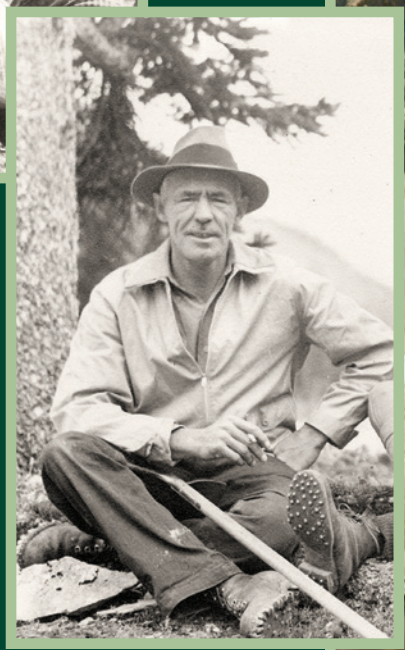
Among The Great Hills

Three Generations of Wheelers
& Their Contribution to the Mapping of Mountains



by R.W. Sandford

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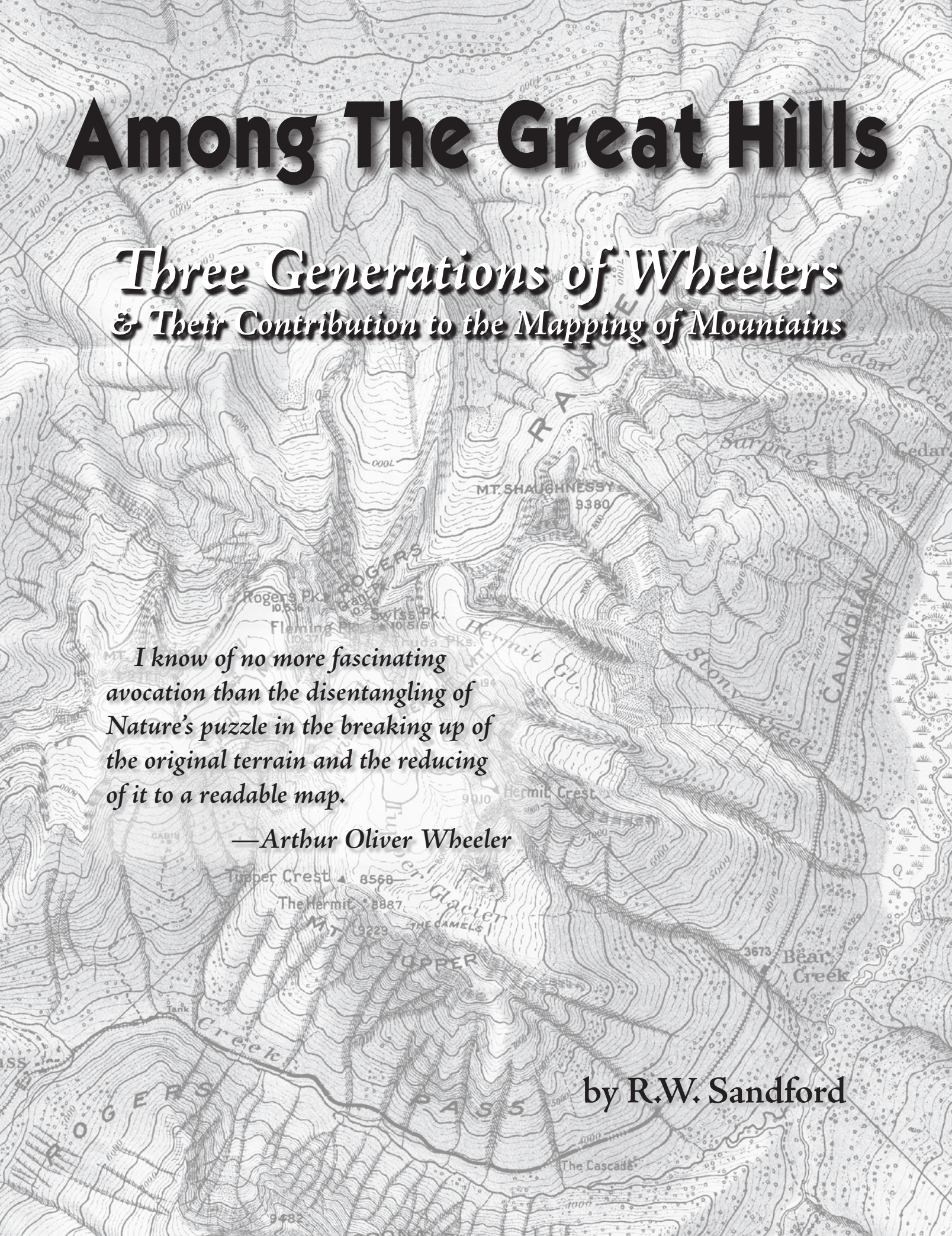

I know of no more fascinating avocation than the disentangling of Nature's puzzle in the breaking up of the original terrain and the reducing of it to a readable map.

—Arthur Oliver Wheeler

by R.W. Sandford

This book would not have come into existence were it not for the generous support of the Canadian Pacific Railway, who were significant partners in the year-long celebration of the centennial of the Alpine Club of Canada in 2006.

CANADIAN PACIFIC RAILWAY

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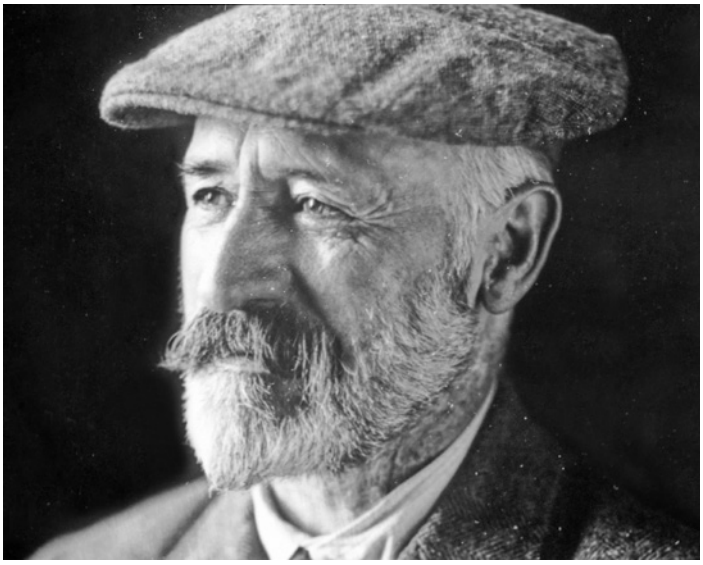
Introduction

The Amazing Wheelers

A.O.

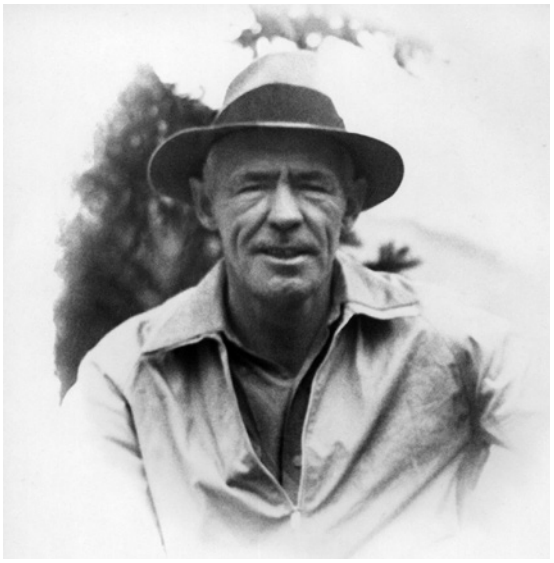


For a hundred years the image of Arthur Oliver Wheeler has towered over the history and legend of the Alpine Club of Canada like a colossus. Here is a man who appears to have been everywhere, known everyone and done everything at the most important junctures, not only in the development of mountaineering, but in the history of Canada.

Before Arthur Wheeler was twenty he fell in love with the notion of the "great lone land" that was the West. He became a surveyor at just the moment in history when cartography was being revolutionized by photography. He fought, and was wounded, in the Riel Rebellion. He followed the tracks of the newly completed Canadian Pacific Railway west. He mapped the Selkirk Range and then wrote the first book published by a Canadian on the history and character of our mountains. Wheeler co-founded the Alpine Club of Canada and then established it as the leading institution for alpine science and exploration in its day. He mapped huge sections of British Columbia and southern Alberta. He was a commissioner of the boundary survey which mapped and named mountains along the 750 mile Continental Divide separating Alberta and British Columbia. Wheeler contributed to the creation of Canada's renowned mountain national and provincial park system and then created a national organization dedicated to its protection and expansion.

Before he died in March of 1945, A.O. Wheeler was known around the world as a champion of Canadian mountaineering. It can be argued that Arthur Oliver Wheeler almost single-handedly drew together the people and resources that made Canada into an alpine nation. For that reason, A.O.'s achievements often overshadow those of his stunningly accomplished descendents. But as time passes, the reputations of his son and grandson have taken on a life of their own. As historically significant Canadians, Edward Oliver Wheeler and John Oliver Wheeler cannot be ignored.

E.O.

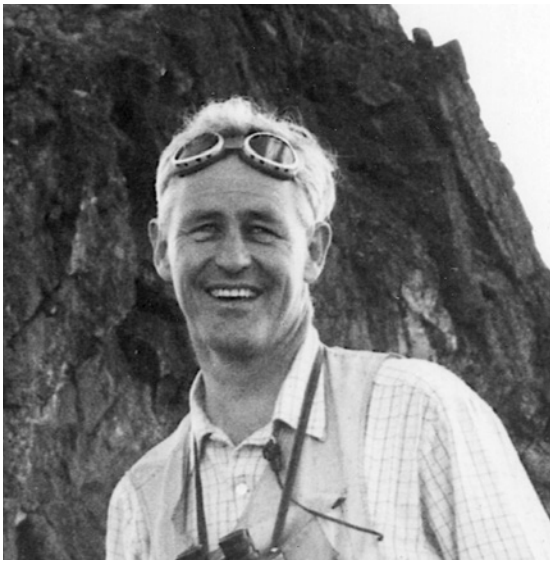


Edward Oliver Wheeler was not daunted by his father's forcefulness of character or his reputation. Under A.O.'s careful eye, E.O. attended Alpine Club of Canada camps throughout his youth and soon became a fine climber and a competent guide. Between the ages of 12 and 20, he climbed with the likes of Sir James Outram, Val Fynn, Tom Longstaff and Albert MacCarthy. He was also highly regarded by guides of the stature of Edward Feuz and Conrad Kain.

At some point, however, it must have occurred to young Oliver that the continent was not big enough for both him and his dad. After graduating from the Royal Military College in Kingston, Ontario in 1910 with the highest marks ever achieved by a cadet and winning the Governor General's Award, twenty year old Oliver joined the Royal Engineers and took up service in Chatham, England. In 1912, he was posted to India but returned to fight in France as part of the Indian Expeditionary Force in 1915. Between 1916 and 1918, he fought for the British in what is now Iraq. In 1919, he was transferred back to the sub-continent where he was seconded to the Survey of India. His reputation as a climber and map-maker was soon such that he was invited, along with George Leigh Mallory and others, to join the first British expedition to Everest in 1921. On that expedition he distinguished himself by being among the trio including George Mallory and Guy Bullock who discovered the way to the North Col. He also created the first detailed map of the Everest region.

Not in the least reluctant to take on the really big jobs, E.O. then went on to become the Surveyor-General of India. Rising in rank as well as in reputation, Brigadier Wheeler was knighted in 1943. Returning to Canada upon his retirement, Sir Oliver Wheeler picked up where his father left off with the Alpine Club of Canada. He became president in 1950 and an Honorary Member in 1956. By this time, his son John – A.O.'s grandson – was already making a name for himself.

J.O.



John Oliver Wheeler was born in India three years after his father had returned from the first British Expedition to Mount Everest. At the age of eight, his parents installed him in a private school on Vancouver Island where he developed self-assurance, independence and an interest in sports and science. He spent many of his youthful summers with his grandfather, often at Alpine Club of Canada camps where he learned to climb at a very high level. While still a teenager J.O. climbed with some of the most famous climbers of his day on major peaks in the Rockies and the Selkirks. As was a custom among Wheeler descendants, he had already lived a full life before he was twenty.

Upon entering the University of British Columbia, John Oliver Wheeler was forced to make a decision between mountaineering and geology. He chose geology and joined the Geological Survey of Canada. In his early career, John began geological mapping of the Whitehorse map area in southern Yukon followed by an exploratory reconnaissance of the remote Selwyn Mountains in the eastern-most Yukon. This was succeeded by arduous field work involving backpacking and air drops in the eastern St. Elias Mountains. This work expanded eastward into the Pelly Mountains of south-central Yukon. Later, in the 1960s, he mapped in southeastern British Columbia in the Selkirks, Monashees and western Rockies. Altogether he mapped some 80,000 square kilometres of mountainous terrain.

