

Storm Bound on Mount Olympus

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THE attempt of the first party of Mountaineers to reach the summit of Mount Olympus through a driving rain and snow storm, with the storm clouds sweeping around the peak, was splendid even in its failure. It was the culmination of an outing remarkable for the number of ascents made, and was undertaken in the storm, only because there was no further time in which to do it. No ordinary storm would have prevented the ascent, even then, for the spirit of the party was splendid, but it was impossible to make one's way up the vast snow-fields facing the thirty-mile gale that was blowing, the fury of which can be judged from the fact that it was found later that a foot of snow fell on the summit during the storm.

The ascent was attempted from a temporary camp in the Queets valley, about eight miles from the main camp, to which the party had moved on the 9th of August. At dawn on the 10th clouds were clinging to the summits and often rolled down into the valleys, but a little later the weather appeared to be clearing and the distant summits of Queets, Meany and Noyes came into view. It was determined to make an attempt, at least, and if the storm broke away to push on to the summit. The party moved out from camp in company formation seemingly very cheerful and happy despite the cold raw morning and the poor prospect of success. Passing the base of the Humes glacier and swinging over a point of rock to avoid the broken ice along its face they dropped down on the ice on the right or northern bank. The mist had changed to a rain, a cold wind was blowing and the situation was anything but pleasant. Ahead for two miles, steadily ascending, the Humes glacier stretched away toward the main bulk of the mountain, now lost in the clouds. The ice-field seemed like a great road-way, walled in as it was by cliffs of slate. There was no danger of losing the way, for all the snow at the base of the cliffs was smooth, unbroken by crevasses, while as a guide, on the left lay the main glacier with its dark, forbidding surface broken and impossible. Over this roadway the party made its way rapidly, the cold being an incentive to action. Only a few were troubled by the altitude, causing a difficulty in breathing, but this delayed the main party, for all must advance together. Because of the rock cliffs in the rear no one could be sent back, and no one could be left along the way.

Half way up the Humes glacier the rain changed to flurries of snow, swept along by a stiff wind. Still hoping against fate, the advance continued. At the head of the glacier the snow-field rose at a steep angle, hiding the mountain beyond. Once out from the protection of this snow-ridge, exposed to the full fury of the gale and everyone's hopes sank. Advancing still in company formation the party came out on the very edge of the snow-field, which here falls away to the great Hoh glacier at such a steep angle that its slope cannot be seen from the crest. Seven hundred feet below, now hidden by the storm, the glacier wound away to the northward. Through the pass at its head a thirty-mile gale was blowing, whirling the snow along as it fell. The distant cliffs of the main mountain were lost to view. The party appeared suspended in the heavens on the edge of some great cloud, with a white desolate world forming out of the chaos.



ALMOST TO THE TOP OF MOUNT MEANY.
Photo by H. Landes.



SNOW CORNICE ON MOUNT QUEETS.
Photo by A. Curtis.

Three members of the party were exhausted, and it seemed folly to risk lives on the glacier in such a storm for the mere bauble of a mountain summit.

Action was necessary, but it must be a retreat. As disappointing as it was to abandon the ascent there was no other reasonable course to be taken, and after a few words of explanation the order was given: "Advance by companies independently."

The long line appeared to melt away as the commands were given simultaneously: "Company A, Company B, Company C, Company D, fall in." Four lines were moving forward instantly where had stood, but a moment before, a shivering group of people. The spirit of the party was still splendid, even in its disappointment, and when the bugler with the general staff sounded the retreat, a faint cheer went up.

The most difficult part of the trip still lay ahead, that of getting a cold, half exhausted party down a mountain safely in a storm such as was then raging. Still moving at almost a double quick with the main party, a small party was ordered from the line and sent on in advance to start fires and prepare for the main party. The girls who were unable to keep up were ordered to the rear with men enough to help them along. Half way down the glacier, two of the general staff went on in advance to place a line up the rock where the party must leave the glacier.

Through all of this the discipline was perfect. Orders were obeyed as quickly as given; no one seemed to misunderstand and everyone appreciated the necessity for haste. When Company A reached the foot of the rock slope the line was in place and, without halting, the party moved along up. Company B followed in the same perfect order and when the two companies were up, the small party of girls, having reached the foot of the slope, were sent up to keep them moving toward camp. The two advance companies were ordered to go to camp without waiting for the others, as the rest of the way was well known and there seemed no possible chance of danger. When the girls, now four in all, reached the top of the slope they were placed under command of one of the lieutenants and also ordered to go to camp. Company C and Company D followed as rapidly as possible and soon the whole party were apparently out of all danger and within but a half mile of the temporary camp. Momentarily losing their way in the mist the small party turned to the right and attempted to go down a steep draw to the snow-field. Here on the slippery, rain-soaked heather one of the girls, Miss Winona Bailey, lost her footing and in a moment slid and fell over the rocks a hundred feet, until she wedged under the snow at the base of the cliff. That the fall was not fatal seemed miraculous. Dr. Stevens, who was acting as rear guard for Company D, was called forward and was working over the girl within five minutes after she fell. A stretcher was hastily improvised from a life line wound around two alpine-stocks and as soon as the worst wounds were dressed she was started for camp, half a mile away along the mountain slope.

The task before the party now was tremendous, that of fitting up a hospital in a driving rain, without even a tent for shelter, and caring for a helpless girl ten miles from the main camp, with that camp sixty miles in the heart of the mountains. That it was possible to dress wounds as severe as her's here in the mountains was due to the foresight of Dr. Stevens, who had brought instruments and supplies, and in the meager shelter afforded by a strip of canvas stretched against a rock, was able to dress her wounds

perfectly, even though one cut alone required eleven stitches. Here in this rude hospital, with the rain still falling, the main party was compelled to leave a small band to watch through the night and for days and nights to come, until it was possible to move her by stages to the main camp. Dr. Stevens was relieved on the second day by Dr. Eaton, who stayed on with the second party.

When at last a report came that the girl was safe the main party fell in line once more and continued the march to the main camp. Reaching the upper Queets valley they turned backward to look long at the two lines of smoke that now rose almost straight to the heavens from the commissary and hospital fires while to the westward the vast bulk of Mount Olympus shrouded in clouds refused even to bid them farewell.