Canadian Rockies -11,000' plus

a series by Peter Rowlands

including articles by Orvel Miskiw and Christine Grotefeld

This series of articles originally appeared in "The Chinook" - the newsletter of the Calgary Section of the Alpine Club of Canada and is reprinted courtesy of Peter Rowlands. Peter has been climbing throughout western Canada for the past 25 years and is currently residing in Calgary, Alberta. This series is being distributed in four logical parts. Part One (the first article) is an introduction to the topic. Part Two provides the "list" that fuels the topic. Part Three contains further ruminations by Orvel Miskiw. Part Four further expounds upon the topic and contains a summary article by Peter Rowlands with some thought provoking questions. Part Four also contains a follow - up to the subject by Christine Grotefeld.

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11,000'+ ...a Revised List?

Part 2 in a series about the highest peaks in the Canadian Rockies

by Peter Rowlands

In an article last month, I suggested that the currently accepted number of peaks in the Rockies over 11,000'/3353m may need to be re-examined, based on the margin of error inherent in surveys and maps used to determine the heights of peaks. The government of Canada claims an accuracy of no more than **+/-20m/65'** on most NTS 1:50,000 maps, and on some of the maps that have undergone more recent revisions, long accepted elevations of peaks are being changed.

The list below shows the 54 peaks that are currently accepted as being on "the list", plus those peaks that could possibly be added or deleted. Elevations given are from the most recent maps and publications that I could find; some of them may be different than what you are used to, especially if you have been referring to older editions of climbing guides or maps.

For peaks that have had significant changes in elevation, I have included some footnotes, indicated by a letter beside the name and elevation of the peak. I have also included some 'food for thought', based on the idea that currently accepted elevations may be out by as much as 20m/65'.

The Lists

1. Mt. Robson.....3954m - 12,972' (a)
2. Mt. Columbia.....3747m - 12,294'
3. North Twin.....3730m - 12,234' (b)
4. Mt. Clemenceau.....3658m - 12,001' (c)
   (if recent maps are accurate..3630m - 11,900'+)
5. Twins Tower.....3640m - 11,940' (d)
6. Mt. Alberta.....3619m - 11,874'
7. Mt. Assiniboine.....3618m - 11,870'
8. Mt. Forbes.....3612m - 11,852'
9. South Twin.....3580m - 11,742' (b)
10. South Goodsir.....3562m - 11,686'
11. Mt. Temple.....3543m - 11,626'
12. North Goodsir.....3525m - 11,565'
13. Mt. Lyell #2 (Edward).....3514m - 11,528'
14. Mt. Lyell #3 (Ernest).....3511m - 11,520'
15. Mt. Bryce SW.....3507m - 11,507' (e)
16. Mt. Lyell #1 (Rudolph).....3507m - 11,505' (e)
17. Mt. Hungabee.....3492m - 11,457'
18. Mt. Athabasca.....3491m - 11,452'
19. Mt. King Edward.....3490m - 11,447' (b)
20. Mt. Kitchener.....3480m - 11,410'
21. Mt. Brazeau.....3470m - 11,386'
22. Mt. Victoria S.....3464m - 11,365'
23. Snow Dome.....3451m - 11,322'
24. Stutfield West.....3450m - 11,320' (e)
25. Mt. Joffre.....3450m - 11,316' (e)
26. Mt. Andromeda.....3450m - 11,316' (b)
27. Resplendent Mtn.....3426m - 11,240'
28. Deltaform Mtn.....3424m - 11,235'
29. Tsar Mtn.....3424m - 11,235'
30. Mt. Lefroy.....3423m - 11,230'
31. Mt. King George.....3422m - 11,226'
32. The Helmet.....3420m - 11,217' (b)
33. Mt. Sir Douglas.....3406m - 11,174'
34. Mt. Wooley.....3405m - 11,170'
35. Mt. Lyell #4 (Walter).....3400m - 11,150'
36. Lunette Peak.....3400m - 11,150'
37. Whitehorn Mtn.....3395m - 11,139'
38. Mt. Hector.....3394m - 11,135'
39. Mt. Lyell #5 (Christian).....3390m - 11,120' (b)
40. Stutfield East.....3390m - 11,120'
41. Mt. Victoria N.....3388m - 11,116'
42. Mt. Alexandra.....3388m - 11,114'
43. Mt. Goodsir Center.....3384m - 11,100' (f)
44. Mt. Willingdon.....3373m - 11,066'

