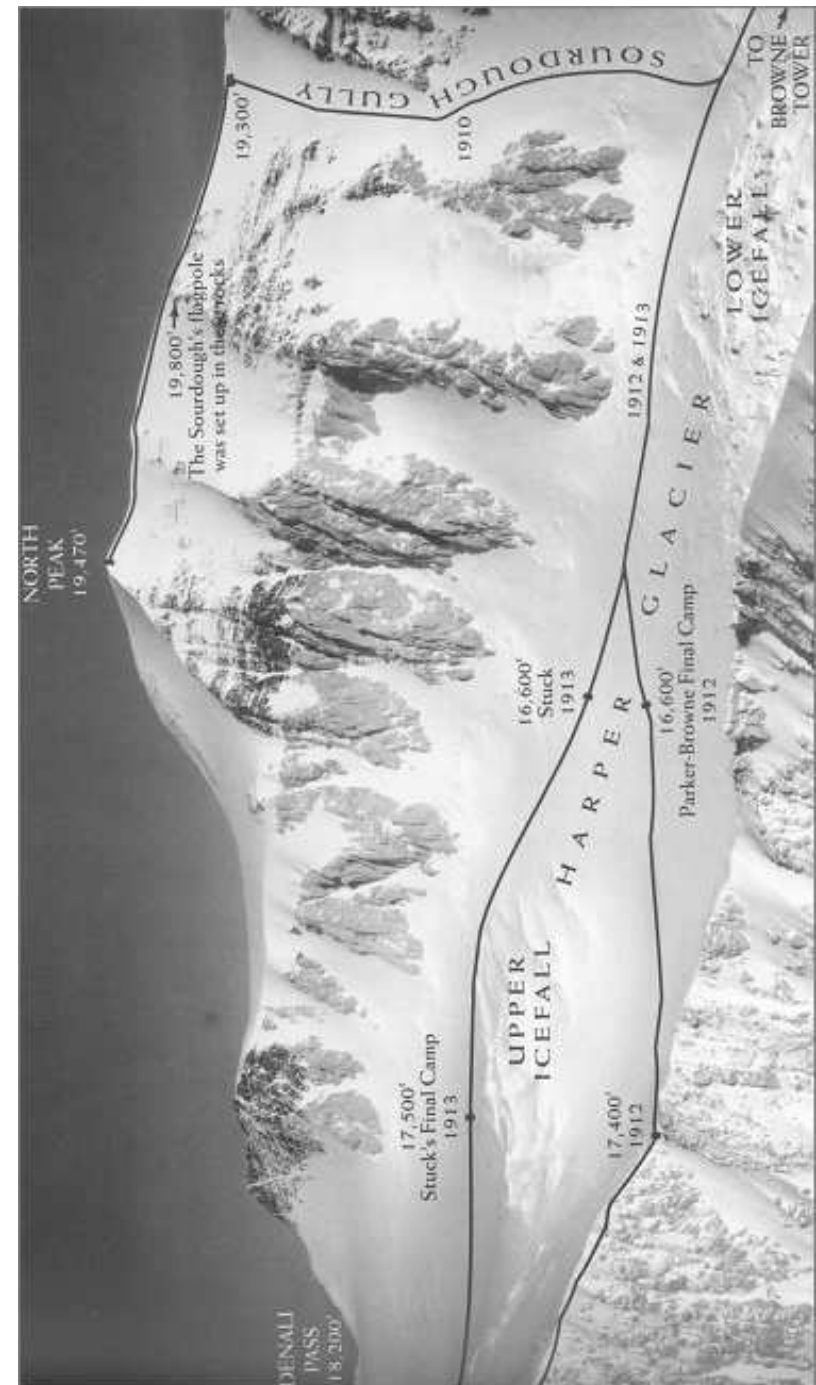


Figure 3: Washburn’s photo of the North Peak showing routes of the early climbing parties

17 Hudson Stuck

17A Although the excerpts above represent all the critical evidence from specified participants in the climb, many others talked to the men over the course of the years. There are many second or third hand accounts like the one in Grant Pearson's book, *My Life of High Adventure*, that garble the facts badly, so they are of no consequence. Among these secondary accounts, some are of value, though. The most important is that of Hudson Stuck, who gave this account of the Lloyd party's ascent in his book documenting the first recognized ascent to the South Peak in 1913, *The Conquest of Denali*, published the next year:

17B . . . On 25th March the party traversed the glacier and reached its head with dogs and supplies. **A camp was made [Tunnel Camp] on the ridge, while further prospecting was carried on toward the upper glacier. This was the farthest point that Lloyd reached.** On 10th April, [sic] Taylor, Anderson, and McGonagall set out about two in the morning with great climbing-irons strapped to their moccasins and hooked pike-poles in their hands. **Disdaining the rope and cutting no steps, it was "every man for himself," with reliance solely upon the crampons. They went up the ridge to the Grand Basin, crossed the ice to the North Peak, and proceeded to climb it, carrying the fourteen-foot flagstaff with them. Within perhaps five hundred feet of the summit, McGonagall, outstripped by Taylor and Anderson, and fearful of the return over the slippery ice-incrusted rocks if he went farther, turned back, but Taylor and Anderson reached the top (about twenty thousand feet above sea level) and firmly planted the flagstaff, which is there yet.**

17C This is the true narrative of a most extraordinary feat, unique — the writer has no hesitation in claiming — in all the annals of mountaineering. **He has been at the pains of talking with every member of the actual climbing party with a view of sifting the matter thoroughly. . . .**

17D In that account [published in the *New York Times*] Lloyd is made to claim unequivocally that he himself reached both summits of the mountain. . . . **As a matter of fact, Lloyd himself reached neither summit, nor was much above the glacier floor; and the south or coast summit, the higher of the two, was not attempted by the party at all. There is no question that the party could have climbed the South Peak, though by reason of its greater distance it is safe to say that it could not have been reached, as the North Peak was, in one march from the ridge camp. It must have involved a camp in the Grand Basin with all the delay and labor of relaying the stuff up there. But the men who accomplished the astonishing feat of climbing the North Peak, in one almost superhuman march from the saddle of the Northeast Ridge, could most certainly have climbed the South Peak too.**

17E They did not attempt it for two reasons, first, because they wanted to plant their fourteen-foot flagstaff where it could be seen through a telescope from Fairbanks one hundred and fifty miles away, as they fondly supposed, and, second, because not until they had reached the summit of the North Peak did they realize that the South Peak was higher. They told the writer that upon their return to the floor of the upper glacier they were greatly disappointed to find that their flagstaff was not visible to them. It is, indeed, only just visible with the naked eye from certain points on the upper glacier and quite invisible at any lower or more distant point. Walter Harper has particularly keen sight, and he was

well up the Grand Basin, at nearly seventeen thousand feet altitude, sitting and scanning the sky-line of the North Peak, seeking for the pole, when he caught sight of it and pointed it out. The writer was never sure that he saw it with the naked eye, though Karstens and Tatum did so as soon as Walter pointed it out, but through the field glasses it was plain and prominent and unmistakable. [Stuck:169-173]:

17F Notice, nothing in Stuck's account is in serious conflict with the climbers' own accounts *except* the route he ascribes to them: "They went up the ridge to the Grand Basin, crossed the ice to the North Peak, and proceeded to climb it, carrying the fourteen-foot flagstaff with them. . . . in one almost superhuman march from the saddle of the Northeast Ridge. . . [U]pon their return to the upper glacier. . . ." The Northeast Ridge is now called Karstens Ridge. The upper glacier is now called the Harper Glacier; it fills the saddle between the two peaks, as distinct from the upper reaches of the Muldrow Glacier. In mountaineering terms a "saddle" is the lowest point on a ridge between two summits. That point is a few hundred feet below what is now called Denali Pass. And notice that they returned to the upper glacier after the climb.

17G Here are the things we can learn by comparing all of these first hand accounts. First, it seems clear that Lloyd never climbed above the 11,000 foot camp. That part of his own account is false. Also, his claim to have been on the South Peak summit is refuted by all of his partners. Taylor says that on the day Lloyd claims they made the true summit of Denali, April 2, there was an all-day storm (§14M). And none of the three climbers claimed they climbed the South Peak in their affidavit, and those who left testimony positively denied it, each saying they climbed only the North Peak.

17H Still, it is interesting to read Lloyd's comment for April 2, that upon reaching the South Peak, "I couldn't find any rocks or any formation in which the flagpole could be placed permanently. From that summit, we could see the mountain wall on its right-hand side and a reef of rocks that crossed right over it . . . so we determined that on the morrow we would make our last climb, reach the North Summit, and plant the flag there." [§12F] This is an entirely accurate description [see Fig.1]. However, such a view could be had from the upper reaches of Karstens Ridge as well, and reported to Lloyd by those who cleared the staircase up to Browne Tower, near where the traverse of Harper Glacier would begin. So, from the evidence, it appears the rest did not, and did not consider, trying to climb the South Peak, and the reason for doing so seems to be what Lloyd, Taylor, McGonagall and Stuck all said in one manner or another: the rocks on the North Peak presented the best place to erect the flagpole permanently where it would have been easiest to see.

17I The South Peak isn't visible at all from the closest settlement to the mountain at that time, the mining camp at Kantishna, 25 miles off. And the flagpole was the crux of the bet made in McPhee's saloon. It was to be the proof of their accomplishment. It also appears that the climbers weren't certain until they arrived on the North Peak that the South Peak was really the highest, even though Lloyd states that he knew that fact in his narrative. [§12F] Washburn says that at the first place you can see both peaks, Browne Tower, the North Peak does appear to be higher. [*idem*] Lloyd may have learned from C.E.Davidson, the surveyor he started out with, that the South Peak was the true summit, no matter how it looked from the ridge, or he could have learned it from Charles Sheldon or Harry Karstens, who had earlier looked over the possible routes up the Muldrow Glacier thinking they might try an ascent themselves.

17J As to his false claims, perhaps Lloyd, who was known for tall stories, believed that with the flag pole in sight and his bet won, he could embellish his exploit any way he wanted, claiming the South Peak as well, and that, he, himself, had been on both of them along with his skookum companions.

17K Before puzzling over the incomplete testimony left by the eyewitnesses, one other point must be made. Although we have these statements from the men who made the claim

and those who interviewed them, it is singularly remarkable that not one of the participants ever drew a map of their route, and none but Lloyd ever wrote his own account of the climb. Possibly, outside of Lloyd, none of them were functionally literate (as Westman thinks likely). But even if that's the reason, why did none of their interrogators, who purported to be so interested in the climb, ask any of them to indicate their route on a map, or encourage them to write their own account of it? What possible reason could *they* have had for not doing so? I asked this question of many people who were familiar with the Sourdough Climb, and none could give a reasonable answer, nor does Waterman in his book.

18 Logic and the Flagpole

18A It really does all boil down to that flagpole. And it is simply illogical that all the participants would claim that they erected the pole on the North Peak if that claim was not true. Lloyd tells in great detail the lengths the men went to, to make sure the flagpole would endure at least long enough for someone to confirm its existence, even if not “as long as the top of the mountain.” The flagpole was to be the proof of the deed, the indispensable detail in their story. On the other hand, to make such a claim, to identify exactly where to look for it, while knowing they never had put it there, would provide sure-fire negative proof they had not made the climb.

18B They knew that Browne and Parker were intending to attempt the mountain from the south that very year to prove Cook hadn't climbed it, and that another climb sponsored by the Mazama Club of Seattle was outfitting for a similar attempt to prove Cook did. All that had appeared in the newspapers as far back as October 1909. And by May, even before Lloyd's full account was published, news of their imminent arrival was all over the Alaskan newspapers. Sometime in the summer of 1910 then, there might be two independent expeditions on the mountain in a position to confirm or deny their claim of placing the flagpole where they said they did.

19 The Flagpole Sighting

19A Neither of the 1910 expeditions got anywhere near a position from which they could catch sight of a flagpole placed anywhere on Pioneer Ridge. They approached the mountain as Cook had, from Ruth Glacier, and never reached an altitude or distance within range of even powerful binoculars to see an object only 4 inches wide. But by that Fall, the conflicting statements made by Tom Lloyd and certain aspects of his published account, not to mention lack of photographic documentation of the climb, made it generally doubted, even in Alaska, as we have seen. And as I pointed out in my rebuttal [§7H], Browne and Parker on their 1912 climb on the same route as the Sourdoughs, said they searched for it with powerful binoculars, but failed to see the flagpole.

19B That was how the matter stood until June of 1913, when Archdeacon Hudson Stuck's party returned to the Kantishna mining camps and announced that they had spotted the flagpole on the North Peak while resting at an elevation of about 17,000 feet. Here's how Stuck described the sighting in his article for *Scribner's Magazine*:

19C While we were resting, on our way to the last camp, sitting on the glacier, now enjoying the beautiful turquoise blue of the sérac and now gazing at the sombre pinnacles of the North Peak, we fell to talking about the pioneer climbers of this mountain, who claimed to have set a flagstaff near the North Peak's summit; as to which feat a great deal of incredulity has existed in Alaska, not without some reason; and we renewed our determination that if the weather served, when we had ascended the South Peak and reached our goal, we would climb the North Peak also, to seek for traces of this

earliest exploit on Denali. All at once Walter [Harper] cried out, “I see the flagstaff!” eagerly pointing to the rocky peak nearest the summit, for the summit itself is covered with snow. Karstens, looking where he pointed, saw it also, and, whipping out the field-glasses, one by one we all looked and all saw it distinctly, standing out against the sky. Through the glasses it rose sturdy and strong, one side covered with crusted snow; and we were greatly rejoiced that we could carry down confirmation of the matter. It was no longer necessary to climb the North Peak. One would like to tell the laboriously unraveled story of this extraordinary ascent; as a tour de force of “sour-dough” mountaineering it is certainly unique in climbing annals. The bare fact is all that can be stated here: That in 1910 three miners of the Kantishna — Anderson, Taylor, and McGonagall — members of an expedition organized by Tom Lloyd, who had never been on a snow mountain before, without ropes or any special equipment save enormous climbing-irons strapped under their moccasins, carried a fourteen-foot flagstaff up twenty thousand feet and planted it so firmly that it stands there yet [Hudson Stuck, “The Ascent of Denali,” *Scribner's Magazine*, Vol.54 #5 (November, 1913), p. 546].

