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# Climb to the Ice

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# Climb

*By Richard Vaughan*

*to the*

## *One hundred and twenty-seven years ago*

this fall, in September 1885, George Bird Grinnell got his first glimpse of the glacier that is today one of the jewels of Glacier National Park ... Grinnell Glacier. Dwindling supplies and bad weather kept Grinnell from reaching the glacier in 1885, but his appetite had been whetted and in his trip diary he vowed he would return "to the ice."

Although new to this pocket of Montana, Grinnell was no stranger to the American West. His western travel experiences had begun fifteen years earlier when he served as a member of O.C. Marsh's first Yale Paleontology Expeditions. A few years later he was spending summers hunting buffalo and elk on the plains of Nebraska and Kansas with the leaders of the famed Pawnee Scouts, Frank and Luther North. In 1874 he served as a scientist on Custer's Black Hills Expedition, and a year later found himself doing the same on the Ludlow Yellowstone Reconnaissance.

Grinnell was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1849 and raised in Manhattan

on the former estate of American naturalist John James Audubon. As the son of a merchant, and later stockholder in the Forest and Stream Publishing Company, Grinnell followed in Audubon's widow, then at a private boarding school, and then traveling to the American West, Grinnell made an unsuccessful attempt to run the family stock business. He wrote his first articles in a young sportsman's newspaper, and then working as an assistant to Professor Marsh at Yale, he took on the additional responsibilities of the Yale History Editor. Over the next few years, Grinnell sold his stock in the Forest and Stream Publishing Company to the majority stock holders. Soon after, George Grinnell became company president and editor of the new Forest and Stream.

As editor, Grinnell worked closely with a group of writers who were spread across the country. One of these writers, George Schultz, captured his interest through his accounts of the unknown area in northwest Montana referred to as the "Lost World." Inspired by Schultz's accounts, Grinnell asked



# Ice



George B. Grinnell circa 1885, Notman Portrait, Library of Congress

list and painter John James Audubon. As a stock broker, Grinnell was educated first by his father, then at boarding school, and finally at Yale. Besides his post-college years were filled with an interest in stock brokerage, the publication of his first newspaper known as *Forest & Stream*, and his work at Yale. While working for Marsh, Grinnell and his father began purchasing land for the company and were, by 1880, the largest landowners in Montana. They returned to New York City to become publishers of a newspaper.

With the paper's freelance correspondents and a writer in particular, James Willard Smith, Grinnell's writing and his knowledge of a little about the region led to as "the Saint Mary's region." Frederick Schultz to serve as his first Montana

guide. Schultz agreed and the two met in Fort Benton in late August 1885 and began a month long excursion by wagon, horse, and foot into the mountains that were then part of the Blackfeet Reservation. Recalling his first impression of Grinnell many years later, Schultz wrote "...the moment he got down from the stage and we shook hands, I knew. 'Here,' said I to myself, 'is no tenderfoot'." Over the next few weeks Grinnell proved him right. Together they explored the Saint Mary's Lakes; traversed mountains, valleys, and streams; met and hunted with the region's indigenous peoples; named several geographic features; and saw evidence of glacial activity, particularly as they travelled up the Swift Current Valley. Besides glimpsing the future Grinnell Glacier they spotted another glacier, to the north, which would become known as Swiftcurrent Glacier. As he would for the rest of his life, Grinnell recorded each day's events in a small trip diary that he would later use as the basis for his articles.

Disappointed at not reaching the glacier in 1885, Grinnell returned to New York and quickly slipped back into the busy world of publishing and the causes important to him. In addition to turning his diary into a 15-part *Forest & Stream* serial, Grinnell immersed himself in the creation of a new society dedi-



cated to preserving the wild birds of America, an organization he appropriately named, the Audubon Society. It soon became clear that finding the time to return to Montana in 1886 was just not going to happen.

"You cannot conceive, what a disappointment it is for me," Grinnell wrote Schultz, "to give up all hope of seeing you this autumn, and in making another trip with you. It is something I had thought about for almost a year, and I had always hoped that something would turn up to make it possible for me to go with you deep into the mountains whose outskirts we explored last year. I shall never be satisfied until I find out what lies behind the frowning peaks that surround St. Mary's, and get close to some of the glaciers that furrow those mountains. Let us think of the trip as only postponed a year."

