Fourteen Pacific Coast Fourteen-Thousanders

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WHEN I stood on the summit of Mt. Shasta, my first 14,000-ft. peak, I resolved that sometime I would climb the other 13 peaks of the Pacific Coast above this challenging height. This was June 20, 1931. My final climb of the list was the Middle Palisade, in the Sierra Nevada, on September 6, 1942.

Of these 14 peaks over 14,000 ft., one is a Cascade peak in Washington, Mt. Rainier (14,408 ft.). The other 13 peaks are in California. One is a Cascade peak in the northern part of the state, Mt. Shasta (14,161 ft.). One is a Great Basin peak in the Inyo (or White) Mountain Range near the eastern boundary of the state, White Mountain Peak (14,242 ft.). The remaining 11 are climbs of varying difficulty in the Sierra Nevada.

Mt. Whitney (14,496 ft.) is the highest summit in continental United States, although a very easy climb if the horse trail is followed. Mt. Williamson (14,384 ft.), Mt. Russell (14,190 ft.), Mt. Tyndall (14,025 ft.), and Mt. Barnard (14,003 ft.) are located a few miles to the N. of Whitney. Just a few summits to the S. is Mt. Muir (14,025 ft.) and several miles to the S. is Mt. Langley (14,042 ft.), which is labeled Mt. Corcoran on the topographic map. Roughly 40 miles to the N. of Whitney is found the Palisade group of peaks, four of which are over 14,000 ft. The North Palisade (14,254 ft.) is one of the Sierra's better climbs. Nearby is Mt. Sill (14,150 ft.) and a few miles to the S. are the Middle Palisade (14,049 ft.) and Split Mountain (14,051 ft.).

In describing the ascents of these 14 peaks, I shall list them in the order of difficulty as I experienced them in the climbing route which I chose in each case. Mt. Rainier is much the most difficult and involves far more climbing technique than any of the others because of its steep and difficult ice climbing. Our route of August, 1938, was an untried route from the W., starting from Klapatche Park.[1] The climb involved two high camps at about 11,000 ft., the one on the ascent having been planned, but the one on the descent thrown in as an extra by the ice gremlins. Our route followed Puyallup and South Mowich Glaciers, continued across 30 ft. of a rotten lava ridge, followed a very steep 1000 ft. of 60°

[1] *A. A. J.* iii, 310.

ice leading to Liberty Cap, the N. summit. We continued across Columbia Crest, the high point, and descended the upper slopes of Nisqually and Kautz Glaciers to the ice chutes of the Kautz. By this time it was dark, and for four hours in darkness we descended the chutes and the ice cliffs below. We were glad to reach finally the lower Nisqually next morning and eventually Paradise Park.

An ascent by Steamboat Prow and Emmons Glacier on the N.E. made in August, 1934, proved a much easier route. Rainier has been climbed by at least six routes other than the three mentioned here, and it still remains a good day and a half trip by any of these nine routes. All parties should be roped at all times on any of the various routes of ascent.

The climb next in difficulty probably was the North Palisade. The start is usually made from the Dusy Basin or the Palisade Basin. These are two source basins of the King's River of the newly created King's Canyon National Park. It is climbed both from the W. and from the E. From the E. the ascent is made over the Palisade Glacier, the largest in the Sierra, but a small glacier compared with those of the Cascades or Canadian Ranges. A nasty bergschrund must be crossed; then a very steep snow couloir is ascended to the ridge. Here one encounters quite good rock climbing to the summit, including one fourth-class pitch.

In July, 1941, Bill Bancroft and I climbed from the Dusy Basin on the W. Bill Rice, who later lost his life on the Grand Teton, was with us. As one looks at the peak across the Palisade Basin, one sees three prominent white cliffs at the bottom of the western face. Our route followed a couloir between the middle one of these cliffs and the one on the right. This couloir was followed about half its length, where a narrow ledge led to the left for several hundred feet. We continued toward the left on this ledge until a corner was reached. We then turned to the right and followed a second chute directly toward the summit. When the climbing became difficult, a third chute was entered, which was filled with snow, and was followed to the crest of the ridge, which led over large granite blocks to the summit. There are at least six other routes on the North Palisade, each a little more difficult than the one described. We used no rope on our ascent, but the rope was used as a precaution in descending the snow filled couloir just below the summit ridge.