19D Stuck's account of the one and only witnessed sighting of the flagpole, is confirmed by an examination of the diary of each of the four climbers in Stuck's party. Here are the entries for June 3, 1913:

19E Walter Harper: *While resting we began to talk about the flag staff that was supposed to have been put up on the north peak of Denali by Anderson and Taylor, and as we were talking about it I suddenly looked up the ridge that was running down the north peak and to our great surprise I saw it standing out against the blue sky. The pole was about twelve to fourteen feet long. It has been there for three years.* [A transcript of Harper's diary was included in the paperback reprint of Stuck's book issued by The Mountaineers, Seattle, 1977.]

19F Harry Karstens: *Windy and cold. Moved camp very near to top of 1st Serack making 2 trips very near 17000 ft. basin where Parker climbed from though something must have been wrong to climb from there “Hurrah” everyone sees flag staff on North Peak Perfectly clear through glasses* [Bradford Washburn notes this was probably at an elevation of 16,400 feet “at the foot of the great granite crags of the North Peak.”] [A transcript of Karstens' diary is printed in the 1969 number of *AAJ*, pp.339-348].

19G Robert Tatum: *We were sitting resting about half way to our new camp. Archdeacon mentioned the fact if the flag staff were up it would be on one of the lower peaks. Then W. cried out “I see it.” Then Mr.K saw it and with the glasses the four of us saw it. This verifies all and we will not have to climb the North peak. We moved further on and pitched camp at 16800.* [a digitized copy of Tatum's diary is available at the U. of Tennessee, Knoxville library website <https://www.lib.utk.edu/special/featured-collections/robert-tatum/>]

19H Hudson Stuck: *While we sat there, Walter cried: “I see the flagpole,” pointing to a peak just below the highest point of the great N. ridge. Then Karstens saw it, and getting out the field glasses it stood out plain and unmistakable to all. It has weathered the storms of three years, and I am very much pleased indeed to be able to carry down confirmation of the exploit of Taylor and Anderson (not Lloyd).* [Stuck's diary is held by the Archives of the University of Alaska, Fairbanks.]

19I Despite all the previous doubts, despite all the fantastic difficulty of their ascribed route, despite their lack of any photographic proof, climbing experience or seemingly necessary equipment, the Stuck Party's sighting has been the linchpin of belief for those who wish to believe, despite the Browne-Parker statement that they had carefully looked for the flagpole, without seeing it¹¹ [Browne:341].

¹¹There were several subsequent claims to have sighted the flagpole as late as 1921, but all were by lone individuals without witnesses or other corroboration.



Figure 4: June 3 entry from Tatum's diary.

20 The Farsighted Walter Harper

20A Could Harper have seen such a small object at such a distance with the naked eye? According to the eyewitnesses, the position of the sighting was along Stuck's known route west of the lower ice fall on the Harper Glacier. The route is shown on Fig.3. At this point, the Stuck party was about 6/10ths of a mile from any point on the summit ridge of the North Peak where the flagpole might have been. Could Harper have seen it without binoculars? I put this question to Dennis Rawlins; here are his findings:

20B DR: "For PERFECT vision (1/10000 radian discrimination) & seeing conditions, the 4-inch wide flagpole base would be 1/3 of an arcminute wide (or 1/10000 rad) at a distance of 0.6 miles or closer, and so MIGHT be discerned without telescopic aid. But with binoculars of say, 6x, it would be 2 arcmin wide, which is doable. Against a bright sky, it would probably be visible if only barely."¹²

20C So, in a word, the answer is "yes."

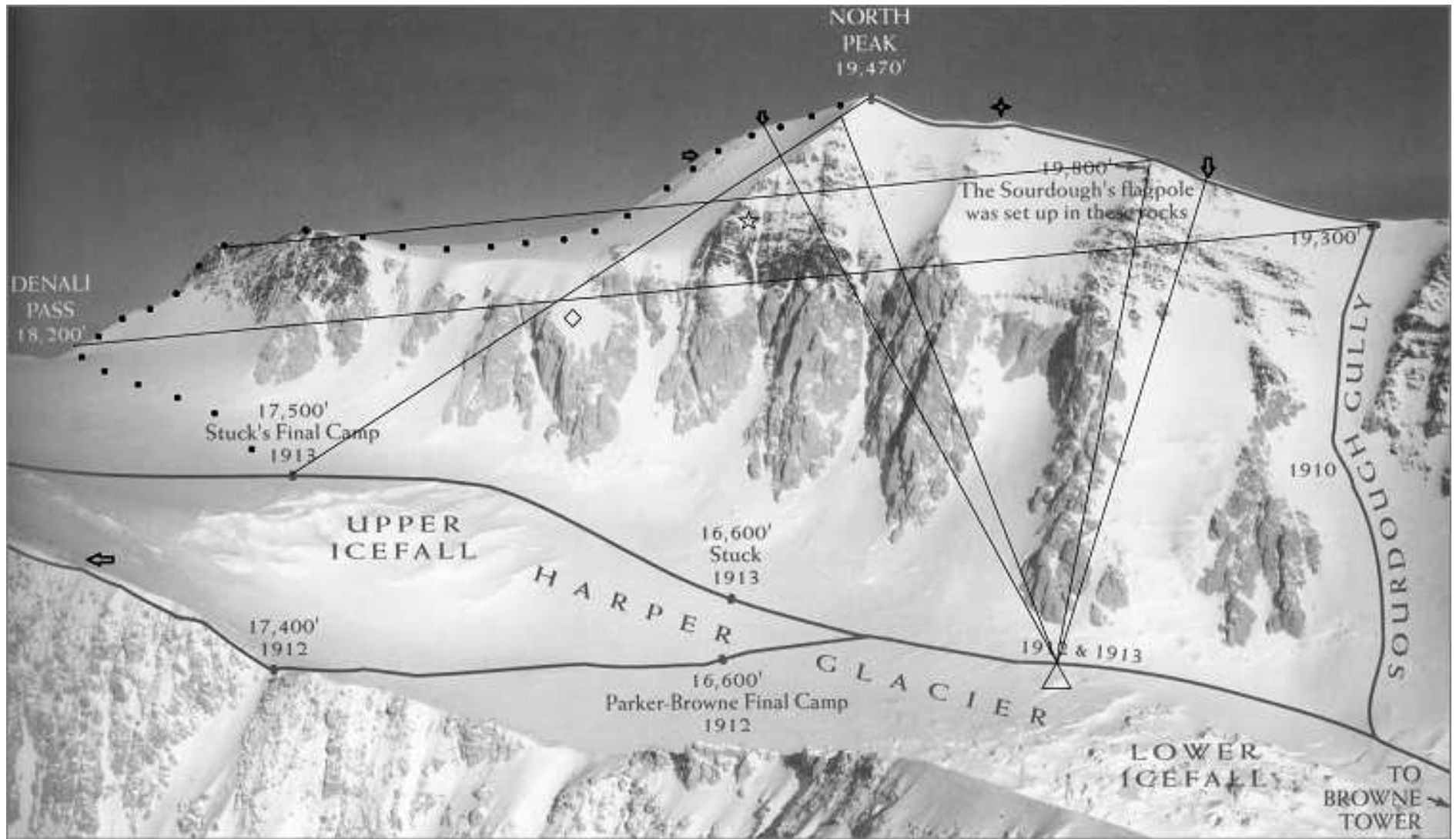
21 Alternative Explanations

21A Various opinions have been advanced to explain Browne and Parker's failure to see the pole in 1912. Some in Alaska thought it was a conspiracy to discredit Pioneer Alaskans. Stuck sought to squash this theory in his 1914 book. He attributed their failure to it being so difficult to see with the naked eye and not knowing where to look, even though Browne had stated they searched for it methodically with "powerful binoculars." [§19I] [Stuck:172-174]

¹²Multiple evidences for 1/10000 radians as human vision's limit are presented by DR in *Griffith Observer* 2020 January [www.dioi.org/g841.pdf] p.16; also in www.dioi.org/ad.pdf. (For the human eye's 6 mm pupil-diameter and maximum light-sensitivity at 6000 angstroms: 6000 angstroms/6 mm = 1/10000.) This limit was discovered 2300^y ago (c.280 BC) by vision-specialist & 1st heliocentrist-astronomer Aristarchos of Samos: www.dioi.org/au.pdf, §§B2-B3.

Browne's route took him farther away, however, because after passing the lower ice fall, he crossed to the eastern side of Harper Glacier. Browne doesn't give any way to estimate just where he made his observations. He implies it was about perpendicular to the North Summit, but he gives no reliable altitude. Most of his estimates of various altitudes, like Lloyd's and Stuck's, were consistently high. Right opposite the peak along his route, he would have been at about 18,000 feet. From there he would have been about 1.4 miles from the North Peak's summit ridge, and could not have seen the flagpole with the unaided eye. [§20B]

21B Waterman says in his book that Brian Okonek believed Stuck had been mistaken and that he mistook some natural feature, such as an iced-over rock wall, or that in their oxygen starved state they just imagined they saw it. He also cites the belief of Mark Westman, a park service ranger who has climbed Denali along seven routes, that the sighting was "a conspiracy of Alaskans incensed by Cheechako outsiders," who as proud Pioneers validated the Sourdoughs so that it "ensured that Alaskans fully 'owned' Denali," and that the Stuck sighting was "concocted to refute the outsider 'Eggheads' in 1912, who claimed that they didn't see the flagpole." [CD:91-92] These are similar to my suppositions [§7J], and the last is not as outlandish as it might at first seem.



Use this Centerfold, adapted from Washburn (Fig.3, incl. all his labels and solid-line suggested paths), to follow the discussions at §§29&30. Azimuth of camera-aim is about 300°.

21C In 2005 I made a camping trip through Alaska and often ran into just this attitude, even on this short visit of less than a month. I overheard many remarks dismissing residents from “the lower 48” that implied that they were soft and didn’t know what hardship was. Anyone, it seemed, who had endured one Alaskan winter believed that feat conferred upon him some sort of superiority no one from “Outside” could come up to. I don’t know if they all are still “killing their own moose meat,” but I can tell you it seemed like every road sign or other stationary object in Alaska was full of bullet holes.

21D Although Karstens once called Stuck “an absolute parasite and liar” after he fell out with him after the 1913 climb, all four diaries would have to be coordinated and forged to include the records they contain of the sighting of June 3. That seems very unlikely.

21E What is most curious about the records of the Stuck sighting is that nowhere, not in any of the witnesses’ diary entries, not in any of their subsequent statements, do any of them give the exact location of the flagpole. Karstens comes closest: “the rocky peak nearest the summit,” and Harper says it was on “the ridge running down the north peak,” but there are *three* such ridges, and a number of “rocky peaks” near the summit. Why did they not say *exactly* where it was seen? Why did they not mark the place they saw it on a map? This lack of specificity legitimately raises suspicions that Westman’s conspiracy theory might have some basis in fact. [§21B]

21F Even if these suspicions can be put aside, the sighting by Stuck’s party must be weighed against all the other fantastic elements of the accepted version of the climb. But what if some of the most fantastic elements could be eliminated?

22 An Alternate Route to Explore

22A As I said, the most interesting part of a comparison of all the primary testimonies, outside of Washburn’s, is that not a one of them supports, or even hints at, the Sourdoughs’ route ascribed to them today. And even Washburn does not quote anything definite from McGonagall on the actual route taken. Consider those descriptions again:

Lloyd: “This morning before daylight we climbed to the saddle between McKinley’s two peaks We had little difficulty in reaching the saddle, as the boys had been there previously cutting steps, which made the ascent easier. Once there we proceeded to cross the Glacier between the two summits, to the North Summit, where the rocks were.”

Taylor described his route as: “From the bottom to the Grand Basin to the top of the North Peak. You come to places like a knife blade and you can see down for thousands of feet below you. It’s a steep climb from 11,000 ft., too, but you haven’t that steep ridge to contend with.”

McGonagall didn’t describe the route in detail at all, only saying he stopped to rest and returned to camp alone without actually reaching the summit.

Stuck: “They went up the ridge to the Grand Basin, crossed the ice to the North Peak, and proceeded to climb it. . . . in one almost superhuman march from the saddle of the Northeast Ridge.” He also said, “Within perhaps five hundred feet of the summit, McGonagall, outstripped by Taylor and Anderson, and fearful of the return over the slippery ice-incrusted rocks if he went farther, turned back.”

22B In summary, all three descriptions of the climb describe, not the Sourdough Gully, but a very different route, *and all of them agree*: **From their camp at 11,000 feet, up Karstens ridge on the steps previously dug out, up to the glacier (the Grand Basin) between the two summits to the saddle between the two peaks and on to the top of the North Peak. The final approach was across slippery, ice-covered rocks to within 500-600 feet of the summit, which was described by Taylor as a mass of ice.**

22C The lack of any mention by any of the men of a hair-raising ascent of a steep gully with inclines up to 55 degrees, without ropes, much of it over deep snow and blue ice (not slippery, ice-covered rocks), was not even lost on Waterman. On his page 86 he notes that Stuck’s description of the climb as a “march” meant that Stuck had ruled out the gully as their climbing route, and continues: “Later, Anderson or Taylor — either too nonchalant,

laconic, or deceitful to give any details about the steep gully — told Stuck that they were greatly disappointed that they couldn’t see the flagstaff from the Muldrow Glacier.” This last statement is inaccurate; Stuck said after *returning*, we should emphasize, to the **upper** glacier, that is, the Harper Glacier. [§17E]

22D Waterman says of Taylor’s interview with Norman Bright, “Strangely, while Taylor didn’t chop steps, he said nothing about the steep Sourdough Couloir. . . . Bright learned nothing about the steep couloir. Did they really muscle their way up this gully to the ‘knifeblade’ without chopping steps? And then they had to get to the summit and back down — without ropes or belays — exhausted in subzero temperatures, on primitive creepers and hooked pike poles. It couldn’t have been done solely through superhuman effort and luck; and since they were inexperienced, they lacked technique. If Taylor had been telling the truth, he’d left something out of the story.” [CD:99-100]

22E Waterman also takes note of Stuck’s statement, but immediately dismisses it with, “Since no one in Karstens’s party, nor Browne’s, could imagine that their predecessors had climbed such a route, they figured that if the Sourdoughs summited, they had found a way to “march” around to it from Denali Pass rather than tackling it directly up the gully.” [CD:83]

22F Waterman never considers for a moment that Stuck *knew for sure* that the steep gully wasn’t their route, having “been at pains of talking with every member of the actual climbing party with a view to sifting the matter thoroughly.” [§17C] And Waterman fails to consider that Taylor might have been telling the truth and left out the steep gully because it wasn’t part of it. Waterman was too prejudiced in favor of the Sourdough legend as he had been indoctrinated in it to see that Taylor’s description of the route might actually *be* the truth.

