

A NEW ROUTE UP MT. RAINIER

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Probably no other high mountain in the world can offer an approach as beautiful, as wild, and as easy as that from Fairfax, Washington, to the foot of Mt. Rainier. An hour after leaving the railway, the giant cedars and Douglas firs of Rainier National Forest close in on a trail so unfrequented as to seem all but untrodden, yet of easy grade and "good" for the region traversed. By night Crater Lake may be reached and early the next day Spray Park, at the foot of the mountain. Here one may camp with wood and water, and grass for the pack horses, in the loveliest of natural parks.

Could the mountain be climbed by this northwest side, and if so could we get to the summit and back in a day? These were the problems confronting our little party of three, all experienced mountaineers and keen for the fray. Our elevation was only 6,100 feet. We had reached the last wood and water and the pack horses could not well go higher—although in Alaska they would have gone much higher. We could camp no higher, therefore, unless we were to waste the precious days of clear weather in relaying up wood, bedding, etc., on our backs, or go without them. It was mid-September. Daylight lasted only fourteen hours and the nights were chill, but on the other hand the summer's avalanches had nearly ceased and new snow had made travel fairly easy on the glaciers above. This side of the mountain was considered impossible because of the almost continuous avalanches from its steep ice walls during the summer, but now there was frost at night and the day's heat was brief.

To reconnoitre, to study the mountain with glasses was the first step. At 7,500 feet our view was complete and was near enough for a satisfactory survey, so down we sat to plan our route in detail, and to watch for avalanches. We were looking across the North Mowitz glacier from half way up Desolation ridge, and when each of us had picked out his route, we found that we all agreed, not only in our judgment that the mountain

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EAST SIDE OF DESOLATION RIDGE. HIGHEST POINT 9500 FEET

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*Dotted line on photograph indicates the route chosen.

could be safely climbed from that side, but also in every detail of the route chosen. But alas! the fates were against us, for at 9,500 feet the next morning, just where the serious work was to begin, the illness of one of our number compelled us to turn back, and when two days later we finally started again without him, again at the same point a terrific wind made it unsafe to proceed, and the fatal cloud cap determined our retreat. We had neither time nor food for waiting, but so sure were we of our route that I am glad to submit a few notes and views for the benefit of other adventurous mountaineers:

From the last wood and water, below Desolation ridge, something more than an hour's climb, even by lantern, will bring one to the east, snow-covered side of this ridge, which should be followed to its highest point (another hour and a half) almost under the end of Willis Wall. Thence the head of the North Mowitz glacier gives a short and apparently safe crossing to a ridge of rocks that lead up some 2,000 ft. In case these rocks can be climbed with an extra rope, by their outward side, the ascent to the summit would at no point be imperilled by ice breaking off from above, and all difficulties would be solved, for the rocks lead upward to easy snow slopes, on which the summit could probably be reached in another hour and a half. For the ascent of the rocks, prudence would dictate that four hours be allowed, but so far as could be

judged from various points by varying lights, the only point of serious difficulty lies not on the rocks but immediately below them. Here a steep ice slope, rotten ice, and deep crevasses below might require some 200 feet of step-cutting. Care must also be exercised in getting on to the rocks lest procedure too far to the west take the party under dangerous ice cliffs. Weather conditions and season are also important in order to avoid either too much snow on the rocks, or avalanches while crossing the head of Mowitz glacier. The route determined, there remains the problem of an eighteen-hour ascent with only fourteen daylight hours—for September seems the best month for this route. If the start is at 2 a. m., with wind-proof Alpine lanterns, this interesting first ascent by the northwest side might safely be accomplished in a day.

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