

# COLUMBIA

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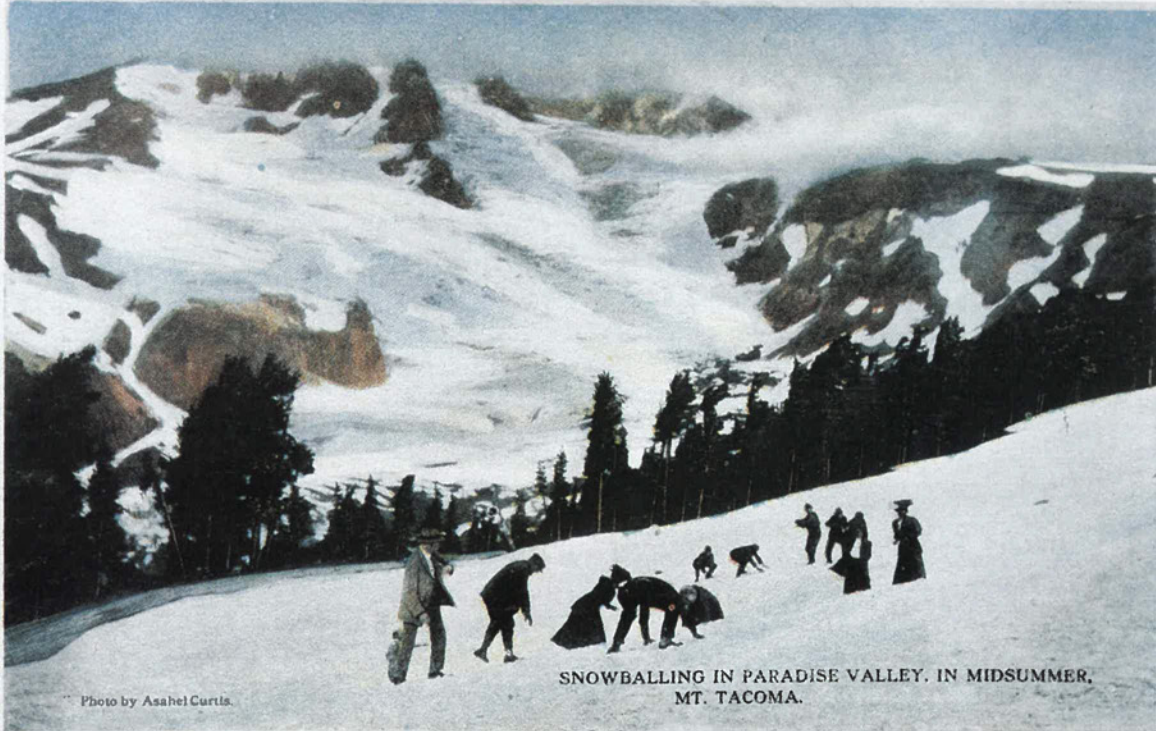


Photo by Asahel Curtis.

SNOWBALLING IN PARADISE VALLEY. IN MIDSUMMER,  
MT. TACOMA.



Crossing a Glacier, Mount Tacoma.

Photo by Asahel Curtis.



hen General Hazard Stevens climbed Mt. Rainier in 1870, it was a lonely enterprise. Only one companion joined

him on this first ascent of the region's most prominent landmark. At the base camp, a single Indian guide waited for their return. When Stevens climbed Mt. Rainier again in 1905 the setting was considerably different. This time, over 200 fellow climbers cheered him on. They were members of four outdoor organizations: the Mazamas, the Sierra Club, the Appalachian Mountain Club, and the American Alpine Club. All had gathered at Paradise in late July for their first joint climbing expedition. In 1870—the year Stevens became the first man to reach the summit of Mt. Rainier—not one of these organizations had existed. Thirty-five years later, the numbers present at this remarkable gathering indicated the increasing popularity of mountain sports.

