The First Ascent of Mt. St. Helens

A daring mountaineering feat is vividly described in a rare 1861 pamphlet.

A rare example of literary talent being exercised in the early years of Washington Territory to document an unusual experience brought into print a description of the first ascent of Mt. St. Helens in 1860. The author is not identified, but he is one of six members of a party who did reach the top of the peak—James A. Burk, Jesse Failing, Amos E. Russell, Lyman Merrill, Squire J. Bozarth and James H. Neyce. The 13,000-word account, entitled "Gold Hunting in the Cascade Mountains," was published in the Chronicle *of Vancouver, Washington Territory, and republished in pamphlet form by the proprietor of the* Chronicle, *L. E. V. Coon. It is probably the earliest nondocumentary imprint in the territory, which was created in 1853. The only known original copy is in the Winlock Miller, Jr., collection of Western Americana in the Yale University Library. Miller acquired it from the pioneer historian and collector Elwood Evans. The library reprinted the pamphlet in a limited edition some 20 years ago.*

The account begins by explaining that reports of gold being found along the upper Lewis River and its tributaries in southwest Washington during the 1850s created the usual "gold fever" and sent scores of men into the foothills of the Cascades in search of riches. Only a little gold was found by anyone, but hunting for it persisted. What follows is the text of the pamphlet, edited for republication here.—Ed.

The "hard times" which have prevailed throughout Oregon and Washington have proved unusually oppressive in this little valley during the past spring and summer, and still continue with unabated power. The desire to relieve themselves from this blight has incited men to cast about them for the ways and means to pay their taxes and store bills, and remove from themselves and neighbors that corroding burden called *debt*. Neither grain, hay nor beef are in demand, even at the low prices which nominally prevail; consequently money has become so scarce in this neighborhood that Cayuse horses, bees and calves have become a *legal tender*. A contemplation of this state of affairs, as early as last spring, brought on an usually severe attack of "yellow fever"; and men began to recall what they had heard of the mines, and others recollected what they had seen in the mountain streams. These two classes got together and the "fever" spread. From May 1860 to the present writing, the mountains and streams have been rarely, if ever, without a number of *gold hunters*....

Sometime during the month of August 1860 some six or eight gentlemen proposed to form a small party, which should go out on the new trail to Kalima [Kalama], rusticate awhile and hunt elk, which are said to abound in that vicinity. ...An account of the progress of this new company and the result of their labors, the wonderful natural curiosities which they saw, as well as their ascent of Mt. St. Helens, I will endeavor to lay before the reader.

Having completed the necessary preparations, the horses were packed, guns loaded, dogs tied, and about 10 o'clock on the morning of the 19th of September, this new party of explorers started to prospect the "new mines" on Lewis River....

Half a day's travel brought us to Chala-cha [Chelachie Prairie], a beautiful rolling plain, containing, probably, 3,000 acres of land. Upon it are some improvements, which were abandoned during the Indian War. Lately several families have settled upon some of the old claims, and are busily engaged in cultivating and improving them....

On the morning of the 23rd we arose before the sun, full of hope and enthusiasm, for here within three miles of us, according to the positive assurance of reliable men, from 5 to 10 dollars a day could be made. After an early breakfast, our company, which had been augmented by the arrival of two more friends, set out prospecting in earnest. All the bars on the east side of the river, for three miles from the canyon, were thoroughly examined; then the streams which came in on that side were prospected down to the bedrock. In every panful of sand or dirt there was the *color;* but it was so fine the naked eye could scarcely distinguish it. We bridged the river and passed over to the other side, down which we examined every sandbar and stream until we arrived at the *hole*, from which a gentleman informed me he had taken five dollars in a few hours; we *failed to get the color.* In order to get back to camp we were compelled to build a raft, which came near swamping. With our enthusiasm some-

what cooled, weary and worn with fatigue we reached the camp, no richer, but much wiser.

Two days spent in laborious exploration in and about the Big Canyon Creek and its tributaries convinced us that we were not in a gold region. Indeed, had it not been for the assurance of gentlemen—in whose integrity I have the utmost confidence, that the points which they described and to which our attention was particularly directed, would richly remunerate the laborer—we would not, for a single moment, have entertained the idea that gold could be found in that vicinity, in sufficient quantities to pay; for neither its geological formation, nor a comparison with other "diggings" either on the Pacific slope or elsewhere, warrants the presumption that paying gold mines will ever be discovered in that portion of the Cascade range. Failing thus far in the main object of our trip, we turned our faces toward headquarters on Cha-la-cha, prospecting the small streams on the way, and arrived at camp about noon on the 24th.

Still hoping to find the places that would pay from 5 to 10 dollars per day, we determined to resume our journey, in the direction of Mt. St. Helens, and the headwaters of Lewis River....

We started northward on the Simcoe Trail, passing over an exceedingly steep and rugged mountain range until we reached the river valley, about six miles east of Cha-la-cha. The valley on the south side is very narrow, sandy, poor and unproductive. On the north side the quality of the land is much better, but the limited extent of the "bottom" will probably prevent its settlement for many years to come. Two miles beyond this "upper crossing" of the Lewis River we forded a very rapid, noisy stream, transparent as the purest crystal and as cold as ice water, which bears the Indian name of Spil-ye-i [Spilyeh Creek]. Within a mile of the ford, and directly on the trail, this stream forms one of the most lovely little cascades imaginable. The stream divides itself amongst the rocks, then pitches over a precipice of some 50 feet, and unites before reaching

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Mt. St. Helens and Spirit Lake before the 1980 eruption.

the surface below, lending a charm and an interest to this wild forest of fir and cedar rarely equaled. Another mile brought us to Spil-ye-i Prairie, where we encamped for the night. This beautiful plain lies about nine miles from Cha-la-cha, contains probably 500 acres of nearly level land, covered with the most luxuriant grass, and is well watered by a good spring, the branch from which runs across the northeast corner....

