



WashingtonHistory.org

## COMING FULL CIRCLE

The Development of Mount Rainier's Wonderland Trail, 1907-1939

By Paul Sadin

COLUMBIA The Magazine of Northwest History, Winter 1999-00: Vol. 13, No. 4

---

*There is a trail that encircles the mountain. It is a trail that leads through primeval forests, close to the mighty glaciers, past waterfalls and dashing torrents, up over ridges, and down into canyons; it leads through a veritable wonderland of beauty and grandeur.*

—Roger Toll, 1920

Every summer backpackers from around the country, including thousands of Washington hikers, travel along Mount Rainier's Wonderland Trail, seeking the same scenic splendors and thrilling adventures that Superintendent Roger Toll described 80 years ago. The 93-mile footpath encircling the mountain is one of the principal recreational attractions inside Mount Rainier National Park. Yet the trail was not initially intended to be a magnet for outdoor enthusiasts. When work crews completed the original around-the-mountain circuit in 1915, its primary purpose was to provide protection, rather than recreation. The new trail gave patrol rangers a way to cover more terrain as they searched for fires, tracked down poachers, and kept watch for vandals.

Not until the 1920s, when the park's visitation rate skyrocketed, did the trail become a popular destination and gain its Wonderland moniker. During the 20 years that followed, the park significantly altered the route and the length of the Wonderland Trail, making it more accessible to the general public. During that time the function of the trail changed as well—the rugged path that began as a park management tool and resource protection device was transformed into the prized recreational resource and cultural landmark that it remains today.

A variety of trails wound along the slopes of the mountain well before Congress established Mount Rainier National Park in 1899. Indian trails of local tribes once led from Puget Sound up and around the lower slopes of Mount Rainier and over the Cascade Mountains to the east. Faint game traces, rough mining tracks, and, beginning in the 1880s, crude wagon roads and tourist trails also snaked across the mountain's flanks. Among the latter were the trails that Bailey Willis and George Driver blazed in the Carbon River/Spray Park region, and the paths and wagon road James Longmire built along the banks of the Nisqually River. But when Grenville F. Allen took charge of the new park as acting superintendent in 1903, he found the existing trails inadequate for his purposes. Allen's chief duties involved protecting the park's rich natural resources and unparalleled scenic beauty from "injury or spoliation," as Congress had mandated in Mount Rainier's founding legislation. Accordingly, he assigned rangers to begin patrolling the park and, in 1906, initiated the construction of new trails to make those patrols more effective.

Allen wanted to establish a trail system that would reach around the mountain and make "a complete patrol of the park practicable." Since the "first object should be to facilitate patrol," he

ordered the paths laid out at the lowest possible elevation. The routes would be less scenic than would a traverse of the subalpine zone but would be free of mud and snow for much longer each year. Rangers began the task of constructing a trail system by relocating and improving a four-mile section of the old Carbon River Trail in 1907. They subsequently extended that trail across the northern reaches of the park to the White River drainage. The ten-mile-long addition was finished in 1910, giving patrols access to the remote White River district.

The following year Ranger O'Farrell rebuilt the old passage from the Carbon River to Spray Park, making it "safe to horse travel throughout...rather than dreaded as was the case formerly." The new trails were essential to the work of Rainier's patrol rangers, who covered miles of the park on foot or horseback to search for fires and prevent poaching, trespassing and acts of vandalism such as tree-felling. The latter violations were an ongoing problem because of the number of prospectors and miners who still held claims in the park.

Other new trails built prior to 1920 were likewise meant for fire and game protection. In his 1911 annual report, Superintendent Edward Hall expressed his concern that if a fire broke out in the remote forested sections of the park, it would be extremely difficult to get a fire-fighting crew into those areas. The solution to this problem, he said, was a trail constructed "around the mountain at the lowest practicable elevation," from which spur trails could be built to reach all parts of the park. Hall made trail construction his highest priority among the many improvement projects needed in the park.

Between 1913 and 1915 Congress approved several new trail projects that brought Hall's objective closer to becoming a reality. The first of these appropriations went toward building a 16-mile section of trail along the southeast side of Mount Rainier, between Reflection Lakes and the Ohanapecosh patrol cabin. Congress allotted an additional \$2,770 to further extend the trail across the north side of the park. The Sundry Civil Act of August 1, 1914, gave the final funding boost needed to connect the existing routes and complete the mountain circuit. Late that summer Superintendent Ethan Allen put several large crews to work on what he called a "trunk line of trail...around the park territory." Fall snows soon halted the task, but the trail crews resumed work in May 1915.

Stephen Mather, then assistant to the secretary of the interior, and Mark Daniels, general superintendent of the national parks, both pushed to get the new trail finished by August so that members of The Mountaineers Club of Seattle could make their planned trip around the mountain for the club's 1915 annual outing. Three work teams of 15 men each toiled for three months—at an average cost of \$300 per mile—to complete the encircling trail by August 1, 1915. The Forest Service also contributed to the effort in those places where steep terrain pushed the route beyond the national park boundary.