Over the next year, Grinnell planned the trip in the little free time he had. He hoped that two close friends, Luther North and George Huntington Gould, could join him on the 1887 trip. As it turned out, only Gould made the trip. After months of planning and correspondence, the two agreed to meet in Lethbridge, Alberta on October 1st, 1887; Grinnell coming from the east coast, Gould from the west.

From Lethbridge, Grinnell and Gould headed to a camp on the Belly River where they met Schultz. They then traveled southwest by wagon and horseback, arriving at the northern end of Lower Saint Mary's Lake several days later. The plan, upon arriving, was to locate a boat Schultz had hidden nearby and then to transport all the gear to the isthmus between the two lakes. There they would make a base camp to fan out on short hunting excursions. Upon reaching the lake, however, Schultz determined that they needed more

manpower to get the gear and horses up the lake. Schultz knew that his friend Jack Monroe was hunting in the Pike Lake area, a few miles to the north, so he sent Grinnell off to find him. The two returned the next day, and the four travelers began their trek. The diary Grinnell kept of the 1887 trip allows us to follow the group on their wilderness excursion.

Over the next few weeks Grinnell, Gould, Schultz and Monroe hunted and fished in the general area of the Saint Mary's Lakes. As it turned out, they had much better success hunting than in 1885, largely due to arriving later in the fall when game had moved down the mountain sides foraging for food. Given Grinnell's desire to get back to the glaciers he had seen two years before, it seems odd that he did not immediately head up the Swift Current Valley. Gould, however, had informed him that he had to return to his Santa Barbara law practice by the end of the month. So, serving as host, perhaps Grinnell felt his friend's time would be most enjoyed if they stayed in the Lakes area hunting and fishing. On October 25th Gould, led by Monroe, headed back to Lethbridge and returned California.

A few days later, while waiting for Monroe's return, Grinnell was relaxing in camp when he saw a man and some horses "coming up the trail on the opposite side of the lake." Grinnell thought that it was Joseph Kipp, the legendary trader who often employed Schultz, but a quick view through his eyeglass revealed it was "a military outfit." The next morning the leader of the group rode into camp and introduced himself as Lieutenant John Beacom of the United States Army. Beacom was stationed at Fort Shaw but spent much of his time patrolling the border region for horse thieves and

whisky traders. Beacom and Grinnell hit it off right away, and soon the young officer was invited on the next leg of the trip. Beacom agreed to meet them the next morning, where Swift Current Creek enters Lower Saint Mary's Lake. Grinnell, Schultz and Monroe (back from escorting Gould) packed up their camp and left for the Swift Current that evening by moonlight.

The next day, joined by Beacom, the foursome started up the Swift Current Valley, camping about one-and-a-half miles below the fifth lake. (In both his 1885 and 1887 trip diaries, Grinnell refers to the Swift Current lakes by the numbers one through six, and always spelled "Swift Current" as two words. The first four of these lakes, moving up the valley, no longer exists, having been submerged into the manmade Lake Sherburne in the 1920s.)

On October 31 the group was up before dawn and headed toward the southern most of the two glaciers Grinnell had seen two years before. The path they chose was around the northern end of the fifth lake, today's Swiftcurrent Lake, and then down its western shore. Continuing on horseback they crossed the land mass that separated the fifth and sixth lakes. Hugging a steep mountain along the western shore, they continued on until reaching a small stream at the end of the lake where, Grinnell's diary notes, "Beacom took a picture." The foursome explored a snow slide above the lake, but realized it was too late to go farther. At about 2:00 P.M. they started back toward camp, Grinnell and Beacom retracing their steps along the western shore of the lake, while Schultz and Monroe swung around on the eastern side.