Four miles further on the same trail we crossed the river again, then traveled up it two miles and recrossed at one of the roughest, most rapid and difficult fords conceivable. For several miles further our trail ran near the bank of the river, the mountains running down so close as to prevent much divergence from it until we came to a small valley, which was entirely covered by lava and pumice stone of immense thickness; our course ran over it for several miles. In several places the upheaved stone had the appearance of having but recently left the "Iron Works" below. To the south of us, across the river, an immense mountain of volcanic origin towered to the clouds in almost perpendicular cliffs. Around the west point of the mountain the river runs with a tremendous rapidity for several miles.

Until our arrival at this trackless deposit of lava, the possibility of losing or missing the trail to St. Helens had not occurred to us. But now the impression that we were far beyond the point at which we should have left the Simcoe Trail could not be shaken off. The reflection was, of course, very unpleasant; but we had to make the most of our situation. We determined, therefore, to go ahead until we should again come in sight of Mt. St. Helens, which the intervening mountain had hid from us for nearly two days. Late in this afternoon, while looking for a place to camp, one of our men came suddenly upon an Indian who seemed to be frightened out of his wits, and indeed there was not much wonder; for our men, being unlearned in the language of Chinook, began to call vociferously for our interpreter, which the Indian mistook for a summons to surrender. He was entirely unarmed and stood and trembled. Our interpreter soon made him understand that we had mistaken our way and wanted to be put right. While talking with him, another Siwash, in the person of "John (Boston) Staps," made his appearance, and very soon informed us that we were several miles too far; that we must return to the further side of the volcanic rocks, where the trail would turn off, if there *had been one*, but since no trail had ever been made, it would be next to impossible for any white man to find the way to the peak of Mt. St. Helens. As long as we believed there existed a good plain trail to St. Helens, which had been frequently traversed by different persons who told us of their ascent, we were somewhat indifferent about going to it; but now the case was entirely changed, it was next to impossible to get there, and of course, human nature must perform impossibilities, so nothing human could now prevent the accomplishment of the trip. A proposition was then made to John Staps to pilot us. At first he objected, but finally agreed to go if we waited until day after tomorrow; he enlarged upon the difficulties of the way; our enthusiasm increased when he finally told us it was entirely impossible for either white man or Indian to reach the summit of Mt. St. Helens. ... We hunted, prospected and climbed a high mountain, from which we could distinctly see St. Helens, still further east than it seemed to be two days before, and from the many intervening hills, chasms and canyons, we became satisfied we had done wisely in engaging John Staps....

At the time appointed, before we had our breakfast, Staps, his friend and an old blind Indian, with their respective families and household goods, arrived, on their way to the berry harvest. Bidding them proceed, and be ready to start with us when we should overtake them, they moved off slowly and were soon lost to view. We were also quickly ready and began to retrace our steps towards the point of divergence from the Simcoe Trail. Within half a mile of this point really commences the ascent of Mt. St. Helens, though it is nearly 20 miles from the foot of the peak. Here we found the family of John Staps, which consisted of a squaw, a boy in a cage and a young puppy, partaking of a sumptuous repast, served up in an old tin kettle. This family group afforded a study which might immortalize an artist; but to portray anything like the effect it produced on my mind is entirely beyond my power. The squaw sat upon the ground with the kettle between her knees, while the baby was placed upright against a tree, within reach of the squaw, and there received its breakfast of berries. The puppy enjoyed a larger liberty; it got into the kettle and helped itself. This scene reminded me of one I had witnessed near Pembina, on the great Red River of the North. Having stopped one night with an Indian family my companion and myself were invited to breakfast on *succotash*, which was served in the kettle in which it had been cooked. After all had eaten, a little, rough, ill-visaged, shaggy dog was called to finish the succotash. He very soon got enough, and began to retreat; the squaw perceiving it immediately made a grab at the little fellow, caught him behind the ears with one hand, and with the other took hold of his tail, turned him "bottom upwards," doubled him into a mop, and deliberately wiped out the kettle from which we had just eaten.

Despite the disgust produced by this exhibition of Staps' family, one of our young men, attracted by the fine appearance of the berries, had the bravery to "pitch into" the bucket and help himself. Mrs. Staps seemed to think the berries were likely to suffer materially from the onslaught, and immediately covered the kettle, with the puppy *inside*.

At 10 o'clock we left the Simcoe Trail, started across an "old burn," in a northeasterly course, and ascended a precipitous elevation of probably 300 feet, which brought us in full view of Mt. St. Helens' peak—standing like a hoary-headed giant amongst an army of dwarfs—apparently not three miles from us. The intervening ascent seemed to be covered with the same volcanic stone and scoria which we had left in the valley below; but it appeared so little undulating that we began to think our guide and his friend (who also accompanied us) had

"taken us in" and that anyone might go directly to the peak without meeting any difficulty worthy of note. We soon learned better....

