

VARIOUS NOTES

UNITED STATES: CLIMBS

A Westside Traverse of Mt. Rainier. In the course of an ascent of the Tahoma Glacier on the W. side of Rainier in 1948, George Senner's and my interests were drawn to the rugged and seldom visited Sunset Amphitheatre and to what looked like a feasible route up Sunset Ridge on the left border of the huge cirque. The fact that the route had been climbed in 1938, by L. Boyer, A. Campbell and D. Woods, did not lessen our interest.

On 9 August 1949 we climbed out of the lowland fog through Sunset Park and out to the end of Colonnade Cleaver. At 8300 ft. we made high camp. This put us at the base of Sunset Ridge, which leads up to Liberty Cap (14,112 ft.), the lowest of Rainier's three summits. Starting at 3.30 A.M. the next day, we dropped down across the S. Mowich Glacier and ascended 1500-ft., 40-degree slope of névé and ice. This tapered out to a crevassed area. An overhanging bergschrund, which cut across the base of all the couloirs extending above the small cirque, yielded to coercion by means of an ice-axe. We continued about 2000 ft. up a 45-degree slope until we hit the ridge proper. On a small pinnacle, where we had to drop down and make our way around some very rotten rock, we found an old sling rope left by the previous party. Now a 600-ft. ice slope, at 50-55 degrees, was all that lay between us and the summit ridge. The thought of losing 4000 ft. of elevation, and the inadequacy of our supply of Band-Aids, made us stamp our crampons in extra hard. A few outcroppings of rock served as belay points and made ice pitons unnecessary. We reached Liberty Cap at 12.30 P.M.

Rather than return the same way, we decided to descend by the Tahoma Glacier. At times, we doubted the wisdom of our choice. The glacier was much more broken up than it had been the previous year, and we spent considerable time finding a route through or around bad areas. We were greatly relieved to reach St. Andrews rock—which added its bit to the difficulties by having the consistency of brown sugar. At 7.00 P.M. we were back at high camp,

MOUNT RAINIER

Point Success (14,150 ft.) and profile of Tahoma Glacier, with route of descent and Mount Adams in distance

Photo, C. Molenaar

and three hours later we were throwing our packs in the car with a feeling of satisfaction on having completed this traverse.

C. MOLENAAR

Blockhouse Tower. In the latter part of July 1949, having a couple of days to squander, Ralph Turman and I set out for the fine granite spires of the Cashmere Crags. To our surprise and regret, mosquitoes were out in very great force. Nevertheless, having eagerness, energy and an ample supply of blood, we tramped up Snow Creek to Nada Lake and then across country by the base of Mt. Temple's E. peaks and N. to a fabulous spot called Edwards Plateau. This is at 7500 ft., just E. of Rat Creek and at the head of Hook Creek. It is level for about a mile square, covered with grassy alpine meadows and scattered tamarack and pine trees. Since the sun was sinking as we trudged across the plateau, we made camp.

The next morning we scampered down Hook Creek to the lower (or valley) base of Blockhouse Tower, which is on the ridge separating Hook and Rat Creeks.¹ The Tower is a huge cube of granite which drops off almost vertically on all sides. It is about 400 ft. from the base of the ridge to the summit, and on the valley sides the sheer distances are just a long way. About 70 ft. below the true summit is an enormous platform on which is perched Rectiloid Tower. This block has been eyed as an objective for the future.

Our plan was to follow the ridge from the Hook to the ridge base of Blockhouse Tower. From here the route (if any) went up—we hoped. After changing into sneakers and selecting a vast assortment of climbing hardware, we proceeded to the ridge and advanced to the wall of the Tower. This part of the climb proved very enjoyable, with a minimum of exposure and still some interesting pitches, one of which consisted of a stem between a tree and a rock wall. Soon we arrived at a point where the rock took on a fantastic angle, both up and down. At the time, since the exposure had quickly increased, I was more interested in the down.

Ralph braved the first lead across the N.W. face and found a belay point at a small tree. He informed me that he could not be budged with a ten-ton truck. I believed these wonderful words at first; but, after glancing down almost 1000 ft. to Rat Creek, I wished

¹ Cf. *A.A.J.*, VII (Sept. 1949), 248-55, 341-3.