

BRITISH AND CANADIAN THEMES

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Excavating the Body from *The Canadian Alpine Journal*, 1907-1940

In 1906, Arthur Wheeler and Elizabeth Parker founded the Alpine Club of Canada (ACC). Remarkably the administrative center of Canada's national alpine association was located in Manitoba, one of the flattest provinces in the country. In 1907, this mountaineering society began publishing an ambitious annual review that summarized the club's accomplishments and promoted its diverse organizational mandate. In determining format and content, the publishers of *The Canadian Alpine Journal* were influenced by similar reviews produced by associations such as the Appalachian Club, the Sierra Club and the Alpine Club (of London). These elaborate mountaineering journals/newsletters were conspicuous reflexive cultural products; they helped members articulate past accomplishments with the ongoing mission of their respective alpine societies. Since the late 1700s, Europeans and North Americans of the upper and bourgeois classes pursued recreation in the mountain ranges around the world. Much of the early trekking and summitting reflected man's ambition to symbolically capture or concur the furthest reaches of their world. At the same time, mountaineering must have provided new physical experiences and forms of embodied knowledge for these adventuresome urbanites. When the Alpine Club of Canada was founded, the pastime of mountaineering was experiencing its golden age. We might expect that *The Canadian Alpine Journal* would provide us with explicit insight into the physical culture of this particular outdoor pastime. Did these mountaineers describe personal or collective knowledge derived from physical experiences in the mountains?

Initially, a review of *The Canadian Alpine Journal* suggests that this was not the case. In response to this apparent absence of embodied knowledge, this paper poses the following question: Can we excavate a sense of these mountaineers' embodied knowledge/corporeality from this primary source? Analysis of *The Canadian Alpine Journal*, several similar journals, and the ACC

archives reveals that reflections or expressions of embodiment are indeed evident in this genre of literature. However, they are embedded in a variety of literary sub-genres that are most closely associated with scientific or aesthetic discourse. This paper argues that the embodied experiences of the ACC members were expressed as incomplete utterances that bridged conventional modern discourses. As such, the mountaineer's body is portrayed as a physical place where modern fields of knowledge converged. *The Canadian Alpine Journal* articulates the *physical culture* of mountaineering with concepts such as wilderness and landscape, nature and civilization, natural history and human progress, sport and work, achievement and disinterestedness. This paper chronicles aspects of an important institution in Canadian physical culture that is frequently overlooked by sport historians. Through discourse analysis, this paper begins to formulate an investigative model to better understand how the human body functions culturally.
