

DATE:
October 26, 1924

PLACE:
Mount Rainier, Washington

It is said that Sluisin, one of the first native guides on Mount Rainier, told this story in 1870: "Takhoma... was an enchanted mountain, inhabited by an evil spirit, who dwelt in a fiery lake on its summit. No human being could ascend [the mountain] or even attempt its ascent, and survive."

He also described what the journey would be like for a climber who tried it, "At first, indeed the way was easy. The broad snow-fields over which he so often hunted the mountain goat, interposed no obstacle, but above them the rash adventurer would be compelled to climb up the steep of loose rolling rocks, which would turn beneath his feet and cast him headlong into the deep abyss below."

Just fifty years later, a film crew would try to climb up one of Rainier's glaciers to prove him wrong... only to narrowly escape a harrowing fate.

"I have climbed the Alps and the Matterhorn but for thrills and real sport I would say that Mount Tacoma holds the greater interest."

- Robert Cain,
actor

THE CHALLENGE OF THE MOUNTAIN

The "Roaring 20's" were a

time of airplanes and automobiles, jazz and silent movies. World War I had just ended and now it was time for fun. And what was a bigger adventure than scaling a mountain more than 14,000 feet tall? Many Washingtonians sought the thrill of climbing on Mount Rainier, also known as Mount Tahoma.

Others came from far away to test themselves against the mountain. One of those was famous movie director, Cecil B. DeMille.



Climbers on Mount Rainier,
c. 1920s. WSHS Collections.

Back in the 1920s, the only movies were "silent movies." The story was told using a series of titles on the screen so that people had to read what the characters were saying. But what movies didn't have in sound, they made up for with grand settings and exotic locations.

Cecil B. DeMille was filming a movie called *The Golden Bed*, part of which was set in the Swiss Alps. But he didn't have enough money to shoot the film in Switzerland so where did he go? Washington.

Mountaineering was popular in Washington long before DeMille and his film crew arrived to show Mount Rainier to the rest of the world. It was so popular at the end of the 19th century that Fay Fuller, the first woman to climb to the summit of the mountain, had her own column in the Tacoma newspaper, "Every Sunday." In it, she wrote about her own climbing experiences and shared the stories of others.

There wasn't only fun on the mountain, but danger. Avalanches, blizzards, and landslides – all of these faced the unprepared climber who ignored the warning signs.



If you were climbing
Mt. Rainier,
what would you bring?

by Gwen Perkins
Washington State Historical Society, ©2008

**CASE 2: DANGER ON
MOUNT RAINIER**



A slowly moving river of snow and ice!

LIGHTS, CAMERA... ACTION?!

On October 26, DeMille and his film crew decided to brave the mountain. With cameras in hand, they began to shoot the final scenes of the movie on Nisqually Glacier. Their guides had told them that they needed to be off the glacier by 3:00 pm. Otherwise, they might be overtaken by blinding winds and blizzard conditions.

But the director didn't listen. Calling out the shots, he kept shooting as the wind began to howl, snow falling thicker and heavier on the mountaintop. Three times, the guides told DeMille that they needed to leave. Three times, he insisted, the show must go on.

In just a few moments, conditions went from clear to dangerous. The actors had to be evacuated immediately! The guides split the group into thirds, carrying three of the actresses on their backs. Everything had to be left on the mountains – cameras, lighting equipment – all but the film which the director insisted had to come off the mountain.

No one was hurt but over \$20,000 was lost because of the sudden change of weather. The actors and film crew left town the next day. DeMille told reporters "it has been a wonderful trip, and it is the grandest mountain in the world."

AVOIDING DISASTER

DeMille and his crew were lucky - things could have been much worse when the storm struck. Many other mountaineers have died because they weren't prepared for the sudden weather changes on Mount Rainier.

The most important thing for a climber to do is

keep his/her eyes open for any change in the mountain. If guides say that it is unsafe to climb, it is better to wait and make the trip another day.

