



R. H. Hayes

WINTER INTERLUDE

*Honorable Mention 1934 Photographic Exhibit*

Mt. Rainier from Chinook Pass, one of the lesser known ski regions.

# The MOUNTAINEER

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## THE NORTH FACE OF MOUNT RAINIER

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**T**HE challenge of untrod mountains is an open challenge. If accepted by the climber, a struggle on even footing ensues, provided the mountain does not enlist the services of the weather-gods. Only once may an unclimbed peak hurl that great challenge. Yet after the battle, the conquered peak still rears its head unbowed. In admiration the victorious climber looks back at the giant who tauntingly seems to fling another challenge: "Approach me, if you dare, from the front."

Every mountaineer who has caught the spirit of the mountains knows when the mountain looks him straight in the eye. The peak lies vaguely cold and distant, passive and unconcerned, when he approaches it from the bulging back, or sweeping sides. But if he steps into the shadow of its front, he can feel the massive head look him over, he can feel its breath, hear its rumbling throat, and sense its inherent power.

Mountaineers who have lived and breathed under the shadow of Rainier's front have accepted its final challenge. Yet the challenge still stands today. Hans Grage, who had started an attack with a party last year, was rebuffed. This year the writer, too, caught the challenging eye of the face that watches the northern lights. Joining forces with Hans Grage, who had some knowledge already of part of the planned route, the attempt was made. The mountain, however, would not face us alone, and threw us back down its sides in a driving blizzard. Two months later, with yet greater determination, we approached the mountain again, hoping for at least an even break in the contest.

A mild September afternoon found us climbing through the trees of Mist and Seattle Park. Stepping out upon the moraines of Russell glacier and up towards Echo Rock, the mountain looked at us with friendly eyes as the last rays of the sun raced past us up toward its peak. Skirting along the east side of Ptarmigan Ridge, we stopped long enough in the darkness to cook hot soup and enjoy a couple of hours of sleep at this elevation of 9500 feet.

A thin sickle of a moon and the stars threw enough light to enable us to push on up the ridge. Working carefully down the west side of the top of Ptarmigan Ridge by flashlight, we crossed the bergschrunds of both sides of the upper eastern end of North Mowich Glacier. Crampons and doubled ropes were pushed into service. Thanks to the moonlight and stars, little difficulty was encountered in finding a schrund-gap that could be crossed.

At last we had come to the first of the three thrilling moments in a climber's day—coming to grips with the mountain. Our face here consisted of three lava ridges spreading fanlike down, the middle ridge separating two steep talus slopes which were covered with glare

ice for over a thousand feet straight up. For the next three hours, ice-axe picks beat a steady tattoo up the steep ice. All movements had to be slow and cautious, requiring constant balance and watching of the partner's maneuvers. At the top of this face we paused to blink into the rising sun and look down into the still dark depth of the great Willis Wall amphitheatre. It was here we sensed for the first time the enormous latent power of Rainier. To verify our feelings, ice and rock fragments began their hissing and erratic bombardment from above, the sight and ominous sounds of which were to be our evil companions throughout the rest of the climb and descent. It is this factor, and that of poor and rotten climbing rock, that makes any climbing routes on this side prohibitive to larger parties. Closely pressing ourselves along the crumbly cliffs, we made a horizontal traverse to the east, planned our next route up an ice-covered chute leading directly to the foot of an overhanging wall. Working under cover of large projections up the right side of this chute which was in the direct path of falling rock and ice, we crawled on hands and feet along the foot of this overhanging wall in an arcade-like undercut from the ceiling of which long icicles hung suspended. Coming out into the sunlight again on the east edge of this wall, we discovered that it represented the end of a long rock rampart, the highest exposed ridge on that side of the mountain. Crampons were at last removed, and rock-work up the east side of this rampart begun. Within an hour and a half we stood opposite the uppermost glacier that slopes gradually to Liberty Cap. We had at last climbed through the face and up to the top snow fields. This point, between twelve and thirteen thousand feet elevation, is directly west of the upper brink of Willis Wall. From here the route lies up the gentle slope of this glacier that forms part of the summit dome. We finally decided with great reluctance that there was insufficient time to walk up the snowfields to the summit and climb down out of the face before darkness set in.

Descending for about 1500 feet whence we had come, we continued our descent to the west of our fan-like face, thereby avoiding the long and difficult glare-ice we had encountered during the night. This led us down the uppermost ice-tongue of the North Mowich Glacier. Crossing this hanging glacier at 10,000-foot elevation above its ice-fall into the mother glacier, we skirted a half mile to the west above the North Mowich Glacier in an attempt to find a schrund crossing. During this time of late afternoon, we were kept constantly on the dodge by hurtling and singing rocks. Ducking the last shrapnel successfully as we sprang upon the glacier, we found voice again as we gave vent to our feelings. The certainty of having to unravel the maze of crevasses ahead of us up the North Mowich Glacier to Ptarmigan Ridge, in oncoming darkness, was nothing compared to the relief we experienced in being rid of the uncertainty of rock bombardment against which the best equipped climbing team is powerless. After traveling a half mile in four hours up this crevasse-gaping glacier, we again topped Ptarmigan Ridge in darkness, sleeping an hour on top, and plodding tired but happy down the moonlit snow slopes to the green parks below. Once more we sank into the heather for an hour's rest before descending to the Carbon River.

It was a climb that neither one of us will ever forget. It taught us at least one lesson, namely, that the best mountaineering is not always

good mountaineering. Although the goal, Liberty Cap, was not quite reached, the North Side was conquered for the first time. And that puts to an end the ever present challenge Rainier has flung us when our wondering gaze would sweep its face.

Remarks: Mountaineers considering using this route, should reach the foot of the face, where it meets North Mowich Glacier, before day-break. Utilizing the afternoon and night for the first half of the climb, the climb can be easily accomplished without the use of sleeping equipment. This requires, of course, a slow pace, and sufficient nourishment at frequent intervals. Sharp crampons, ice axe and spare rope are absolutely essential. It is advisable to take along red marking flags that can be used to mark bergschrund and crevasse crossings for the descent. A flashlight that leaves the arms free to work, and a small gas cooker, were found to be of invaluable service.

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