

The Ascent of Mount Olympus

By L. A. NELSON

THE first ascent of the west peak of Mount Olympus made by the Mountaineers, and probably the first made by any one, was accomplished by a party of eleven on August 13, 1907. Although hampered by storms the party reached the summit without great difficulty and were rewarded by one of the grandest views to be had in the American mountains.

At 4:30 on the morning of August 13th, the most despised call of the day was sounded through camp and with a reluctant sigh the company rolled out of their warm blankets only to encounter a cold wet fog that lay like a pall over the valley. With hopes of better weather after sun-up, breakfast preparations were begun and rushed to a finish and at 5 o'clock breakfast was served. In the meantime it was discovered that two of the party had not reported, and a short search revealed them tucked snugly away in their blankets. A vigorous bombardment with tin cans soon drove them out, with the remark that they had no desire to be canned. Visions of at least fourteen hours between breakfast and dinner seemed to be a wonderful appetizer, judging by the way food disappeared.

The call, "Fall in" came at 5:40 and five minutes later the march was begun. The clouds hung low, with every indication of rain and with many an anxious look and comment on the weather the conquerors of Olympus moved onward.

After traveling across the morain of the Humes glacier we turned to the northwest up a snow-slope, which we followed a short distance. Leaving the snow we crossed a talus of rock-slope and descended a precipitous rock cliff to the Humes glacier. A few minutes for adjusting packs and the party started for the head of the glacier. The weather was growing colder and in a short time it began to snow. Nothing daunted we pushed on, and to a question as to the weather, an optimist of the party said, "The sun will be out soon," and sure enough in a few minutes the snow stopped falling and the sun came out in all its splendor.

After traveling two miles up an easy slide, winding in and out among crevasses, that yawned on every side, we climbed a 35 degrees slope to the summit of Blizzard pass. From this point we had our first clear view of Mount Olympus, East peak with its clear-cut profile of a sphinx head being the nearest; to the left of it and a mile further away Middle peak, a massive bulk; and still further away and directly west of East peak was West peak, the main and highest of all. Working our way down a steep snow-slope and a ridge of rock to the Iloh glacier with a loss of elevation of 700 feet we turn to the south toward the head of the glacier on a gradually increasing grade. On reaching the steeper slopes we turn to the westward a trifle and with short rests keep plugging away.

About this time the question arose as to whether we would see Mount Rainier, and, during one of our rests one of the party called out, "There it is," followed by a chorus of, "Where?" and sure enough, there in all its matchless beauty was the greatest of all our mountains. A few stages further, and, "There is Adams!" is heard. On a short distance and as we pause to look again at Rainier and Adams, St. Helens is also seen. By this



FIRST PARTY TO REACH THE HIGHEST PEAK OF THE OLYMPIC MOUNTAINS.

Photo by T. C. Frye.



ON THE TOP OF MOUNT NOYES.

Photo by John A. Best, Jr.

time we do not know what to expect and when Mount Baker and Mount Hood are seen, the latter over 200 miles away, words fail and we can only gaze in silence at the magnificent panorama spread before us. Upon reaching the top of the slope we find it to be comparatively flat and about one-fourth or one-half mile in extent, seamed here and there with crevasses. To the right, the East and Middle peaks, seemingly within easy reach. A short rest was taken here, during which an anxious lookout was kept to the west for a view of the ocean.

One-half mile further and within one-half hour of the summit of Middle peak we stopped for lunch. No tonic nor appetizer was necessary and the scene of the morning was repeated. The inner man being refreshed, and with spirits corresponding to the altitude, the conquest was resumed. A short distance nearly level, then a long climb up a 40 degree slope. Reaching the end of the snow we stepped over to the rock and after a short climb, reached the summit.

Here we found a cairn with the record of the Parker ascent of July 17, 1907, inclosed in a tin can. While some were busy building a cairn that would stand the weather, others were writing the record and taking pictures. The Parker party thought this was the highest and main peak when they made the ascent, but after seeing the peak to the west they were in doubt and said that from their observations it was possibly higher. They did not like to admit having missed the main summit.

The view from the summit of Middle peak surpassed our expectations. To the westward lay the mighty Pacific; to the north, beyond the dark canyon of the Hoh that scars the northern slope of Olympus, lay the Straits of Juan de Fuca, with Vancouver Island in the background. It was to the eastward, however, that the most wonderful scene was unfolded. Probably the grandest setting of mountain scenery in the world stretched away from our very feet. Close at hand were the rugged summits of Meany, Seattle, Cougar peak, Queets, Noyes, Anderson, Christy, Dana and Barnes, surrounded on the higher levels by large glaciers and snow-fields with beautiful parked valleys below. Beyond this lies the range of the Olympics that is seen from Puget Sound and known as the Coast range, with Mount Angeles, Constance and The Brothers the most prominent peaks, while through a gap in the mountains the Sound itself was visible. As a background for all this rose the great volcanoes of the Cascade range from Mount Baker, "the Great White Watcher," on the north, past Glacier peak, Rainier, Adams, St. Helens and on to the distant spire of Mount Hood, 200 miles away. To the south a vast sea of timbered hills stretched out and out as far as the eye could see, fading away into a blue haze.

The work on this peak being finished, the course of empire was still westward, down the rocky west slope of Middle peak. The first to reach the end of the rock and get out on the snow saw a laughable sight, some of the more timid passing down their alpine stocks and hanging on tooth and nail, making the descent with fear and trembling. Every one being safely down and ready to move the clouds played us a fine trick by coming down and shutting out all of the peaks from our sight, leaving us to travel on the information we had gained from our former view. Going slowly and doing a good deal of prospecting we at last made out what we thought to be the West peak. Three of the party having reached the top, one of them gave a shout that died when half uttered, for just at that moment the clouds parted, and there, one-fourth mile away was our goal. We had climbed one of the

five fingers to the north of West peak. Retracing our steps a short distance we swung around to the north side of the proper peak, up which we made our ascent. There was some real climbing here, every climber having to be extremely careful not only to keep from falling, but also not to loosen and start rock on the people below. Slowly, steadily, surely we moved on, and, at last, we reached the summit that so many have tried for and so many claim to have reached. After a thorough search for traces of former ascents we came to the conclusion that we were the first to reach the summit of the highest peak in the Olympic mountains, West peak, 8,250 feet, as well as the first large party to reach the next in altitude, Middle peak, 8,150 feet. With a mighty cheer and then a song we started our task of cairn building, record writing and picture taking.

The record contains the names of the party, which was comprised of the following: Miss Anna Hubert, the first woman to reach the summit of Mount Olympus, L. A. Nelson, W. Montelius Price, Prof. Henry Landes, Prof. Charles Landes, Prof. T. C. Frye, Prof. F. M. Plumb, Prof. Weaver, Prof. J. B. Flett, E. E. Richards, A. W. Archer.

We were soon on our way back to camp. The descent was a great deal faster than the ascent and we quickly reached the snow, making good time for Middle peak, which we had to climb again to reach the Hoh glacier.

The summit of Middle peak was soon reached and then a glorious coast down the slope that took so much energy to surmount, it taking over twenty minutes to ascend and one of the party coasted it in ten seconds.

From this point it was a case of travel and we surely did that, reaching camp in two and one-half hours, or one-half the time it took to make the same point in the morning. Twelve and one-half hours after leaving camp we were back again and found a warm dinner awaiting us.

The writer found two days later that West peak could be reached by a shorter and easier route without the ascent of Middle peak, leaving an easy trip up Middle peak on the return to camp.

