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THE FINAL CONQUEST

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TO BE able to write the last chapter of a series of three attacks made by the writer upon the front of the white giant, that is truly a privilege. And so this final epistle is written not without some pride and thankful appreciation. Pride in the clean safety technique that successfully opposed the often unfair counter-attack of the mountain, and grateful acknowledgment to St. Peter, the weather apostle, and to Jack Hossack, the loyal teammate who stood by his man when physical and moral support were needed most. The writer wishes to express additional acknowledgment to Harry Myers and to Major Tomlinson of the Rainier Park Department for their efforts and goodwill in sanctioning the climb during the late season; and, last but not least, the patient and trustworthy ground crew in the person of Harriet Woodward who stood by on Ptarmigan Ridge during the cold night and early morning hours with binoculars and flares, prepared to receive and transmit signals during the difficult and, at first, uncertain phases of the work on the lower glare ice chutes and verglass covered lava outcrops of the main face. The climb could not, therefore, and did not fail; although forty-eight hours were needed to complete the traverse of the mountain from Carbon River to Paradise Valley.

Many pages could be devoted to a climb of this type in describing in cold detail the various techniques employed in working out the many problems and immediate difficulties such a varied route with its ice pitches, rockfall chutes, lava cliffs, crevassed cornices, icefalls, schrunds, and ice chimneys has to offer. Suffice it to present the trip from a general interest standpoint.

Outfitted to face Rainier for at least four days, we were equipped with spare food concentrates such as cheese, figs, butter, dates; with a primus cooker and soup concentrate; with a small flask of alcohol, sleeping bag covers, headlights and flares, red cloth schrund markers, detailed waterproof aerial photographs of the whole route, and the usual tools and safety equipment. Half of a 120-foot rope was carried by the last man in his Bergen, the remainder serving to rope up the team with stirrup loops for the axe anchoring maneuvers.

It was the week-end following Labor Day. Meteorological conditions prevailed much as the year before. A high, steady barometer, small and scattered southward sailing cirro-strata clouds, and a low first quarter moon left the mountain to rely on his own resources to defend his unconquered side. Never had this writer felt so certain of success before a difficult climb.

Northwest faces of Mount Rainier showing routes of Ptarmigan Ridge and Liberty Ridge ascents. Dotted line indicates route in Ptarmigan Ridge attempt last year by Hans Grage and Wolf Bauer. (A) Carbon Glacier (B) Liberty Ridge (C) Russell Glacier (D) Bivouac of Liberty Ridge party (11,000) (E) Ptarmigan Ridge (F) North Mowich Glacier (G) Edmunds Glacier (H) Highest point reached in 1934 Ptarmigan Ridge attempt (I) Liberty Cap (J) Columbia Crest (K) Russell Peak (L) Willis Wall (M) Winthrop Glacier. Mount Adams in the distance.

It was agreed that if the climb of the face was done at all, it would be done with credit to the mountaineering art, and if it took three days to climb through the face to Liberty Cap. This meant reaching the face of the top rampart before the sun had thrown the rock and ice bombardment into high gear. A four-hour sleep on the arete of Ptarmigan ridge above the upper cirque of North Mowich Glacier found us rested and in eager anticipation for the night's and morning's assault. Descending down the crumbly west side of Ptarmigan Ridge by flashlight, and crossing the upper North Mowich Glacier and its ice bergschrund, it was decided to make a stab at the tremendous icefall of the snout of the hanging glacier that descends from Liberty Cap onto the divide between the Carbon and the North Mowich Glaciers. The chute fringing the west side of the icefall proved, however, too exposed to rock and ice fall for the prolonged operations necessary in that location. A contour traverse to the west back onto the face had to be made. Here a flare signal was given to the lone ground crew saying that conditions were okay, and the team would carry on over the top. This signal carried with it the further significance of a hot meal awaiting us at Camp Muir should we get there that evening. The "crew" came through, but we didn't.

The next two thousand feet consumed eight hours, most of which were spent in cutting steps into the steep glare ice slope of the face and its chutes. Because anchoring was almost wholly confined to body and ice axe belays, large footholds and frequent knee and handholds had to be chiseled. This work proved to be slow and tiring since the cutting was done under intermittent but often furious bombardment from whole swarms of hissing rock and ice fragments, necessitating constant cover and quite restricted working positions. At noon, the point along the uppermost rock rampart which terminated the previous climb was reached. The following five hundred feet consumed almost four hours. The key to the problem of reaching the top of this rampart proved finally to be a narrow inclined ice chimney and a detour over a verglass coated neve roof. Deep ice belays had to be cut here as neither pick nor shaft gave anchoring security on the exposed surface. From this point on, it was only a matter of chopping through a small fringe of seracs before we could step on the wind-crusting neve that overlaid the rampart top. The face was again conquered—this time completely.