23 Lindley-Liek

23A Suppose the Sourdoughs actually did surmount the North Peak and plant their fabled flagpole, but they did it the way Lloyd and Stuck and Taylor indicate. That’s still no mean feat, considering all the circumstances involved. But if Sourdough Gully could be eliminated, that would take away many of the most unbelievable elements of their legendary climb, making it still a feat of great endurance, but not a “miracle.”

23B To help to decide if this is a plausible idea, we need to look at the expedition that reached the North Peak summit in 1932, the Lindley-Liek Expedition. It was the first to attempt the summit of Denali since Stuck’s first ascent 19 years before. Albert Lindley was a ski enthusiast, who saw great possibilities for their use on the mountain. He brought along as guide the Norwegian Erling Strom, resident in Lake Placid, NY. Also along was Harry Liek, who had succeeded Harry Karstens as superintendent of Mt. McKinley National Park, and one of his park rangers, Grant Pearson. All were mountain climbing novices, and all of them left accounts of their climb.

23C In their explorations of their route to the top, after ascending Karstens Ridge, they entered the Grand Basin [Harper Glacier]. “The pictures of the Browne and Stuck parties taken in the upper glacier (also called the Grand Basin) show soft deep snow all the way,” Lindley reported. “To our great surprise, we found the snow in the upper glacier the hardest sort of wind blown crust, and one attempt at skis proved sufficient and they were permanently discarded. However, the snow was perfect for crampons, so we had no reason for complaint.” Lloyd, in his account said “We didn’t want any weather above zero.” [NYT] for that very reason. That’s why he wanted to start the climb as soon in the spring as possible. Lindley-Liek climbed the mountain in May.

23D Their reconnaissance and packing trip up the Grand Basin “proved quite easy to negotiate, with the rope necessary in only one or two places.” After summiting the South Peak they rested a day at their high camp at 17,000 feet, then set out for the North Peak, despite Pearson having been injured in a fall on the way back from the summit.

23E “Often on the climb to the South Peak we had halted and looked over the North Peak and discussed the best route up the latter,” Lindley related. “We hesitated between a direct steep route up one of the many snow chimneys facing our camp site and the long easy route up the Grand Basin to its head and then back up the rocky west ridge and face of the Peak. We decided that we were out to get there, not to make it as hard as possible, so we chose the long easy route.”

23F Wouldn’t the Sourdoughs, who had never climbed a snow mountain at all, have reasoned likewise, and chosen “the long easy route” rather than one of the steep snow chimneys, let alone Sourdough Gully? After all, Lloyd said the boys had been up marking the trail and cutting steps up in the saddle to prepare the way to the summit [§12G] and must have lined out the trail they would follow to their target, the North Peak.

23G Harry Liek, who was neither a skier nor a professional climber, found the route up the Grand Basin from their camp not so easy as Lindley: “Our path lay up a glacier, and the going was very hard. Our route was on the west side, and we could look directly down on Mount Foraker.” This view is only obtainable from the head of Denali Pass at 18,200 feet. “After the glacier had been conquered we had to go up a big rock cliff. It took a long time to do so, and once up we were to the north of the North Peak.” [Actually, they would have been west of the North Peak; north of it is a sheer drop down the Wickersham Wall].

23H Both Lindley and Liek noted that after ascending the rocky cliff they came to a slight basin, which Lindley estimated cost them 200 feet of altitude [actually only 100’] before reaching the last steep climb to the summit. “It was a waste of altitude,” he said, “but the ease of the route justified it, and we arrived at the top without undue difficulty.”

23I Lindley described this part of the climb as “a short stretch of rocky going on the ridge,” while Grant Pearson added, “we had been traveling on packed snow. Now, for about two miles [Pearson was writing 30 years after the fact, and by then it might have seemed like that, but on the topographical map it’s nowhere like 2 miles; maybe a half mile at most], we hit slippery, ice-coated rocks that extended up to within 600 feet of the top. The going was snailslow. We chopped and belayed our way, making about a quarter of a mile an hour. It was hard work, and it was drudgery, for me, anyway. . . . it wasn’t until 6 o’clock that we stood on the packed snow at the summit. . . . Almost at our feet, facing north, there was a sheer drop of 10,000 feet.”

23J Liek again, however, was not so sanguine as Lindley, and described the final slope’s face as “very abrupt and climbing was tortuous.” The trek had taken 12 hours.

23K The rocks the Lindley-Liek party describe have an eerie similarity to those that caused Charley McGonagall to turn back. Pearson described them as “slippery, ice-coated rocks that extended up to within 600 feet of the top.” Stuck had said McGonagall turned back because he was “fearful of the return over the slippery ice-incrusted rocks if he went farther,” and estimated the distance between them and the summit as “within perhaps five hundred feet of the summit.” If that’s a coincidence, it’s a pretty stark one. The view noted by Pearson matches Taylor’s account: “You come to places like a knife blade and you can see down for thousands of feet below you.” [§14F]

23L The Lindley-Liek Expedition’s members’ statements on searching for the flagpole in their articles proves they didn’t fully believe the Sourdoughs climbed the route attributed to them, though they do prove they were aware of it. Lindley said that once they reached the summit of the North Peak, “There we of course looked down to all of the nearby rocky ledges for traces of the old sourdough flag-pole which was reputed to have been placed there in 1910, but could see no trace of it. If those hardy pioneers came up from the Muldrow glacier in one day by the easterly facing ridge of this North Peak, which is steep, sharp and icy all the way, they must indeed have been giants.” Liek, who had succeeded Harry Karstens as park superintendent, knew him well, and probably had discussed the Sourdough saga with him. Perhaps the idea of that route came from him. [§16J]



Figure 5: The view from the North Peak looking somewhat north of east. The Sourdoughs are reputed to have come up the ridge line ending in the rocks seen sticking up over the snow at right center. This prominent rock structure forms the far side of Sourdough Gully. From the 4-pointed star they would have come up the ridge in the foreground to where the photographer is standing. (Camera pointed at azimuth c.65°.) Another view looking up this ridge rather than from the west is to be seen in Fig.16. Photo by Mark Westman.

23M In Lindley's account for the *AAJ* he said: ". . . we scouted around trying to find the old flagpole. We observed that the easterly ridge of the North Peak, up which the Sourdoughs must have come in 1910, was, in its upper five hundred feet, sheer ice of considerable steepness, and that the last rock ledge on that east ridge was at the base of this upper five hundred foot stretch. It was here we assumed the flagpole had been placed, but we were not inclined to cut steps down this ridge to find it, as it was already six o'clock." This description could also fit Stuck's description of slippery rocks and a five hundred foot icy ascent. So, in this respect at least, the 1932 accounts don't rule out the Sourdough Gully entirely. However, that route's sheer difficulty certainly is the main impediment to believing they actually came that way.¹³

23N If Harry Karstens didn't start the story that the Sourdoughs reached the North Peak via the Sourdough Gully, perhaps it just evolved as the consensus route because it was thought no other route offered a possibility for the 1910 climbers being able to climb it in their stated time schedule of 18 hours. They had to have taken this bold "shortcut" because "one superhuman march" by any other route seemed even more impossible. But was it? First let's look at that time schedule in detail.

24 Time vs. Distance

24A Could the Sourdoughs have summited via the Lindley-Liek route, or one very similar, from a camp 6,000 feet lower than Liek and Lindley and back in just 18 hours. The threesome was "skookum"; Billy Taylor and the Swede had massive reputations for strength and feats of endurance. According to Lloyd, they had prepared a path up beyond the end of Karstens Ridge and probably across the glacier, and Billy Taylor's remark on their aborted attempt on April 1 indicates they may have gone even farther than that. [§14M] The one flaw in this story is that if they made it that far, why would they have not cached the cumbersome flagpole at the highest point they reached instead of lugging it back to do it all over again two days later. Maybe they did leave it, though Taylor didn't mention it. After all, Lloyd definitely said they packed the flagpole up toward the summit in his entry for March 22 [§12B] However, he makes the equivocal statement later, "This morning before daylight we climbed to the saddle between McKinley's two peaks, dragging the flagpole with us." [§12G] But that doesn't necessarily mean they took the flagpole from the start.

24B It took them 18 hours even. Billy Taylor was sure of it. [§14D] The testimony of the participants and people who talked with them seems consistent with that. They left the 11,000 foot Tunnel Camp about 3 a.m. according to Taylor and McGonagall. [§§14D&16F] Because they spent 2-2 1/2 hours putting up the pole and the sign, according to Taylor [§14L], before they raised the flag on it at 3:25 p.m. [§12G] they must have arrived near the summit around 1 p.m., or about 10 hours after starting. After raising the flag they started back [Lloyd said this happened "in the afternoon" (§12H)], arriving back at Tunnel Camp between 9-10 p.m. [§§12H&14D], meaning they took 5 1/2-6 1/2 hours to make the return trip. Is this plausible?

24C How fast would they have had to travel to make the trip in the time they said? A look at Bradford Washburn's marvelous topographical map¹⁴ of Mount McKinley [Boston Museum of Science, 1973] can provide the answers. The route described by Stuck would have had them climb Karstens Ridge, make a traverse of the Harper Glacier at 15,000 feet

¹³All of the quotes in this section come from the members' accounts: Pearson's appeared in his book, *My Life of High Adventure*, Prentice-Hall, 1962, pp.156-157; Lindley wrote two accounts. The quotations all come from "The Ascent of Mt.McKinley," *Canadian Alpine Journal*, 1932 pp.111-121, except for the one mentioned as from the *AAJ*. This other article, far less circumstantial, and also quoted below, was "Mount McKinley, South and North Peaks, 1932." *AAJ*, 1933, pp.36-44. Liek's are from "The Second Ascent of Mount McKinley," *Sierra Club Bulletin*, Vol.18 (February 1933), pp.81-87.

¹⁴A portion of the map is reproduced as Fig.22 near the end of this paper.

and go up the west side of it to Denali Pass. From there, like Lindley-Liek, they would have climbed one of the relatively low snow chimneys at the head of the pass and gotten on to the gently dropping snow plain that leads to the base of the western summit ridge of the North Peak. Up Karstens Ridge from the location of Tunnel Camp would be about 2 miles, the traverse and route to the cliff near Denali Pass, not quite 3 more. The snow plain is about half a mile wide, once up the cliff, and the climb up the western summit ridge from its rocky base, about another half mile. That comes to about 6 miles one way.

24D Lindley-Liek left their high camp at 17,000 feet at 6 a.m. They reached the summit of the North Peak at 6 p.m., spent about 3/4 of an hour resting and looking for signs of the flagpole and made it back to their high camp the same day; they don't say when, but implicitly before midnight. That would be 12 hours going and about 6 coming back. That's also 18 hours, the same as the Sourdoughs.

24E That getting back took far less time is implied by Strom's account, who described their return from the South Peak to their high camp: "The descent was done in a hurry; the difficulty in breathing then disappeared. One may run down where one had to crawl up." [Moore:133, translated from Strom, Erling, "How We Climbed Mt.McKinley."]¹⁵ Unfortunately, the part of his account covering the climb of the North Peak was not translated from the Norwegian in Terris Moore's book.

24F The pace of the Sourdoughs going out (6 miles in 10 hours) would be .6 of a mile an hour; coming back it would be about .9 mph. Lindley Liek only had to go about 1.5 miles each way. Or about .25 mph going and a maximum of twice that coming back. Quite a difference! But the Sourdoughs were skookum and traveling light. The question is, was it possible?

24G Mark Westman, speaking from long climbing experience on Denali, believes it would not be raw distance but altitude gain that would be the biggest physical barrier to meeting the Sourdough time schedule. In our discussions via email, he pointed out that pure physical prowess and stamina, which those miners certainly had, is no guarantee against the effects of altitude gain on inadequately acclimatized climbers. Although he did not rule out their climb on this basis alone, and conceded that their preparatory work on Karstens Ridge and their aborted April 1 attempt would have been helpful, he felt the fact that they never had slept at a camp higher than 11,000 feet before attempting the North Peak was a critical factor, and would make avoiding the debilitating effects of high altitude on their attempt much less likely. No amount of raw stamina or physical strength could guarantee a climber against such effects, either.

24H If these doubts could be put aside, however, beyond having great stamina, the three could have been sped on their way by several factors. First, they had cut steps up Karstens Ridge with their coal shovel previously, but it had snowed the night before and they would have had to clear them. [§14M] Washburn says it took 3 hours to get to the top. [§16F] That would be better than the required pace. They would have had a safe, marked trail to where they turned back on April 1. They probably would also not have had to carry the flagpole to that point again. They would have cached it, as any sensible person would have. The incline from the top of the lower ice fall to Denali Pass is moderate, with an altitude gain of 1,800 feet in about 1 1/2 miles. From there to the summit would be an altitude gain of 1,200 feet in a bit over a mile, most of it on the summit ridge, the snow plain being nearly level. The conditions on the upper glacier Lindley found perfect for crampons in 1932, and they had on those enormous ice-irons. It would have been drudgery getting the pole up the cliff at Denali Pass and perhaps up the slippery rocks on the western ridge, but the rest of the way shouldn't have been that arduous. Part of the route across the snow plain was even slightly downhill. Coming back they had a marked trail all the way. If they matched the Lindley-Liek pace's proportions, 10 hours out, 5-6 coming back is about right.

¹⁵In the Norsk Tinde Klub's *Årbok*, date not cited; the original text was in Norwegian.

24I Taylor said that on the April 1st attempt they would have needed four more hours to reach the summit. [§14M] If they reached the summit, because he was speaking after the fact, this would not have been a guess. He would have known how long it took to reach the summit on April 3rd from the place they picked up the pole. As we have seen, their time schedule requires that they average 6/10 of a mile an hour going out. [§24F] If they made the summit in 10 hours, then, backtracking along the proposed route, they would have been about 2.4 miles from the summit when they turned back, or about at the 16,400 foot contour line. That would have placed them one mile beyond the place they started up the Harper Glacier after their traverse. So, they only had those 2.4 miles to carry the pole on the final attempt, with an altitude gain of 3,470 feet. If they cached the pole even farther up on April 1, their progress on April 3 along the prepared trail from where they turned back would have been just that much faster. They had ice-irons strapped to their moccasins that allowed them to walk “right over everything” [§14E]. Lindley described in 1932 as “perfect for crampons” [§23C] and didn’t require the use of the rope for the most part. From Tunnel Camp they traveled light, just a knapsack, a coal shovel, their pikes and some spruce stakes to mark dangerous places, logically assuming they cached the pole. “Alpine Style” they call it today.

