

Mount Cromwell (Unnamed): A 55th 11,000er?

FA August 1936: Oliver Eaton Cromwell and E. Cromwell, Jr., F.S. North, Monroe Thorington – South Ridge, via Habel Creek and glacier (AAJ 3-61). North Face: Winter, 1980, Jim Elzinga, C. Miller

I climbed S. Ridge via Stutfields on Friday, May 13, 2005.

Mount Cromwell is listed in *The Rocky Mountains of Canada-North* as 3330 metres. But the 1:50,000 topo map Sunwapta Peak 83 C/6 – published in 1978 and using aerial photos taken in 1974 – shows a 3360-metre contour, which, if accurate, would put the summit seven metres or 23 feet above the 11,000er mark.

Curious as to how accurate the map was as to this allegedly new 11,000er, I finally went up it in mid-May of 2005. Two friends and I skied up the Athabasca Glacier and went across the Columbia Icefield towards the Twins. From the Stutfield Col, we skied up Stutfield's West Peak (which incidentally my GPS measured as 11,375 feet, versus 11,319 in the guidebook). We then skied north down a nice slope from the saddle between the two Stutfields, dropping about 300 vertical metres to the East Stutfield-Cromwell Col (a few, visible crevasses).

From the col, I easily scrambled up Cromwell's South Ridge on firm snow and good, blocky scree in about 45 minutes. At the summit cairn (no register found), I pulled out my GPS with considerable anticipation – it initially read 10,985 feet; close but no cigar. But I then went up towards the high point of the snow ridge above, inching as close as I dared to what might have been a cornice. The next reading was 11,004 feet, which changed to 11,006 a minute later (at that point, the GPS indicated an accuracy of 17 feet, which I assume is horizontal).

Given the accuracy/inaccuracy of any such hand-held consumer device, Cromwell could easily be just under or just over 11,000 feet. I have found from using this GPS on a number of summits, that it is usually accurate within 10 or 15 feet of the listed height when I get maximum satellite coverage, as was the case on Cromwell.

The bottom line? Cromwell's height is indeed in the 11,000er ballpark and is probably as legitimate a contender as Recondite, which is listed at 3356 metres, or only 3 metres or 10 feet above the mark.

Incidentally, the glacier above Habel Creek that was used on Cromwell's first ascent looked pretty broken up from what I could see and could be particularly troublesome in summer. The slope descending east from the Cromwell-Stutfield Col was snow covered and didn't look too bad; this was the approach on the first ascent of Stutfield East from the Icefields Parkway and involves a crossing of the Sunwapta River and some perhaps tricky cliff bands to navigate.

The spring approach on skis up the Athabasca Glacier, though long, is a lovely trip with fabulous views of the Twins, Columbia, Alberta, et al in good weather. Three reasonable days or two very full days.