When viewed from the west, from the lakes at the head of Whitney Creek, Mt. Russell is a most imposing peak. It rises in two sheer granite spires. There seems to be some question as to which of these two peaks is the higher, the W. or the E. When Ernest Walker and I climbed Russell in July, 1938, we visited each summit and could not decide which was the higher. In the climb from the head of Whitney Creek, there was one bit of good climbing for a distance of perhaps 100 ft. Here the rope was used as a safety measure. The rest of the climb was very easy and was made unroped. There are at least six other climbing routes.

The Middle Palisade was easily climbed from the E., from a camp on a small lake just below Southfork Pass. We crossed the Middle Palisade Glacier and followed the open gully to the summit ridge, with the summit only a few steps along the ridge. This was my final climb of the 14 peaks. Our ascent was made unroped, but we roped to the glacier for the steep descent.

Mt. Williamson is a massive peak and rises directly from the Owens Valley to the very crest of the Sierra, a height of 10,000 ft. Our climb in August, 1939, was from Shepherd Pass through the Bowl between Williamson and Tyndall and followed a gully on the W. face nearly to its head. Then came a traverse around toward the right (S.) and along the S. face. From here another gully was followed to the crest of the ridge, which was then ascended to the summit. Our party was not roped. There are at least three other routes to the summit.

Mt. Shasta was a very early season climb, June 20, 1931. Mrs. Woods was my companion. We had snow nearly all the way from Horse Camp, and the weather was threatening throughout the entire day. Our climb was entirely in fog and cloud, and we nearly missed the easy route up the summit pinnacle because of poor visibility. When returning to the Red Banks, we had to follow our ice-axe holes in the snow for two hours. When we returned to the Sierra Club's stone lodge at Horse Camp, the custodian brought us tubs of hot water for baths and after this furnished us with a fine, hot dinner. For all this much appreciated service his charge was very low. I mention these accommodations to contrast with the trips yet to come. We made no use of the rope on this climb except on two false leads on the ice-coated pinnacle.

Most climbers would think of White Mountain Peak as a very simple climb when they knew nothing of the region. However, it is quite long and much more of a climb than many of the better known Sierra peaks. Bill and I climbed from the Champion Sillimanite mine in the Milner Creek canyon, and made the mistake of trying to reach the summit and to return to the mine the same day. This was hardly time enough for the twenty mile round trip, including the climb of 7000 ft. The climb was not difficult but long and tedious. In July, 1941, it was quite warm with no water except what little we carried. Leaving the summit at a late hour, we were able to descend only the first 1000 ft. before dark. Choosing not to attempt a sharp and jagged ridge after dark, we crawled under a huge rock with an opening at each end and a space just large enough for the two of us, one on top of the other. We had no food, no water, and not enough clothing. The wind whistled through our slight shelter, and we spent a most miserable night. But morning came finally, as it does in such predicaments, and we were soon at the mine enjoying a fine lunch with the workmen. This climb did not require a rope at any time.

That night found the two of us camped by our car in the Owens Valley at the start of the old abandoned horse trail to Diaz Pass and Mt. Langley. Once again we underestimated an 18 mile round trip with 8500 ft. of elvation to make. Once again we foolishly thought we could make the trip in one day. But we found that our judgment was faulty. The climb of Langley by this old Diaz Creek trail was quite easy, except that the trail was indistinct at times and very difficult to follow. We were on the summit about 6.30 and had descended about 2000 ft. by dark. But this time our forced bivouac was quite different from the one two nights before. We were by a lovely stream in a pretty high mountain meadow, with plenty of fox tail pin wood for a fire, jackets for warmth, and some extra food. And so, after quite a comfortable night, we returned to our car by mid-morning and drove to South Lake to pack into the Dusy Basin for the climb of the North Palisade, which has already been chronicled. We used no rope on our ascent or descent of Mt. Langley.

Clarence King, in his book *Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada,* describes his ascent and particularly his descent of Mt. Tyndall in glowing colors as extremely difficult and dangerous.

When Ernest and I climbed the N. slope from Shepherd Pass in July, 1938, we found no such difficulties. It was a very easy climb, and no rope was needed. There are at least four other routes of ascent, those from the Bowl toward the E. being much more difficult and quite interesting.

Mt. Sill is most easily climbed from the Palisade Basin on the W., but there are at least five other routes from the E. that are far more interesting, with difficulties up to fourth class. Our climb in late June, 1939, was easily made from a camp in the lower Palisade Basin where wood was available. It was a long trip. We ascended the ridge W. of the main crest and climbed a peak 13,950 ft. then circled around the head of the cirque between this peak and Sill. There was one large snowfield that we had to cross in tennis shoes. The climb of the last slopes from this cirque was very easy, no rope being required any place on the climb.