Rarely had such a large group camped at Paradise. In 1905 Mt. Rainier offered few roads and amenities. The train went only as far as Ashford, and the stage ended in Longmire; visitors had to travel the steep 13 miles to Paradise on horseback or foot. For all its inaccessibility, however, Mt. Rainier became a subject of great interest to climbers when it was designated a national park in 1899. It is significant that the Sierra Club, based in San Francisco, chose Mt. Rainier in 1905 as the site for its first trip outside California. For the Appalachian Mountain Club, too, the expedition to Mt. Rainier was a momentous event; many

**COOK AT THE Mazamas' Camp.** *The size of the pans and the number of pitchers in the background indicate that meals were large-scale operations.*

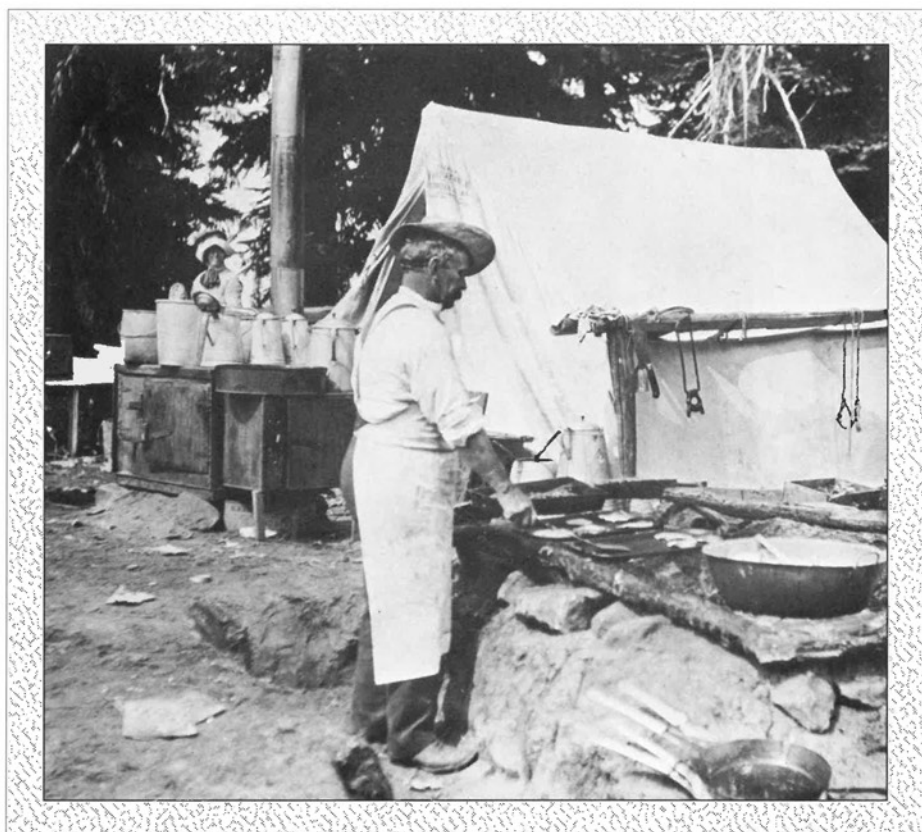
# The EXPEDITION of 1905



## Two hundred climbers tackle Mt. Rainier

members were visiting the Pacific Northwest for the first time. The Mazamas, based in Portland, acted as hosts.

This expedition quickly became a source for regional pride. Newspapers in Portland, Tacoma and Seattle boasted that the visitors were awed by Washington's superlative scenery. It was inevitable, noted one reporter, that climbers from other regions would seek the wild, rugged peaks of the Cascade Range, for no "true nature lover" could remain satisfied with the tamer mountains of the rest of the country. Complaints about the weather received less coverage from the locals. However, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that Sierra Club members disliked the summer rain, "and had no hesitation in saying so." Some of these Californians resented the necessity of



Courtesy of the Bancroft Library

pitching tents; they longed “for the stable climate of the high Sierra.”

Despite such occasional grumbling, the climbers encountered no serious problems. In part, their success can be attributed to their remarkable ability to organize. At Paradise, the large and unwieldy group divided into two camps: one for the Mazamas, and one for the Sierra Club and other climbers. Each featured men’s quarters, women’s quarters, and a commissary. The Sierra Club was the most regimented group. Even their meals were executed with military precision; they were called to eat by a bugle—and they arrived for their food in single-file lines, utensils in hand. The Mazamas, who were more relaxed, poked fun at the Californians’ culinary routine. However, such regimentation proved useful in dangerous climbs.