24J Furthermore, from their testimony the route can be broken down into three sections: 3 hours to reach the top of Karstens ridge, 3 hours to reach the point they cached the pole, and 4 hours to reach the summit from there. The first leg is about 2 miles and 3,400 feet altitude gain, the second about 1.75 miles and 3,200, the third about 2.25 miles and 1,200. The first was on a pace of .66 mph over a fully prepared trail with no pole, the second .58 mph over a partially prepared trail and carrying the pole part way, the third .56 mph over an unprepared trail with the pole. The last part is the slowest, just as would be expected, without a prepared trail and carrying the spruce pole over terrain similar to Lindley-Liek’s route, even though the altitude gain is the least per mile on the last leg.

24K Oddly, the story of their alleged and almost as fantastic second climb on May 17, 1910, which is widely doubted by most experts who believe in the traditional route of their first, proves to be strong evidence that the route the Sourdoughs followed was similar to Lindley-Liek. They were said in the news report in the *Fairbanks Daily Times* to have gone to the summit, but in Charley McGonagall’s interview with Francis Farquhar he said they went to “the place between the two peaks where you can look over to Foraker.” [§15D] Mt. Foraker can only be seen when you reach Denali Pass at 18,200 feet.

24L In his letter to Terris Moore [§15H], Farquhar used “col,” the French term for a pass, when he talked to McGonagall about the second climb. In mountaineering usage it means only very high passes or saddles connecting high peaks with each other. The use of the term here in connection with the Sourdough climb is significant. Col would perfectly describe Denali Pass. It was by Denali Pass that the Lindley-Liek Expedition gained access to the “easy” way to the North Summit. Notice that Farquhar used the term again in reference to the point reached by the “second” Sourdough climb in May 1910, the place McGonagall said was “between the two peaks where you can look over to Foraker” — Denali Pass. Why, if their “first” climb had been up Sourdough Gully, would they on their “second” climb to photograph the flagpole, have gone all the way up to Denali Pass instead of retracing their previous route? They complained to Stuck that they couldn’t see the flag from even the upper part of the glacier [§17E] So they knew they had to go at least there to have any chance of photographing it.

25 More than half the Time, 1/10th the Altitude

25A If they did actually go up Sourdough Gully, no one to this day has ever even remotely duplicated what the Sourdoughs are said to have pulled off in 18 hours flat. And probably no sane mountaineer today would even momentarily consider a literal attempt to duplicate it.

25B Waterman recounts the experiences of the one expedition that sought to “recreate” (not duplicate) the fabled climb up the consensus choice of the mountaineering community for the route that the Sourdoughs actually took, but it was only a “recreation” in a few aspects. According to Waterman, the 1977 attempt, led by Jeff Babcock, consisted of a team of seven strong climbers, not three novices who had never been on a snow mountain before.

25C They were thoroughly acclimatized and were equipped with modern climbing gear, including 12-point crampons. They did drag a 14-foot pole with them, but they used ropes fixed with snow pickets to assist their climb. A third of the way up the gully, portions of the black shale cliff on the ridge started hurtling past them. They chucked the spruce pole down the gully and beat a hasty retreat. When they arrived back at camp 10 hours after they had left, they had taken more than half the time the Sourdoughs said they had and only made a tenth the altitude gain.

25D Waterman also relates that the year before, two climbers had been killed when they plummeted 1,500 feet while trying to belay one of their party down the gully after he had come down with severe altitude sickness. They only tried it because they needed to bring their teammate down as quickly as possible, not because they wanted to take that route. [CD:92-94]

25E In light of this, and the fact that absolutely no one has ever climbed to the top of Sourdough Gully by any means since 1910, makes skeptics of many experienced climbers, including Brian Okonek and Mark Westman, who have seen the ascribed route in person. Remember, even the seasoned authority on Denali, Bradford Washburn, called the “fact” of the Sourdoughs having returned by that route alive “a miracle.” [§16G]

26 Finally, Original Research

26A Despite his sloppy analysis, misreportage of facts, some complete invention, book-padding accounts of irrelevant climbs, and repetition of most of what can be found in Terrance Coles’s anthology of Sourdough sources, Waterman must be given credit for some original research. However, most of it, comprising random notices about the three climbers’ activities in the years after their alleged ascent and a good deal of material about Lloyd’s colorful past in Utah and various unusual marital relationships, is totally irrelevant to the question at hand.

26B Waterman wasn’t going to be “leery of sexual scandals,” whether [§4V] they be Lloyd’s or Pete Anderson’s marital histories [CD:102]. He even cites specific examples from Stuck’s diaries documenting the pedophilic tendencies he accused me of “alleging” to diminish Stuck as a respectable Pioneer [CD:77] [§4N]. The irony of Waterman’s book is that in spite of all of this, he may have actually found the key to how the Sourdoughs might have planted their flagpole.

26C The one thing he did uncover that is of importance is a clipping from a Seattle newspaper in which Lloyd expounds on the “ice-irons” used during the climb. This led him to take a look at the actual article, a pair of the Sourdough’s ice-irons which was retrieved from the Muldrow Glacier by the Lindley-Liek Expedition of 1932 from where they had been abandoned by Lloyd’s party 22 years before. Waterman, who knows mountain gear, was struck by just how far ahead of their time they seemed to be.

26D The standard “ice-creeper” of the time was a contraption that strapped onto boots for extra grip. [Fig.6] Both Browne’s party and Stuck’s used them, but Stuck never even strapped them on until he reached above 16,000 feet, climbing all of Karstens ridge wearing only shoe-packs. Here’s what he had to say about the ones he had:

For the most part the climbing-irons gave us sufficient footing, but here and there we came to softer snow, where they would not take sufficient hold and we had to cut steps. The calks in these climbing-irons were about an inch



Figure 6: 19th Century creepers

and a quarter long; we wished they had been two inches. The creepers are a great advantage in the matter of speed, but they need long points. They are not so safe as step-cutting, and there is the ever present danger that unless one is exceedingly careful, one will step upon the rope with them and their sharp calks sever some of the strands. They were, however, of great assistance and saved a deal of laborious step-cutting. [Stuck:97]

26E By comparison, the Sourdough ice-irons were massive 9-pointed affairs that covered the whole bottom of the foot. [Fig.7] Waterman compares them with the first modern crampons developed by Oscar Eckenstein, a British mountaineer who invented the techniques of unroped “balance climbing” in 1913.

26F In the interview with Lloyd that appeared in the *Seattle Times* after the 1910 climb, Lloyd had this to say: “McGonagall invented a new kind of ice creeper. It is one that covers the entire sole of the foot. If it hadn’t been for these creepers, and the fact that we carried files with us to keep them sharp, we never could have climbed up the steep slopes. . . . With these creepers a man can scale an almost perpendicular wall. Had we been equipped with the ordinary ice creepers we couldn’t have climbed half way.” And hadn’t Stuck remarked on them as “great climbing-irons strapped to their moccasins Disdaining the rope and cutting no steps . . . with reliance solely upon the *crampons* . . . ? [§17B]

26G Although the Sourdoughs couldn’t have known anything about Eckenstein’s advanced creepers or theories, after looking at the 1910 ice-irons Waterman concluded that McGonagall was way ahead of his time: “These crampons could explain everything: somehow, in far-off Alaska, a total neophyte climber — who happened to be a methodical tinkerer — ingeniously came up with an even better design than the British engineer-alpinist. McGonagall’s galvanized crampons were lighter and provided a platform that added stiffness, which provided security on steep slopes (otherwise missing with floppy moccasins).” [CD:118] But here he goes wrong; the Sourdough ice-irons were made in



Figure 7: Sourdough Ice-Irons

2 sections held by rivets to the parallel outside frames that allowed them to flex at the front and the back with the foot. They would not have provided “added stiffness” needed for the ankle-bending “French technique” he describes as revolutionary for climbing steep ice covered slopes.

26H French technique is also known as flat-footing, and it is most applicable on lower-angled ice slopes. It involves opening your feet and walking up the slope in a duck-like manner. The French technique gets harder on a climber’s ankles as the steepness of the slope increases, and requires crossovers on such inclines. French technique also assumes the use of an ice axe, not a pike pole like the Sourdoughs carried, and certainly doesn’t take into consideration a method for carrying a 14-foot spruce pole while doing it.

26I But what if the Sourdoughs didn’t need “French technique”? What if instead of up “an almost perpendicular wall” like Sourdough Gully, they chose a longer but relatively easy route, such as Lindley and Liek had done, just like that suggested by Lloyd’s and Taylor’s and Stuck’s accounts? Could they, wearing these revolutionary irons, have made it to the summit of the North Peak and back in 18 hours by the route they seem to indicate in these various accounts? Even Waterman agrees that route is comparatively easy. He remarks: “The route up the North Peak from the west buttress off 18,200-foot Denali Pass is a moderate scramble through snowfields and bands of broken black shale.” [CD:xxvii] It seems that if they did plant the flagpole somewhere on the North Peak, they probably made that “superhuman march” Stuck envisioned along a route far more plausible than up Sourdough Gully.

27 Merl La Voy and his Graflex to the Rescue?

27A But having found the means of getting the Sourdoughs to the North Peak along a plausible route, Waterman just can’t be swayed from mountaineer mythology. It’s the Sourdough Gully or bust. So Waterman wanders off their indicated route, looking for “proof” they did it the hard way, even after discovering in the advanced ice-irons the means

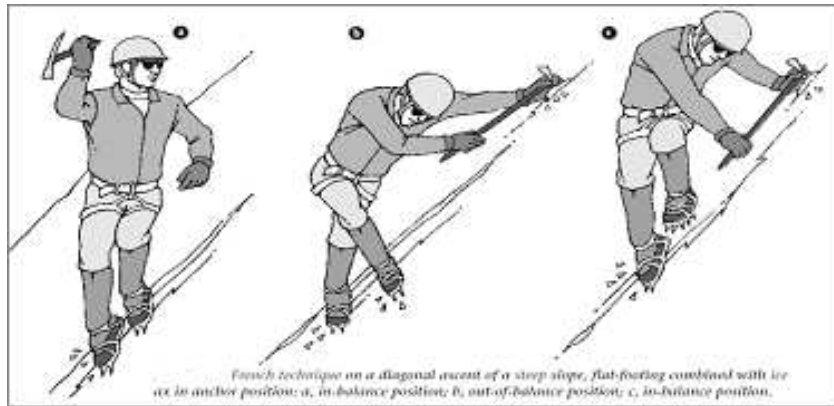


Figure 8: French Technique

by which they could have done it as they said they had, and within their specified 18-hour time frame.

27B One of the members of the 1912 Browne-Parker near-miss of the summit was Merl La Voy, a professional photographer. Waterman says that before the expedition he was given an expensive Graflex camera by the National Geographic Society to take on the expedition. [CD:120] Even this statement is doubtful.

27C In a memorial notice of La Voy's death in the *AAJ* in 1954 [pp.132-134], Belmore Browne wrote: "When he came to us in 1910, he had a camera and used it with skill, so much so, in fact, that he soon began marketing his Alaskan photographs to newspapers and magazines. In 1911 he bought a Graflex which became his most highly-prized possession." [Fig.9]

27D In Browne's published account of his 1912 attempt to climb Mt.McKinley, he confirms the camera was a Graflex, but he has this to say: "On starting on our long journey La Voy had invested in a beautiful and expensive Graflex camera. To protect it on the trail he had purchased an expensive leather box of the best workmanship." He goes on to say how it was damaged by a wolverine that "gnawed his way into the camera case." What damage was done to the actual camera, he doesn't say. So it is possible that the Graflex was disabled by this attack. But there is nothing about the camera coming from the National Geographic Society. [Browne:228]

27E Waterman also states that La Voy's camera used 3"1/4x5"1/2 film, so La Voy's camera was probably the 3A Speed Graflex. According to technical information on Graflex cameras, the film for the 1911 model was loaded using a Kodak daylight loading cartridge containing Kodak 122 film, producing 3"1/4x5"1/2 sized images. The standard¹⁶ camera had an f4.5 lens. [Fig.10]

27F Waterman relates how Brian Okonek put him on to three pictures of La Voy's (Figs.23-25, below) that were intended to become a panorama of the North Peak of Denali. He claims these were shot by La Voy on the Browne-Parker expedition from a location 1.75 miles distant on Karstens Ridge, on the eastern side of Harper Glacier at a height of 18,000 feet. [CD:120] [For La Voy's location, see the left-pointing arrow on Centerfold, above at pp.40-41).] According to the topographic map [Fig.22] the distance is more like

¹⁶For technical data on this camera see the Graflex Journal website at <https://lommen9.home.xs4all.nl/graflex/3A%20Graflex.html>



Figure 9: Merl La Voy



Figure 10: La Voy's Most Cherished Possession: The 1911 Speed Graflex



Figure 11: La Voy's 1912 Photograph as it appears in Waterman's book. (Same photo as Fig.25 below.) The box shows the area where Waterman says he sees the flagpole.

1.4 miles at the 18,000 foot contour.

27G After obtaining a copy of this photograph [Fig.11] from the Rauner Special Collection Library of Dartmouth College in Hanover, NH, where it was part of the Belmore Browne papers, he "made a scan of the old photograph." He then relates how he and Okonek enlarged it 400x. In the area of one of the black shale outcrops on the eastern summit ridge that runs up to the North Peak, he says they found a vertical line that represents the flagpole the Sourdoughs said they erected there. He reproduces the photograph in question with a tiny rectangle (Fig.12) to show the area encompassed in the 400x enlargement showing this "flagpole." He claims that nowhere else on the photograph, which is vast in comparison to the tiny area that has been enlarged, could he find another such vertical line. "Just to be sure," Waterman says, he shared the photo with "several professional photographers and an image-analyst researcher." "They all concluded that the line (or pole) is not a scratch. And no one could say that the Graflex camera wouldn't be able to resolve an object at that distance." [CD:121-122]

27H This is not exactly a ringing endorsement of Waterman's claim that the line is the Sourdough flagpole. Objectively, all it tells us is that it might be anything other than a scratch, like perhaps a digital artifact from the scan made of the image at Dartmouth. And because several professional photographers and one analyst couldn't say that this particular "camera wouldn't be able to resolve an object at that distance," it doesn't mean that it can resolve an object that all the eyewitnesses said had a width of no more than four inches.