The volcanic cover grew rougher and more difficult to traverse. Large chasms and deep holes intercepted our track, many of which our horses could hardly be forced to leap. A high mountain towered above us to the north, and on the south a precipice of 200 feet cut off all communication with the valley. Immense piles of smoke-discolored rock obstructed our pathway, so that it now began to appear impossible to get to the mountain with horses. The few firs which had grown in the crevices of the rocks had all been blasted and killed, nothing like life appeared over the entire extent of this vast bed of lava. Our guides would sometimes mistake the way and become hemmed in by some impassable barrier; but when discovered, neither would speak, but they would point with their gun sticks to the particular ledge which was to conduct us between two yawning chasms. Greatly rebuked were some of us who had been cursing the way, when these untutored savages afterwards told us that they had too much reverence for the Spirit, and were too much awed by this evidence of His mighty power, to laugh and talk foolishly in the sight of Him who had devastated the traditional hunting ground of their fathers.

After having traveled to every point of the compass until three o'clock, our guides turned in the direction of St. Helens again, and soon found a smoother country, over which we continued for four miles. We now left the volcanic valley and struck off through the woods to the west. The rain which had been falling slowly for several hours now came down copiously; the huckleberry bushes caught it, and drenched us thoroughly. Our horses, however, were much improved by the change from rock to earth, and made much better time. Frequently, while passing through this dense forest of huge trees, the tramp of our horses would produce a sound similar to that emitted by a bridge while being crossed by heavy wagons. How the weight of these immense trees was supported seemed a mystery. Large and deep caverns were discovered on either hand, but our time would not allow us to explore them.

The changes in the growth and species of timber, as we ascended, attracted our attention. The red fir of the valleys and hills had been exchanged for the gigantic hemlock, balsam fir, white fir, shittim-wood, spruce and what is commonly known as Norway pine. These now gave place to the scraggy, split, broken and almost limbless dwarf pines of every high latitude. Mosses and lichens became more common. The lowest forms of vegetable life now and then appeared. The ascent become more rugged and difficult; again huge masses of volcanic rock frequently intercepted our way; in one place they confined us to a narrow ledge, barely wide enough for our horses to stand upon, while a yawning chasm on each side seemed ready to swallow the entire train. A misstep would have proved the destruction of both horse and rider. Thick clouds hung around the summit of St. Helens, and hid it from us; but the pulverized pumice washings, and debris on every hand, indicated our near approach to the limit of vegetable life on the mountain and the close proximity of the peak. Shortly after passing the "narrow way," our guides started up a gulch which had been washed out by the melted snow, and pursued it about three miles; we then left it, crossed a small ridge to the east, and about six o'clock of the 27th of September, we camped upon the bank of a very deep chasm, through which a large stream of water was running. The rain soon began to pour down in torrents, for which the Indians credited the "Bostons," saying we had caused it by our much talking.

After eating our suppers, the guides were invited to help themselves. While they were thus engaged, our interpreter began to ply John Staps with questions about the mountain, to ascertain the Indian idea of it, as well as to learn whether any white man had ever ascended it. He replied to a few questions, but when he found them coming thicker and faster, he stopped eating, looked around, laughed, and said: "Bostons great man; he *eat* heap and *talk* heap, *all at one time*. Siwash *can't*." Having thus delivered himself, he set about his supper again with a zeal and relish which seemed to say, "You see I can enjoy 'Boston' *muck-a-muck*, if I can't their *wa-wa*." We were not surprised to find that John, after traveling 20 miles over a very rugged country, upon a limited supply of berries, had quite an appetite for his supper. But he managed, by dint of close attention to the matter in hand, to get through it in an hour, and then announced his readiness to *wa-wa* all night.

He said the only company of which the Indians have any knowledge, traditionary or otherwise, that ever started from the settlements for the purpose of ascending St. Helens, were a party of Hudson's Bay Company's men, headed by old Mr. Lewis, which proceeded, some by water and some by land, under the direction of their Indian guide, to Spil-ye-i Prairie, where it began to rain. Some of the party became discouraged and wanted to return; others wished to go on. The guide refused to go without more blankets. The advance party threatened to shoot him; the return party encouraged and protected him. Quite an angry scene occurred, which resulted in the return of the whole party. This happened about 20 years ago. Hudson's Bay men have hunted and trapped in the streams around it, but they never attempted its ascent. Since the return of the party mentioned, sometimes one or two men would start with a guide or without one, and get to the end of the trail leading to the berry patch or in sight of St. Helens, and then return. But neither white man nor Indian had ever made the ascent to the summit of the mountain. Nor had any white man ever gone as far up its side as our party were then encamped. When an Indian boy wished to be received into the council of the brave of his nation, he would ascend the mountain peak as far up as the grass grows, and there prove his bravery by walking to and fro, in presence of the Spirit which governs the mountain, until morning. His return to his people was hailed with every demonstration of delight....

Being encamped near the limit of

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"We could distinctly see St. Helens... and the many intervening hills, chasms and canyons."

the timberline, we turned our horses upon a fine undulating prairie, which lay on a ridge to the southwest of us, and set about the necessary preparations for the great event of our trip—the ascent of *Loo-wit-lat-kla*, or Mt. St. Helens.

Having accomplished all that could be done that night towards the great work of the next day, we retired to our blankets—which laid beneath a poor shelter that we had constructed of the miserable pine boughs we found growing sparsely in the hollow about us—our minds alternating between fear and hope. Indeed after everything became quiet in camp, we were so completely occupied in estimating the chances for a fair day and a successful effort that we were only aroused to a consciousness of material things by a flood of water which poured down upon us. The structure, which out of charity I have called a shelter, served to "tangle" the rain until we were snugly stowed away, as we imagined, for the night; when the descending torrents found an opening that let in a deluge, soaking our bedding, clothing, arms, ammunition and our persons, sleep was, for a time, out of the question. While we were considering the best means of protecting ourselves, one of our most excitable young men became very indignant at the liberty the water was taking with him, and, as he stood before the fire, his boots filled to overflowing, while miniature cascades ran down and pitched off his head, shoulders and arms, he suddenly exclaimed, with all the vehemence of excitement, "By the *jumping Judas priest*, I would sell my interest in Washington Territory for four bits." No bidder appearing at that ruinous price, he presently added, "Or a drink of whiskey!" As the utterance of that magic name fell upon our half-conscious ears, all of us involuntarily arose from our wet blankets, looked wildly around, and inquired, "Where?" Discovering that we were *sold*, our entire party expressed their emotions by a terrific yawn, which aroused our Indians from their slumbers, and set the wolves to howling around the camp.