John Wheeler's insights into the geology of the Cordilleran region formed the basis for his remarkably detailed and meticulous recompilation and updating of the Tectonic Assemblage Map for the region. This map, probably the finest of its kind in the world, is a work of enormous scope, calling for great insight into the geology of an immense area. It has become the most-used publication of its kind in western North America, constantly in demand by industry, academia, and government.

John was also the chief compiler of a team of regional experts and cartographers who produced the Geological Map of Canada which portrayed more than a century of geological mapping.

In addition, John also played an important role in coordinating with Jack Reed of the U.S. Geological Survey and Brian Tucholke of Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute to produce a new Geologic Map of North America, the first such in many decades. His expertise in North American geology was recognized by his selection as coordinator and general editor of the eight-volume Geology of Canada series, an authoritative and comprehensive account of the nation's geology and resources.

In the 1970s, John moved from Vancouver to Ottawa to take on increasingly senior management positions up to Chief Geologist with the Geological Survey of Canada. He did this because he wished to put something back into the organization from which he had received so much.

For his outstanding contributions to geoscience in Canada, John has been elected to the Royal Society of Canada. He has received the Logan Medal, the highest award by the Geological Association of Canada. Recently he received the Massey Medal from the Canadian Geographical Society for his contributions to geology and for outstanding achievements in the field of Canadian geography. He has also received an Honorary Doctorate from the University of British Columbia, and many other awards. Most fittingly in 2006, following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather, J.O. Wheeler became an Honorary Member of the Alpine Club of Canada.

The life of John Oliver Wheeler symbolizes the passion Canadians have for their own mountains. His life and achievements are the embodiment of the physical strength, persistence of character and great love of place that make Canadians worthy of their spectacular mountains.

It is a great honour to have John Oliver Wheeler as the Patron of the Alpine Club of Canada's Centennial Ball.

Bob Sandford
Vice President, Mountain Culture
The Alpine Club of Canada

Arthur Oliver Wheeler

The Wheeler Legend Begins

Arthur Oliver Wheeler was born at "The Rocks" the Wheeler family estate near Kilkenny, Ireland on May 1, 1860. Wheeler was born into a family that was already well established in Ireland. Though they were of English descent and Anglicans in a predominately Catholic country, their land holdings – which were likely appropriated from the native Irish by Cromwell's armies – allowed the Wheelers to aspire to the ruling class.

A.O. came from a long line of prominent clergymen, military officers and political leaders who lived for generations in Kilkenny. Wheeler's great grandfather, Jonas Wheeler, was Lord Bishop of St. Canice's Cathedral in Kilkenny. His grandfather, William Oliver Wheeler fought with the famous 12th Lancers against Napoleon in Portugal and Spain. He later became the Mayor of Kilkenny. One of six sons, Wheeler's father, Edward Oliver Wheeler was a Captain in the Kilkenny Fusiliers. The Wheelers were also connected through marriage and privilege to other aristocratic Irish families including the Cuffes, the Helshams and the legendary Butlers.

Arthur Oliver Wheeler in his prime. This famous image of "He who must be obeyed" was taken by botanist Julia Henshaw at the ACC Vermilion Pass Camp in 1912. Photograph courtesy of the Wheeler family.

These connections, however, did not prevent the family from falling on hard times. In 1876, an agricultural glut precipitated an alarming crash in farm produce prices throughout Britain. The resulting economic depression led to widespread unemployment in Ireland and a dramatic decrease in rental income for the Wheelers. When Arthur was sixteen, his father was forced to sell his two lovely estates – Mount Brilliant and Glendine – and move to Canada where he took up the post of harbour master. In Collingwood, Ontario. Arthur's father never fully recovered from the change in his aristocratic circumstances. Arthur, however, found the change in circumstances ideal. In fact, he found just what he was looking for – the opportunity to live out a boyhood dream. Wheeler discovered that there was still enough of "the great lone land" in the Canadian West to capture the imagination and to shape his adult dreams.

Arthur Oliver Wheeler was born into a world that preceded ours; a world that defined itself by class and social standing, wealth and privilege. Though he would carry elements of his upper class upbringing with him always, this would not be the world Arthur Wheeler would choose. The inspiration for a new and different life from any lived by any Wheeler before him may have come from an amazing travel book. When A.O. was only twelve, one of his aristocratic Kilkenny neighbours visited Canada and, in the fine British exploration tradition, came home to write what would become a classic in its genre.


"OUR HUT AT THE FORKS OF THE SASKATCHEWAN."

Sketch from William Francis Butler's Great Lone Land. Butler's descriptions and images captured the imagination of a generation of would be travellers to the Canadian west. Image courtesy of the Alpine Club of Canada.

Published in 1872, William Francis Butler's *The Great Lone Land* offered a first-hand account of an expedition to the Red River and other travels and adventures in Western Canada. The book was an instant success because of the beauty and clarity of its landscape descriptions. Such descriptions of Canada were utterly new.

Initially the landscapes of the West as described by early travellers were too fantastic to be believed. With further exploration this was, in fact, confirmed. Later it was held that the landscapes of the West were beyond the power of art to reproduce. Many sophisticated visitors proclaimed the grandeur of the western mountains in particular to be beyond description.

William Francis Butler understood the huge intellectual challenge the West posed to those who would understand it and share it with others. He recognized that the landscapes of the West were places crying out for living description. He recognized in visiting these places the need to imagine and create a new descriptive vocabulary, new comparisons, analogies and similes.

In *The Great Lone Land*, and in *The Wild Northland* which he published the following year, Captain Butler attacked the uninspired interpretation of the western wilderness and challenged those who loved the landscape to put down their "wooden words" and to find new ways to represent the natural glory of place. In his own writings, Captain Butler never ceased in his quest to describe the ineffable. He never let up in his desire to create descriptions and interpretations worthy of the landscape.

William Francis Butler is seen even today as an important divide in the literature of exploration of the Canadian West. His work continues to mark a transition between writers who attempted to expand the language and perceptual capacity at the heart of a genuine interpretation of place and later writers and artists who used the landscape merely as a vehicle for talking about themselves.

One can hardly wonder why young Arthur Oliver Wheeler was so deeply impressed by Butler's descriptions. How could a young boy of Wheeler's adventurous nature fail to be inspired by solitudes "broken only by the whisper of the pine tree and the music of running water…"? Name a young boy who cannot be moved by images of a prairie ocean "whose shores are the crests of mountain ranges eternally capped in snow…" It also helped that all of Upper Canada was abuzz over the West. Even before finishing school and choosing the career of Dominion Land Surveyor, Wheeler had committed the rest of his life to extending the course of Empire westward.

In the spring of 1877, seventeen year old Arthur Wheeler was hired by surveyor Elihu Stewart to work in the Algoma region north of the Great Lakes, Wheeler spent the summer in a birch bark canoe and like Butler's "red men" mastered travel in the rugged Laurentian landscapes of northern Ontario. At last he was following William Francis Butler into *The Great Lone Land*.

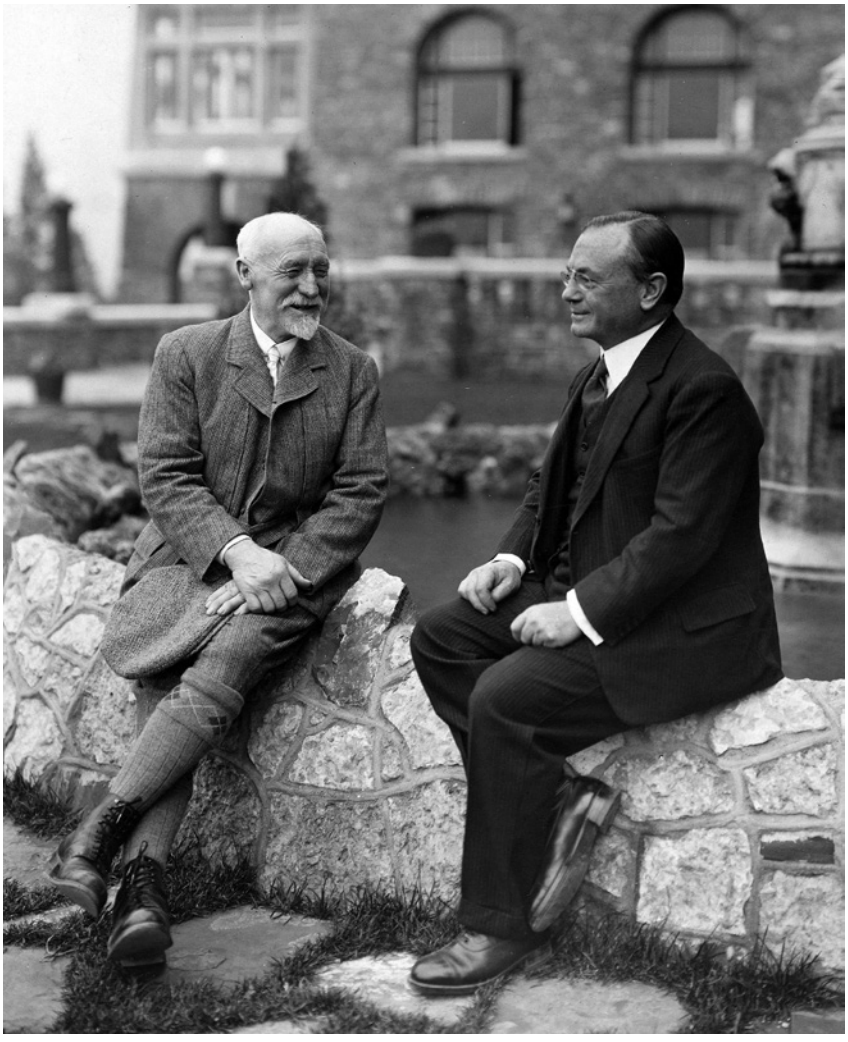
The following summer, Wheeler worked again for Elihu Stewart, this time in surveying Indian Reservations near Prince Albert, in what was then the Saskatchewan District of the North West Territories. *The Great Lone Land* had captured him. For the next three years Wheeler

During a long life some of A.O. Wheeler's deepest emotions and sense of achievement were experienced in moments of solitude and physical danger.

—Esther Fraser

stayed in Ontario where he gradually mastered the first six books of Euclid, plane table on spherical trigonometry, astronomy, geology, field note taking and other skills required to qualify fully as a Dominion Land Surveyor.

While Wheeler learned the skills of his trade, the West was changing. The railway had begun to advance toward the Rockies. Settlement was destroying the Métis way of life on the plains and tensions were rising. Early in 1885, the Riel Rebellion exploded onto the Canadian stage. By March 30th, militia and volunteers were sent to quell the rebellion on the Saskatchewan River between Prince Albert and Saskatoon. Two days later, Arthur Wheeler attended a meeting of patriotic surveyors anxious to get into the fray. It was an honourable calling. There is a long history of map-makers in the service of the military. Wars are won and lost on the basis of good maps. Arthur Oliver Wheeler made maps that were used by the Canadian Militia and the North West Mounted Police. His son Oliver, would later perform similar duties in the Middle East during World War I.



Arthur Wheeler with famous British parliamentarian and climber, Leopold S. Amery at the Banff Springs Hotel in August of 1929. Photograph courtesy of the Wheeler family.

As Arthur Wheeler quickly discovered, military surveyors often find themselves in the middle of the action. At Batoche on Sunday, May 10, 1885, Wheeler was grazed in the shoulder by a sniper's bullet. Batoche fell that afternoon but not without the death of one Dominion Land Surveyor the wounding of three others. Nine days later, the militia made a triumphant entry into Prince Albert. At Fort Carlton, a few days later Wheeler discovered that his family in Ontario had been notified of his death in action in what many later argued an inglorious war.

Back in Ottawa, Wheeler the war hero met Minnie Macoun, and her older sister Clara. The Macoun girls were daughters of legendary Canadian botanist, Professor John Macoun, who had just returned from a journey on the newly completed Canadian Pacific Railway. Though it appeared a relationship was at hand with Minnie, it was Clara who ultimately turned his head. Though his class-conscious mother may not have entirely approved, Arthur and Clara were married in St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Ottawa in June of 1888.

In 1890, Arthur Wheeler began to suffer wanderlust. With a slow economy, it was uncertain that he would get survey work in the West. The only real opportunity, it seemed, was sub-division work at the end of the rail line in New Westminster. After much deliberation, Wheeler decided to leave the Department of the Interior and to go into private practice in British Columbia. On March 11, 1891, Wheeler, Clara and their new son headed West once more in search of William Francis Butler's Great Lone Land. The ideal of "the Great Hills" had fired Wheeler's young imagination and would keep it burning a lifetime.