Twenty-four hours had elapsed since the Carbon River was left behind, of which thirteen had been spent on the face from the Ptarmigan Ridge bivouac. At this elevation of 12,500 feet the slope angle to the top changes to one-half of that encountered throughout the face proper. A sense of freedom and happy satisfaction stole over us as we looked at the world below us through the rose-colored glasses the afternoon sun had slipped over our eyes. No more step cutting. No more bombardment. No more rotten rock and glare ice pitches. Securely our crampons bit into the crusted snow boards as we slowly pushed our way around a few more crevasses and cornices, up over the Sunset Amphitheater, and on to Liberty Cap, which was reached at about nine o'clock Sunday night. A temporary bivouac of seven hours' duration was quickly established on a small spot of lava gravel near the Cap. Crawling into our sleeping bag covers and cooking hot pea soup on the primus, we prepared to weather the icy blast. A warm little eruption from the old boy that night, we agreed, would have been a welcome disturbance. However, having been fairly beaten, there was nothing he could do about it now except make us as uncomfortable as possible. And here we give Rainier his due credit.

Blinking airplane beacons and a brilliantly lighted-up St. Helens from a nearby forest fire reflection presented a rare sight. The next morning a unique spectacle greeted our amazed eyes. The whole cone-like shadow of Rainier hovered projected in the air to the south. It seemed as though the black shadow represented the malicious soul of the old boy, the presence of which we had been kept aware of throughout the previous day. And now that this ominous soul and spirit had departed, there was nothing left but the glorious white head in the crisp morning air, and the rising sun greeting us in celebration of our victory. Though it was probably the most wretched, it was truly the most inspiring and scenic bivouac I had ever set up.

After two hours, we reached the north rim of the crater. Steering leisurely through the crevasses to Gibraltar and proceeding through the chutes to Camp Muir, we reached Paradise Valley at 3:30 Monday afternoon. The peak was in our rucksack, and the Mountain had for the first time been climbed and traversed from Ptarmigan Ridge.

With a cheery yodel we descended under a lazy afternoon sun down into the green valley which, after the cold deadness of the upper ice world, seemed truly a paradise valley to our hungry eyes.

The route through the face from the upper North Mowich Glacier to the top of the rampart was laid somewhat east of last year's route, but crossed the latter beneath the rampart face. The reason for this was not only the fact that the icefall of the Liberty Cap glacier to the east was tried first, but that the route was laid with greater care as to rock and icefall protection, a factor which had made the last trip such a hazard and poor mountaineering.

A number of alternative routes are yet present to the west of this face, their points of attack located on the ridges which make up the cirque heads of the Edmunds, South Mowich and Puyallup Glaciers. With the right type of ice gear, the icefall on the snout of the Liberty Cap glacier may be tackled, thereby avoiding the glare ice face. To the east, Liberty Ridge presents the route up the north side which was first climbed a week later by Ome Daiber and party. East from there, between Liberty Ridge and Russell Cliff and the Winthrop, lies Willis Wall. This cirque wall with its ice pitches and rotten ice spurs, constitutes probably the most dangerous rock and ice exposure on the mountain, and should, in my opinion, never be attempted without the most painstaking preliminary observations and scouting. The difference between ridge and wall climbing under rock and icefall exposure is obvious, for wind and sun-loosened material does not roll and collect along the aretes and ridges, but falls, should it hit a ridge, to both sides into the chutes. With sound rock, and the absence of an ice-cap rim, Willis Wall would certainly present excellent climbing opportunities.

The true mountaineering art is after all a safe and sane art and sport or recreation. It is no more "death defying" or "dangerously hazardous" than any other publicly accepted occupation or sport such as swimming, skiing, flying or automobile driving. If climbing and true mountaineering is to become an accepted art and sport in our Northwest, as it has become recognized on the Continent, then the public must be made aware of the fact. It cannot be done by misleading and unsound pictures and statements extolling the wrong sort of bravery or nerve. A risky climb, a dare-devil thrill picture, or a serious accident due to unpreparedness can be of more

harm directly and indirectly to our climbing fraternity and climbing future, than seems to be realized by many of our climbers along the West Coast. Our Northwest will surely become one of the greatest skiing and climbing centers of the world, and it is up to us to set a standard and foundation to the spirit and ideals of mountaineering, both winter and summer, that will give our Northwest country and its climbing public the right type of recognition and publicity, and give us climbers the realization of our goal, namely, a mountaineering conscious public which will be helpful in developing our many climbing districts, and a Northwest climbing fraternity that knows better than to regard the mountain world as a place to defv