When we arose in the morning, the rain had ceased, but a dense fog hung like a pall over the mountain; the air was quite cold and uncomfortable, and the stream of water which we left running down the gulch at 10 o'clock of the night before was now dried or chilled up, so that we found it difficult to get sufficient water to cook with. Our enterprise seemed to be doomed to a reward of disappointment; should the fog continue, we knew it would be next to impossible to find our way up the peak, and altogether impossible to see anything after getting up. Hoping for the best, however, we prepared for the ascent, and at seven o'clock, of the 28th [of] September, we started. Our Indian guides continued with us until we had passed the timberline, and traversed a small part of the belt of magnificent grass which girdles the mountain and extends from the timber to the base of the snow line, probably a mile and a half in width. Nothing, however, would induce them to cross it, nor would they agree to go with us. They shuddered at the idea, and strongly protested that it was impossible to ascend the peak and further intimated that our persistence in this, to them, mad attempt would inevitably bring upon us the sore displeasure of the *Sah-hah-ly Ty-ee* [or *Tie*] of the mountain, who would inflect upon us a severe penalty for our temerity. Leaving us to make our way as best we might they directed their course toward a beautiful prairie of some 3,000 acres, lying on the top of the ridge to the southwest, where mountain sheep, black-tailed deer and woodchuck are numerous.

An impassable ledge of volcanic rock on the west extending from the timber to the summit prevented us from going up what had appeared to be the easiest and consequently the most practicable route. We were, therefore, compelled to bear more to the east. The fog was now rapidly drifting away; and as Mt. Hood, in the southeast, showed its hoary head above the clouds, we rejoiced in the prospect of a clear, bright day. The ascent was so gradual over the grassy belt that we might have ridden our horses up it with ease, had it not been for the deep gulches that we were compelled to cross. Prodigious

rocks were started by us which caused the earth to tremble as they pursued their mad career, dashing and tearing the timber, towards the valley, far below.

As we ascended we encountered several gulches which had been washed out by the melted snow, to the depth of from 100 to 250 feet. Falling over the precipices of lava were some beautiful little cascades of 50 to 80 feet in height. Grass had become more and more sparse, until now, not a spear could be seen; and the mossy covering which succeeded it had gradually given way to the immense stone, pulverized lava and ashes, which covered the upper part of the mountain. The ascent became more difficult, but by hard labor we at length succeeded in reaching the first deposit of snow, the surface of which we found soft enough to walk upon. Over this we traveled until it became so steep that we could not stand upright. Compelled to leave it our only alternative was to climb a sharp ridge of loose rock and pumice for nearly half a mile. Here we found another snow bed to walk upon, but our progress was frequently impeded by the deep chasms which intercepted us. Several of these appeared to be bottomless. The narrow ones, of from two to four feet, we leaped; others, of from six to ten feet, caused us to take a circuit, sometimes of half a mile. Rocks almost as large as houses were settled on the snow and in the sand or pumice, which but little labor would remove and send like an avalanche down the mountain. Climbing another sharp ridge of rocks, we found a comparatively level spot of about half an acre, which, I have no doubt, had been formed by the descending scoria, as it became hemmed in by the ledges that run from the south to the east and west of it. Fatigued and dispirited—the fog having come over again—we halted to rest and refresh ourselves, while we discussed the chances of further progress.

For the first time our men complained of great oppression about the chest, and a stinging sensation in the lungs, while a dense weight seemed to hang upon them. Breathing became more difficult and painful. As the western breeze swept the clouds away to the westward, the sun shone out bright and revealed the top of St. Helens, apparently not over a quarter of a mile distant, and perpendicularly above us. The valleys of the Columbia and Willamette stretched away to the south, while these majestic streams looked like streaks of silver on a groundwork of velvet as they pursued their tortuous course through the beautiful evergreens that bordered them. To the west, apparently not far below us, laid the broad Pacific, as placid as an infant's slumbers, as it reflected the golden rays of the noonday sun. An involuntary exclamation of delight broke from us as we viewed the enchanting scene. Fatigues and privations were soon forgotten, and with renewed energy and unflagging resolutions, we started again for the summit.

When we crossed the narrow table we came to an almost perpendicular bank of pulverized lava and ashes, which at first afforded a good footing, but, after climbing from 60 to 80 feet, a misstep would start us downward with such velocity that we could not stop until we arrived at the bottom. Here the stoutest, most rugged and robust man of our party "gave out." After making several efforts to gain the top he sat down, completely exhausted, to await the return of his more fortunate friends. A sharp ridge of loose rock, on each side, formed a border to this deposit, and we determined to climb the one on the right. To accomplish this feat we had to crawl on our hands and knees for more than a quarter of a mile, every instant in danger of rolling off to the right or the left, down a rugged precipice, of from 200 to 300 feet, into a chasm, the bottom of which could not be seen. The danger attending the ascent of this ridge was sufficient to appall the stoutest heart, but, in the excitement of the occasion, while we flattered ourselves that it would conduct us to the summit, we did not give a single thought to the danger.

