

North Cascades National Park—A Mountaineering Park

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THE NORTH CASCADES NATIONAL PARK encompasses some outstanding mountaineering with a variety of mixed ice and rock climbing. Its complex geology of highly metamorphosed gneisses form jagged ridges and peaks. These durable rocks have been cut by ice-age glaciation and are still being worked by extensive icefields and icefalls. No peaks rise to 10,000 feet, most of them lying in the 7000 to 8000-foot range. The peaks are nonetheless imposing with 4000 to 5000-foot escarpments from glacier-cut valleys. No volcanic mountains are included within the park though volcanic rocks appear in a few places.

There are still some first ascents to be done. Not maybe of major summits but of real peaks. A few majors boast only two or three ascents and new routes remain to be done. A hardy soul can get into the remote sections and do some climbing with just a few days available if he is willing to go light with bivouac gear. For most people it is more practical to take a week's pack and plan on some rugged walking in trailless, bushy valleys. A 3000 to 4000-foot climb out of the steep, cliff-laced valleys is usual in order to gain the alpine country above timberline at 5000 or 6000 feet. Camping on the heather slopes is a delight unless the skies are dripping and mists swirling. The profusion of wild flowers threaded with bubbling rivulets in early season gives way to brilliant foliage and succulent huckleberries later in the fall. The pleasures of glacier camping sometimes provide better access for climbs. The glaciation tells of a high precipitation of around 100 inches annually. The Cascade traveler learns to waterproof himself.

Most of the area was prospected by miners and several valleys boasted a larger population in the early 1900s than they now have. Trails have disappeared that were once used by pack animals. Some valleys have seen very few men and maybe a few are still untrod.

References:

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