In New Westminster, Wheeler's private survey contracts were soon augmented by work he did on behalf of the Department of the Interior defining timber berths and surveying mining claims. His first-hand knowledge of British Columbia quickly grew as he completed work on timber berths on the east side of the Columbia River, on Shuswap Lake and in the Stave and Pitt Rivers basins which rise in the mountains of what is now Garibaldi Provincial Park. Soon he was joined in his business by his younger brothers Hector and Willie. Their surveying business boomed briefly before a real estate crash nearly wiped them out in 1893. Early the following year, Wheeler successfully applied for full-time employment with the Topographical Survey Branch of the Department of the Interior in Ottawa. His boss was Colonel John Sloughton Dennis, Wheeler's commanding officer during the Riel Rebellion. Dennis had just made a tour of the irrigation belt in the Western United States and was convinced that this kind of agriculture could open up the Canadian West. In June of 1894, Wheeler was generating surveys that would form the foundation for large-scale irrigation in the Canadian West. During this period Wheeler's father-in-law, Professor John Macoun, was also dispatched to the southwestern plains to pronounce on the agricultural suitability of the Palliser Triangle. Wheeler spent six years surveying south of Calgary in areas now well-known to all Albertans. These include the watersheds of the Elbow, Sheep, Highwood, Oldman, Belly, Waterton, Little Bow, St. Mary's and Milk Rivers as well as Willow, Jumping Pound, Fish and Pincher Creeks. Suddenly, Arthur Wheeler knew a lot about Alberta, as well as British Columbia.

Wheeler had so much work in the West that, in 1898, he, Clara and their eight year old son Oliver moved to Calgary, where he began one of the most productive and formative periods of his life. In 1899, Wheeler mapped south of Calgary as far as the Bell-Irving Ranch. Early in 1900, Wheeler received instructions from Ottawa that the Department of the Interior's Calgary office was to close later in the year. During the summer Wheeler hurried to complete a photo-topographical survey of the Crowsnest Pass mining area. In February of 1901, the Wheelers again returned to Ottawa where Arthur waited impatiently for news of his next assignment. When it arrived, Wheeler knew in an instant that his life was about to change.

By the turn of the century, the Rogers Pass area of the Selkirk Mountains was already famous for its grand alpine scenery and for the challenges the Canadian Pacific Railway had to overcome to keep the line open in winter. Though preliminary mapping of the area had already been undertaken – mostly by foreign mountaineers – the Surveyor-General of Canada, the legendary Edouard Deville, wanted to continue photo-topographical surveys of the railway belt. In 1901, he sent Arthur Wheeler to Rogers Pass to initiate this work. Though the 41 year old Wheeler had never been on a glacier or climbed a mountain for mere pleasure in his life, he was immediately immersed in a culture that both inspired and excited him.

On the train West, Wheeler had the occasion to meet Edward Whymper, the most famous mountaineer of his age. Whymper, who had established his fame by making the first ascent of the Matterhorn in 1865, was in Canada as a guest of the Canadian Pacific Railway. Whymper's visit to the Canadian Alps were deemed so important to the tourism future of the country that government survey efforts were redirected to ensure they didn't conflict with the great climber's alpine ambitions. At Rogers Pass, Wheeler came face to face with Canada's developing mountaineering culture when he met professional Swiss mountain

> *Clara Macoun was twenty-one; dark hair softly framed a high forehead, and finely moulded features were enhanced by a delicate, fresh complexion; deep-set eyes and sensitive mouth suggested gentle laughter. But the tall, easily carried figure was regally erect – an indication of inner strength and independence.*
>
> *—Esther Fraser*

… there are some for whom a knife edge in the air has no terrors, I am not one of these; I climb in fear and trembling, fully knowing the result of a slip or weakening of the physical powers. But it is worth it … To feel the thrill of danger and the tingle of the keen rarified air. To see the whole world and glory of it!

—Arthur Oliver Wheeler

guides in the employ of the railway. It was with six of these guides that Wheeler made his first ascent of a major peak. While this ascent marked the beginning of Wheeler's celebrated mountaineering career, it also marked the beginning of an often very complicated relationship with mountain guides in which pride and jealousy often played disproportionate roles in the development of sometimes begrudging life-long associations.

Wheeler's concentrated work in the Rogers Pass area accelerated the development of his mountaineering skills and made him highly appreciative of the potential that these grand landscapes possessed to shape Canadian identity.

In 1902, Wheeler had begun occupying ever higher stations in his photo-topographical efforts. He would often take his son Oliver on these climbs. One day, Arthur and Oliver made their way to the summit of a previously unclimbed peak which Arthur named for his son. This climb may have made Edward Oliver Wheeler the youngest person to have made a first ascent in Canada. Wheeler also made an ascent of a larger peak which he unabashedly named Mount Wheeler.

The founding members of the ACC at the inaugural meeting in Winnipeg, March 27 - 28, 1906. Arthur Oliver Wheeler front row third from left. Photograph courtesy of the Alpine Club of Canada collection at the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies.

After a visit to the Yukon in early 1903, Wheeler was appointed official Topographer with the Department of the Interior and assigned the survey of the railway belt through the Rockies east of Roger Pass. During the following two years, Wheeler visited some of the most spectacular landscapes in all of the Rocky Mountains. The mountains had captured him. He spent the Christmas of 1903 at Glacier House and then all of the summer of 1904 in the Rockies where he befriended American and British mountaineers who were making history among the vast ranges of unclimbed summits of the Canadian West. An invitation to speak at a meeting of the Appalachian Mountain Club in Boston in May of 1905, stimulated his desire to generate interest among Canadians in mountaineering. Later that year, Wheeler published *The Selkirk Range*, one of the most important books written by a Canadian and the first ever to celebrate local appreciation for what mountains might ultimately contribute to the character of the nation.

The story of Wheeler's efforts to create a national mountaineering organization in Canada is the stuff of legends. The success of emerging mountaineering organizations, and in particular the profile of the Appalachian Mountain Club, argued for the creation of a national climbing body in Canada. Though Wheeler tried everything within his means, he could generate no interest in the formation of such an organization in Canada. After the American Alpine Club was formed in 1902, its first president, Charles Fay proposed that a Canadian chapter of the same club would suit the needs of America's northern neighbours. This was exactly the kind of offer that Wheeler needed to stimulate Canadian interest in his plan. The American proposal hit a nationalistic nerve which found its most lively expression in the Winnipeg Free Press where the idea of Canada becoming subsidiary to the United

States in something as important as exploring the country's own mountains received a fierce "pen-lashing" from staff writer, Elizabeth Parker.

In an article signed "M.T.," Parker claimed it was downright un-Canadian to subject local mountaineers to the dictates of foreign alpine institutions. Parker pilloried the idea's proponent, Canadian surveyor-mountaineer Arthur Oliver Wheeler, for his "lack of patriotism and imperialistic zeal" in even considering the American proposal. "It knocks me speechless and fills me with shame for young Canada," Parker railed in response to Canadian apathy. The wily Wheeler knew a good thing when he saw it. When the Alpine Club of Canada was formed in Winnipeg in March of 1906, he made sure Elizabeth Parker was its founding Secretary.

Through the efforts of the Alpine Club of Canada, mountain place slowly began to penetrate the Canadian psyche. Canadians began having challenging, satisfying and memorable experiences in their own mountains. Canadian mountains transformed those who climbed among them. By overcoming physical and mental challenges inherent in mountaineering, climbers discovered in themselves a new identity, one shaped almost completely by intense experience of this new and extraordinary land.

Canadians began to make their own maps of the mountains and create their own language and vocabulary of experience. Through the *Canadian Alpine Journal* their stories became the foundation of a growing literature and a new history. This developing history became an imaginative invitation for Canadians who would never have dreamed of being mountaineers to explore themselves through exploring their mountains. Canadians began making their own first ascents in the Mountain West, in the Yukon and, finally, in the High Arctic. In time, a distinctly Canadian mountaineering community emerged. It wasn't long before Canadian climbers were establishing a reputation not only at home but abroad, in the Alps, the Andes and, finally, in the Himalayas.

Arthur Wheeler and "Ems" at the Sky Line Hikers of the Canadian Rockies pow-wow at Moraine Lake Lodge in 1937. Photograph courtesy of the Wheeler family.

While Arthur Wheeler went on to contribute hugely to the mapping of the Mountain West through the Alberta-British Columbia Boundary Survey in which he was a principal between 1913 and 1924, his most enduring gift to his adopted nation was the Alpine Club of Canada. A national organization with sections all across the country, the Alpine Club of Canada continues today to re-affirm our identity as a people and to build our international reputation as a vibrant alpine nation. Because of the ACC, Canada is now recognized worldwide, not just for its mountain scenery, but for our strong and uniquely Canadian appreciation and protection of our mountain landscapes.

Dynamic, strong-willed, with a volatile temperament, he was a man of his time with a Victorian sense of duty and dedication. Imperious? Decidedly. A long inheritance had conferred upon him an air of command – a natural "presence". He was never plagued by the modern search for an identity. Twenty years spent on Canada's western frontier had softened some of his inborn attitudes of class distinction; though he may have preferred the friendship of his social equals, he worked with and enjoyed the company of all manner of men. Vain? Arrogant? He was humble only in the presence of "the Great Hills".

—Esther Fraser

Sir Oliver Wheeler

An Unsung Canadian Everest Pioneer

Arthur and Clara Wheeler's only child was born in Ottawa on April 18, 1890. He was named Edward Oliver Wheeler after his grandfather. His parents, however, called him only by his middle name. Like most children, Oliver possessed character traits granted to him by both parents. Bright, thoughtful, inquisitive and independent, Oliver quickly came into his own as a capable, but modest young man.

At the age of nine Oliver was already travelling through Alberta ranching country surveying with his father. On an 1899 trip, Oliver learned how treacherous mountain rivers could be and was forced to learn quickly how to ford them on horseback. The next year, Oliver was climbing mountains with his father in Crowsnest Pass. Following in his father's footsteps he was learning early what it meant to be a competent wilderness traveller, climber and self-reliant adventurer.

When the Wheelers returned to Ottawa from Calgary in 1901, Oliver was, in the Wheeler tradition, sent to private school at Trinity College in Port Hope. Wherever his father went in the summer, Oliver was sure to be there. In 1902, when Arthur and Oliver climbed and named Mount Oliver in Rogers Pass, twelve year old Edward Oliver Wheeler became the youngest person to have made a first ascent in Selkirk Mountains.

As he advanced toward graduation from Trinity College School, Oliver worked for the Dominion Land Survey under the direction of his father. This allowed him to spend summers productively engaged in exploration and mountaineering. When his father brought the Alpine Club of Canada into existence in 1906, sixteen year old Oliver was already an accomplished climber and quickly became an active member of the club. He helped his father organize the club's first mountaineering camp in Yoho Pass and participated as a climber at the 1907 camp at Paradise Valley. Meanwhile his academic efforts were being recognized at Trinity College School. In 1907, he graduated with the Chancellor's Prize and the Governor General's silver medal for proficiency. In addition his classmates elected Oliver as the student most deserving of recognition for "integrity, courtesy and industry", qualities that he would possess for the rest of this life.

Captain Oliver Wheeler in Mesopotamia (in what is now Iraq) during the Middle Eastern campaign in 1918.
Photograph courtesy of the Wheeler family.

The following year the depth of E.O. Wheeler's character was put to a great test. In 1908, the Alpine Club of Canada's Annual General Mountaineering Camp was held at the summit of Rogers Pass, British Columbia. So confident was Arthur Wheeler of his eighteen year old son's mountaineering abilities that he had Oliver lead a party of seven up Mount Avalanche on the second day of the camp. Though it was not deemed a particularly difficult or technical ascent, things went very wrong even before the real climbing began. A.O. Wheeler later offered a full report on the accident – the first fatality in the history of the Alpine Club of Canada – in the 1909 edition of the *Canadian Alpine Journal*:

It happened on Wednesday, the 8th of July, the day after the official opening of the Camp. Among the parties sent out that day was one to make the ascent of Mt. Avalanche by the north-west face. The party was composed as follows: E. Oliver Wheeler, of the camp staff of guides in charge; P.D. McTavish, one of the club's best men, assisting; the Rev. Alex M. Gordon, also one of the club's experienced men; G.E. Howard, the English Alpine Club's representative, who had had experience of mountain climbing in Switzerland; A.H. Ford of Minneapolis, a novice; Miss E.M. Parslow, of Calgary and Miss Helen Hatch of Lethbridge, both of whom had made climbs previously, the former at the Paradise Valley Camp of 1907, and the latter of Crow's Nest Mountain in the spring of 1908.