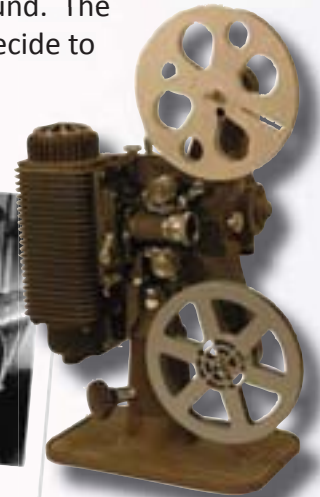
MOUNTAINEERING TODAY

Mountain climbing is still something that Washingtonians do for fun and exercise. Every year, thousands of people climb Mount Rainier using precautions that past mountaineers would have been happy to have. One of the precautions modern mountaineers take to prepare for a climb is honor the "Ten Essentials." This means they always bring: extra clothing, extra food and water, sun protection/sunglasses, a knife, a fire starter, matches, a first aid kit, a flashlight, a map of the area, and a compass.

Mountaineering is an important part of Washington's history. Mountains abound. The important thing if you decide to climb one is to stay safe and be prepared!



A picture of Cecil B. DeMille relaxing, c. 1920s.
Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.



WORD CLUES

Evacuate

To evacuate is to move from an unsafe location to a place of safety.

Mountaineering

Mountaineering is the sport of walking, hiking, trekking and climbing up mountains. Sometimes, this is also called alpinism after the Swiss Alps, a large mountain range in Switzerland.

EVIDENCE SOURCES

Carpenter, Cecelia. *Where the Waters Begin: The Traditional Nisqually Indian History of Mount Rainier*. Northwest Interpretative Association, 2001.

Filley, Bette. *The Big Fact Book About Mount Rainier*. Dunamis House, 1996.