Nearly two hours were consumed in ascending this ledge, but when we reached the top of it and found another bed of snow, of half a mile in width, lying between us and another precipice, our limbs and lungs aching and our bodies weighed down by the pressure of the atmosphere, we nearly despaired of ever attaining the summit. A short rest and increased determination renewed our wasted strength, revived our drooping spirits, and we crossed the snow quickly. Another narrow ledge of some 400 feet in height, more precipitous than the last, had to be ascended. From the top of it, we looked upward, at an angle of about 60 degrees, and there, only a short distance from us, stood the little peak, which forms the summit of Loo-wit-lat-kla.

Now began an exciting race, to determine who should be first to reach the summit, and the intervening snow, which had been lying there for untold ages, was for the first time impressed with the marks of human footsteps.

Mr. Failing, the young gentleman who loves berries and wishes to dispose of his interest, was the first to reach the summit, and to him belongs the honor.

At that moment—at half past two p.m. on the 28th day of September A.D. 1860—the top of Mt. St. Helens ceased to be a *terra incognita*.

The Summit of Mount St. Helens

The intensely cold atmosphere which greeted us as we ascended the little embankment which had separated us from the summit produced the most unpleasant sensations, and at the same time warned us not to remain long without moving. And, as the thick dark clouds had again spread over the surrounding country—veiling it with their impenetrable, vapory mantle—we set about the erection of the flagstaff, which one of our party had brought as a walking cane from the timber, where it had been cut. Nailing our "duck" to the little pole, two held the staff, while the others heaped stones around it to the height of three feet, thus securely bracing it against the heavy winds, which at times passed over it. In a few minutes the work was accomplished, and then the *first* flag that ever waved over Mt. St. Helens was fluttering and cracking in the gale, as if proud of the high distinction to which it was assigned. And there it waves yet, triumphantly, while it stands ready to

announce to the next successful pilgrim, that "on the 28th day of September A.D. 1860 James A. Burk, Jesse Failing, Amos E. Russell, Lyman Merrill, Squire J. Bozarth and James H. Neyce succeeded in reaching the summit of Loo-wit-lat-kla, or Mt. St. Helens, under the directions of John Staps (Indian) guide." Having made the flag before we left camp, we were not prepared to believe—indeed we could not have been persuaded—that any of our party would fail to make the ascent or that our guide would "back out." Hence the name of every man in our party was inscribed upon it; but, as already stated, our stoutest man, Mr. B., was overcome by fatigue and the Indian could not be induced to accompany us. Now that we have performed what were represented as physical impossibilities, while we stood gazing at our little flag, every man of us felt himself a hero, so trifling in themselves are the events necessary to excite self-adulation and vanity in the human heart.

Still hoping—almost against hope—to see the clouds again disappear and reveal what we so much desired to see, we busied ourselves in a closer examination of the summit.

The top of the peak is in form a triangular, inclined plane, the right angle of which forms the *highest* point, while the hypotenuse describes a horizontal line to the southwest, at a declination of about 30 degrees from the top. Within this area is embraced, probably, an eighth of acre, but the extreme topmost point is not larger than the top of an outspread dining table, in shape much resembling the larger end of an egg. Upon this egg-shaped elevation stands the little monument of stone which supports our flagstaff. North and east there is an abrupt descent of from 25 to 35 feet, that terminates at the commencing of a large plateau, containing 10 or 15 acres and embracing the triangle on two sides. This plateau is in turn bounded by an impassable barrier of basaltic rocks, many points of which rise from the lower side to the height of from 100 to 300 feet above the snow which covers this entire area.

Unlike any mountain of equal height I had ever seen, this highest point of this was without snow, though to the north, east and west, but a few feet below, the snow of ages probably covered the stones and lava for many, many feet. Equally peculiar and remarkable was its physical formation. Instead of an immense pile of stones to crown its lofty head, its coronet is composed of hematite, pumice, sand and ashes. "As loose as an ash-bank" would aptly describe the surface of the inclined plane of the summit. In view of this peculiarity there is no doubt in my mind that the Indian's assertion that "the mountain is not as high as it once was" is not only well founded, but strictly true. The high points of rock around the summit have no doubt been deeply covered by volcanic deposits, but the melting snow which the summer sun has started in semiliquid streams, down the mountainside, age after age, has carried with it a portion of the surface, until are formed *acres* of deposits now found lying around the base of the peak. Thus the mountain had continued to diminish in size and height, until the once-buried rocks around the summit now stand as sentinels to protect the plane above them.

As a propitious gale drove away the clouds and revealed the sublime works of nature, which were spread out to our admiring gaze, we felt that nothing could transcend the grandeur of the scene or surpass in interest and incident the magnificent panorama then presented to an enraptured vision. Words are inadequate to a portrayal of its beauties. Pen and pencil must unite their utmost powers to convey an idea of a *moiety even* of its loveliness. Mount Hood (Wi-yeast of the Indian) first to reach its stupendous form above the clouds; then came Mount Jefferson (Pahto), Mt. Adams (Klickatat), Mt. Rainier (Tahoma) with their connecting ridges and intervening valleys; the placid lakes and meandering rivers; dense forests and lovely plains; beautiful cascades and purling rills; the glistening glacier of the mountain and the dark brown volcanic scoria of the valley all combined their peculiar features to form the most gorgeous, the most sublimely grand, picturesque and wonderfully attractive spectacle upon which the eye of man ever feasted—a scene far surpassing in all the natural points of interest many for which the tour of Europe is annually made—more *profoundly* imposing because the hand of man has never interfered to despoil the perfect work of nature. Surely, thought we, no sane man occupying our standpoint and viewing the evidences on every hand could for a moment doubt the existence of an Almighty Creator. All nature seemed to proclaim, in the language of revelation: (only) "the fool *hath said in his heart, there is* no God."