27I The blowup doesn't even resolve the rocks in the original photograph in enough detail when enlarged 400x to be able to say they are rocks. Even knowing what I was supposed to be looking for, to me, the enlargement looked like so much pixelated gibberish. No one shown it without any pre-knowledge of what it might be could possibly identify one physical object of any size and tell you what it was. I, personally, saw nothing convincing about it. On the other hand, I saw contradictions to the eyewitness testimony.

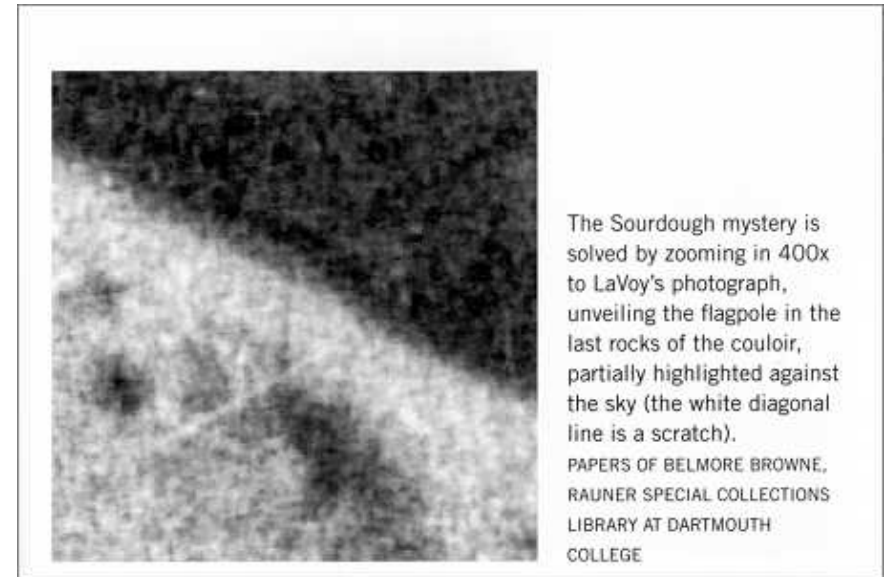


Figure 12: Waterman's 400x blowup of this box and its caption.

27J "I looked again," Waterman tells his readers, "at the top of the blustery couloir, in the final rocks needed to shore down the heavy limbed spruce, the pole is right where the 1913 climbers described it." [CD:122] But that is not at all what they said, and he himself inadvertently proves it at the bottom of page 122 by quoting Stuck's diary entry for June 3, 1913. "Walter cried: 'I see the flagpole,' pointing to a peak *just below the highest point of the great N. ridge.*" [emphasis added] If that's not clear enough, in his book, Stuck said, "Walter cried out, 'I see the flagstaff!' eagerly pointing to the rocky peak nearest the summit." [§19C] [emphasis added] The rocky peak nearest the summit is not the location enlarged from the La Voy photograph by any stretch of the imagination. The last visible rocks are up the ridge toward the peak at an elevation *300 feet higher than the enlarged area.* Bradford Washburn called these the Flag Rocks, and labeled them as such on many of his photographs of Denali. The Flag Rocks are more than 2,700 feet away from the summit. [Fig.3] Furthermore, the "flagpole" in the La Voy image, if it clears it at all, doesn't stick up far enough above the horizon, which it would have to do if it was going to be seen from the north, especially looking up at it from the other side of the ridge, which was the point of putting the flag on the North Peak to begin with. It would therefore be an unlikely choice for the climbers to place the flag. The other side of the ridge would be the obvious choice, or at least the very top of it. In fact, Brian Okonek told me that anyone traveling up the ridge would travel on the north side of it because the terrain is less steep there and probably would not even see the rocks where Waterman says he sees the flagpole in La Voy's photo. According to Mark Westman, Waterman's rocks are at least 40-50 feet below the actual ridgeline, making it impossible to have been seen from the north.

27K A much better candidate for "the rocky peak nearest the summit" is the little hump on the ridge between the actual peak and Washburn's Flag Rocks [indicated by a 4-pointed star on Fig.5 & our Centerfold (above at pp.40-41)]. A rocky rib runs up to it, but the rocks on the bump are not exposed. Yet, Lloyd said that "although the rocks were hard for us

to dig out in that altitude . . . we dug down 15 inches into the rocks until we had found a solid spot.” [§12G] Taylor said “we dug down in the ice with a little axe we had and built a pyramid of 15 inches high and we dug down in the ice so the pole had a support of about 30 inches and it was held by four guy-lines — just cotton ropes. We fastened the guy-lines to little spurs of rocks.” [§14K] Both these statements suggest that the rocks they set up the flagpole in were not completely exposed. Such descriptions would not limit the size of the rocks in which the flagpole was set to large outcrops visible from below. It could have been any one of many small outcrops invisible in La Voy’s picture but still large enough for the purpose.

27L But even Washburn’s Flag Rocks is just a guess, and no one can say definitely which outcrop “nearest the summit” Stuck and his party was looking at. They never said exactly where they saw it. There are rock outcrops down the western side of the ridge as well, and there is that “reef of rocks running right over the summit” that inspired Tom Lloyd to tell his boys to climb the North Peak and plant the pole there rather than on the true summit that, from his vantage point or his boys’ reports, was all ice and snow with only small pinnacles of rock exposed. [§14J]

27M After viewing the vague line on the photograph, however, Waterman’s desire to believe spins out an imagined scene. He imagines a lot after that — no more need for reference books or primary sources. He has Taylor and Anderson erect the pole while McGonagall sits watching, too overcome with mountain sickness to help. But McGonagall denied being anything but “OK” to Francis Farquhar and every account says, even all of McGonagall’s, except to Norman Bright, that Taylor and Anderson left him somewhere about 600 feet below the summit, and because it wasn’t his turn to carry the pole, he sat down while they went on without him with the pole. But for Waterman, “Even though [Charlie] would never speak about it in his later years,” it was “easy to imagine his suffering.” He not only did speak about it, he told Farquhar he wasn’t sick; “I was feeling perfectly OK.” [§15H]

27N And that’s not all it was easy for Jon Waterman to imagine on pages 123-126, including minute details of what McGonagall did and felt, how he practiced good “French technique” while nursing a “splitter headache” he also never mentioned. Once the others reached the summit Waterman knew “as taciturn frontiersmen, both were surprised, yet careful, to hide the swell of emotions that came over them.” He even knows that “Neither miner had any interest in photography, so Anderson kept the Kodak camera in his rucksack.” That’s not what Lloyd said; he said that it was Taylor who had the camera, and that he took a picture of Anderson with the flag, but it didn’t come out [§12F].

27O The view Waterman says they had from the top is completely at odds with that described by Billy Taylor to Norman Bright [§14M] but Waterman imagines the solid cloud floor serving as “an immense reflector that illuminated them in bright, coruscating light — highlighting their ascension.” Truly, Waterman’s previous statement about his fuzzy enlargement from La Voy’s photo was more applicable to his imagination than reality. The Sacred Quest had been successful; he, at 60, had climbed Denali and gotten his heroes to the top of the North Peak, without a doubt: “This image says it all. Although I briefly lost faith, my ‘god’ once again became more real to me than the one described in Psalms, Exodus, or Deuteronomy.” His restored faith caused Waterman to write many things with no evidence, but with certainty, that it took them less than an hour to return to the flagpole down Pioneer Ridge, that they ate before they started down the couloir and that “All of this epic was no more a myth.”

27P Myth or not, Waterman “likes to believe” a lot of things, but evidence is another matter; it sometimes gets in the way of beliefs and imaginings of quasi-religious fervor. Until someone systematically explores all those rocky outcrops on every side of the North Summit; until someone finds the flagpole or remnants of it; anyone can believe as they please, but that does not make it so.

27Q Wishes aside, however, we can, at least, examine Waterman’s evidence and see how well it stands up.

28 Camera capabilities and analysis of the La Voy photograph

28A From the format of the La Voy photographs, let’s assume that his camera was the standard Graflex 3A with a B&L Zeiss lens with a focal length of 11 1/16 inches, which was a common lens on this type of camera.

28B Brian Bryce, a PhD at the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Lab makes this analysis: Absolute outer resolution possibility, as limited by the wave nature of visible light (wavelength .56 μ): an f4.5 lens can resolve 4.5 x .56 μ or c.2.5 μ on the film (μ signifies microns, millionths of a meter). For the camera’s focal length $f = 281\text{mm}$, a 1.4 mi-distant object’s image on the film is smaller by roughly a factor 1.4 mi/281mm ≈ 8000 . So a 4-inch-wide pole will be 1/2000 inches or 13 μ wide on the film. Therefore, given the coarse grain of the film used at that time, the object could not be resolved.

28C But this is only a theoretical exercise to see if this particular camera/lens combination could resolve an object of the flagpole’s known dimensions at a distance of 1.4 miles. Although it is likely that La Voy’s camera was the one shown in Fig.10, we can’t know that for sure. Furthermore, these cameras came with a variety of lenses. Each of those had a different focal length. Therefore, we probably could never know the exact specifications of La Voy’s camera. So, rather than dabbling in further theoretical unknowns, we must turn to the physical product of that camera, the three La Voy photos of the North Peak taken with it in 1912.

28D Whatever the technical abilities of the camera were, it all boils down to one simple question: is the flagpole actually visible in the photograph as Waterman claims; that’s the only thing that matters. The answer is either yes or no, answers on which a factual analysis can be made.

28E Of his discovery of the La Voy photograph, Waterman says, “On the advice of my friend and fellow Sourdough skeptic, Brian Okonek, who had thoroughly researched the 1912 expedition [of Browne and Parker], I turned to the Belmore Browne papers and photographs archived at Dartmouth College. Among the files, Okonek identified a large negative shot by La Voy, the expedition photographer. . . . On a hunch, following Okonek’s advice, I scanned the old photograph that showed the Sourdough Couloir. Okonek and I then used computers . . . [to] zoom in to this high-resolution image and transport ourselves to the top of the couloir in 1912. By magnifying in 400 percent, we discovered a vertical pole-like object contrasted against a snowfield and surrounded by pixelated-looking summit shale of the same tonality.” [CD:120]

28F According to Joshua Shaw of Dartmouth’s technical department, the negative in question is the standard-size of the negative the Graflex illustrated in Fig.10 produced: 3” 1/4x5” 1/2. Furthermore, in corresponding with Morgan Swan at Dartmouth and Brian Okonek, I found that Waterman’s statements about how he discovered the “flagpole” in La Voy’s photo were not accurate. According to Morgan Swan, Dartmouth no longer furnishes physical prints from negatives or photographic copies of prints, and hasn’t done so for many years prior to 2016, the earliest date compatible with Waterman’s narrative of his pursuit of the elusive Sourdough claims. So, Waterman’s statement that “I scanned the old photograph” can’t be accurate. The scan was done by Dartmouth’s technical department from its negative in Belmore Browne’s papers and delivered electronically as a 1:1 positive digital scan. Dartmouth’s standard format is tiff, at a sample rate of 400 ppi.

28G Okonek indicated that he had only seen a digital scan of the photo and had not worked with Waterman in scanning it. Okonek also said it was he who discovered the line that is supposed to be the flagpole and verified that he could find no other feature like it on the scan. He, however, is not convinced it is actually the pole: “It is impossible to tell what

the straight line is. It is not a scratch as the grey tones are the same as the rocks. . . . Perhaps it is some kind of blemish. Who knows?" he wrote. [email to author, September 12, 2019]

28H Waterman wasn't even consistent in reporting what he, himself, did. Whereas he said in his text that by "magnifying in 400 percent" he was able to see the flagpole, the caption of the blowup in the picture section reads, "by zooming in 400x." [Fig.12] That's not the same thing; "400 percent" is magnification 4X, not 400X.

28I So it appears that Waterman is just as sloppy at reporting his own procedures as he is with reporting historical "facts" about Cook or Peary. At this point, not willing to accept Waterman's word, I obtained a copy of the La Voy photograph from Dartmouth. At first, Morgan Swan was unable to locate the print just on my description alone, or even with a copy of the photo as printed in Waterman's book, but Brian Okonek had the item's number: StefMss 190-5-41-325. I put in an order for a digital scan but requested a higher sampling rate to increase the resolution to as close to the original negative's grain as Dartmouth's scanner could accommodate, which was 2400ppi.

28J I also was able to obtain scans of the other two photos La Voy had taken at about the same time. They were StefMss 190-5-41-323 and 324. In doing so, I hoped that there would be some overlap in the photos, since they were intended as a panorama. An obvious check on Waterman's hypothesis that the line is the elusive flagpole would be to look at the overlapping images to see if this feature is consistent in both, because if it represents a physical object rather than a photographic blemish or digital anomaly, it would be consistently represented in both pictures. If it did not appear in both, or in two separate scans of the same negative, then it would have to be something other than a physical object, because both were exposed at the same time by the same camera under the same conditions.

28K The copies I obtained of all three of the photos were from negatives; Mr.Shaw's opinion was that the negatives were not modern, i.e. not after 1940, but he could not say if they were the original 1912 negatives or copies. Unfortunately, neither of the other two overlap the area highlighted in Fig.11. However the other two were helpful in other ways.

28L I was able to replicate Waterman's results; the line he says is the flagpole does appear on my scan, so it is a feature of the actual image. However, in the denser scan I obtained, the line is much less prominent. A rough estimate of the height of the line can be made by a simple experiment that might rule out any possibility that the line is the flagpole.

28M The central picture [Fig.24] includes the summit of the North Peak and overlaps with the first little hump down the ridge to the right of it on the one in Fig.11. By putting the two pictures together one gets a continuous ridge line from the summit to the Waterman "flagpole." Fig.25 is tilted differently (by c.5°), making it harder to overlap the two images, but this doesn't matter for our experiment, which is only approximate, since we are just looking for gross discrepancies.