Mt. Muir is really nothing more than another high point on the Whitney massif. It is really a shame that the grand old man of the mountains does not have a more prominent peak named for him. When viewed from the Mt. Whitney trail above Consultation Lake, Mt. Muir is quite impressive, and climb up this E. face is a good class four climb. Muir is usually climbed from the Mt. Whitney trail, as it towers only 400 ft. above and is easily ascended in 10-15 minutes from the trail over talus and large granite blocks. No rope was required on our climb in late June, 1938.

Split Mtn. from Mather Pass is nothing but a simple walk. However, there are more interesting climbing routes on the E. face. Our climb in early July, 1939, was ropeless and required only a few hours from the lake at the base of Split Mtn. On our return to the lake, four of us, without fishing tackle, in a half hour, had caught 20 golden trout with our hands. They were caught in the stream that flows into the lake. They measured from nine to fifteen inches in length.

Mt. Barnard is such a simple climb from Wright Lakes that no description is necessary. It can also be climbed easily from Wallace Creek or from George Creek on the E. No rope was used on our climb in July, 1938.

Because of the horse trail to its summit, Mt. Whitney is classed as a very simple climb, really nothing more than a long walk. The usual approach is from the Whitney Portal road from the town of

Lone Pine in the Owens Valley. It is about 12 miles by trail to the summit of Whitney from the end of this road. A good camp with tent and meal accommodations was maintained by the packers before the war at Ibex Meadow, which is about 5 miles up the trail from the road. Just above Ibex is Mirror Lake, a favorite climbers' camping spot. The trail leads past Consultation Lake to Whitney Pass, elevation 13,650 ft., just below the peak of Muir. From here the trail continues a little below and to the W. of the crest, past Third Needle, Day Needle, and Keeler Needle, each one over 14,000 ft. in elevation, to the summit of Whitney. This route was followed by our party in late June, 1938. A second trail approach is from the W., by the John Muir Trail from Crabtree Meadow, from the Kern River Canyon. It is 6 miles by trail from Crabtree Meadow to the summit of Whitney. Our later party in July, 1938, followed this route.

Whitney can be climbed by several routes other than these two trail routes. One may scale the W. face, the N. face, the N.E., and there are three very fine routes on the E. face and E. buttress. These last mentioned routes are fourth class climbs, and the E. buttress has one fifth class pitch. All three start from a tiny lake at the base of the E. face, known to the rock climbers as East Face Lake. If a camp is made on this lake, wood must be carried, or a primus stove, as it is above timber line. Better camp sites are found at Clyde Meadow and Mirror Lake.

The reader may be interested in the number of climbing trips needed to complete these 14 climbs. Of course, all could be climbed in one summer, as was done by a party of Colorado Mountain Club climbers who had climbed each of the 53 peaks in Colorado over 14,000 ft. the preceding summer. If one is a bit more conservative than this, four trips could be made to climb them all. Rainier and Shasta are so widely separated that a trip is needed for each. On a third trip, to the Palisade region, one could make four climbs. On a fourth trip to the Whitney district one could climb the seven in this area, with a possible climb of White Mtn. Peak included, or a fifth trip could be made to this peak.

My climbs required seven trips to finish the list. In June, 1931, Mt. Shasta was climbed. The next climb was Mt. Rainier, first climbed in August, 1934, and later in August, 1938. The third trip was a two weeks back-packing trip with a group of boys from

San José High School, California, in July, 1938. On this trip five of the climbs were made, these being Mts. Tyndall, Barnard, Russell, Whitney, and Muir, in this order. The fourth trip was another two weeks of back-packing with a different group of boys from the same school, in late June and early July, 1939. While on this trip, Mt. Sill and Split Mtn. were climbed. The fifth trip was another two weeks of back-packing with the Rock Climbers of the Bay Chapter of the Sierra Club. Among many rock climbs made was the ascent of Mt. Williamson, in August, 1939. The sixth trip, made in July, 1941, included climbs of three widely separated peaks, each one from a different camp. White Mtn. Peak and Mt. Langley, were each climbed from the car in the Owens Valley, and the North Palisade was climbed while on a four day back-packing trip into the Dusy Basin. The seventh and last trip was on Labor Day, 1942, and was a four day back-packing trip to the Middle Palisade with the Rock Climbers of the Southern California Chapter of the Sierra Club.

In closing I should like to state that from a mountaineering standpoint, these fourteen climbs are not at all formidable. There are a great many 12,000- and 13,000-ft. climbs in the Sierra Nevada that are much more difficult and spectacular than any of the fourteen-thousanders.