**M**ost of the 200 participants hoped to reach the summit of Mt. Rainier. However, all were required first to demonstrate their climbing ability on more accessible glaciers and peaks. These were reached on lengthy day-excursions, during which the men and women marched single file. For nearly two weeks, the group prepared for the big climb. In the long run, this training effort was worthwhile. Although the expedition experienced several close calls with falling rocks and small avalanches, no one was killed or seriously injured.

For all the intense preparation, there was plenty of time for frivolity. One of the most notable activities was a snowball fight involving 75 people. Even here, the climbers demonstrated their organizational skills; the participants divided themselves into two “armies,” one of which was “commanded” by



General Stevens. They also appointed an arbiter. The “battle,” recorded by the Kiser Photographic Company of Portland, appeared in the local newspapers. Owing to the size of this group, most of its activities were large-scale. Even the evening campfires grew to “gigantic proportions.” Participants seemed well-aware that they comprised one of the largest expeditions in the history of American mountain climbing.

The composition of the group was also impressive. Included in the activities were geologist Joseph N. LeConte, photographer Asahel Curtis, and Stephen T. Mather, future director of the National Park Service. Stevens, the most revered member of the Mazamas, remained the center of attention at the camp. Notably missing was John Muir, president of the Sierra Club. The presence of these eminent figures attracted the press and kept the expedition before the public.

By the end of July, the group was ready for the big climb. The Sierra Club, which sent 62 people, went first. After

*THE MAZAMAS, dressed in elaborate costumes, prepare to “raid” the Sierra Club camp. The peculiar creature in the foreground is a mountain goat, made from a stolen sleeping bag. The Mazamas derived their name from the mountain goat—and this was their mascot. Signs in the background indicate school rivalry, as well as the controversy concerning the name of the mountain. Although the Mazamas called it “Mt. Tacoma,” the Sierra Club, after carefully considering the matter, decided to use the name “Mt. Rainier.”*



**CLIMBERS** march single file up a glacier.

**FIVE MAZAMAS**, clad in club uniforms, pose for the Kiser Photographic Company of Portland.



Mt. Rainier's "rarified atmosphere becomes a developing fluid which quickly brings out any lurking evil or narrowness of mind as well as capacity for kindness, courage and self-reliance." 🐾

an icy night at Camp Muir, they reached the summit in less than six hours. What made this party remarkable was that it included 17 women. Although the first ascent by a female had occurred in 1890, few women, until the Sierra Club climb, attempted the feat. On their return to Paradise, the Californians passed over 50 Mazamas making their ascent. As the pioneer climber, Stevens gave the expedition valuable perspective. Now in his sixties, he reported that his second journey to the summit was every bit as rigorous as his first. "I believe the dangers and extremities are about the same now," he assured his fellow climbers, as "they were thirty-five years ago." When the group reassembled at Paradise, there was much to celebrate.

The climbers' attitude toward their feat varied. Many claimed to have mastered the mountain. John Muir, president of the Sierra Club and veteran climber of Mt. Rainier, sneered at the notion that humans could conquer nature. "When a mountain is climbed it is said to be conquered," he observed. "As well say a man is conquered when a fly lights on his head." Yet the Sierra Club boasted that their expedition to the Pacific Northwest "had conquered the kingliest among all the mountains of the United States." Some Mazamas, too, regarded Mt. Rainier as a trophy to be bagged. In recounting the big climb, they emphasized their physical prowess as well as their ability to endure pain and discomfort.



t times, the expedition assumed a carnival atmosphere. In an effort to add color and fanfare to their ascent, the Mazamas left two men to spend a night on the summit with several bags of "flashlight powder." These men withstood freezing gales to light an enormous red blaze, which was visible for a distance of 60 miles. The Boosters in Tacoma responded to this

signal by shooting off fireworks over Commencement Bay. To modern climbers, the expedition's whimsical display might seem frivolous and even foolish. Similar to the nightly firefall which scorched the granite cliffs of Yosemite, the fire on Mt. Rainier in 1905 reflects an era which viewed national parks as playgrounds and places for amusement.