While visiting Niagara I have seen persons standing on the tower above the cataract, who became so completely lost to all consciousness of their own physical materiality by the fascinating power of the grandly enchanting scene, so etherealized by the exhilarating influence of its majesty and beauty as to feel as if they could arise from their position and sail gracefully and safely to any point below them. So we, whilst enchanted with the grandeur of the stupendous works of nature, felt as if nothing was easier than to soar from crag to crag and from peak to peak, until we had visited all the points around us. But the intense cold served to bring us to reason again, and make us feel that we were yet in the *flesh*.

The heavy clouds which hung for an hour or more over the west, shutting out entirely every object of interest in that direction, now began to drift towards the east again; very soon the enchanting landscape was covered by rolling clouds.

Occasional fitful gusts of wind would sweep away the fog that hung around Mt. St. Helens and reveal many of the wonders immediately connected with it. Far

down the declivity on the north was plainly visible the yawning crater—now cold as the snow around it—which in 1842 sent forth clouds of smoke, ashes and lava. Farther still, near the base of the peak, but more east, lies a beautiful little lake, looking like a splendid jewel in an enameled setting, as it reflected the beautiful deep green shadows of the surrounding forest.

Out of this lovely basin the water pours over a precipice for 40 or 50 feet, forming in its descent a strikingly beautiful cascade; and then, losing its identity, becomes the west branch of the north fork of Cathlapoodle [or Cathlapootle, now Lewis] River. Running with the velocity of the wind, dashing and foaming among the boulders as it pursues its tortuous course, it presently meets the east branch which runs from Mt. Klickatat, where the two unite and form the rapid stream, called Lewis River by the whites. The lake (the Indian name of which, I regret, I can't remember), it is said by our guide, abounds in the largest and finest-looking salmon but nothing could induce the Indians to fish them, because the salmon are not fish except in form. According to their belief their deceased warriors have assumed that form to mock their people and punish them for allowing the white man to take possession of this country. It would not be possible for the most skillful fisherman to take one of these salmon. Near the lake, in the dense forest, resides one of their greatest and most ancient chiefs who sometimes condescends to exhibit himself in the form of an immense lion. The terror of his roar strikes consternation to the heart of every hearer, whether that hearer be man or beast. So great is his displeasure that he will not permit his nation to take any game in his vicinity, no matter how great may be their necessity. Warriors and hunters can surround and hem in the game until its capture seems to be beyond peradventure; but this fearful monster is always on the watch, and no sooner does he perceive the advantage of the hunters, than he utters one terrific roar which completely paralyzes them and sends the game rushing through the woods, far beyond the reach of the swiftest arrow.

West of the lake, across a high ridge of volcanic rock, rises one branch of the river Cowlitz, called *Kilick-a-Parma* by the Indians. Still west of this again the *Kowena* [Coweman River] commences; and to the southwest of St. Helens is seen the *Kalima*, as it meanders through a canyon in pursuit of an outlet. Between the Kalima, Kowena, and on the north side of the ridge upon which the prairie lies is the little creek called *Xobias*. It waters the prairie, then runs a little way and loses itself in the waters of the Kowena. Hence it will be perceived, five streams, some of them of considerable magnitude, are formed from the melting snowbanks upon Mt. St. Helens.

The cold increased in intensity as the fog thickened around us, until it became unsafe to remain any longer. Every hair of our whiskers, mustaches and eyelashes was encrusted with hoarfrost and ice. Our limbs and lungs ached and we prepared to descend, the declining sun warning us to hasten back to camp.

Starting from the summit by a more easterly course than that by which we made the ascent, we soon encountered a large glacier, which appeared to extend from the wall of rock around the plateau to the foot of the peak. It was wonderfully smooth and very steep; but we concluded to use it to facilitate our descent. Squatting on our feet, therefore, and sliding, as boys frequently do, our progress became fearfully rapid and, when we had passed over but a small portion of our unique pathway, we were horrified at perceiving but a short distance ahead an immense yawning chasm in the snow, extending entirely across our intended track, and much too wide to leap. A few more feet and inevitable destruction appeared to await us; to avoid it required some presence of mind and instant action. Throwing ourselves flat on the snow and digging our heels and hands into it, we succeeded in arresting our progress, upon the very brink of the awful abyss. Crawling carefully along to the westward, we presently reached a rocky ledge which we climbed, and from it looked down into the fissure, which we just escaped. The peculiarity of its formation was to us very remarkable. A ravine in the mountainside extending, apparently, from near the summit to the base of the peak had been filled with snow, until in one place it had assumed a conical elevation of from 10 to 15 feet above the snow level. Through this cone were two fissures, which cut each other at right angles, at the highest point where they were not over six or eight feet wide. But as they descended, they increased in width as far down as we could see, probably 300 feet, assuming the form of an inverted funnel.

While we were gazing at this wonderful deposit of snow, wondering how many ages were represented in its strata, a slight wind blew away the drifting clouds and left the atmosphere above it very clear. But no sooner did the wind cease than a slight mist arose from the fissures, and settled in a cloud just above the united chasms. Our curiosity became aroused and we waited further developments; and while we watched from our inconvenient perch we witnessed the same phenomenon again. At once the inquiries suggested themselves: "What causes the cloud to gather here before it can be seen over any of the neighboring chasms? And why are these fissures wider as they descend, whilst all the others become more and more narrow?" Can it be that there is still some latent fire, an embryo volcano struggling into life and activity, which now can only produce sufficient heat to cause the steam to arise from the melting snow? If so—and I confess my mind inclines strongly to the opinion—we may yet live to witness another eruption of Mt. St. Helens.