The next day Grinnell, Schultz and Monroe packed extra gear on the mules and started for "Grinnell's lake"



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those mountains.”*

*- George Bird Grinnell*

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George Bird Grinnell  
on Grinnell Glacier,  
1926, Photograph  
by Morton J. Elrod,  
Archives & Special  
Collections, Man-  
sfield Library, The  
University of  
Montana- Missoula



# 1910-12

Looking up toward  
Grinnell Glacier, 1910-  
1912, photograph by  
Fred Kiser, Glacier  
National Park Archives

as they were now calling the sixth lake (today's Lake Josephine). Beacom, unable to climb because of an old injury, headed back to meet the rest of his outfit on the Lower Saint Mary's Lake, but not before proposing that the glacier they were attempting to reach be called "Grinnell's Glacier." In the years to come, Schultz would often take credit for naming the glacier, but the diary clearly indicates it was Beacom. Years later, after his death, Beacom's brother sent Grinnell a quote from Beacom's own 1887 diary in which he describes the trip and confirms it was the Army Lieutenant who gave the glacier its name.

The group camped at the head of the lake, with a plan to "make the glacier" the next day. Grinnell's first sentence in the diary entry for November 2nd leaves no doubt as to their success – "A most important day, for we reached the glacier, discovered a new lake, a most beautiful falls, true moraines at the foot of glacier and killed a superb ram." He follows that brief summary with more details:

"We breakfasted by moonlight and started in the gray

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*"We breakfasted by moonlight  
and started in the gray dawn,  
on foot, for the glacier."*

*George Bird Grinnell*

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dawn, on foot, for the glacier. Crossed the snowslide, about ¼ mile from camp, and kept up the valley on the East side, keeping well away from the creek. Less than a mile from camp we crossed another little creek, which runs down from a cañon in the southeast, and soon found ourselves at the edge of the timber. Beyond was a grass opening, dotted here and there with low spruces. Passing through this, we





Looking up toward  
Grinnell Glacier, 2011,  
Photograph by Will  
Czyński

stood on the border of a beautiful lake. It is perhaps a mile long and not quite as wide. Its water is of a clear green, not quite clear, but much less muddy than I supposed would be the case. To the left of it, or South, stands the solid wall of a peak which we named Monroe's Peak. At the head of the lake there is a narrow fringe of willow and lodge pines. Then rises a thousand feet of precipice over which plunges the water fall from the glacier. On the north, Grinnell's Mountain rises abruptly in a series of rocky ledges to a great height. Over all, is the tremendous amount of ice of the glacier, and about that, the snow patched vertical walls of the knife edged mountains. Here we stopped for a while and gazed in wonder and admiration."

After taking some pictures, the explorers proceeded along the lake, eventually reaching the foot of the falls where they began their ascent. The spray from the falls kept the rocks slippery, and the need to constantly renegotiate finger and toe placements made the going hard and slow. About two thirds of the way up, they reached a shelf that held debris

that had been pushed down from the glacier. "Here," the diary continues, "were enormous peaks of drift—from boulders the size of a small house to pebbles the size of a pin head. Some as sharply angular as where they fell from the cliff above onto the ice, others worn and wounded by attrition against the subjacent rock. Most of this drift was larger; the finer gravel having been carried on and over the falls into the valley below where it was spread out in a great mass covering many acres."

As they ascended, they kept an eye on the falls that served as their map upward. Great masses of ice jetted outward from the falls, while in other places the water dropped down a sharp incline for a hundred feet or more. Keeping to the right of a great mass of "morainal drift," they continued working their way up until they reached a point just below the lowest edge of the glacier. From this vantage, Grinnell could begin to get a sense of the Glacier's size. "The glacier," the diary records, "lies in a basin two miles wide by one and one-half deep, and consists of two principal masses; one

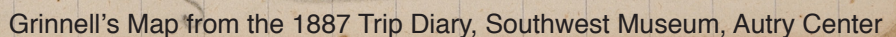


Although he had called the ice mass a glacier when he had first seen it in 1885, Grinnell was now compiling observational evidence to help solidify that declaration. In addition to noting the thickness of the ice and the debris found on the surface, he also noted the milky water he had seen in the sixth lake in 1885 was not present in 1887. He

Unable to reach the upper section of the glacier, the trio ate lunch on the lower section and took in the sights. Soon the temperature began to drop and they decided they had better keep moving or begin their descent. Just then they spotted a big-horn sheep. Grinnell loaded his rifle, dropped to his knee, and fired. Sure that he had hit the ram but unwilling to give up his quickly dwindling time on the ice to find out, Grinnell sent Jack Monroe off to retrieve the ram while he and Schultz continued exploring. Finally, realizing that they

