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BELMORE BROWNE - Artist, Explorer, Hunter, Writer, Mountaineer



Theodore J. Holsten
EMERITUS MEMBER
Boone and Crockett Club

The game's up: we've got to get down.

With these words to his two companions, Belmore Browne conceded defeat only 125 feet from the summit of Mount McKinley, North America's highest peak at 20,335 feet. A fierce gale, 55 miles per hour, along with blinding visibility and the temperature at -15° made it impossible to continue. They came so close to the summit while setting an altitude record for climbs in North America. A short time later, as they retreated, a major earthquake rattled the mountain.

Belmore Browne made three attempts at a first ascent of Denali, the Indians' name for the mountain. He was a member of Dr. Frederick A. Cook's expedition in 1906. After sending most of his party home, Cook, along with one companion, claimed he had continued on to climb and reach the summit of the great peak. Belmore, on his second McKinley expedition in 1910, proved Cook's claim to be a lie, placing Cook's "summit" photograph many miles away on a much lower peak.

Belmore's third and last expedition came in 1912, and but for the onset of the great storm described above, would probably have been successful in being the first to reach the summit. Many factors made it remarkable that Belmore's party got as far as it did. Mount McKinley, unlike most of the giant peaks of the world, rises from a low

valley rather than a high plateau. Approaches to the mountain took many weeks of difficult travel. His party had no porters and had to carry all their supplies on their backs. Their equipment was heavy and primitive by modern alpine standards. Belmore's sleeping bag alone weighed 17 pounds! The ice-creepers they wore on their boots were no match for modern crampons. Even their food presented problems. The fatty pemmican that was to be their principal energy source proved to be inedible at high altitudes, making them wretchedly sick with cramps. What they achieved was remarkable under the circumstances.

To Belmore Browne's everlasting credit, he was one of the earliest proponents for preservation of one of North America's finest wildlife areas by creation of Mount McKinley National Park. The Camp Fire Club of America and the Boone and Crockett Club are given much of the credit for persuading the government to act. However, the pressure from these organizations was largely initiated by Belmore Browne and Charles Sheldon, who was also a pioneer explorer of the McKinley area.

Belmore Browne's first major exposure to the Pacific Northwest took place in 1902 when he accompanied the Andrew J. Stone expedition to the Cassiar region of British Columbia as hunter and artist. Using his hunting prowess, he collected many animals used by the American Museum of Natural History for its habitat groups. On a later trip to the Bering Sea area, he collected Alaska brown bear groups for the museum. One of

BOOKS BY BELMORE BROWNE

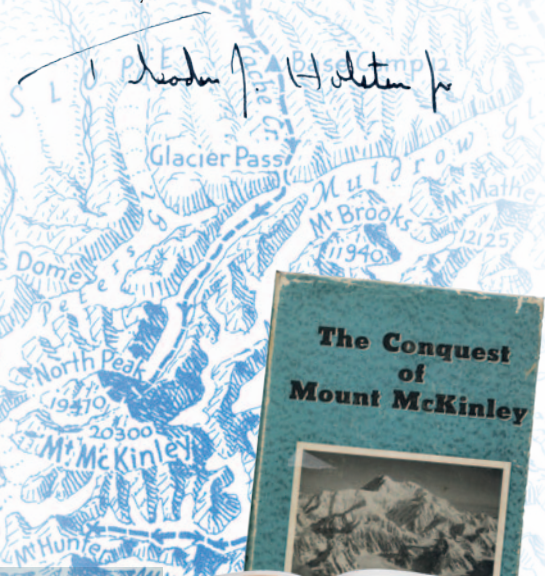
Guns and Gunning (1908)

The Conquest of Mount McKinley (1913)

Mountain Man (1988) biography of Belmore Browne by Robert H. Bates

his special assignments was to secure a cub for the Bronx Zoological Gardens. The bear cub he brought back was named Ivan. It grew to a monstrous size and for many years was a major attraction at the zoo.

Belmore was an outstanding artist, and his paintings have been widely popular. When his exploring days ended, he settled in Banff, Alberta, and with his family enjoyed the spectacular scenery of the area while he painted the wildlife and mountains that he loved. In his later years, he painted the background scenes for the wildlife dioramas at several museums including seven at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. At the time of his death at age 74 in 1954, he was working on the dioramas at Yale's Peabody Museum. ■



FROM LEFT: Browne with two Dall's sheep heads and capes. ■ One of Browne's painting of Mount McKinley. ■ *The Conquest of Mount McKinley*, written in 1913 after three attempts to reach the summit. ■ The inside spread of *Mountain Man*, by Robert H. Bates, shows a portrait painting of Browne as well as artwork done by Browne himself.