Leaving our ledge, we descended to the snow on the west, and taking our squatting posture again, recommenced our descent, passing over the snow for a mile and a half with almost the speed of a

locomotive. Intervening fissures were easily passed, all being narrow, by assuming our perpendicularity as we approached the edges of them—a single step would be sufficient to take us several feet beyond. But woe to the unlucky wight whose equilibrium was overbalanced as he attempted this feat....

This somewhat novel mode of locomotion brought us directly to a small deposit of scoria, wedged in between the ledges of basalt, burying beneath it the frozen snow of ages probably—upon and around which were some very large rocks but slightly imbedded in the pumice and snow. These served to amuse us, as we started them down the mountainside and watched their reboundings, until the dense fog shut them out from view. The trembling earth, the dull, deep reverberating sound, and sudden crash, frequently heard, as they dashed headlong in their progress and the dense fog intervening to prevent us seeing, served to delude the imagination into the idea that a convulsion was rending the earth.

The amusement however was too much like work to continue long. We therefore started again stepping down the sandy declivity as upon a bed of down, the weight of our bodies being sufficient to take us downward with fearful velocity, without an effort to move forward. Varying this mode of descent when occasion permitted, by running, jumping, sliding, skating and sometimes rolling, we soon reached the point below which we had left our companion. Hailing him several times without receiving any response, we concluded that he had become chilled and tired waiting and had started back to camp. Here the large, scarped and scraggy rocks, smoke discolored and burnt, looked as if but a few hours had elapsed since they had left the deep, dark caverns of the earth. Lying loosely around they offered too great a temptation to our evil genius to allow considerations of the safety of our missing friend to interfere with our sport. We therefore commenced undermining them, and as they would topple over and start on their mad career, the earth trembling beneath their ponderous weight, it required no very great stretch of the imagination to present to the mind's eye a picture of that terrific eruption which shook the earth to its remotest bounds, when Mt. St. Helens became for a while an active volcano, and hurled these huge rocks from her lowest strongholds. Still progressing, we were presently hailed by a voice near us, but we neither recognized it nor could we perceive at first from whence it came. But we were not long in suspense. The long continued, deep-toned and impressive "left handed" blessing which now greeted our astonished ears left no doubt upon our minds, as to whom the voice belonged. High upon a huge rock, and directly behind a larger one, was perched the form of our bell boy, the picture of dismay and alarm. The descending rocks had frightened him from the uneven tenor of his way, and hurried him up a precipice which would have puzzled a goat to climb.

Now that our companion was out of danger, as the physicians say, and intervening chasms protected our camp and horses, we renewed our sport as we descended, until we reached the line of vegetation. Crossing a narrow gulch, partially filled with snow, we found upon its western bank a small bed or patch of strawberries, which we gathered and found to possess, notwithstanding its great elevation, all the properties of that delicious fruit. Here, within an area of six feet, were represented the natural phenomena of the four seasons—the spring by the deep green leaves, thrifty vine and white blossoms of the strawberry; summer by the fruit ripened; fall, by the dying vine, and sear and yellow leaf; and winter by the deep snow in the chasm.

Another run over the grassy belt and another short walk brought us about nightfall to our encampment, having "done" the distance, in descending, in two hours, which required seven and a half in the ascent.

Weary almost to inaction none of us, though very hungry, felt like setting to work to get supper. In a few minutes, however, one of our Indians returned, tottering under a very large black-tailed deer and woodchuck of aldermanic proportions. The sight of his "provender" increased our appetites, already sharp as the tongue of slander, and awakened our sleeping energies, so that, as the generous savage divided his game with us, every man stood ready to lend a helping hand; and very soon we had a glorious feast in preparation. The night became intensely dark, the slowly falling rain intensifying the blackness of darkness, until the glare of our fire seemed to shine upon walls of jet. All hope of seeing our guide that night had departed from us, but while we were commiserating his to us sad condition, away from camp, without coat, blanket or fire, we heard the dry boughs cracking and breaking, and presently John Staps, pressed down beneath the weight of an enormous deer, entered camp. He also graciously divided with us, and after eating his supper commenced drying his portion before the fire, the better to carry it to his family....

As John sat before the fire turning his venison upon the spit, he appeared uneasy and anxious; and finally inquired how high we ascended. When informed he professedly believed us, because, he said, the Bostons could do anything when they had their Tamanawos [a legendary Indian leader] with them; still there was a good deal of the incredulous lurking in his deep, dark eye....

Homeward Bound

The next morning found us much refreshed; but the thick fog and slowly falling rain induced us to listen to the Indians' expostulations, abandon our projected trip to the lake and turn our faces homeward. All nature appeared to be overawed by the expectation of some unusual phenomenon; and but for the light trickling noise of the water drops falling upon the dry moss, everything would have been as silent as the grave. The guide predicted a tremendous storm, and admonished us to hurry from the mountain before it came upon us; because the Tie was mad and meant to punish us for invasion of his domain.