28N By blowing the two images up the same percentage, the height of the "flagpole" can be measured mechanically. Using this height as a unit of measure, it can be used to determine the distance from the "flagpole" to the summit of the North Peak. The result of this measurement comes to 185 units. If the line is the flagpole, then the unit should equal 13 feet for the anchored pole; 185 x 13 feet = 2,405 feet as the distance between the "flagpole" and the summit. If anything, this estimate is on the low side; because the summit is a bit over a tenth of a mile closer to the camera than the "flagpole," the units of measure would increase in length as the summit is approached, making for fewer than 185 units. In other words, if the "flagpole" were on the summit itself, it would appear taller to the camera.¹⁷

28O I also took a close look at other places along the ridge visible in the photo where the flagpole might have been placed as indicated on the Centerfold above (pp.40-41). I could

¹⁷Mark Westman, who is familiar with Waterman's conclusions, said [email to author dated 2019/11/30] that because the rocks in the picture are 40-50 feet below the ridge line and the "flagpole" extends to the horizon, the pole would have to be substantially taller than 13 feet, given that La Voy's photo was taken from a similar altitude to the supposed flagpole's location.

see no evidence of it at any point along the ridge line. In fact, the photos are simply not well focused enough to be able to see an object of the flagpole's dimensions, even though they look sharp in actual size. When magnified, even the sharp dividing line between the bright snowy ridge line and the relatively dark sky looks blurry, and it can easily be seen without any magnification that not all parts of the pictures are in equal focus. This, especially, indicates that the negatives at Dartmouth are not originals but copies, and therefore not "high-resolution image[s]" as Waterman claims. [§28C]

28P If the negatives, or prints from the negatives, were copied on a photostand and the image being copied was not perfectly flat, that would account for the lack of focus over some parts of the Dartmouth negatives. There is also a curious light flare that runs all along the left side of image 323 that looks far more likely to be a darkroom or copying malfunction than a problem with the camera while taking the photograph. This is indicated by the light flare involving the unexposed black border of the image as well as the exposed area. It might even be just a function of a copy stand light glaring off a glossy print as it was copied. [Fig.23] With all these sorts of characteristics, these negatives surely must be at least second generation, maybe even third. No matter how good the original negative was, copies could never be expected to retain enough quality to show such minute details as a four-inch wide stick of wood at a distance of 1.4 miles. In fact, even in a perfect image it would not be visible. I asked DR for his analysis from a full sized copy of Dartmouth's 2400 ppi scan:

28Q DR:

CD claims the pole shows on a 400ppi scan of one La Voy photo. The photo's 5".5 width tells us it equals 5".5 x 400 ppi = 2200 pixels, which covers about 30°-35° or roughly 2000' (2000 arcminutes) of terrain. Therefore, on the photo, a pixel represents about 1 arcminute. Since 1.4 statute miles is 1.4 mi x 5280 ft/mi x 12"/ft = 89000", the pole's maximum width of 4" would cover (3438'/radian) x 4"/89000" < 0.16 arcminutes of angle, which is about 0.16 pixels. So the pole would be at most 1/6 of a pixel wide: undetectable. For a 2400ppi scan, it'd be one pixel: borderline.

28R Finally, although I clearly see the line said to be the flagpole, I disagree that there is nothing else like it on the image. I only had to look slightly down the slope from the area encompassed by Waterman's enlarged box to find three other potential "flagpoles" standing there, and what about those two light colored "lines" projecting above the horizon? [Fig.13] Might not they be flagpoles, too? Who knows? — as Brian Okonek prudently said. [§28E] After examining these photographs, all one can objectively say is the "flagpole" is strictly in the eyes of the beholder, not a fact.

28S All these factors — and the unlikely placement of the flagpole on the south side of the ridge — make Waterman's wholehearted acceptance of the line as proof of the Sourdough's claims just so much wishful thinking. There is no objective proof at all in the Dartmouth photographs. [For the record, the other two Dartmouth images are reproduced below with some commentary on each at Figs.23&24.]

28T So the La Voy photograph does not contain evidence that the Sourdoughs climbed the North Peak, let alone performed the "miracle" of climbing it via the Sourdough Gully. But the question remains: could they have climbed it by a more sane route on their stated time schedule?

29 A Speculative Route

29A Readers should refer to our Centerfold (above at pp.40-41) for the following discussion. Anyone coming off Karstens Ridge from Browne Tower would have to avoid the lower ice fall, and so traverse Harper Glacier below it and come up the northwestern or right side, as both Browne-Parker (1912) and Stuck (1913) did. Their routes have been drawn on this view by Bradford Washburn.

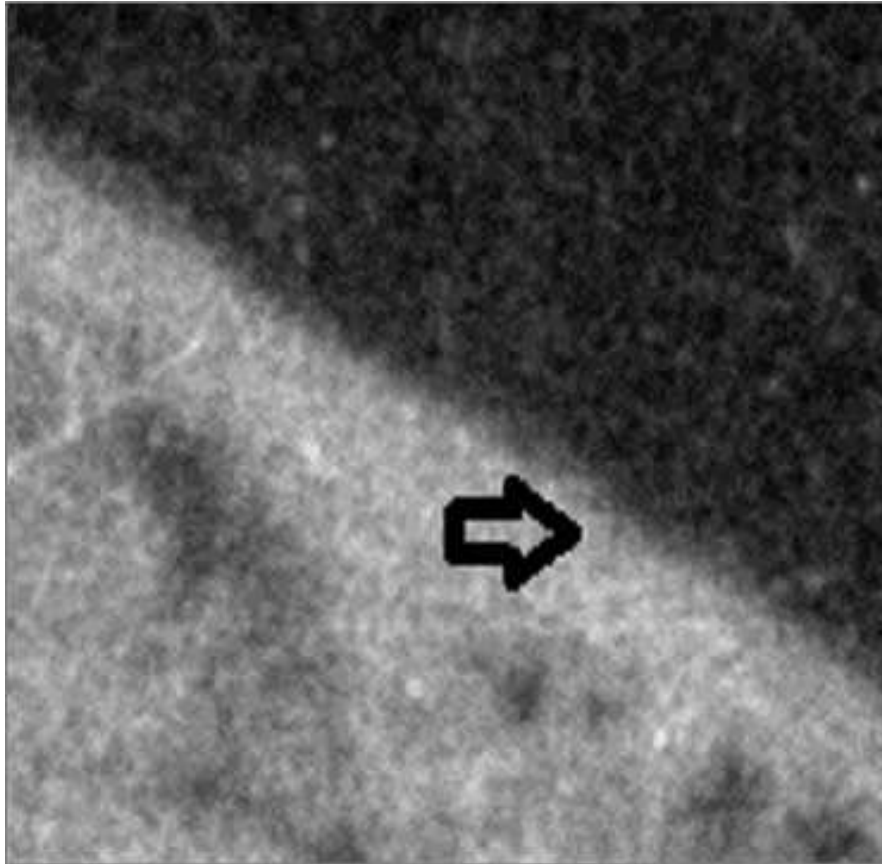


Figure 13: A blowup from a 2400 ppi scan of the same picture Waterman used to detect his “flagpole” showing other possible “flagpoles.”

29B Once past the lower ice fall, the 1912 expedition crossed back to the southeast to avoid the upper ice fall, while Stuck chose to skirt it on the west. The location from which La Voy’s photograph was taken is near the point of the Centerfold’s leftward arrow, at an elevation of 18,000 feet. (Below the bottom of the “E” in “MOUNT MCKINLEY” on Fig.22, by about the height of the “E” itself.) Camera-aim azimuth nearly 0°. The route ascribed to the Sourdoughs is shown by Washburn at the right, straight up Sourdough Gully.

29C The place tradition says they reached the ridge is indicated by Washburn as altitude 19,300 feet, but this is an error. Actually, in his text for the description of their route [Washburn:68], Washburn estimates it at 18,200 feet. The altitude of the place he indicates as the spot where they set their flagpole is also an error, since it can’t be higher than the actual summit. It should be 18,700 feet, according to Washburn’s text [Washburn:68]. The place Waterman says he sees the flagpole in his enlargement is indicated on the Centerfold by the downpointing arrow above the summit ridge on the right.

29D A speculative alternative route for the Sourdoughs, based on their accounts, is indicated by the dotted line after they departed from the route Stuck followed to his high camp at 17,500 feet. From there they would have proceeded to Denali Pass at 18,200 ft, at the same altitude at which they would have hit the ridge coming up Sourdough Gully, but without climbing any extreme inclines. They would have then climbed up to one of the snow chimneys that run up the rocky cliff above the pass.

29E Drawing a line between the two places at the equal height of 18,200 feet, an estimate of the height of the ridges across the picture can be had. By drawing a parallel line to the one for 18,200 feet from the Flag Rocks at 18,700, it can be seen that where they would have reached the top of the snow gully above Denali Pass is at about that same altitude. The climb of the cliff would have gained them 600 feet from the level of the pass. Checking the topographical map, these heights are confirmed. They are now about 670 vertical feet below the summit.

29F However, we know from Lindley, that there is a loss of altitude going down into the snowfield lying between the cliff and the base of the summit ridge, and according to the 18,700 foot line, they do not regain that lost altitude until they are just below a rocky area on the summit ridge, indicated by the rightward arrow. The base of the rocks at the foot of the summit ridge is, according to the topo map, indeed 18,700 feet.

29G Just 770 vertical feet left to go before reaching the summit: once past the top of the rocks, there might be about 500-600 linear feet left [from the leftward arrow to the downward one in Fig.16] on the knifeblade ridge to the actual summit, again confirmed by the topo. This stretch is relatively flat, with only a little altitude gain along its length.

29H This route meets all of the physical descriptions indicated in the various statements made by Lloyd, Taylor and McGonagall, and would be manageable given the experience, stamina, and equipment known to have been possessed by the Sourdough party, Mark Westman’s objections having been noted. [§24G] All of it is very much suitable for men wearing the advanced ice-irons they had, especially on the very hard packed crust in very early April. The only technically challenging parts of the climb would have been the climb up from Denali Pass to the snowfield above it, an altitude gain of only about 600 feet, and the climb up the summit ridge from about that same height after walking across the snow plain. That would involve another altitude gain of about 770 feet, the last stretch being near level.

29I On this route, the most likely place for them to have placed the flagpole would have been at the spot indicated by the downward arrow on the left on the above Centerfold. However, this position would have been impossible to see from the general area Stuck claims to have seen the flagpole. It is also possible that the flagpole might have been placed just down the ridge running roughly north-south over the summit that Lloyd described as a “reef of rocks.” [§12F] Although this is less likely because it would be below the ridgeline viewed from Kantishna, and so could not be seen from there, Mark Westman makes a case for this placement, nevertheless.



Figure 14: Photo from above the South Summit's Kahiltna Horn ridge, camera-aim azimuth very nearly 355° . The upward arrow indicates the probable snow gully climbed by Lindley-Liek in 1932 (and perhaps the Sourdoughs before them). The Archdeacon's Tower, elevation 19,650 ft., can be seen in the foreground. The west summit ridge is hidden in the clouds beyond. The Diamond on this figure and Fig.15 marks the same point. Photo by the author from airplane.



Figure 15: The western summit ridge up the "slippery rocks." The cliff over which the climbers could have come is seen in the background, the snow plain between. The West Buttress looms in the background. The Diamond indicates the same point seen from the other side in Fig.14. Camera-aim azimuth roughly 200° . Photo by the author.



Figure 16: North Peak (downward arrow). Shaded side is north face. At lower-left, the tiny rightward arrow is the spot marked by the 4-pointed star on the Centerfold & Fig.5, Camera-aim azimuth roughly 220° . The leftward arrow on the right is the place climbers arrive on the summit ridge following the usual route used today to climb the North Peak. It is the position marked by the downward arrow to the left of the summit on the Centerfold; this is also the position of the last substantial rocks along the western ridge approach. Photo by the author.

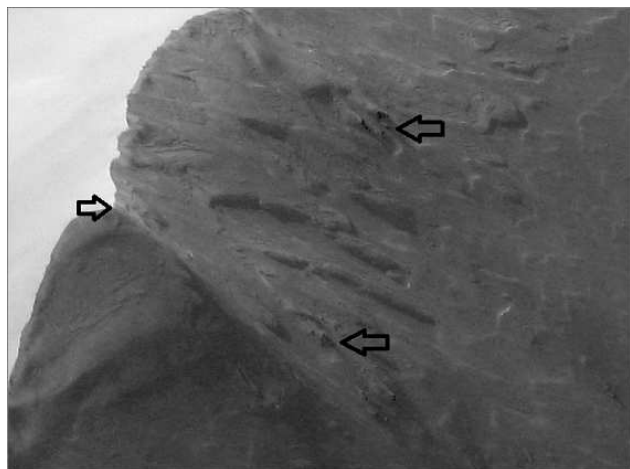


Figure 17: An enlargement of the lower left corner of Fig. 16 showing scattered outcroppings of rocks near the “peak nearest the summit” indicated by the arrow pointing to the right. Smaller outcrops are scattered along the ridge down from this point, which is represented by a 4-pointed star on the Centerfold & Fig. 5.

29J He argues that because of the angle of the outcrop it could be seen from Fairbanks, and the last rocks on this particular ridge are actually probably closer than any others to the actual summit. The slope down to them from there is moderate as well, and so the climb back up would not be as difficult as, say going down the easterly downslope to the rocks marked by the 4-pointed star in Fig. 5. This is the small snowy peak with such a star above it on the Centerfold. Several large rock outcrops can be seen down the north slope from there, and there are a number of much smaller outcrops even nearer the ridge at this point, as can be seen near the lower arrow in Fig. 17 (enlargement from Fig. 16).

29K This speculative route is the same as described by the Lindley-Liek expedition from their high camp at 17,000 feet, but not the commonly followed route from the South Peak for climbers who have summited via the West Buttress route. They strike the ridge at the left arrow in Fig. 16, but do not come up the rocky ridge pictured in Fig. 16, using the slope coming up the south face, thus avoiding the “slippery rocks.” Thus, even the relatively few climbers who “tag” the North Peak today would not be on the route hypothesized here and wouldn’t be in position to notice the “time enduring monument” Lloyd says his boys erected there, if it is indeed near the top of that rocky western ridge shown on the Centerfield.