*“The roof seemed  
that eight inches  
and admitted the  
It was beautiful s*

The diary reveals no detail about their route down. Grinnell's published account suggests they hung to





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*not to be more  
or a foot thick  
light quite freely.  
ky blue ice."*

*- George Bird Grinnell*

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the side of the newly named Grinnell's Mountain, rather than climbing over the precipice at the foot of the glacier. Regardless of the route, they were in store for one more

amazing sight. "We had gone but a short distance," the diary records, "when we passed on the lower side of a great snow drift in a gully. The snow had melted from above and the water had tunneled under it, so that a heavy roof stretched across the ravine. Jack went into it, and then called to me to come and see. I entered and was astonished at its beauty. It was eight to ten feet from floor to roof and perhaps thirty feet wide and sixty to seventy feet long. The roof seemed not to be more than eight inches or a foot thick and admitted the light quite freely. It was beautiful sky blue ice and had melted from the bottom so as to form a curious pattern of squares. It was lovely." Continuing on down to the camp, the day's diary entry concludes with a satisfied, "Feasted on sheep meat."

After the excitement and exer-

tion of the climb, the next few days were spent relaxing in camp, writing up notes, and packing for the trip back down the valley. By November 5th they were back on Lower Saint Mary's Lake. Carrying a quarter of the sheep on his horse, Grinnell rode over to see Beacom and present the meat to the soldiers. Additionally, he told Beacom about the ice "in G's Basin," and presented him with a sketch of the valley and "his ideas as to the glacier."

The last two weeks of the trip were spent working their way back to Lethbridge, with occasional side trips to see the sights, hunt, and visit with friends of Schultz and Monroe. Monroe departed at an undisclosed date, but Schultz stayed with Grinnell all the way to Lethbridge. Grinnell's diary entry for November 20th simply notes, "Parted rather tearfully from Schultz, who returns to Agency



Looking East Over  
Grinnell Lake,  
Photograph by Rick  
and Susie Graetz





*In Glacier Park. July 1916  
Photo by T.G.P.*

George B. Grinnell in Glacier National Park, 1916, Pearson Photograph, Collection of the Author

at once.” A day later Grinnell was eastbound on the Canadian Pacific Railroad.

Arriving back in New York City, Grinnell immediately began converting his diary into a massive 18-part serial account for *Forest & Stream*. Gould contributed three parts to the series, including a 1500 word poem. Part one of the serial, entitled “The Rock Climbers,” appeared on December 29, 1887. As winter settled in, Grinnell managed what were to be the final days of the Audubon Society (although other organizations of similar name and purpose would soon continue its work), while taking on a new cause as a co-founder (with his friend Theodore Roosevelt) of the Boone and Crockett Club. He also began work on the first of what became more than twenty books he would write over the next forty years. Grinnell continued to travel back to the Saint Mary’s region, whenever time permitted, well into the 1920s. His relationship with *Forest & Stream* lasted until 1921, ten years after he sold the publication. When not writing books or *Forest & Stream* articles and editorials, Grinnell published dozens of articles in scholarly journals, as well as more general pieces in the day’s most widely read

periodicals—often offering his paternalistic views on the conditions and treatment of the Native Americans of the day.

Although always wary of getting officially involved in the relationship between the government and Native Americans, Grinnell did accept an appointment to serve as a Commissioner to negotiate the sale of much of the Saint Mary’s region from the Blackfeet in 1895. The “ceded strip” sale, as it became known, ultimately opened the region to becoming a National Park, but contemporary historians have questioned not only Grinnell’s reasons for serving as a Commissioner but also his fairness toward the Blackfeet.

One of the popular-press pieces Grinnell wrote, entitled “Crown of the Continent,” appeared in *The Century Magazine* in 1901. The article took Grinnell’s descriptions of the region’s beauty to a new and larger audience. The call for turning the region into a national park quickly followed and for the next ten years Grinnell worked the halls of Congress while

his pen urged the public to let their voices be heard as well. Finally, in 1910, the Saint Mary’s region, and the larger area surrounding it, officially became Glacier National Park.