Shortly after luncheon one of the boys – scouts we call them – came to me and said Mr. P.D. McTavish wished to see me in Tent No. 1. For a moment I did not grasp the import of the message and then I realized that something dreadful had happened. I found Mr. McTavish in a state of complete prostration and unable to articulate more than the words: "It has happened." "Oh, it has happened!" the nervous shock combined with his very rapid descent of the mountain had left him almost devoid of the power to speak, and I feared for a few minutes that all the party except himself had been killed. Gradually I drew from him the fact that Miss Helen Hatch alone had fallen. His statement, in substance, was as follows: The party commenced the ascent directly opposite the camp and had reached the summit of an outlying spur, scarcely above timber-line.

The ground was still covered with grass and heather and small brush, the last vestiges of timber growth were scattered here and there, with outcrops and ledges of rock showing in places. It was necessary to descend from this shoulder to a snow-filled couloir leading to an amphitheatre, also filled with snow, across which rose the main peak of the mountain, where the real climbing commenced. We had begun the descent but were not roped, as no necessity had yet arisen for such a precaution. Coming to a patch of snow, Oliver turned to Miss Hatch, who was next to him and said; "Wait a minute until I go down and see if it is all right, you may have to go round." He then started to glissade downwards. As he started, Miss Hatch, full of the exhilaration of the climb and ignorant of the danger, called "I am coming. Look out!" and taking a little run, shot down the snow, lost her footing and, as Oliver reached the bottom, went by him with tremendous velocity. Hearing her call he checked himself, turned swiftly and grabbed for her. Alas! She had gone wide and he only touched her outstretched hand. She passed on down the slope from ledge to ledge, gathering velocity as she fell and, at a depth of 120 feet, dropped over the final ledge, twenty feet perpendicular, to the snow-filled couloir. She had not uttered a sound and must have fainted the moment she realized what had happened. On reaching the couloir she slid rapidly down its surface. Had she continued the full length of it and of the wider depression which lay beyond, she might not have lost her life, but alas! The snow stratum on which she had fallen curved inwards to the cliff and she dashed head-first into a projecting spur of rock, where the body came to rest.

Oliver Wheeler was devastated by what he had happened right in front of his very eyes. Although a thorough inquiry into what happened on Mount Avalanche found no fault with anything he had done – Miss Hatch's death being the result of the fatal impetuosity of the moment – Oliver predictably felt responsible for the accident. He returned to camp and remained in his tent. His experienced companions, however, were wise enough to see the importance of not letting Oliver lose confidence in himself because of the accident. As Helen Hatch's body had been recovered, the same party invited Oliver to lead the uncompleted ascent of Mount Avalanche. To his very great personal credit, Oliver Wheeler chose to do so. It was a turning point in what would become a very courageous life.

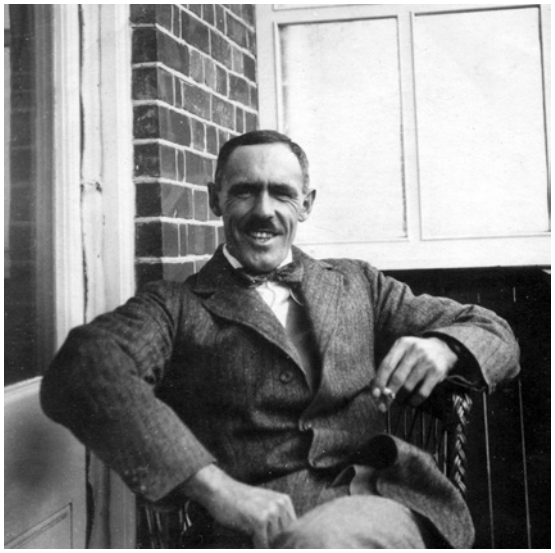
The following year, Oliver once again helped his father organize the ACC summer camp which was held at Lake O'Hara in Yoho National Park. That summer Oliver made friends with the legendary Austrian guide Conrad Kain, who had arrived from Europe to work with his father first on the camp and then in further survey work in the Rockies. It is a measure of Oliver's character and mountaineering ability that he made the first guideless ascent that summer of difficult Mount Hungabee with Val Fynn, arguably one of the finest climbers of his time.

Oliver Wheeler on his trip to the Gangotri Glacier 1914. Photograph courtesy of the Wheeler family.

When Oliver, known as "Teddy" to his friends, arrived in Banff in June of 1910, he brought with him news that made his father very proud. He had just graduated from the Royal Military College in Kingston, Ontario where he was Head Cadet with a rank of Sergeant Major. To say that he graduated with honours, however, may be an understatement. Oliver Wheeler had the highest marks ever earned by a student at that prestigious college. Wheeler not only led in class in engineering, but was sufficiently athletic to become a member of the school's football, hockey and gymnastic teams. An all-round achiever, Wheeler won twelve of the thirteen prizes awarded to particularly capable students including the Governor General's Gold Medal and the Sword of Honour. As was becoming customary in Wheeler family tradition, Oliver had already lived a very full and successful life by the time he was twenty.

That summer, Oliver met a small, wiry but most remarkable British explorer and mountaineer. Dr. Tom Longstaff was famous all over the world for having reached 23,400 feet in the Himalayas, the highest altitude yet achieved by a man. Oliver was no doubt very interested in Longstaff's Himalayan adventures. The notion of peaks three times the height of the Rockies could hardly have failed to fire the imagination of the young Canadian climber. The words that were exchanged between Tom Longstaff and Oliver Wheeler at the Alpine Club of Canada camp at Mount Assiniboine in the summer of 1910 are unknown. But it appears a seed was sown in the young man's imagination that would lead to the fulfillment of almost unimaginably bold dreams.

Oliver Wheeler's outstanding performance at the Royal Military College qualified him to apply for service in the elite Corps of the Royal



Oliver Wheeler in 1920. Photograph courtesy of the Wheeler family.

Engineers. When he was accepted in 1910, he left almost immediately to begin training in the corps' depot in Chatham, England. Two years later, Wheeler won the Haines Memorial Medal at the School of Military Engineering and was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant.

Oliver returned to Canada in 1912 by which time his parents lived in Sidney, near Victoria, British Columbia. He attended the Vermilion Pass Camp and later took part in the ACC expedition to the newly created Strathcona Provincial Park on Vancouver Island. There he led the first ascent of Mount Elkhorn. He then travelled to India to take up his first posting with the Royal Engineers. In 1914, he visited the Gangotri Glacier region in the Himalayas – the site of famous peaks such as Shivling and Bhagirathi Parbat III, later climbed by Canadians.

One can speculate on all the considerations Oliver Wheeler had weighed in making his decision. There was, of course, the call to adventure in a remote and exotic land. There was also his family's intergenerational commitment to service to the Empire. It may have also been that this very skilled climber may have thought the mountains of his homeland already dominated by his father and his many mountaineering friends. Just as likely, though, was the notion sown in his imagination when he met Tom Longstaff in 1910 that India offered an opportunity to penetrate, explore, map and climb in the Himalaya.

Whatever ambitions Oliver Wheeler may have had relating to mountaineering in the Himalayas, they were put on indefinite hold when World War I broke out the following year. Oliver soon reported to his parents that he had been put in command of a company of King George's Own Bengal Sappers and Miners, an Indian Expeditionary Force fighting in France. Safe in Sidney, his family could barely imagine the danger and trials Oliver faced in what is now regarded as one of the most horrific war zones in the history of human conflict. While Major Wheeler was mentioned no fewer than seven times for his heroism in official dispatches, his parents lay awake at night praying for his safety.

Dorothea (Dolly) Danielsen and her new husband, Oliver Wheeler after their wedding in Bombay, India in 1921. Photograph courtesy of the Wheeler family.

Then the day came when Arthur Wheeler was told that his son had been killed in action. The rumour proved, however, to be wrong. Suddenly there were two generations of Wheelers that had been falsely declared dead in battle: Arthur during the Riel Rebellion and his son Oliver in France.

The Wheeler stock clearly held up well even in the most fiercely fought battles. In November of 1915, Edward Oliver Wheeler was awarded the Cross of the Legion of Honour, one of France's highest medals for bravery and distinguished military service. In June of 1916, Wheeler was promoted to the rank of Captain. The following October, Oliver received the Military Cross. That year, while his father was completing the Alberta-British Columbia Boundary Survey reports, Oliver Wheeler was dispatched with the Forces to fight in the Mesopotamian campaign, where he commanded operations in what is modern day Iraq where he remained until the war ended in November of 1918. In January of 1919, Wheeler was promoted again, this time to the rank of Brevet Major. Wheeler returned to his position on the General Staff in India until he was seconded to Survey of India in December of 1919.

Oliver Wheeler with his parents, Clara and Arthur Wheeler in Banff in the summer of 1920. Photograph courtesy of the Wheeler family.

Oliver Wheeler did not return to Canada until 1920. He had not seen his parents for eight years. The war had changed him, as it did so many others. Cool and unassuming and modest to the extreme, Major Wheeler never talked about what he experienced. Moreover, he had come home with a greater purpose than visiting his parents. Upon his return to India after the war ended, he had been commissioned by the British government to assess the suitability of Canadian photo-topographical methods for the mapping of the high mountains of India. In order to complete this assessment, he spent the summer assisting his father in the advancement of the boundary survey along the Great Divide. In the footsteps of his father, Oliver Wheeler was about to become a surveyor.

Oliver Wheeler also attended the Alpine Club of Canada's "Homecoming Camp" of 1920, which had been dedicated to returning veterans. Because of his father's involvement in a new "walking tour" business in the Rockies, the camp was held at Mount Assiniboine. At the camp Oliver's father reminded him of his close relationship with Tom Longstaff and Felix Wedgewood with whom he had climbed in 1910. Longstaff's sister Kate had married Felix Wedgewood who had most unfortunately been killed in the war leaving her a widow with three children. Oliver was compelled by friendship and professional courtesy to visit Kate and made of point of arranging to visit her in Little Hampton in September en route to joining the Survey of India.

On August 23, 1920, Oliver took a train to Toronto and then sailed to England. When he arrived at Littlehampton he quickly discovered that Kate Longstaff had made plans to keep him fully occupied for the week he intended to stay. In anticipation of his arrival, she also lined up a congenial female companion to entertain him during his visit. Thirty year old Oliver Wheeler was immediately smitten by the beautiful Dorothea Danielsen, a woman who actively shared his interests in tennis, golf and dancing. Five days after they met, Oliver and "Dolly" as she was known, were engaged. They would marry in Bombay on the Ides of March, 1921. Their wedding was only the beginning of a year that neither would ever forget.

At the end of World War I, interest was revived in Britain in the kinds of exploration challenges that had excited so much attention in the Victorian era. Among these was an intense British desire to accurately survey and then be the first to climb the world's highest mountain. This would not be an easy accomplishment. Though a distant trigonometric survey had determined that Everest was the world's highest peak in 1849, seventy years had passed without explorers or surveyors coming closer than a hundred kilometres from its base.

Early in 1921, Edward Oliver Wheeler was formally invited to join the British Mount Everest Reconnaissance Expedition as surveyor and photographer. The invitation, the only to a Canadian, was likely the idea of Tom Longstaff and Arnold Mumm. Among the few British mountaineers who knew anything about the Himalayas, these influential adventurers were also well aware of Wheeler's combined climbing prowess and surveying experience. Edward Oliver Wheeler did not fail them. He not only produced the first detailed map of the Everest region, he also made mountaineering history in the Himalayas.

The expedition left Darjeeling in the third week of May, 1921 just as the monsoon began. The climbers and porters marched through the jungle for weeks before attaining the cold, windy reaches of the Tibetan Plateau. On June 24th, Wheeler and three "high coolies" broke from the main party to establish their own camp and began the survey.

In 1931, Oliver Wheeler ready for the Durbar Parade, Quetta. Photograph courtesy of the Wheeler family.

Wheeler employed photo-topographical methods pioneered in Canada by his father and other members of the Topographical Survey Branch to complete a detailed survey of the Tibetan side of Everest. This was a demanding task at altitude in that it required the establishment of survey stations at altitudes between 6000 and more than 7000 metres above sea level. Many of these stations had to be occupied several times in order to wait for clear enough weather to undertake reliable readings and to take photographs that would later be used in completing new maps.