Washington State Historical Society

**HAZARD STEVENS,**  
son of Isaac I. Stevens,  
(the first territorial  
governor of Washington),  
made the first ascent of  
Mt. Rainier in 1870—  
and returned for the  
expedition of 1905.

Still, some members of the expedition regarded Mt. Rainier with respect and reverence. To them, the ascent was a spiritual venture. "Most of us had seen and climbed high mountains," explained one member of the Sierra Club, "but none like this mountain. Rainier has a dignity, a majesty all its own." According to him, Mt. Rainier not only "dominates the landscape" but also "captivates the mind, dominates the will." Another Sierra Club member noted the power and sublimity of this landmark, which "is grand to a degree that is truly terrifying." His words convey deference as well as respect. Not all the climbers,

## Campfire Song for Expedition of 1905



THE FOLLOWING words, reprinted in the *Tacoma Daily Ledger* (July 25, 1905) were sung to the tune of "John Brown's Body." (According to the author, this song appeared clever at the time, though she was not certain whether it was the altitude or the wine that made it so.)

The Appalachians and Mazamas and Sierras

are climbing to the top—  
if they possibly can.

The way is long and stormy and the  
wind is surely blowy,  
But we still go climbing on.

### CHORUS No. 1

Glory be to General Stevens,  
Glory be to General Stevens,  
Glory be to General Stevens,  
The very first man on top.

### SECOND VERSE

The trail around Gibraltar Rock is  
pretty hard to tackle,  
The trail around Gibraltar Rock is  
pretty hard to tackle,  
The trail around Gibraltar Rock is  
pretty hard to tackle,  
But we'll go 'round or bust.

### CHORUS No. 2

Glory be to the Sierras,  
Glory be to the Mazamas,  
Glory be to the Appalachians,  
Who soon will be on top.

### CHORUS No. 3

Glory be to Mt. Tacoma,  
Glory be to Mt. Tacoma,  
Glory be to Mt. Tacoma,  
Which is sometimes called Rainier.



**THIS SNOWBALL** fight above Paradise involved 75 people and was featured in most local papers.

**A MAZAMA** WASHES her clothes in a stream, to prepare for a campfire meeting with the Sierra Club.



Courtesy of the Bancroft Library

then, were convinced that they had conquered Mt. Rainier.

For some climbers, the expedition was a process for revealing character. One Mazama, for instance, concluded that Mt. Rainier's "rarified atmosphere becomes a developing fluid which quickly brings out any lurking evil or narrowness of mind as well as capacity for kindness, courage and self-reliance. Nothing in our natures remains hidden in the mountains." Hence, climbing could impart a sense of enlightenment and humility.

There will never be another expedi-

tion like the one in 1905. Today, the National Park Service limits the number of people assembled in a single spot. Modern rangers might well cringe at the thought of over 200 people camping at Paradise; the damage to park vegetation caused by pack stock is still visible. Owing to safety concerns and a desire to protect ecosystems, the size of climbing parties also is regulated. Generally, they do not exceed 25 to 30 people. In 1905 most visitors to Mt. Rainier National Park were not concerned with resource protection. Yet this group, for all its large size and rambunctiousness, demonstrated significant foresight. The expedition of 1905 culminated with a lengthy report, written by the members of the four outdoor organizations, concerning the need for stronger preservation of the park's natural features. Submitted to the President of the United States and the Secretary of the Interior, this report indicated that its authors were more than mere climbers—they were activists. Indeed, the Sierra Club in particular has been a prominent force in the conservation movement throughout the twentieth century.

*Lisa Mighetto teaches history at the University of Puget Sound. Her book Wild Animals and Environmental Ethics will be published in 1991 by The University of Arizona Press.*

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Cover: Asahel Curtis' experiences in the epic group climb of Mt. Rainier in 1905 (see story on page 32) were likely the inspiration for a chromolithograph souvenir pamphlet on "Mount Tacoma"; these are photographs from that Curtis publication. (Washington State Historical Society)