Grinnell remained a New Yorker all his life, ultimately dying there in 1938. His last trip to the glacier that he first climbed in 1887 was in 1926 at the age of 76. His diary for the trip is brief and his tone seems a little more possessive about the region, referring to the features named after him as “my mountain” and “my lake.” Even at an advanced age though, Grinnell observed the world with a scientific eye, noting in his 1926 diary that “the glacier is melting very fast and the amount of water coming from it is great. All these glaciers,” he noted, “are receding rapidly and after a time will disappear.” Grinnell managed one more trip back to the Park a year later but did not return to the glacier.

Besides the firsthand account of Grinnell’s ascent of the glacier, the 1887 diary contains one other treasure—a



The Toe of Grinnell Glacier, Photograph by



drawing of the valley—probably created at the same time as the one he gave Beacom on November 5th. The drawing is a bird’s eye view of the basin looking down upon the valley. In the center of the page are two unidentified lakes, one small round one to the left (the newly discovered lake, or today’s Grinnell Lake), and a longer one to the right (the sixth lake, or today’s Lake Josephine). Above the lakes sit two mountains labeled “Grinnell Mountain” and Appekunyns Mountain” (Appekunny being Schultz’s Blackfoot name – today the two mountains are considered the single Mount Grinnell). To the left of the round lake are the words “Ice Glacier,” “Ice,” “Ice,” with two thin ovals to the left of the



y Rick Graetz

words. The ovals might represent ice masses or the rock peaks of today’s Garden Wall. Below the glacier is “Gould Mountain,” with the triangular “Monroe Peak” sitting between it and the round lake. While Gould Mountain, a tribute to his 1887 traveling companion remains on today’s maps as Mount Gould, “Monroe Peak,” named in honor of the man

who became Grinnell’s favorite guide, is today known as “Angel Wing.” To the right of these two mountains is a line coming in from the bottom left, labeled “Creek in woods – canon” – today’s Cataract Creek. Further to the right is an unnamed mountain (today’s Mount Allen). Two other marks, a squiggly line running down from the glacier into the round lake and a small “x” on the southwestern shore of the longer lake, represent Grinnell Falls and the campsite the trio used on those cold November nights.

In a letter to Gould, written some months after the trip, Grinnell explained that Beacom indicated he would use his copy of the sketch to produce an official army map. If Beacom ever did that, the map has not been identified. Grinnell produced at least three more formal maps of the region over the next few years. The nomenclature of the valley evolved as each map was produced; named features appeared, changed or disappeared altogether as each map

became more detailed than the one before—but all can be traced back to this 1887 sketch.

In 1919 Grinnell’s friend, Madison Grant, published a history of Glacier National Park for the National Park Service. In a footnote he suggests that a more suitable name for today’s Swiftcurrent Lake, the fifth lake, would have been Lake Grinnell. Doubtless Grant thought it fitting because that lake rests in the center of the Swiftcurrent valley, catching the waters of both the glaciers Grinnell spotted in 1885. Today the Many Glacier Hotel sits on the shore of that lake, and it does seem an appropriate feature to name after Grinnell. Perhaps, however, George Bird Grinnell would have thought it more appropriate that those interested in seeing the geologic features that bear his name should have to do a little more hiking of their own and, perhaps, even climb “to the ice.”



Rick Vaughan joined the Indiana University Law Library staff in 1990, bringing his broad experience to the technical services department. As the acquisitions and serials control librarian, he oversees

both the financial and procedural aspects of the area.

Active in university and national committees, he has served on the Bloomington Library Faculty Council and has chaired the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) Committee on Relations with Information Vendors (CRIV) as well as the AALL Price Index for Legal Publications Advisory Committee. Long active in the relationship between law libraries and legal publishers/vendors, he has twice served as editor of *The CRIV Sheet* newsletter.

Although he has written numerous articles on issues within law librarianship, his research centers on the life of George Bird Grinnell (1849-1938), American ethnologist, naturalist, writer, and newspaper editor. He is currently working on a biography of Grinnell. His most recent Grinnell related publication, «To the Ice: George Bird Grinnell’s 1887 Ascent of Grinnell Glacier,» can be found in the *Journal of the West* (v. 49 no.1).