> *It was a bit of a bombshell, for although I knew that an Expedition had been proposed, I was under the impression that it would not take place until 1922, if at all. And it was with somewhat mixed feelings that I received the news, for I then thought the Expedition would leave Darjeeling about the middle of April and I was to be married in Bombay in March!*
>
> *—Oliver Wheeler*

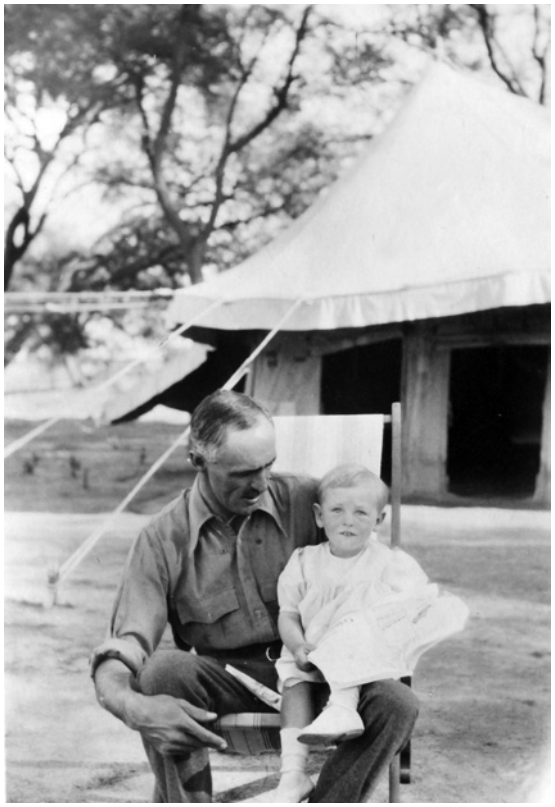
While this kind of activity might appear simple and straightforward by today's climbing and adventure standards, it must be understood that most contemporary Himalayan travellers would likely die if equipped to the same standard as the 1921 reconnaissance. No one had the kind of packs we use today. Climber Guy Bullock carried a suitcase around with him. Porters were often selected for certain duties on the basis of whether or not they had shoes. In his journal Bullock said it all when he noted "Having only brought one coat, which was wet, spent the evening in sweater. Luckily I had two." Bullock made this journal entry at 20,000 feet in the midst of the Asian monsoon.

By mid-July the expedition had explored the Everest region from the north to the west. George Mallory and Guy Bullock had explored the Rongbuk Glacier system proving to their satisfaction that there was no access to the south side of the mountain from Tibet. Despite all this outstanding work, however, they were wrong.

The depleted climbing party – Mallory, Bullock and Wheeler with their ten Sherpas – descended the Lhakpa La to the East Rongbuk Glacier, crossed the ice and began to toil up to the North Col. Though they found the climbing technically much easier than they had expected, the altitude and their tiredness made it hard going and they were glad enough to make it a short day by pitching their tents at 22,000 feet. The North Col lay above them, within striking distance the next day.

—Walt Unsworth

The members of the 1st British Reconnaissance to Everest in 1921 pose in one of the most famous photographs in mountaineering history. Oliver Wheeler is seated second from left, between George Leigh Mallory (left) and Guy Bullock (right). Photograph courtesy of the Wheeler family.



Oliver Wheeler and his two year old son, John, at the Survey of India camp at Hyderabad Sind, 1927. Photograph courtesy of the Wheeler family.

Adjacent to their first camp on the Rongbuk was a turbulent stream that tumbling through a gap in the mountainside to disappear into a cave in the glacier. Mallory and Bullock had intended to investigate the origins of the stream but had chosen instead to explore more likely prospects. They failed to see the potential of this watercourse to point the way to the climbing route leading to the North Col on Everest. The person who did see it, however, was Oliver Wheeler. Working on his own and lugging his heaving photographic survey over the ice and the moraines, he and his Sherpas discovered the key to climbing Everest. The East Rongbuk Glacier was a highway to the high col from which the summit stood in bold relief against the grey cold of the monsoon sky.

When the weather finally cleared on the 20th of September, the expedition set up a camp on the Lhakpa La, at 22,200 feet. Before retiring back to Advanced Base Camp, George Mallory examined the slopes that led upward to the North Col from the East Rongbuk Glacier. He recognized immediately that only a very strong party could cross the unknown glacier and ascent the steep snow slope and return alive.

Eight year old John with his mother and father in Banff prior to his parents' departure for India, August, 1933. Photograph courtesy of the Wheeler family.

The party returned to Lhakpa La where Oliver made a survey station – the highest ever established at that time. The next day Mallory, Bullock and Oliver and their ten Sherpas dropped into the head of the East Rongbuk Glacier. From there, on the following day, only Guy Bullock and Oliver Wheeler and three Sherpas were strong enough to join Mallory in the attempted ascent. When they reached the col, Oliver Wheeler's feet had lost all feeling. While Mallory ached to go further, Wheeler advised against it. Bullock was grateful when Mallory eventually agreed. The expedition had accomplished its goals. It was time to go home.

While George Leigh Mallory and others would go on to establish their own reputations on Everest and in the Himalayas, Edward Oliver Wheeler had plenty to be satisfied about with respect to this first-ever expedition to the world's highest mountain. He had seen and explored the greatest of "the Great Hills". He had equaled or bettered Tom Longstaff's high altitude record and he had discovered the feasibility of the way along the East Rongbuk Glacier that would ultimately become the route taken by every expedition to Everest before World War II.

Edward Oliver Wheeler proved himself in the extreme conditions of the first reconnaissance of Everest and would have been most welcome on the 1924 expedition that followed it on which George Mallory and Andrew Irvine disappeared into the mists of time. Unfortunately, Wheeler developed health problems linked to drinking contaminated water that would not be resolved for many years. Despite these problems, Wheeler was making considerable progress in his work and in his career. In January of 1924, Wheeler was appointed Deputy Superintendent of the Survey of India in charge of the Northern Circle Office with headquarters in Mussoorie. Two years later he was promoted to the full rank of Major and transferred to Quetta where he commanded survey operations until he took an extended and well-earned leave in March of 1932.

During this period, Oliver's connection to his father and mother was intermittent. "Ol and Dol", as Arthur Wheeler called his son and daughter-in-law, came home whenever they could afford the time and had leave to do so. They visited in 1922 just after Oliver had returned from Everest. They also came back after Clara Wheeler died in 1923 and stayed with Arthur Wheeler in Claremount, the newly completed home he had built for himself and Clara near Middle Springs in Banff. During this visit Oliver did much to encourage his father's interest in the ascent of the remaining unclimbed giants in Canada. With Everest still clearly and unforgettably branded in his memory, Oliver encouraged his father to employ the resources of the Alpine Club of Canada to organize a serious attempt on Mount Logan, the highest mountain in Canada. Oliver and Dolly returned again in 1926 with "a son and an heir". He instantly became the apple of his grandfather's eye.

During this period, Oliver Wheeler's career took a meteoric turn. In October of 1933, Wheeler was put in charge of the Eastern Circle of the Survey of India and moved to its

Oliver Wheeler, Dolly Wheeler, twelve year old John Wheeler and Anna Danielsen at the ACC Yoho (Reunion) Camp in 1937. Photograph by legendary CPR photographer Nick Morant.

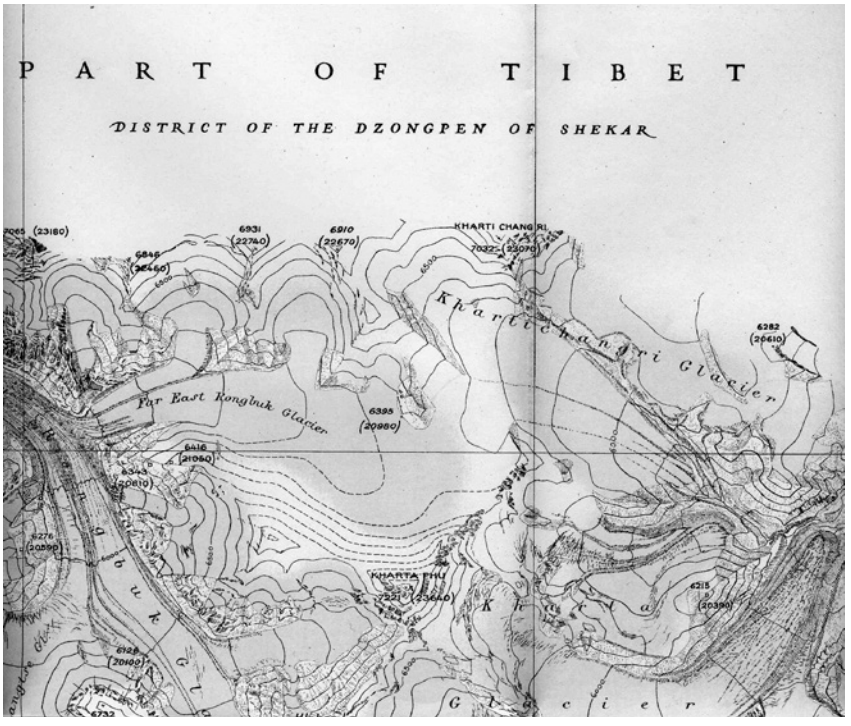
Wheeler, who had done a splendid job throughout the expedition, was intent on making a photo-survey of the one valley he had so far missed, and Howard-Bury was keen to climb up to the long ridge joining Everest to Makalu, so that he could look into forbidden Nepal.

—Walt Unsworth

headquarters in Shillong. Two months later he was promoted again, this time to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. In December of the following year, 1934, Wheeler was transferred to Calcutta to become the Assistant Surveyor General of India. In 1938, Wheeler was appointed Director of the Geodetic Branch of the Survey and promoted to the rank of Colonel. In April of 1941, Wheeler was formally appointed as Surveyor General of India and promoted to Brigadier. In support of British forces Wheeler sent a thousand men into military survey units, and published an average of 20,000,000 maps a year during the Second World War. It is perhaps no surprise, given this accomplishment alone, that in 1943 this quiet spoken, modest Canadian was knighted for his extraordinary service to king and country.

Though Oliver Wheeler was eligible for retirement from military service in 1945, circumstances dictated that he stay on in his position with the Survey until he finally retired and returned to Canada in 1947 at the age of 57. After moving to British Columbia, Wheeler spent his leisure hours writing *The Survey of India during the War and Early Reconstruction, 1939 – 1946*, which was published in 1955. His interest in Canadian mountains remained undiminished from childhood. From 1950 to 1954 Oliver Wheeler served as President of his beloved Alpine Club of Canada, the organization his father had brought to life in 1906. Just like his father, Edward Oliver Wheeler was made an Honorary Member of the club in 1956. Canadians hardly knew what greatness there was among them. E.O. died in Vernon in March of 1962. He was 71.

Brigadier Sir Oliver Wheeler, Surveyor General of India, after his investiture when knighted, February 23, 1943.
Photograph courtesy of the Wheeler family.



Map section from: map of Mount Everest and the group of Chomo Lungma; which accompanies: The Fight For Everest: 1924 by Lieutenant-Colonel E. F. Norton, D.S.O., London 1925.

John Oliver Wheeler

Renowned Geological Surveyor

John Oliver Wheeler was born in the foothills of the Himalayas at Mussoorie, India on December 19, 1924. He was too young to remember his first visit to Canada in 1926. That year his parents brought him with them to visit Arthur Wheeler and his new wife Emmeline "Ems" Savatard whom he had married in 1924, a year after Clara Wheeler's death. Arthur Wheeler reported in his diary that he "Saw the boy. A very fine baby." Instantly "Ol and Dol" became "Ol and Dol and Co."

Arthur Wheeler delights in the arrival in Canada of his first and only grandson John, aged one and a half, in 1926. Photograph courtesy of the Wheeler family.

John Wheeler does remember the next time he met his famous grandfather. In November of 1932, Ol and Dol and Co. arrived for an extended Christmas visit. Arthur had not seen his son and grandson for seven years. The senior Wheeler took immediate delight in sharing stories and images with his bright and engaging grandson. Beginning with lantern slide presentations, Arthur affectionately began to sow the seeds of mountaineering ethic in the young boy's imagination.

In January of 1933, Oliver and Dolly installed their son as a boarding student in Shawnigan Lake School on Vancouver Island and then in August returned to India where Oliver continued his work with the Survey. Though he seldom saw his parents, John Wheeler spent his summers with his grandfather climbing and hiking in the Rockies. It was clear that young John Oliver was predisposed to the glory of "the Great Hills" and soon had his own stories to tell.

John attended Shawnigan Lake from 1933 to 1942. Except for the summer and Christmas holidays in 1937, John did not see his parents again until 1947, when Oliver retired from the Survey of India and he and Dolly returned to buy property near Vernon, British Columbia. Like his father, John grew to become a modestly understated but highly competent young man. Each summer he spent with his grandfather at Claremount in Banff and enjoying rowing and camping holidays at Shuswap Lake. Having attended a number of Alpine Club of Canada camps, he had also developed a fine reputation as mountaineer who had climbed with distinction in the company of the some of the very best of his day. Among these were Bob

Hind and Rex Gibson, who was John Wheeler's mountaineering mentor. Included also in this group was John Gibson, a fellow instructor at the ACC military mountaineering camp in the Little Yoho in 1943. John Wheeler remembers Gibson as the best climbing partner he ever had.