About nine o'clock we left our

encampment upon Loo-wit-lat-kla and entered the wood en route for Lewis River. Now the value of our precaution and foresight in causing our track to be marked or blazed became manifest. Our guide and his companion were packed with at least a hundred pounds of meat each, besides their guns and blankets, which so materially interfered with their locomotion that we began to entertain serious apprehensions of being compelled to camp upon the bed of lava—She-quash-a-quash as the Indians call it—without fire or food for our horses. But the marks encouraged some of our men to go ahead; and while the fury of the most terrific rainstorm I ever witnessed came down upon our pathway, saturating everything at all pervious, we slowly pursued our adamantine track to the valley, where we arrived about dark. From the last high point beyond the valley we looked back toward St. Helens and were surprised to find the side next us covered, from timber to summit, with a heavy mantle of snow, thus demonstrating what the guides had told us before commencing the ascent—the delay of a single day would render it *impossible* to ascend Loo-wit-lat-kla beyond the timberline.

Scarcely had we stopped before the rain began to pour down in torrents again, and the wind increased to a gale. The wood was very wet, matches decidedly damp and the chances of fire extremely remote and problematical; and added to this cheerless catalog was the soaking condition of our bedding and our clothing. Altogether there was presented for our contemplation and endurance one of the most unpleasant evenings that ever caught a "pleasure party" from home. Still the relentless storm increased in violence, as if in mockery of our "dripping" situation. Cold, wet, hungry, angry and uneasy, some of our party were ready to curse the day that beguiled them from their homes; but the mother of ingenuity came to our aid and called our genius into action. Fire or freeze appeared to be the alternatives; and the condition of everything around us favored the latter immensely; but by the time wood had been collected, we had so dried our matches by placing them under our arms that they ignited without difficulty; then very soon, by the aid of powder and rags, we had a cheerful fire blazing up before us, enlivening the scene as it illumined the dark forest around us. During the night the rain continued to pour down as if the floodgates of heaven were opened; still we slept soundly. When we awoke in the morning, we found the river much swollen and all chance of crossing apparently cut off. But we were "homeward bound," and when you get a married man's face turned towards the dear ones at home, after a three-week absence, neither swollen streams nor swift running waters present any obstacles to his determined will! As we had at least two of this class with us, we were compelled to go.

The first ford was rapid and difficult, and required a good deal of courage to attempt it; but three of us started in far up the rapids and landed far down on the opposite side. The worst being now passed, the other two crossings were easily made. The ascent of the almost perpendicular mountain which lay between us and our next camp was rendered more difficult by the tremendous rains which had been falling for several days, and frequently, during our progress, our horses would fall and slide downward until some projecting crag would stop their descent. Scrambling up again they would push onward over this marvelously steep trail, until fall after fall had nearly exhausted them. So laborious was it that the sweat rolled off of them in large drops, though the day was damp and chill.

Whilst stopping here a large pack of tiger wolves came in full cry apparently upon our track, and instantly every man was pouring powder into his gun barrel, half filled with water. Finding it utterly impossible to charge our guns with anything explosive, terror took possession of the minds of some who as the wolves approached us suggested the propriety of abandoning our horses to the wolves, whilst we saved our selves by climbing trees. But before this wise and valiant suggestion was executed, the wolves turned off and passed several hundred yards from our track. They had possibly been baited with Cayuse horses before, and now feared another trap!

Four days of fruitless prospecting and diligent traveling brought us to our homes, ourselves worn down by fatigue, and our horses' feet almost worn away by the stones.

For several weeks we were beset by anxious inquirers after the "diggings." As our report was not the most encouraging, the excitement amongst the whites soon died away. The Klickatat Indians, however, were greatly exercised when they heard that we had been to the top of Loo-wit-lat-kla. They came down in delegations to ascertain the truth; and when informed they manifested the most serious apprehensions for their people. To their superstitious minds the fact that one of their people had been our guide was sufficient to produce the greatest alarm. The Sah-hah-ly Tie would be angry and their people punished, if not destroyed.

Fearing the storm raised about his ears, John Staps, the Siwash, denied all participation in the enterprise, and probably saved his bacon by his resolute persistence in asserting a lie; but the Indians still look upon our party with suspicion.

To the farmers of Lewis River bottoms, I would say before closing—though we have failed to find the place where gold can be scooped up by the *panful*, I *have* discovered mines, *near your own homes*, that will pay if only the *labor* be expended upon them, which gold placers require to make them profitable. Your farms contain these mines; cultivate them *assiduously* and *intelligently* and then look for the gold! It will as surely come as you pursue this plan.

Reader, to the partiality of the editor of the *Chronicle* and the solicitations of a few friends are you indebted for this very long journey over a very short distance; but if I have succeeded in exciting a feeling of interest in the wonderful natural curiosities and magnificent lands of Washington Territory, or enabled you to relieve an otherwise monotonous hour—then am I amply rewarded for the labor of preparation.

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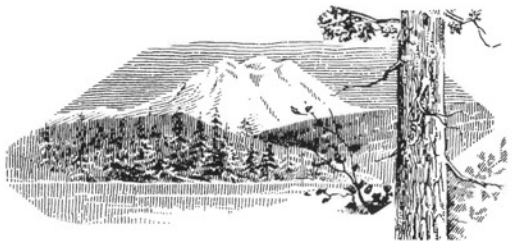

Front cover: *Harriet Foster Beecher, regarded as the best of Washington's turn-of-the-century artists, produced two portraits of the state's most famous pioneer, Ezra Meeker. One of these is reproduced on the cover of this issue. For more about Meeker, turn to page 12. Courtesy of the Museum of History and Industry.* ***Back cover:*** *This Samuel G. Morse photograph shows Makah Indian woodcarver Allabush holding one of his unusual mother-and-child figures, one of which is in the Indian Collections of the Washington State Historical Society. The background, showing adze marks, is a huge plank laboriously chopped from a tree of great girth. To enjoy more of Morse's fine photographs of the Makah turn to page 41. Courtesy of the Washington State Historical Society.*