30 What could Stuck see?

30A Another check on the plausibility of these speculations is to consider what Stuck’s party could see from the point they claimed to have seen the flagpole in 1913. Because he was approaching the summit below the cliffs of the North Peak, his view of the upper reaches was obscured to a certain extent by those cliffs looming above him. Depending on his exact observation point, what he could see of the east-west summit ridge (Pioneer Ridge) would vary. We don’t know at exactly what altitude Stuck’s party was when they say they saw the pole. Stuck put it at just below 17,000 feet, [§19B] but the camp altitudes

in his book were consistently high. For instance, he said his final camp was at 18,000 feet, an estimate about 500 feet too high. Tatum said in his diary that they moved camp up to 16,800 feet after making the sighting. [§19G] Karstens gives the best description: *Moved camp very near to top of 1st Serack making 2 trips very near 17000 ft. basin where Parker climbed.* Based on this description, Washburn believed the observation point was below 16,600 feet, which he identifies as Stuck’s camp after the sighting, so he places it at 16,400 feet “at the foot of the great granite crags of the North Peak.” [§19F]

30B Stuck published a picture [Fig. 18] of the North Peak as seen from his high camp which Bradford Washburn placed at about 17,500 feet. On the Centerfold, a triangle has been placed at the point Washburn identifies to mark the hypothetical observation point. However, it seems unlikely that the flagpole could be seen from this position. (The 19470’ summit couldn’t be seen from this 16500’-high location, since an 18500’ barrier intervenes that’s only 3/2 closer to the former.) Stuck himself said “It is, indeed, only just visible with the naked eye from certain points on the upper glacier and quite invisible at any lower or more distant point.” [§17E] He adds that the Sourdoughs told him they couldn’t see it from the upper Harper Glacier after they made their descent from the North Peak.

30C Right to left on the Centerfold, a line has been drawn from the triangle to the point Waterman says he sees the flagpole, another to Washburn’s Flag Rocks, and a third to the most likely position for it along the speculative route from Denali Pass. and a fourth to Lloyd’s “rocky reef.” It appears, from that vantage point, the one most likely to be seen is the one least likely to have been chosen — the rocky reef. [but see §29K] The others would seem to be blocked by intervening outcrops. But the position of Stuck’s party at the time of the sighting is just a guess based on Karstens’s diary, and a change in elevation of only a couple of hundred feet would change what could be seen radically. Only being on the ground would prove the point. From Washburn’s hypothetical vantage point, the “great granite crags of the North Peak” would probably block out the sight lines to most points on the ridge.

30D The only actual perspective we have on what Stuck could see of the North Peak is instructive in this regard, even though his photo (Fig. 18), taken from his high camp at 17,500 feet, was more than a thousand feet higher than the hypothetical flagpole-sighting-viewpoint. At his camp he would have not only been higher, but farther away from the base of the North Peak’s view-obscuring cliffs than at 16,400 feet, and so could get a longer view. The view from the camp shows part of the cliffs above. The mountainside points visible in Stuck’s photo have been labeled by me with a Diamond and a Star. Also notice the small peak to its right marked with a (barely-visible) 4-pointed star. Matching symbols to indicate all three corresponding positions are provided on the Centerfold. The North Peak’s summit is visible as the topmost peak in the center of Stuck’s photo.

30E Even from this position, it appears that it would be difficult to see the Flag Rocks or Waterman’s rocks; they would probably be blocked from view. From the position marked by the triangle, even closer to the cliffs, a sight line to either appears even more unlikely. The speculative point on the western ridge is farther away, but just as high as the Flag Rocks, and would have less chance of being seen. The small peak indicated by the 4-pointed star above the ridge on the Centerfold is clearly visible as the point on the right where it is labeled with the same star. It could be said generally that the farther away from the cliffs and the higher the viewpoint, the better the chance of seeing any particular point on the North Peak’s ridge line. And the farther toward Denali Pass one would move, the speculative location on the western side of the ridge would be more favored than the 2 locations on the extreme eastern side of the ridge. However, it would take a series of photographs from along Stuck’s route to prove any of these speculations with any certainty, and they are only mentioned for the reason of making an evaluation of possible likelihood. There is no proof here.

30F Brian Okonek offers a solution to the dilemma of Washburn’s viewpoint by saying he feels Stuck’s position was not at 16,400 feet, but much lower, at 15,100 feet. From this position Waterman’s, Washburn’s, and the small peak with the star would all be visible, as



Figure 18: Stuck's photo of his high camp from his *Scribner's* article.

well as the actual summit, but as one ascends Stuck's route, the viewer comes in too close to the cliffs to see any of these points. Okonek sent a photo taken from that approximate position. [Fig.19] From this position, the peak marked by the 4 pointed star in Fig.13, which is the second arrow from the right in Okonek's photo, comes closest to the position indicated by Stuck: "a peak just below the highest point of the great N.ridge;" — "the rocky peak nearest the summit."

31 Rendition or Reality?

31A The *New York Times Sunday Magazine* contained 18 photographs and drawings. None of the six photos showing the landscape appeared to have been taken at high altitudes. Most of the drawings are totally nondescript. But the drawing that appeared in the upper right corner of the front page of the article bears careful study. It is inscribed, "Pete Anderson planting the American flag on top of Mount McKinley." [Fig.20]

31B Note these features of the drawing: Only Anderson is shown in the drawing. Anderson's costume is accurate in every detail: the striped "parkie," the fur hat, the mittens, the knee-high floppy moccasins and ice-irons, and the hooked pike pole. [See Fig.2.] Also notice the proportion of the flag to the pole. We know the exact dimensions of each: the flag was 6 x 12 feet, the pole 14 feet tall, but, according to Lloyd, it had been anchored in the rocks to a depth of 15 inches, making it effectively only a little taller than the length of the flag. The proportions in the picture match these aspects exactly. But none of these details would be required of a mere artist's rendition. Nor is the composition of the scene depicted suggestive of an imaginary one. If only an imaginary scene, why is only Anderson shown, when the artist could easily have put Taylor in the picture as well? Why are two pike poles shown when only one man is depicted? Also notice that the rocks are built up around the pole's base, just as in Lloyd's description, too, and that the snow slope appears not smooth but disturbed, with random rocks strewn about. Not only that, but this is not a "triumphant" scene. Anderson does not grasp the flagpole; the stars and stripes aren't shown flying in the wind. Instead the flag hangs limply, in very natural folds. All the elements an artist's imagination would have incorporated to show the moment of conquest are absent. Rather, Anderson's posture is entirely natural; he leans slightly forward, head tilted, supporting his weight with his pike pole while the flag hangs absolutely slack on the pole. Contrary to popular misconception, no-wind conditions atop McKinley are not greatly out of the ordinary. Multi-climber Mark Westman comments (2020/6/24-27):

I don't have a percentage, but I can say that 4 of the 9 times I've been to the summit, the winds up there were between 0-10 mph; in three of those cases it was dead calm. In the others, it was maybe 15-25 mph. Dead calm days are not exactly common but are definitely no unheard of. More common perhaps is the wind to be stronger in places like Denali Pass and other places affect by terrain. . . .

The first time I ever went to the summit, we spent about 90 minutes on top as there wasn't a breath of wind. I could have lit a match. Two other times were similar. Many, many people I know have enjoyed similar summit days. So the notion that the winds up there are ceaseless is without merit.

I don't recall how the sourdoughs described winds that day, but if it was really 30 below as Taylor claimed, it couldn't have been that windy, or they would have gotten frostbite. Those guys knew how to deal with the cold, but in places like Fairbanks and Kantishna, when it's 30 below there's usually no wind. It takes little wind in such temps to cause frostbite, and I'm not convinced the clothes they had would have offered much defense if the winds were up much above 10.



Figure 19: The view from 15,100 feet. The arrows left to right indicate: the North Peak summit; the peak marked by the star; Washburn's Flag Rocks; the position of Waterman's line. Photo by Brian Okonek.

The emphasis should remain that such calm days are not "common" but nor are they one in a million.

31C All these aspects suggest that the drawing may be based on something more concrete than mere description or only the artist's imagination. All of the details that precisely match Lloyd's narrative would be more than required of a mere imaginary depiction of "Pete Anderson planting the American flag on Mount McKinley," and the pose seems far less of what would be expected of an imaginary depiction of that scene. Even the presence of the second pike pole is suggestive; naturally, Taylor would have had to put his pike pole aside to take a photograph of Anderson. If, however, it is actually an artist's enhancement of an actual scene, both its slavish accuracy and its lack of drama make sense.

31D Remember that Lloyd said in his narrative that "a picture of the flag and pole, with Pete Anderson standing by them, was then taken," but that it did not come out because of Taylor's inexperience using cameras, and "looked like it had been taken in a snowstorm." [§12F] It should be noted that every photograph except one of Mt. Foraker taken at the summit of Mt. McKinley by Stuck's party was botched as were all of Lindley-Liek's, and they had the camera experience Taylor lacked. Fig. 21 shows what Stuck's attempt to photograph his flag raising at the summit in 1913 looked like: double exposed, and "like it was taken in a snow storm," as Tom Lloyd might say. So Taylor's failure to get a clear image is not exceptional. But even so, as with Stuck's photo, although botched, it might have been at least clear enough for the artist to use it to draw this picture. If this drawing is actually based on the mentioned photo, then other aspects of it become important as well.

31E Notice that Anderson is shown standing on the "knife edge ridge," and the rocks shoring the flagpole are right along side the ridge, what one would expect of the pole's position if it were intended to be seen from below. Furthermore, the logical place to

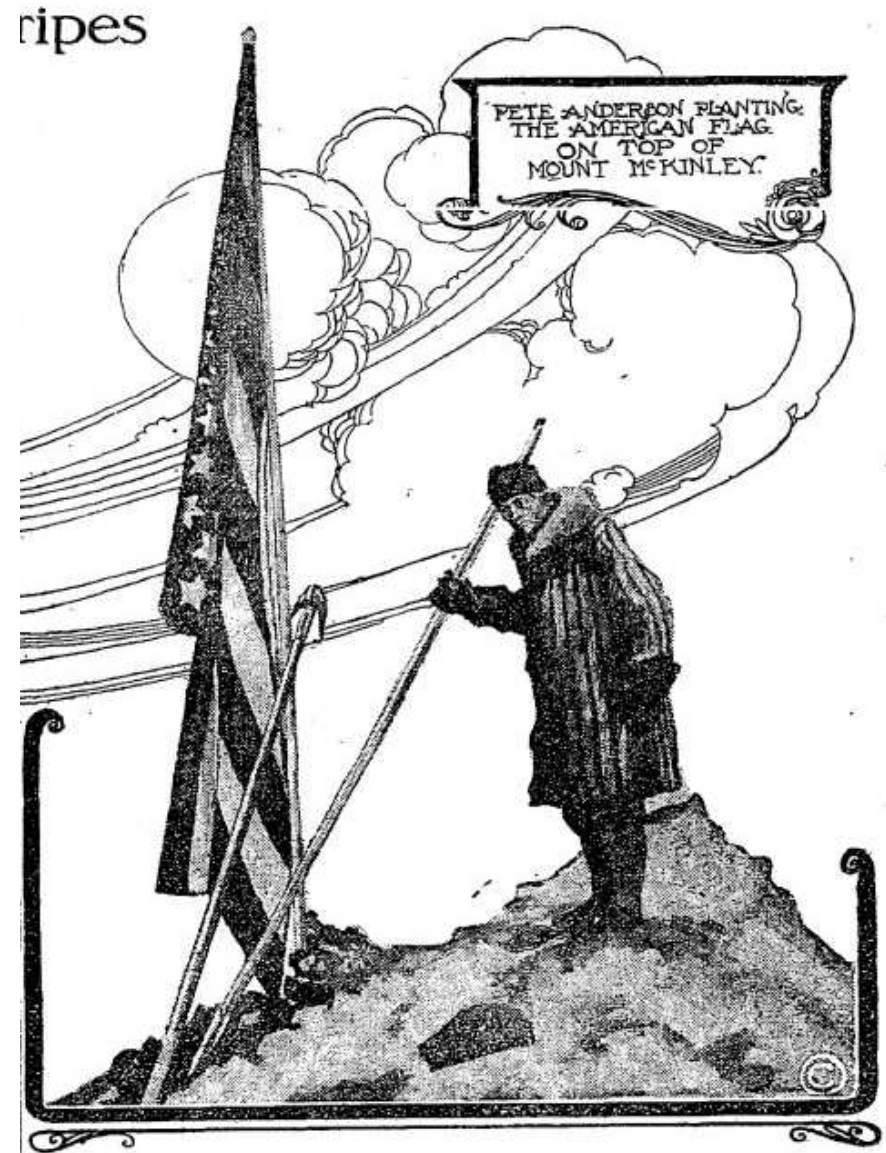


Figure 20: Drawing from the *NYT Sunday Magazine*



Figure 21: Stuck's botched summit photo as published in *The Ascent of Denali*

position the pole so that it might be seen from the north is the north side of the ridge; if so, the orientation of the picture would be looking east. However, the ridge is higher in the background behind Anderson, suggesting that the flagpole's location is on the western side of the ridge, but being above the ridge line, it might fit the position of the 4-pointed star on the ridge on the Centerfold, a position more likely visible from Washburn's hypothetical observation point for Stuck's sighting than Okonek's. If it were placed about where the rightward arrow on Fig.17 is, it might fill all the requirements of the evidence; even though on the north side of the ridge, it might possibly be seen from the position ascribed to Stuck by Okonek. Compare the rise behind Anderson in Fig.20 to the view of that point taken looking east from the summit in Fig.5.

31F Notice also that the board sign they say they affixed to the pole is not in evidence in the drawing. There appears to be an unnatural object at the right-hand base of the pole, but what the object is is not definite. However, the sign is mentioned by Lloyd only after he says the picture was taken, so if this is an artist's enhancement of an actual photograph, that matches as well. Finally, the details of Anderson's costume could easily have been filled in by the artist from Fig.2. In fact, there is an artist's rendition based on Fig.2 in the *NYT* article, suggesting that the artist was indeed working from photographs. Finally, the face of "Anderson" in the drawing bears much more of a resemblance to McGonagall, who appears in that photograph, than to Anderson [see inside front cover].

31G None of this can be considered proof of anything, however. It is merely offered as a further detail supporting the authenticity of Lloyd's account and Taylor's assertion of actually having put up the flag on the summit ridge.

31H Proof of the Sourdoughs having reached the North Peak will only be had when someone does a very methodical search of all the rocky outcrops below the peak, not just those on the traditional route ascribed to them. If you consider the evidence left us as true, the most likely places to look would be near the "snowy peak" marked by the 4-pointed star on the Centerfold and by the rightward arrow on the lower left of Fig.16, if you believe

Stuck's sighting was not mistaken. If you believe his sighting was mistaken or a lie, then the last rocks on the western summit ridge are more likely, rocks which few, if any, climbers have ever visited since 1910 [leftward arrow on right in Fig.16]. After such a careful search has been done, maybe then the issue can be resolved and they can be enthroned on Olympus, or like Cook, consigned to the "gates of Hell" or whatever place tellers of tall tales do time for eternity.

31I Speculations aside, two things are sure: the proof is neither in La Voy's photograph, nor in Waterman's interpretation of it.

