



NPS Women Cartes de Visite Collection



Alma Wagen, 1919. (Courtesy of University of Washington Libraries, Special Collection, PH Coll 341).

Alma D. Wagen
Mount Rainier National Park Company
Licensed Guide, 1918-c. 1923

- Born on November 5, 1878 and grew up in Mankato, Minnesota on her grandparents' farm.
- Became known as the "windmill climber" because she climbed local windmills at a young age.
- Graduated from the University of Minnesota and moved to Tacoma, Washington in 1903 to teach high school math.
- During her breaks from school, she joined a climbing group, The Mountaineers, and began climbing throughout the northwest and Alaska.
- Traveled to Glacier National Park in 1914 and set her sights on guiding in the park.
- In 1915 she circumnavigated above tree line and summited Mount Rainier.
- Began working with the Rainier National Park Company (RNPC) as a climbing ranger at Mount Rainier in 1918 with the goal of "teaching other women the joy of climbing."
- First female mountain guide in North America and received press attention across the country.
- People traveled to Mount Rainer just to be guided by her.
- Transferred to Yosemite in the spring of 1922, but returned to Mount Rainier later that summer.
- Worked as a seasonal mountain guide for the RNPC until at least 1923, and possibly until 1926 when she married Doctor Horace J. Whitacre and retired from guiding.
- Died on December 7, 1967.

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