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-------------------------------------------------(g)
45. Diadem Peak.................3371m - 11,060'
46. Mt. Bryce Center............3370m - 11,055' (b)
47. Mt. Huber...................3368m - 11,051'
48. Mt. Edith Cavell............3363m - 11,033'
49. Mt. Cline...................3361m - 11,027'
50. Mt. Fryatt..................3361m - 11,026'
51. Twins West..................3360m - 11,025' (h)
52. Tusk Peak...................3360m - 11,025' (i)
53. Mt. Harrison................3359m - 11,020'
54. Recondite Pk................3356m - 11,010'
-------------------------------------------------(j)
55. Queens Peak.................3350m - 10,990'
56. Mt. Saskatchewan............3342m - 10,964'
57. Mt. Barnard.................3339m - 10,955'
58. Mt. Willingdon S (Crown)..... 3337m - 10,950'
59. Mt. Freshfield.............. 3336m - 10,945'
60. Mt. Murchison...............3333m - 10,936'
61. Cataract Peak...............3333m - 10,935'
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(a) With the chance of the elevation being out by as much as 65', it is possible that Robson could break the 13,000' barrier, making it the only Canadian peak outside of the Coast Range / St. Elias to do so!

(b) Older publications appeared to round off some elevations. More recent elevations show a change in elevation greater than what can be accounted for by the conversion from imperial units to metric, indicating that these newer elevations are more accurate revisions of the older figures.

(c) One of the most interesting possible changes! The most recent editions of the 1:50,000 NTS maps show the highest contour line on Clemenceau as being 11,900', meaning that the actual elevation is over 11,900' but **not** over 12,000'; it appears likely that the Rockies contain only 3 peaks over 12,000', not 4. It is also possible that Twins Tower (11,940') may be higher than Clemenceau, making it necessary to switch the order of #4 and #5.

(d) May be the 4th highest peak in the Rockies.....see "c" above.

(e) Several peaks have identical metric elevations, but slight differences when shown in feet. This is a result of rounding to the nearest meter when converting imperial units to metric.

(f) One of the most interesting additions to the former list of 51. This peak, between the much higher North and South Goodsir Towers, appears from some angles to more of an outlier to South Goodsir than a peak in it's own right. However, it does meet the more formal definition of a separate peak in that it shows over 300' vertical separation from the col separating it from South Goodsir. If you are still in doubt, check out the photograph on page 159 of Sean Dougherty's "Selected Alpine Climbs" and decide for yourself.

TRIVIA: Don Forest, who was the first to climb all the "official" 11,000'ers also made the first ascent of Goodsir Center in 1979, meaning that he is the only person who will ever be able to claim to have climbed all the peaks on the list as well as making the first ascent of one of them!

(g) With an accuracy of no more than +/- 20m/65' for elevations given to peaks, this is the cut-off for peaks which are **without doubt over 11,000'**. Any peaks below this line **may or may not be over 11,000'**.

(h) Like Goodsir Center, this peak is shown as a separate summit. Located between the more famous North and South Twins, this peak has often been ignored by peak-baggers charging up its' more famous neighbors.

(i) Perhaps the most intriguing addition to the list. An impressive peak, Tusk has traditionally been listed as 10,950'. When revised maps for the Clemenceau region were recently published, Tusk Peak was shown with an 11,000' contour, and a new listed elevation of 3360m/11,025'.

(j) Peaks below this line **may be over 11,000'** if the possible error of 20m/65' is taken into account. There are some fine peaks on this list, most of which are deserving of more attention than they currently receive. If they turn out to be over 11,000', it would force potential "list-baggers" to visit at least one more major group of peaks with difficult access (the Freshfields) in order to complete the list.

Just Dreaming: What if we add an extra 5m/16' of possible error in surveyed elevations. This would introduce another 6 possible additions to the list:

62. Oppy Mtn.....3330m - 10,925'
63. Mt. Shackelton Center.....3330m - 10,925'
64. Catacombs Mtn.....3330m - 10,925'
65. Mt. Cromwell.....3330m - 10,925'
66. Mt. Amery.....3329m - 10,920'
67. Mt. Mummery S.....3328m - 10,918'

What does it all mean? To me, the most intriguing possibility is that there may be more 11,000' peaks than currently thought. Many of the peaks that may be added to the list deserve more attention than they currently receive. Peaks such as Mt. Saskatchewan, Mt. Barnard and Mt. Freshfield are all spectacular peaks that offer much better climbing experiences than some of the scree piles that see more traffic simply because they are over the magic 11,000' elevation. With the possibility that additional peaks may be added to the list, these "forgotten" peaks may receive the attention they deserve. Conversely, if some peaks are removed from the list, it will make the task of completing the list easier, albeit at the cost of missing out on some of the classic climbs of the range such as Mt. Edith Cavell, the Bryce Traverse or Tusk Peak.

In a concluding article to come, I propose to discuss whether any of this really matters; what motivates many of us to pound up piles of scree that are over 11,000', while ignoring superior climbs and peaks just because they are a few feet short of an arbitrary elevation of significance.