Mount Rainier National Park website.
<http://www.nps.gov/mora/>

EVIDENCE



9. Leaving Paradise Valley



11 Nigwally Glacier



10 Whirling Clouds

EVIDENCE

Rainier National Park

Where Flowers and Glaciers Meet

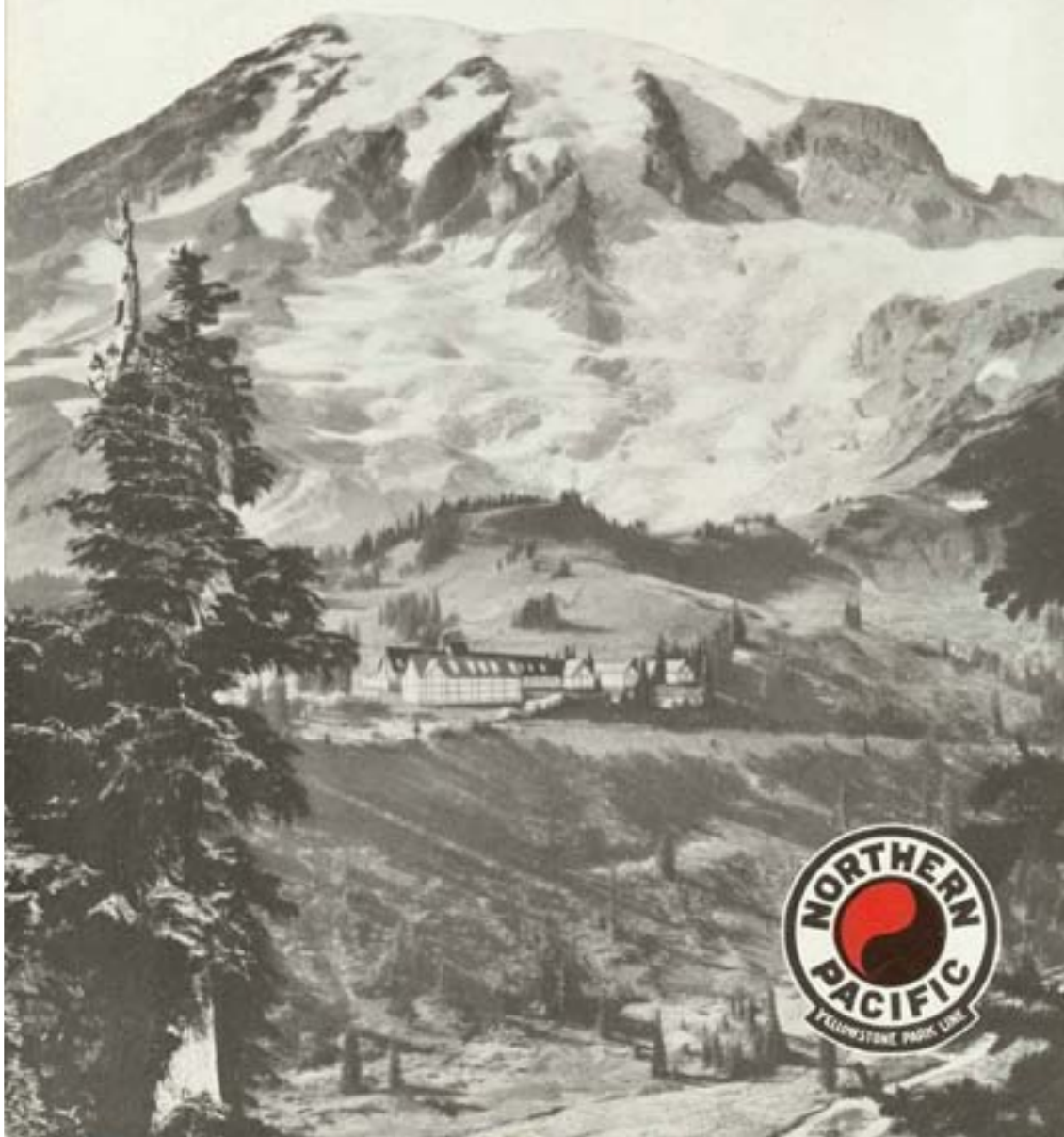


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EVIDENCE

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 28, 1924.

BLIZZARD TRAPS ACTORS

FORTY HAVE NARROW ESCAPE ON MOUNT RAINIER.

Cecil B. De Mille and Company Forced to Abandon \$20,000 Equipment on Nisqually Glacier.

Special to The Times.
TACOMA, Tuesday, Oct. 28.—With a story of narrow escape from death in a blinding blizzard on Nisqually Glacier, Mount Rainier, a group of motion picture players with their director, Cecil B. DeMille, returned here last night from a week at Paradise Inn.

While filming the final scenes of their picture, members of the company said, they were warned by guides to be off the glacier by 3 o'clock. Mr. DeMille had a few more scenes to make and they were delayed until suddenly, without warning, a furious blizzard broke upon them. The party, numbering about 40, was divided into three groups, each accompanied by a guide, and it was with great difficulty that they fought their way back over the ice fields and finally to safety at the inn.

Miss Lillian Rich and two other women in the party were carried with difficulty by the men, whose hands were made numb by the icy winds.

Mr. DeMille was forced to abandon a tent and about \$20,000 worth of equipment. He left eight of his men behind to rescue the equipment, which it is believed will be accomplished with the assistance of guides and forest rangers.

Mr. DeMille called Mount Rainier a magnificent location for pictures and said he would return early next season. He and his party left today for Los Angeles.

WIL THREATENS PEKING

AT LAST

A MAN'S WET-WEATHER SHOE

That
Looks
Dressy



MADE EVERY PART
SOLID LEATHER

Brown calfskin upper
overweight full soles
calf lined. Combin
lasts. Some
value.....

ARCADE BOOT

EXHIBIT " C "

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EVIDENCE

CASE FILE: Danger on Mount Rainier

YOUR MISSION: Review the evidence to determine what happened. Answer the questions below about the case, then write your own report about which type of natural disaster was responsible.

EYEWITNESS STATEMENTS:

“At first the way is easy and the task seems light. The broad snow — fields over which I have often hunted the mountain goat, offer an inviting path. But above that you will have to climb over steep rocks overhanging deep gorges where a mis-step will hurl you far down — down to certain death. You must creep over steep snowbanks and cross deep crevasses where a mountain goat could hardly keep his footing. You must climb along steep cliffs where rocks are continually falling to crush you, or knock you off into the bottomless depths... And if you should escape these perils and reach the great snowy dome then a bitterly cold and furious tempest will sweep you off into space like a withered leaf.”

— Sluiskin, climbing guide

“I don’t envy them [the guides] their job when the mountain is acting up.” — Cecil B. DeMille, film director



What happened on Mount Rainier’s Nisqually glacier in 1924? See if you can find the answer!

WHEN DID THIS DISASTER STRIKE?

WHERE DID IT TAKE PLACE? (Describe where to look for it on a map.)

WHO WAS INVOLVED?

WHAT KIND OF NATURAL DISASTER WAS IT?

LIST TWO “SIGNS” THAT LED UP TO THE DISASTER AND ONE RESULT.

USING YOUR NOTES ABOVE, WRITE A SHORT NEWS ANNOUNCEMENT ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED ON MOUNT RAINIER. (Use the back of the paper if needed.)