By the time he was twenty, John Wheeler, like his father and grandfather, had already lived a full and accomplished life. But this was only the beginning. John Oliver's mountaineering experiences led him to a refined appreciation not only for the beauty and danger of mountains, but for their nature, structure and development. His grandfather encouraged this interest to take up a profession in geology. In the tradition of his great grandfather John Macoun, John should logically join the Geological Survey of Canada. John began studies in geological engineering – the best way in those days to learn the subject – at the University of British Columbia in 1943.

John Wheeler and the great landscape and wildlife painter Carl Rungius compare the merits of an ice axe and a geological hammer at Summit Lake in Yoho in the summer of 1938. Photograph by Nick Morant.

John's academic record in the first two years of general engineering was, by his own admission, mediocre. However, in the last two years of specialization in geological engineering his academic performance improved greatly. This, and involvement in athletics contributed

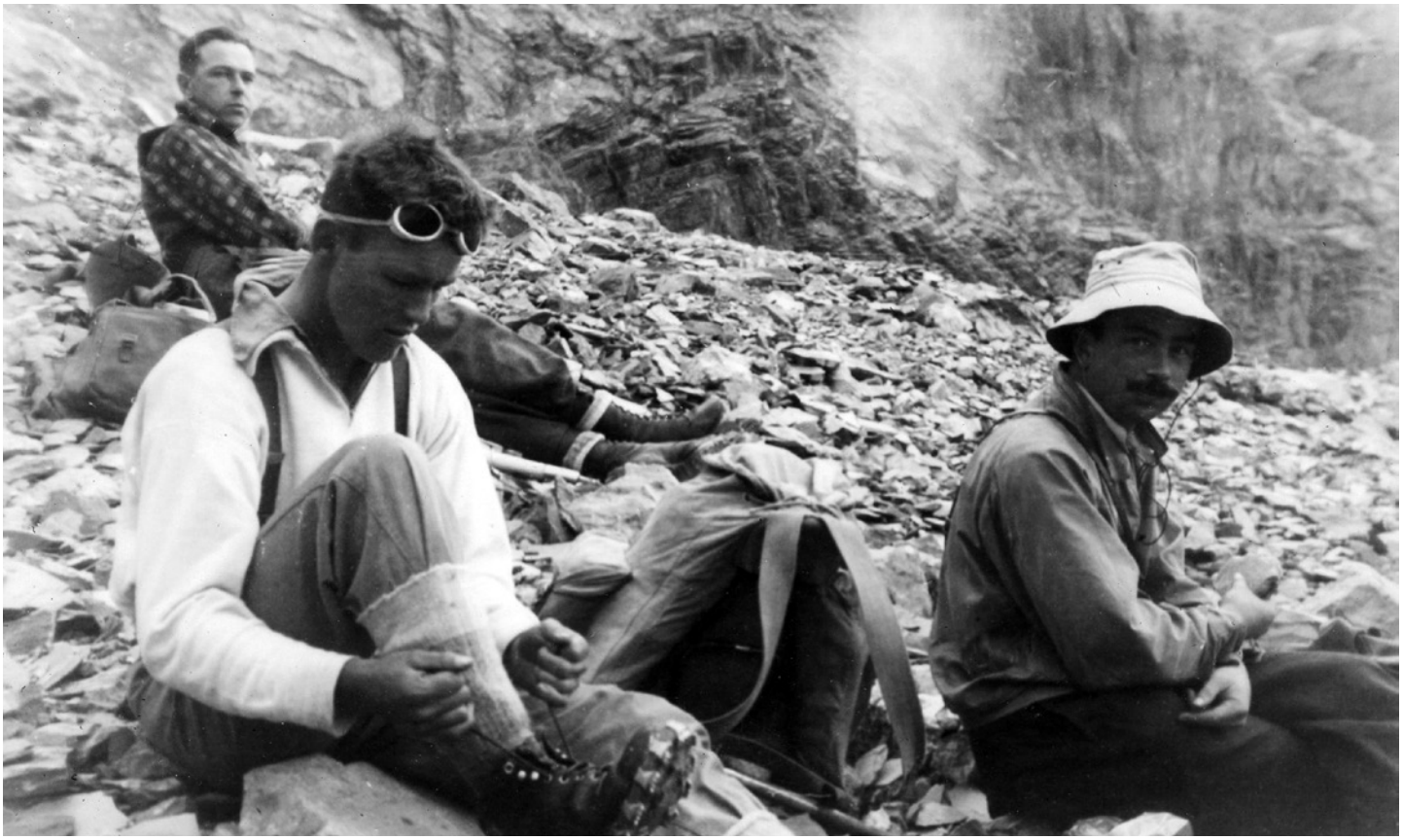
Sixteen year old John Wheeler on the summit of Mount Hungabee, August 21, 1941. Like his father and grandfather, John Wheeler had already lived a full life by the time he was twenty. Photograph by Rex Gibson.

to balance in this young man's life. This led to important recognition. In 1946, John won the Rev. George Pringle Bursary for scholarship combined with leadership in university athletics. That year he also won the George M. Dawson Scholarship for the highest marks in fourth year geological engineering. Later John also won the Bobby Gaul Memorial Trophy recognizing the outstanding male athlete in performance, leadership and sportsmanship in his graduating class.

John Oliver Wheeler, "J.O." as most of us like to call him, is the gris eminence of the Geological Survey of Canada. A tall, athletically-built man with strong rectangular features beneath a gleaming white mane, his sleepy blue eyes belie extraordinary energy.

—Chris Yorath

Rex Gibson, John Wheeler's friend and mentor.
Photograph courtesy of the Alpine Club of Canada.

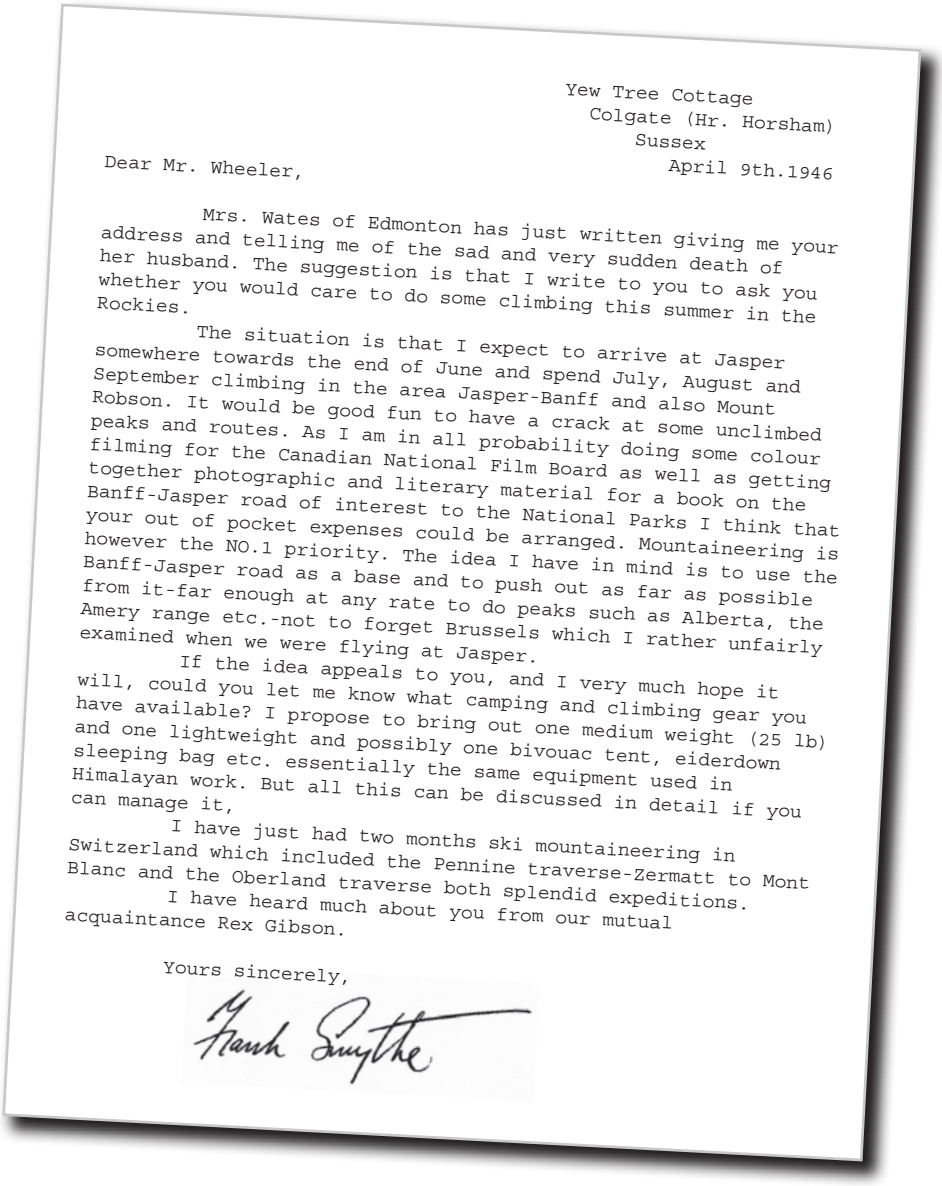


John Wheeler and John Gibson taught together at the ACC military mountaineering camp in the Little Yoho in 1943. John Wheeler remembers Gibson as the best climbing partner he ever had. Top: Reg Nourse, centre: John Wheeler, right: John Gibson. Photograph courtesy of the Wheeler family.

His reputation as a mountaineer was already such that in April of 1946, John Wheeler received a letter from Frank Smythe. Smythe was working on a book and a film on the Rockies and invited John to spend July, August and September climbing with him in the Banff and Jasper areas with a final focus on Mount Robson. The offer to make first ascents in the Rockies with one of the most famous climbers in the world was almost too much for Wheeler to turn down. But, having made a commitment to serve as a summer student assistant with the Geological Survey of Canada and having discussed the matter with his professors as well as Hugh Bostock, his former GSC party chief, Wheeler chose to pursue geology. The mountains would always be there waiting to be climbed. As it turned out, they were.

After graduating from the University of British Columbia in Vancouver in 1947, John Oliver or "J.O." as many of his friends called him, began working with the Geological Survey of Canada. After three summers of apprenticeship as a student assistant with the GSC, first in southwestern Yukon with Hugh Bostock and later in the Omineca Mountains of northern British Columbia with ACC member Fred Roots, John Wheeler was offered the opportunity by the GSC to map the Whitehorse map area in southern Yukon. The data for mapping purposes could be used in support of a Ph.D. degree needed to qualify for a permanent research position with the GSC. John began his studies at Columbia University in New York in 1949 and received his Ph.D. in 1956 after interruptions caused by being assigned priority projects by the GSC in the Selwyn and St. Elias Mountains. The GSC already recognized Wheeler's considerable geological skills and valued his ability to travel without complaint or incident in the most remote of regions, a quality he had acquired through many years of packing horses with the GSC.

As the helicopter had not yet come into widespread use, geology in the late 1940s and early 1950s was still undertaken in the traditional manner. The bulk of the early geological mapping done at that time was undertaken by the federal government. Geological Survey of Canada field teams set out with packhorses and supplies and disappeared for weeks into remote and often very wild regions. They returned with detailed information that was later correlated and incorporated into reliable maps which the GSC made available to other government agencies and to industry.



Yew Tree Cottage
Colgate (Hr. Horsham)
Sussex
April 9th.1946

Dear Mr. Wheeler,

Mrs. Wates of Edmonton has just written giving me your address and telling me of the sad and very sudden death of her husband. The suggestion is that I write to you to ask you whether you would care to do some climbing this summer in the Rockies.

The situation is that I expect to arrive at Jasper somewhere towards the end of June and spend July, August and September climbing in the area Jasper-Banff and also Mount Robson. It would be good fun to have a crack at some unclimbed peaks and routes. As I am in all probability doing some colour filming for the Canadian National Film Board as well as getting together photographic and literary material for a book on the Banff-Jasper road of interest to the National Parks I think that your out of pocket expenses could be arranged. Mountaineering is however the NO.1 priority. The idea I have in mind is to use the Banff-Jasper road as a base and to push out as far as possible from it-far enough at any rate to do peaks such as Alberta, the Amery range etc.-not to forget Brussels which I rather unfairly examined when we were flying at Jasper.

If the idea appeals to you, and I very much hope it will, could you let me know what camping and climbing gear you have available? I propose to bring out one medium weight (25 lb) and one lightweight and possibly one bivouac tent, eiderdown sleeping bag etc. essentially the same equipment used in Himalayan work. But all this can be discussed in detail if you can manage it,

I have just had two months ski mountaineering in Switzerland which included the Pennine traverse-Zermatt to Mont Blanc and the Oberland traverse both splendid expeditions.

I have heard much about you from our mutual acquaintance Rex Gibson.

Yours sincerely,

Frank Smythe

Frank Smythe's 1946 letter to John Wheeler, in response to which Wheeler chose a career in geology.

