MAPPER OF MOUNTAINS: M.P. BRIDGLAND IN THE
CANADIAN ROCKIES 1902–1930. By I.S. MacLAREN,
with ERIC HIGGS and GABRIELLE ZEZULKA-MAILLOUX.
0-88864-456-6. xviii + 295 p., maps, b&w illus., append-
dices, bib., index. Softbound. Cdn$39.95.

I wish I had known more about the remarkable life of
Morrison Parsons Bridgland six years ago, when I was
completing my history of mountain climbing in Canada.
As I have discovered, Bridgland played a major role in the
Canadian mountaineering community in the early years of
the 20th century and, until now, has been overlooked. He
was, as well, one of the most important surveyors of the
mountains of western Canada for 30 years.

This book will be of interest to all those who have a
passion for Canadian mountain history. With extensive
footnotes, bibliography, and index, it is also an excellent
resource for serious historians.

‘Mapper of Mountains’ grew out of the Rocky Moun-
tain Repeat Photography Project (RMRPP), in which J.M.
Rhemtulla and Eric Higgs re-photographed central Jasper
National Park from the same high-elevation stations that
Bridgland had used when he surveyed and photographed
the park in 1915. We now have an impressive record of
change in the natural environment over a period of more
than 80 years. It is a resource that is proving of tremendous
value to researchers from many varied disciplines.

The book begins with an introduction to exploration,
mapping, and surveying in western Canada prior to
Bridgland’s career. The heart of the book is the story of
Bridgland himself, in particular his contribution to the
formation of the Alpine Club of Canada (ACC), his role as
chief guide at the early ACC mountaineering camps, and
his 30-year career surveying in the Canadian Rockies and
the Selkirk and Monashee mountains. The book concludes
with the story of the RMRPP and Bridgland’s legacy.

I enjoyed the story of this unsung Canadian hero, but as
his life was largely one of hard work, modesty, and dedi-
cation to duty, it is not an exciting read. There were few
moments of drama or excitement in Bridgland’s life (or
few that he chose to record). As a fellow historian, I found
the authors’ search for Bridgland’s original materials, in
particular the plate negatives, very interesting and satisfy-
ing: the negatives were ultimately discovered in
uncatalogued cardboard boxes in a warehouse of the Na-
tional Archives. The story of the development of the
technique of phototopographic alpine surveying, which
was perfected in the Canadian mountains in the late 19th
and early 20th centuries, makes another fascinating story.

The book is at times a dense read, full of facts and details.
And there are a few errors that surprised me—James Hector
was a famous geologist (not botanist) and Conrad Kain did
not “later write up his adventures in the Canadian Rockies”
(these stories were collected and edited after Kain’s death by
J.M. Thorington). I would have liked very much to see a series
of illustrations showing the technique Bridgland used to turn
his photographs into topographical maps. The explanation of
this process given in the book is very hard to understand. The
quality of the black-and-white photographic reproductions
suffers from the quality of paper used in the book. Finally, a
map of the mountains of western Canada showing the extent
of the territory surveyed by Bridgland would have been of
interest.

I noted that MacLaren and his fellow authors felt a
touch of resentment that Bridgland has been overshad-
owed by the better-known Canadian mountain surveyors,
J.J. McArthur and A.O. Wheeler. This book, however, will
now place Morrison Parsons Bridgland in that illustrious
group and make his remarkable story available to all of us.

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