32 A New Mythology

32A Having shown at least a possibility that the Sourdoughs were only human, though exceptionally hardy humans, and had the good sense "not to make it as hard as possible," it's possible to write an account of their possible conquest of the North Peak of Denali without illogically departing from the actual evidence that exists, while allowing for a few logical assumptions from that evidence.

32B After a couple of weeks of preparing a staircase up Karstens Ridge and marking a safe trail with spruce stakes out across the upper glacier that avoided pitfalls and crevasses, Taylor, Anderson and McGonagall set out from Tunnel Camp at 11,000 feet for the North Peak on April 1. They chose the North Peak because Lloyd wanted not to owe money on a lost bet. The flag had to be placed where it could (theoretically) be spotted from Kantishna or Fairbanks, so the true summit was out; besides, it didn't look like there were any rock outcrops on the Coast (South) Summit where the flagpole could be erected permanently, though the North Peak appeared to have plenty of rocks in the vicinity. Although Lloyd knew the South Peak was higher, he didn't tell his boys that; from Kantishna the South Peak would be invisible. Once the flagpole had been spotted, if he claimed they had been up to the South Peak too, why wouldn't he be believed? He was a master at embroidering trail tales already. So he told the boys the North Peak was the one to climb, and he was the boss.

32C The flagpole had been moved up the ridge on March 22, and as they marked the trail across the glacier, they had advanced it as they went. Only when they reached the place where the trail stakes ran out did they have to pick up the cumbersome pole again. They had gotten well up the glacier, climbing nearly to the top of the steep first ice fall, marking the trail as they went — in retrospect, Billy Taylor thought only four more hours would have been needed to reach their goal — when advancing storm clouds caused them to cache the pole and return to Tunnel Camp. It set in to snow, alright, and snowed all the next day as well.

32D The storm had cleared off by the next morning and the three set off again over the prepared trail with only light knapsacks, carrying grub, candles, a couple of pieces of box board, some cotton rope, a small axe, matches, a coal shovel and some spruce stakes to mark the trail. Each had a long hooked pike pole, similar to those carried by firemen. Thus equipped, they put their snow glasses on and started at first light, about 3 a.m. the morning of April 3.

32E The storm had filled in their staircase here and there where the wind hadn't blown it off, and they had to use the shovel to clear it, reaching the top of the ridge at 14,600 feet in about 3 hours of work, around 6 a.m. At about 15,000 feet they crossed the glacier to the western cliffs to get around the big ice fall there, as they had two days before. But they didn't have to worry about crevasses; their spruce stakes placed over the last few weeks showed the safe way, and they made good time. They had already looked over the steep snow chimneys coming down gullies between the yellow granite walls of the North Peak from the vantage of Karstens Ridge, but they were far too steep for safety. They wanted to get there, not to make it as difficult as possible, and they already knew from their trip two days before that as they climbed the glacier, the wall of cliffs seemed to become less and less high.

32F The additional stakes they had placed on that hike showed the way up the west side of the first ice fall into the Grand Basin, but first they had to pick up the spruce pole they'd cached two days before near its top. When they had, as before, the Swede took the butt end on his shoulder while Billy and Charley took turns carrying the tapered end. They continued upward into the Grand Basin where the snow became hard-packed crust, and with their big ice-irons strapped to their loose moccasins they made rapid progress that didn't require a rope. With those in place, they forgot all about step cutting, too, and just went right over everything, past another ice fall, and kept going until they reached the head of a pass in the saddle between the two peaks. From there they got a fine view of Mt.Foraker off to the southwest. At the pass, their easy travel ran out; they would have to climb up the cliffs to get toward the goal of the North Peak, but what lay ahead, they couldn't see from the glacier floor.

32G They chose one of the snow gullies that led up the steep, rocky cliff of black shale that fell off steeply over the lip of the pass, that looked to be maybe 600 feet high. It was a strenuous climb with the spruce pole. It had to be pulled up behind them on a line. By hooking their pike poles over the rocks above, they pulled themselves up in the tight places, but they were all skookum, and reached the top.

32H There, to their surprise, they could look down from the top of the yellow granite crest onto a wide snow plain that descended in a gentle slope toward the rocks at the base of the summit ridge, maybe a half mile off and about level with the top of the cliff they had just climbed. Going downhill was a pleasant change after nothing but up, and they made quick progress. They guessed by the sun that it was nearing noon but they never paid any attention to the actual time, not bothering to take off their mitts to check their watch.

32I Once they made the rocky outcrop at the base of the summit ridge, it stretched above them maybe 800 vertical feet in less than half a mile. Once on the outcrop, they found the black shale crumbly, slippery and ice encrusted. McGonagall, especially, didn't like the footing as he helped the Swede heft the pole to the top of the rocks, and once there he decided he'd had enough of climbing. After all, his turn was over, and as Taylor took the tapered end of the pole, he told them to go on without him. He knew they didn't need his help to put up the flagpole and wanted to catch his breath before taking his time getting back down the icy rocks and heading toward camp. Hell, he never wanted to go on this trip in the first place! [Cole:62]

32J The other two set off up the slope carrying the pole the 500-600 feet left between them and the summit. The remaining distance wasn't steep, but the summit ridge was like a knife edge, and in places they could look down thousands of feet off the side facing north. It didn't take that long to reach the summit, but there they could only find small pinnacles of rotten shale no more than a few inches in height, not enough to secure the pole well enough so that it would stand until it could be seen in the mining camps to the north. From the summit, they could make out some of the creeks and rivers and some timber in the distance at first, but that view was gradually obscured by clouds until only towering Mt.Foraker, which they first caught sight of when they topped the pass, could be seen, its lofty summit still above the clouds. It was colder than hell, maybe thirty below — felt like it anyway — so there was no reason to linger. They stuck their coal shovel into the crust on the summit and left it there. No use lugging it back; they had no further use of it. All they had to do now was follow their outward trail back to camp, and they hadn't dug a single step on the way out, anyway.

32K But first, they would have to lug that pole down the ridge below the summit to the last rocks that would hold, and put it up there. It wouldn't be on the summit, exactly, but it could still be seen from Kantishna, they figured. So down the knife edge they went. Using the pike poles to keep their balance by jabbing them in on either side of the crest, they headed down, with the butt of the pole on Anderson's shoulder and the tapered end in Taylor's ice-covered free mitten.

32L At the first snow covered rocks nearest the peak they dug around in the hard-crust snow and pried up some rocks with their axe; they used it to dig a hole into the ice and rocks about 15 inches deep. It was cold, and the work went slowly at 19,000 feet. After two hours, the pole was ready to have E.W.Griffin's big flag tied to it. After they stuck in the pole, they took the dug-out rocks and piled them up around the base of the pole so that it had 30 inches of rock and ice holding it in place. Just to make sure, they took some cotton line from their knapsack and with the blade of the axe cut it into four pieces. After tying them to the spruce pole they attached them to rock pinnacles to guy it against mountain storms.

32M There was no wind, and the flag hung loosely, almost touching the ground. Taylor stuck his pike pole in the slope and retreated a few feet along the ridge and with their Kodak took a picture of Anderson leaning on his pole next to the limp flag. Since he had his mitten off, Anderson took out his watch — it was 3:25.

32N There was still one more task to do, though. Taking out a piece of boxboard from a candle box on which Tom Lloyd had written the names of their party and two of their backers, along with the date of the ascent, they nailed it to the spruce pole with the butt of the axe, then covered that with another board inscribed "Look Inside. Lloyd Party." Then they packed up and headed back the way they'd come.

32O When they reached the top of the rocky ridge they had come up, McGonagall wasn't there. They figured he was taking his time going down the slippery rocks. Part way down, using their pike poles and watching their footing at every step, they looked out and caught sight of Charley, a black speck far out on the snowfield, or at least they thought it was him. Despite their snow glasses, the glare off the ice was something fierce. Once at the bottom of the rocks they followed Charley's trail to the top of the snow chimney they had come up. With no flagpole, the climb down was not nearly as difficult as the climb up. They were glad to be rid of the thing, and looked forward to some beans and meat with 'em when they reached camp. All they'd had to eat all day was a few trail doughnuts and a thermos of hot chocolate each.

32P Once back on the glacier, they felt as if they could run. They didn't have to worry about stumbling into a bottomless crevasse or other unseen hazards like they had on the way up once they had passed the last of the spruce stakes. All they needed to do now was follow their outward trail marked by their ice-irons' nine spikes. They looked up once they were out far enough from the line of cliffs, and were disappointed that even from there they couldn't make out the flag they'd stuck in the last rocks below the summit. Oh, well, they had the proof in their camera, and with a telescope someone was sure to spot it in Kantishna, once they told them where to look.

32Q It was getting dark by the time they started down the staircase they'd dug up the ridge from Tunnel Camp. When they reached the bottom of the ridge, somewhere between 9 and 10 o'clock, they found Charley safe and sound in their tent in the snow cave. It was just about 18 hours since they started; it must have been about 12 miles round trip, they figured. Good time, considering having to lug that damned pole and all! They'd shown what old Alaskan Pioneers could do, all right. "In One Day, by God!" exclaimed Taylor. They slept well that night, and in the morning they met Lloyd at Willows Camp farther down the glacier. Once back in Kantishna, they headed for their assessments in the Kantishna hills. Lloyd headed for Fairbanks to claim his bet and do some, as it turned out, big bragging.

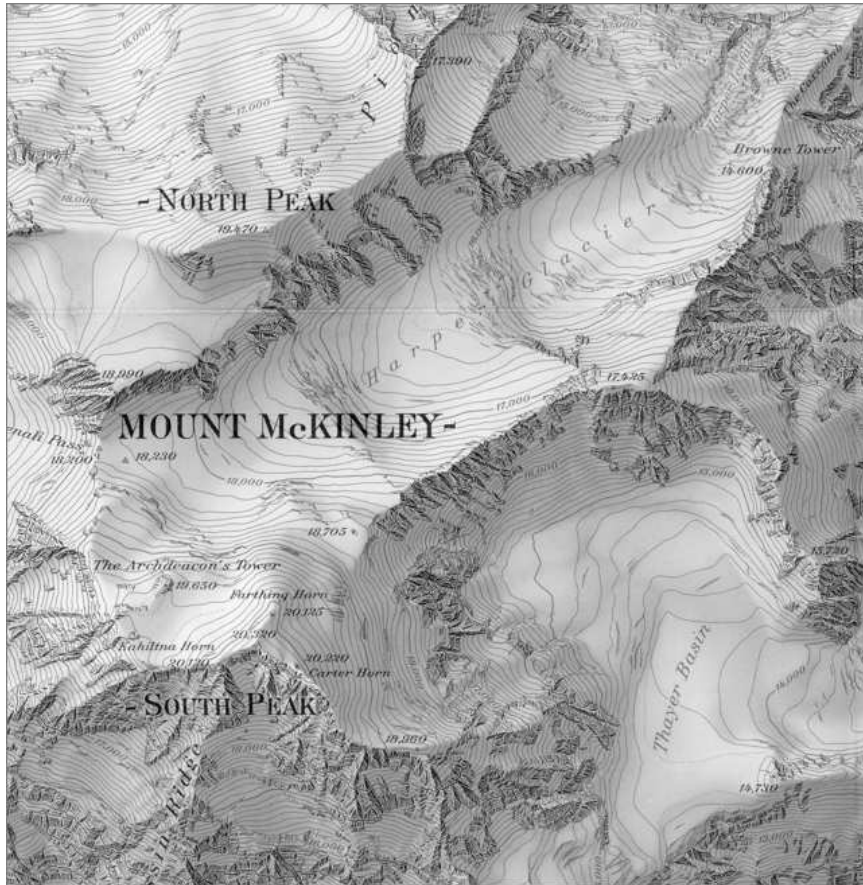


Figure 22: Topographic Map by Bradford Washburn. Scale: _____ = 1 mile.
Distances discussed here:

- 2 miles up Karstens Ridge from Tunnel Camp (off the map to the right)
- 4 miles from Browne Tower to Cliff at Denali Pass
- .5 miles across the snow plain
- .5 miles to the summit from the base of the summit ridge
- 4.75 miles from Browne Tower to South Summit by Stuck's route
- 1.4 miles from La Voy's camera position to the position of the "flagpole" in his photo
- Washburn's position for Stuck's flagpole-sighting report is on the 16,400 contour line
- Okonek's position for Stuck's flagpole-sighting report is on the 15,100 contour line.



Figure 23: Photograph made by Merl La Voy in 1912 showing the cliffs facing Harper Glacier. Just off the extreme left is Denali Pass and the black shale cliff that drops over its edge. The rocky West Ridge of the summit ridge can be seen across the nearly level snow plain above the cliffs. Camera azimuth c.310°. The light flair is likely a defect that was not part of the original negative. StefMSS 190-5-41-323



Figure 24:
 Photograph made by Merl La Voy in 1912 showing the North Peak of Denali taken from the same vantage point as Figs.23&25. The camera is aimed to about 330° azimuth. StefMSS 190-5-41-324



Figure 25: Photograph made by Merl La Voy in 1912 showing the eastern portion of the summit ridge of the North Peak just beyond the small peak visible on the right of Fig.24 & the left of Fig.25, and marked by a 4-pointed star on the Centerfold (above at pp.40-41). Taken at the same place as Figs.23-24, but with the camera inadvertently tilted to the left c.5° vs the other two photos. (Same photo as Fig.11 above.) StefMSS 190-5-41-325

Bibliography: Frequently referred to titles are coded as follows:

Browne = Browne, Belmore, *The Conquest of Mount McKinley*, Putnam, 1913
 C&P = Bryce, Robert M., *Cook & Peary, the Polar Controversy, Resolved*, Stackpole, 1997
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The La Voy Photographs are from the Rauner Special Collections Library, Dartmouth College. StefMSS 190 (the papers of Belmore Browne).

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This being said, all the opinions this paper contains not specifically attributed to them, and especially its evaluations, criticisms and characterizations of Jon Waterman's book are entirely my responsibility alone.

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Publisher's Note:

Publisher DR regards the Sourdough tale as merely notorious liar Tom Lloyd's greatest success. *DIO* is publishing the present issue nonetheless for several compelling reasons:

- [a] It is by far the fullest and most accurate history of the 1910 Sourdough incident.
- [b] Alpine experts have taken it so seriously that it is worth our review on that basis alone.
- [c] Robert Bryce's record of vindications, integrity, and scrupulous accuracy — with full&balanced display of all sides' evidences — justifies publishing whatever he produces.

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