In 1950, the GSC identified as significant a serious dearth of geological knowledge of large regions of the Yukon, notably in the area encompassing the Porcupine Plateau and the northern and southern ranges of the Selwyn Mountains. As prospectors were already beginning to find their way into these remote regions, the GSC looked for the funding and personnel to begin a formal survey of the resource base of these areas. In 1952, they asked John Wheeler if he might suspend his Ph.D. studies briefly in order to lead an expedition into the northern Selwyn Mountains. It was just the type of adventure that would appeal to a young man of the disposition of John Wheeler. No maps existed of the area, only a few people had ever seen it and the only knowledge the GSC possessed of the region were aerial photographs that demonstrated that mountains dominated the character of this great lone land.

When John Wheeler was chosen to lead an expedition to the Northern Selwyn Mountains, only a quarter of Canada had been properly surveyed and accurately mapped from a geological perspective. A great field for exploration lay open before him. But, as the Selwyn Mountains project in the Yukon and Northwest Territories clearly demonstrated, exploration and mapping in the middle of the twentieth century could be just as demanding and difficult as it was two centuries earlier when the first explorers began following northern rivers inland from Hudson Bay. John Wheeler's Selwyn Mountains Expedition was one of the last of the epic packhorse adventures geologists undertook in the golden age of adventure that marked geology before the helicopter changed surveying forever.

Descending Pinnacle Mountain in good company. Top left is Bob Hind who later became the President of the Alpine Club of Canada. Below him are Misses Walters and Hartley. John Wheeler is belaying Jean Sherlock. July 27, 1942. Photograph by John Gibson.

In many ways 1952 was to John Wheeler what 1921 was to his father: a landmark year in which the course of his life's work and achievement would be established. The first life-changing event of 1952 occurred on May 17th when he married Nora Jean Hughes, the younger sister of a fellow student at the University of British Columbia. Highly competent in her own right, and very independent, Nora would prove an ideal life-long partner for a young, mobile geologist who often spent months at a time in the field.

After a brief honeymoon in Banff, John left for the Selwyn Mountains. His party consisted of four, including John, and eight pack horses. A University of Alberta geology student, Hank Nikiforuk, was his assistant as he had been for a year in Whitehorse. Ed Kohse and his son Fred, with whom John had worked previously in the Whitehorse area, provided the services of packer and cook.

The expedition trucked the horses to Mayo and then drove them to Wernecke on Keno Hill. The horses were packed on June 19th and the party set out down the valleys of the Keno Ladue River past Scougale Lakes and across the Beaver River to Kathleen Lakes where fresh supplies and mail were flown to them by the legendary Yukon bush pilot Pat Callison. From the Kathleen Lakes, Wheeler's party travelled northeast with the intention of fording the Bonnet Plume River near Corn Creek but found the water too high to cross. They were forced southward to Rackla Lake where Callison once again re-supplied them. Utilizing the full value of air support, Wheeler and Nikiforuk flew to Pinquicula Lake northeast of the Bonnet Plume to complete part of the survey. After Callison flew them back to Rackla Lake, the party proceeded eastward. After crossing the Bonnet Plume, they found their way to the Snake River where their survey section was carried to the divide and into the Arctic Red River drainage. They then re-crossed the Snake and Bonnet Plume rivers to Bonnet Plume Lake where they were once again supplied by Callison before heading southward to Misty Lake in the Selwyn Valley. They then found their way through a maze of mountains by way of Marmot Pass to Arrowhead Lake. On the final leg of their journey they crossed the Hess River where their mapping ended and they set out on their 300 kilometre trip home.

Nora, John and "Mike" the dog on one of their many trips in the mountains. Photograph courtesy of the Wheeler family.

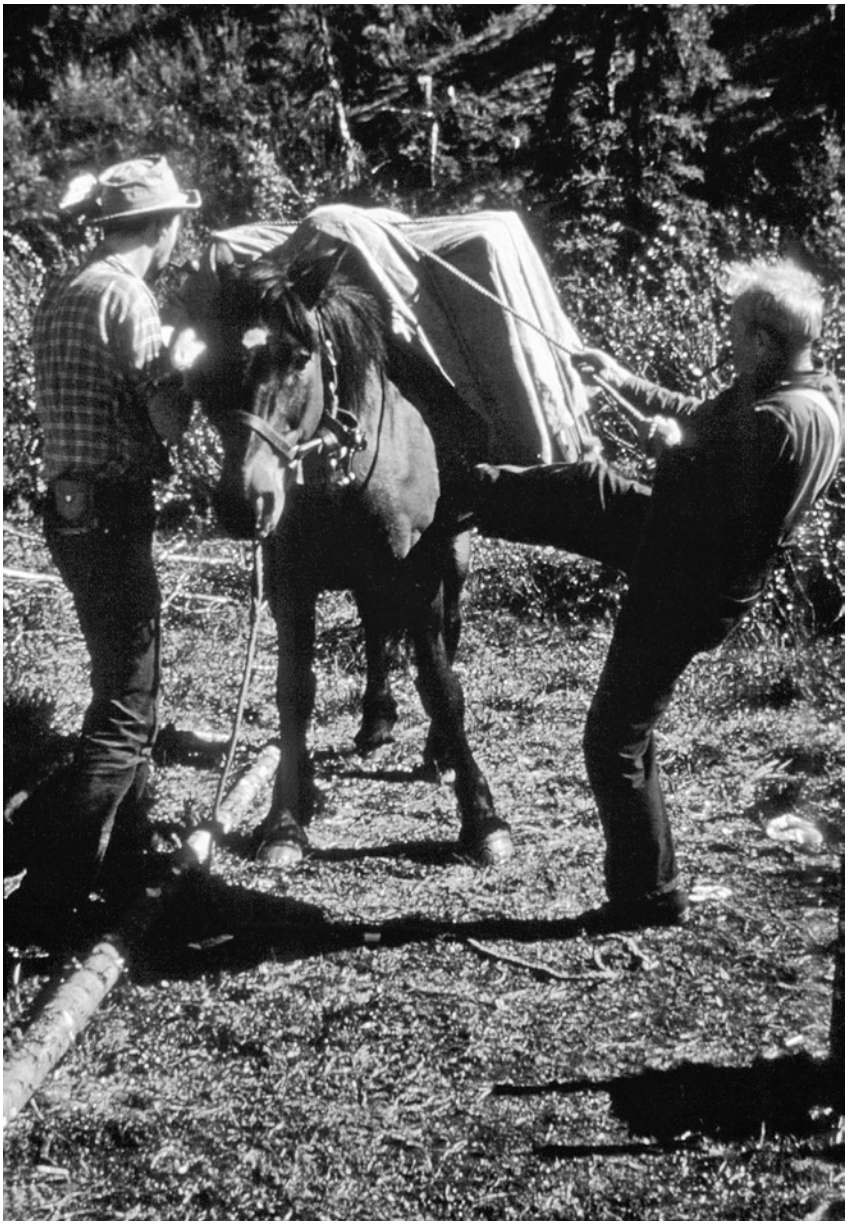
John Wheeler married Nora Jean Hughes in Vancouver, B.C. on May 17, 1952. After a brief honeymoon in Banff, John disappeared for months into the silence of the Selwyn Mountains. Highly independent and self-motivated, Nora quickly adapted to the field schedules of her geologist husband.

This trip was not without incident. After crossing the Hess River, Ed Kohse was kicked by a horse and could not travel. As bad weather and confusion in communication delayed Callison's scheduled rendezvous with the party, Wheeler was forced to walk all night to reach Fairweather Lake some 40 kilometres distant to ascertain if his party could rely upon aerial re-supply. The party arrived back in Whitehorse in early

October. It had truly been a visit to the great lone land. On their 800 kilometre four-month trip, the Wheeler party saw only three other human beings.

Hugh Bostock of the GSC wrote in his autobiographical *Pack Horse Tracks* that John Wheeler's 1953 Selwyn Mountain expedition was of historical significance:

> *The northern Selwyn Mountains project was a notable one and warrants background. It was an exception in the general policy of the Survey of methodical 4-mile mapping. Also it was perhaps the longest and loneliest packhorse journey for the Survey ever in the Yukon if not anywhere in the Cordillera.*



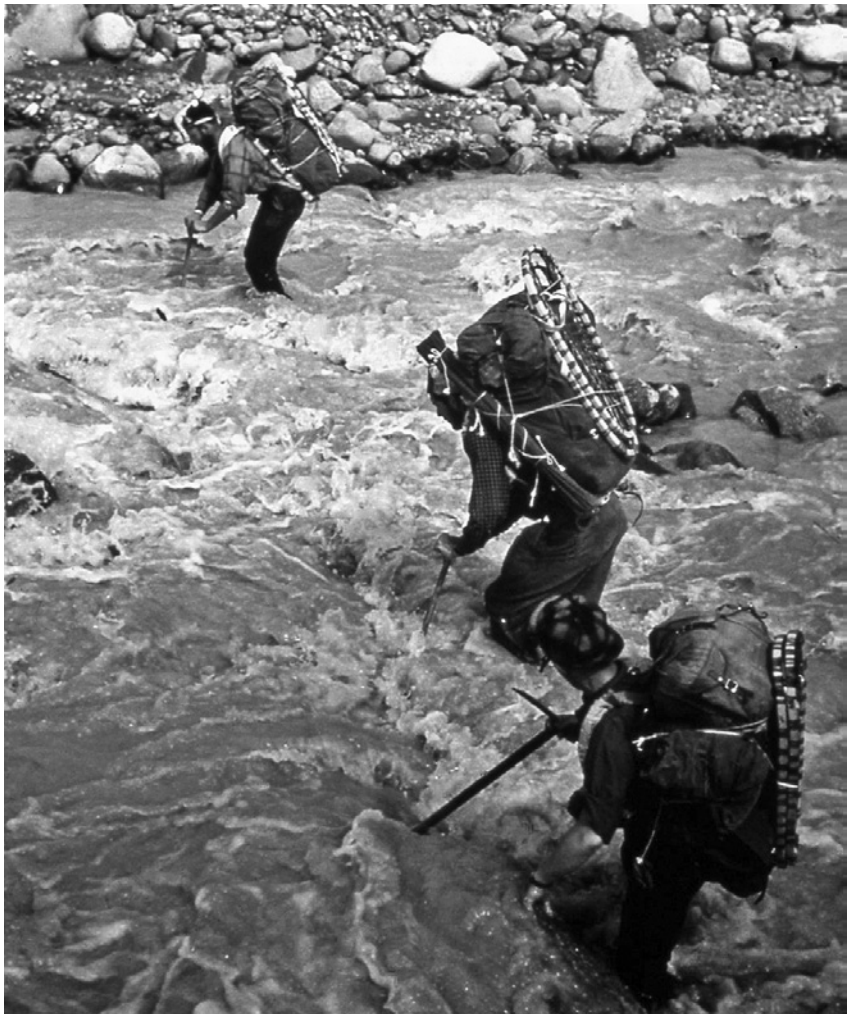
Ed Kohse (right), and his son Fred, packing Finnegan, the "stove" horse during John Wheeler's epic geological survey of the northern Selwyn Mountains in the summer of 1952. Photograph by John Wheeler.

John Wheeler spent twenty years mapping the geology of the mountainous regions of the southern Yukon and southeastern British Columbia. Though John Wheeler's field studies would eventually cover an area of over 80,000 square kilometres in the Whitehorse, Kaskawulsh, Glenlyon, Quiet Lake and Finlayson Lake areas of southern Yukon, and big swaths of the Rogers Pass, Big Bend and Lardeau areas of southeastern British Columbia, it is perhaps his geological exploration of the Selwyn Mountains that are most interesting and telling of John Wheeler's character. Though modest and gentlemanly, John Wheeler was tough and reliable. You could send him into the most difficult circumstances and expect good results. John Wheeler's three years – 1953 to 1955 – in the Kaskawulsh area of the St. Elias Mountains were the toughest of his career. The geology was complicated, backpacking travel was arduous over huge glaciers, meltwater streams were intimidating to ford – and then there were the bears. Following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather, John Oliver Wheeler started his career with a huge success and then continued to build on that success for the rest of his life.

While John Wheeler took an active interest in field work and mountaineering throughout his entire career, his two greatest accomplishments

> ***It is almost certain no horse expedition was made in earlier decades even by G.M. Dawson and D.D. Cairnes in such solitude. In their areas prospectors were frequently to be met here and there but here there was no expectation of meeting a single soul.***
>
> ***—H.S. Bostock***

resulted from cumulative understanding of the larger geological structure, first of the Cordilleran region of the West and then of the grand mosaic that is the geology of the greater lone land of Canada itself. Though J.O. Wheeler may not have at first realized the scale of the work toward which his career inclined, the pieces soon began to fit together. By 1965, Wheeler was more and more involved in syntheses and in solving the mysteries of tectonics in the western mountains. In 1967, Wheeler was appointed the Head of the Cordilleran and Pacific Margin Section of the Geological Survey of Canada in Vancouver. In 1970, J.O. was approached to become a manager but hated to give up the field work he so enjoyed. He decided, however, that he should give something back to the institution that had given him so much pleasure and accordingly was persuaded to become a manager. Mirroring his father's meteoric rise through the ranks of the Survey of India, J.O. was appointed Chief of the Crustal Geology Division of the GSC in Ottawa in 1970. A year later this division was enlarged and became the GSC's Regional and Economic Geology Division with John as chief. In 1973, John Wheeler became Deputy Director General of the Geological Survey of Canada. In this capacity he was responsible for all GSC research programming and became the Survey's Chief Geologist. Wheeler was 48, and on top of Canada's geological world.

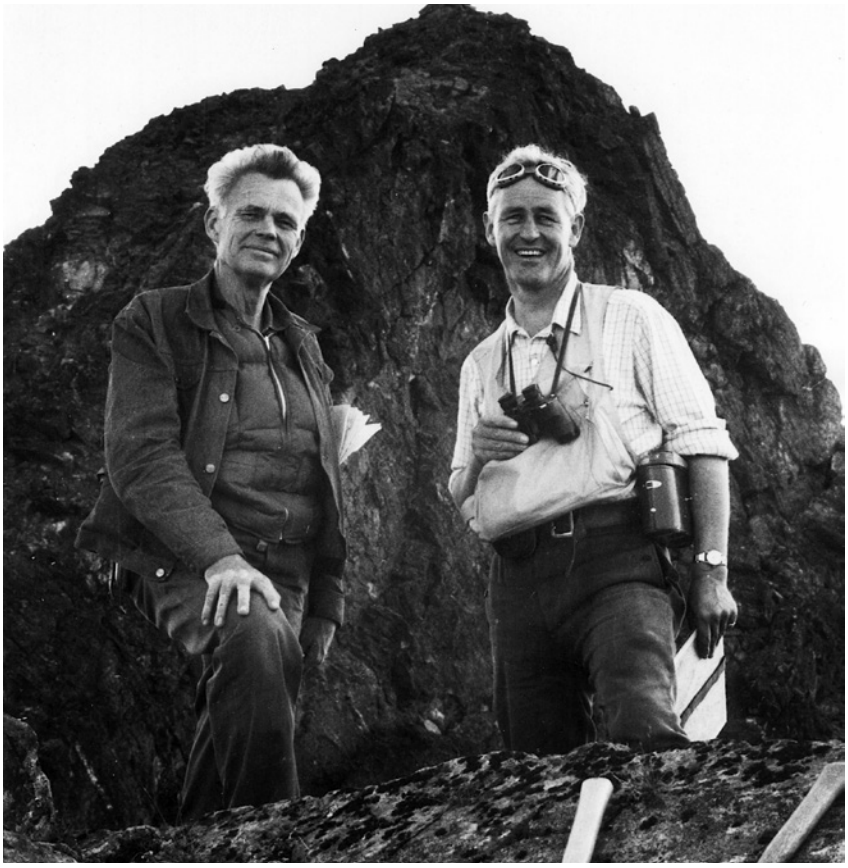


Fording a glacial torrent during the St. Elias Mountains survey in the summer of 1955. Photograph by John Wheeler.

For me, the most enduring thing about J.O. is that, apart from being the most knowledgeable person about the geology of Canada, he is probably the most respected geologist in the country and the most well-liked. In any career those credentials are hard to match.

—Chris Yorath

In 1979, John gave up his senior Ottawa position to return to Vancouver to work on the completion of the greatest geological map series ever created in Canada. Wheeler and his colleagues began by piecing together the complex geological story of the cordilleran region based on new knowledge of plate tectonics. Years of work went into the careful correlation of surface geology that composed the entire mountain region of the West. When the *Terrane Map of the Canadian Cordillera* and the *Tectonic Assemblage Map of the Canadian Cordillera* were published in 1991, an era of Canadian exploration came to an end. It was not just John Wheeler's ambitions that were fulfilled with the completion of these beautiful and profoundly important maps. John Wheeler did for Canada what his father did for India: he defined the nature and character of the country's great hills. His grandfather's voice can also be heard in these maps. With their publication, Arthur Oliver Wheeler's desire to know our country's mountains was at last realized. Canadian could at last be fully at home in their mountains. Three generations of surveyors had made them ours.



John Wheeler (right), President-Elect of the Geological Association of Canada, with John Rodgers, of Yale University, President of the Geological Society of America, Mount Revelstoke National Park, August, 1970. Photograph courtesy of the Wheeler family.

But John Wheeler was hardly finished. The work he had done on the cordillera allowed him to see greater possibility in the larger work of generations of GSC geologists. In what his wife Nora – who assisted with the project – has described as a twenty year passion, Wheeler became the chief compiler of a team of seven regional experts who portrayed more than a century of geological mapping in Canada. A quote from Paul Hoffman, one of the regional experts, now at Harvard University:

It is everything a map should strive for – stand back and the major features stand out clearly; move closer and all the details snap into focus … There is beautiful balance in colours between the different regions.

Indeed, it might well be described as the most extraordinary geological map ever created in this country. It could arguably be called the *Great Map of the Great Lone Land*. When the new Geological Map of Canada was published in 1996, it marked the end of the pioneering era of geology in Canada. The surface of the country was now completely known. Canadians could now see at glance the nature and true character of the land in which they lived.

The completion of the *Geological Map of Canada* in 1996 marked a huge GSC triumph. In only fifty years, three-quarters of the surface geology of the second largest country in the world had been surveyed and mapped. It was John Wheeler and his team who did the work to put the efforts of so many others together to make this remarkable accomplishment possible.

Rising as his father did in the later years of his career with the Survey of India, J.O. was still not finished. With the *Geological Map of Canada* complete, Wheeler contributed his

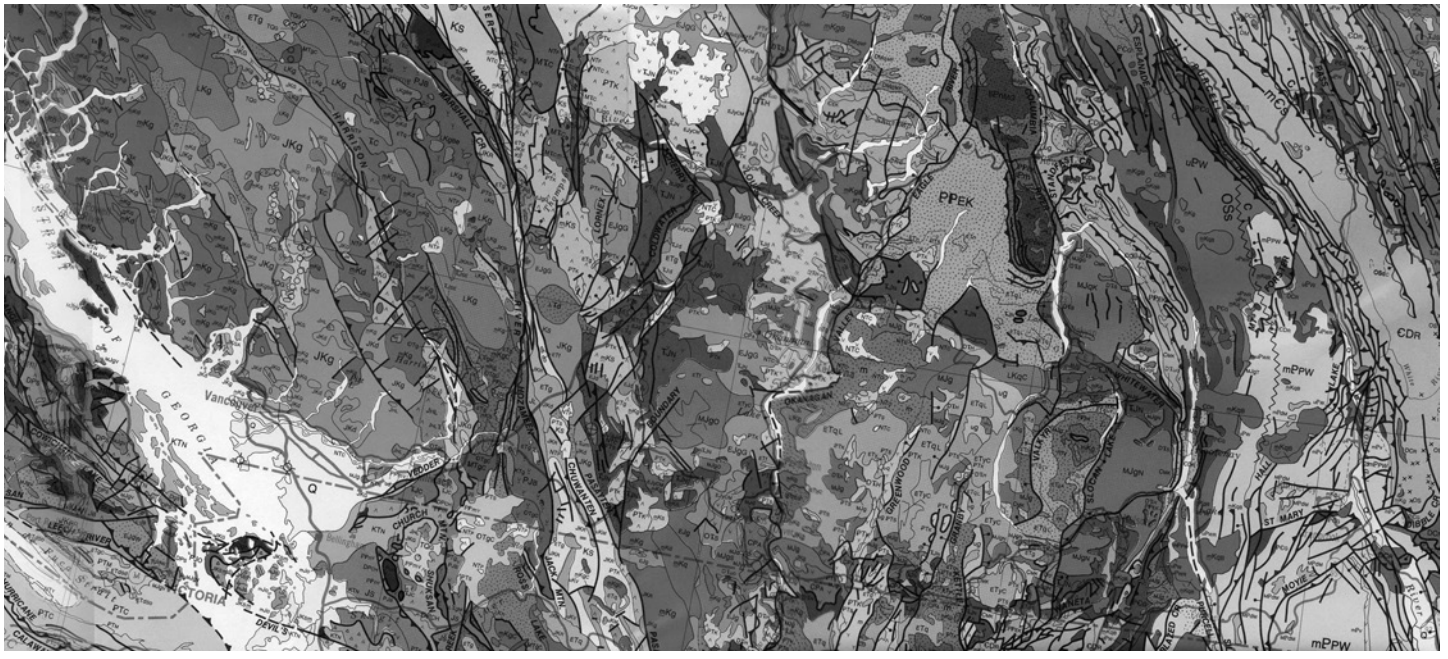
Canadian knowledge to the completion of the first comprehensive *Geological Map of North America* published by the Geological Society of America in 2005. This landmark map was the first to show the seafloor geology of the surrounding oceans. In addition, John Wheeler also found time between 1981 and 1998 to edit and coordinate the publication of the monumental eight-volume Geology of Canada. John also compiled the Canadian information for the second edition of the Geological Map of the World published in 2000.

John Wheeler may have consciously wanted to live the life his grandfather lived – and to a very real extent he ultimately did. But he also lived in his father's time and in many respects transcended E.O.'s monumental achievements. Edward Oliver Wheeler was responsible for the mapping the Indian subcontinent, an area of 3,183,643 square kilometres. John Wheeler was responsible for the geological mapping of Canada which covers some 9,976,139 square kilometres, half a continent. But John Wheeler would not have you consider his relationship with his father competitive. The man known in Canada today as the "Father of Geology in the Cordillera" competed only against himself to give service to the country he loves. As he once quoted sportswriter Grantland Rice in closing remarks in a speech to the students of Shawnigan Lake School:

John and Nora Wheeler's two daughters, Kathleen (left) and Jennifer (right) on the summit of Observation Peak in Banff National Park in the summer of 1969. This pleasant ascent marked four generations of Wheelers to climb to this summit. Photograph by John Wheeler.

When the last Great Scorer comes to write against your name He writes not that you won or lost but how you played the game.

Tectonic Assemblage Map of the Canadian Cordillera, courtesy of the Geological Survey of Canada



In the Wheeler family tradition, John Wheeler has played the game with consummate skill, quiet passion and great dignity.

Using maps rather than words, three generations of Wheelers have in effect achieved William Francis Butler's goal of finding a new language to describe and define the West. But there is more. An intergenerational theme emerges out of the Butler's influence on Wheeler family history.

When young Arthur Oliver Wheeler read *The Great Lone Land*, he assumed that the way of life Captain Butler described no longer existed. But while mapping the Canadian West, he discovered a world very similar to the one Butler described in his own remarkable adventures.

A.O.'s son E.O. would have a similar experience. Thinking that perhaps the world described by Victorian adventurers was long lost, he found romance, danger and self-fulfillment aplenty in "the Great Hills" of the Canadian West. He had even more rewarding experiences later while mapping the remote regions of India.

A generation later, E.O.'s son J.O. confronted similar doubts. He wondered if the amazing world occupied so prominently by his grandfather in the Mountain West would last into his time. To his great surprise and delight, he discovered it in all its wonder and glory while mapping the geology of the Selwyn Mountains of the Yukon.

Adventure is where you find it, in landscapes and in yourself. A good place to look for it, however, is in the Great Hills. In this quest it helps to have a map. Any one of the Wheelers' will do.

John Wheeler in front of the Geological Map of North America, the most significant map of its kind ever produced, in his West Vancouver home in 2006. Even the seafloor geology surrounding the continent is represented on this most amazing of maps. Photograph by R.W. Sandford.

Among the Great Hills

Three Generations of Wheelers

& Their Contribution to the Mapping of Mountains

For a hundred years the history of the Alpine Club of Canada has been dominated by the vision and forceful character of the Club's co-founder, Arthur Oliver Wheeler. In his shadow, however, are two generations of Wheeler descendents who made equally important contributions to the history of mountaineering and the appreciation of mountain landscapes in Canada and abroad. Arthur Wheeler's son, Oliver Wheeler, was a fine and accomplished climber before he was twenty. Oliver went on to become an Everest legend and the Surveyor General of India. Arthur Wheeler's grandson, John, also became an accomplished climber at an early age. His interest in mountains, however, turned to geology. After pioneering exploration in the Yukon, John went on to become Chief Geologist of the Geological Survey of Canada and one of the most respected earth scientists of his time. This book is a tribute to "the amazing Wheelers" in gratitude for their contribution to mountain culture in Canada.

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