The nascent version of the Wonderland Trail was finished, but the route was quite different from the one hikers travel today. Across the northern portion of the park the trail went from the Carbon River Valley up Chenuis Mountain, through Grand Park and Huckleberry Basin, then over Burroughs Mountain and St. Elmo's Pass to Glacier Basin. On the west side of the mountain the new trail ran close to the park boundary, far lower than the current route through St. Andrews and Klapatche Parks. Mount Rainier Supervisor DeWitt Reaburn reported that the trip around the mountain could be made in about seven days at an average "march" of 20 miles per day. His estimate suggests that the original route was somewhere between 130 and 140 miles long.

Reaburn believed that the trail, with proper advertising, would become a "very popular feature of the park."

The Mountaineers Club of Seattle became the first group to travel the length of the newly completed trail, making the circuit in August 1915. During the preceding years The Mountaineers, an organization of Seattle and Tacoma outdoor enthusiasts established in 1906, also had a hand in scouting and building some sections of the round-the-mountain route. Following their 1915 trek around Mount Rainier, the club repeated the trip for their 1919, 1924, 1930, and 1936 summer outings. The news and publicity generated by those excursions, and the lobbying by club members to make the route a more scenic one, helped establish the recreational potential of the new trail.

The club had begun planning a trip around Mount Rainier as early as 1908 but postponed any such outing when G. F. Allen told them it was not possible to make their way around the mountain via the route they had indicated to him. Since the park did not yet have the trail for a circle trip, The Mountaineers pitched in to build one. In 1910 the club spent \$67.50—and their labor—to build a temporary trail across the moraine of the Carbon Glacier. Two members of The Mountaineers, C. A. Barns and J. B. Flett, made a 1911 "knapsack trip" around Mount Rainier as a scouting mission for the coming club outing. Barns and Flett (who later became the park's first "information officer") followed their own bearings around the peak, having found the established trails to be "worse than no trails at all." They repeated the trip with two other club members in 1912.

That summer another, much larger, contingent of The Mountaineers made a group outing across the northern tier of the park. During that trip the members built a trail from Fryingpan Creek to the subalpine meadow called Summer Land, laying the groundwork for a later Wonderland route that would run from there to Stevens Canyon. A year later Calvin Phillips, Jr., and J. H. Weer made an extensive scouting trip around the mountain, exploring a high-elevation route and investigating future campsites in the "timber line parks." Whether the encircling trail was ready or not, club members were prepared to make a circuit of Rainier.

When The Mountaineers finally accomplished their inaugural trip around the mountain (from July 31 to August 21, 1915), they actually followed two routes. Each day one portion of their 90-plus member troupe followed a "sky-line" (or "high-line") route that crossed many of Rainier's glaciers, while a second group took the low-line route of the just-completed trail, descending below the snouts of the larger glaciers and then climbing back to their nightly camps in the subalpine meadows. Those in the high-line party were required to hike with military precision and discipline, keeping specifically-assigned places in the line behind their leader and responding to blasts from the signal whistle. The members of the low-line group traveled at their own pace, pausing at times to take photographs, botanize, or enjoy a tranquil resting place. On the occasion when dense fog obscured the high-line passage over the ice fields, the entire party tramped along the forest trail. By contrast, all members of the party crossed the ice when they came to the long expanse of the Carbon Glacier, while the packers took the horses along the lower-lying trail. The rubble-covered ice made for a hazardous crossing, as did the descent from the rock cliffs onto the glacier.

Designated scouts went ahead of the main party and marked each campsite by nailing a triangular aluminum plate (inscribed with the club name and the camp number) to a conspicuous-looking tree. They chose sites in the wildflower-strewn subalpine parks that ring

the mountain near the 5,000-foot level and offer superb views of the summit. When the hikers reached camp at the end of their day, separate quarters were set up for men and women, often on either side of an intervening ridge. Members made "individual reservations" by jabbing their alpenstocks into the ground when they located an appealing spot. The kitchen detail built a large bonfire and set up the commissary for serving meals. When "the shrill whistle" announced that dinner was ready, there followed a "grand rush of the hungry hordes to get into line."

The trip afforded the participants three weeks of adventure, physical fitness, and the chance to revel in the mountain scenery. They witnessed the changing face of Mount Rainier, which presented dramatically different profiles to the company as they circled the peak. Sometimes the mountain looked "so near and looked so inviting in its beautiful white mantle, one felt tempted to run up to the summit before breakfast just to work up an appetite." Outing chronicler Philip Rogers noted that the changing visages and the "titanic proportions" of the summit dome made one "gasp and gaze in silent awe and wonder." Fine weather enhanced their experience; clouds obscured the spectacle of Rainier for but a few of their days on the trail.

The club completed its inaugural round-the-mountain trip on schedule, without accidents or mishaps, and with "everybody in better condition at the end of the journey than at its beginning." Although the trail was "but faintly marked" in some places, the new encircling path had served them well. They estimated the distance of the journey, not including side trips, to be 120 miles. Fifty-seven members, both men and women, also climbed to the summit from the Glacier Basin camp. "And so it has come about," Rogers wrote, "that the grand old mountain has been circled for the first time by any considerable party,...and a trail has been opened up—partly by the work of The Mountaineers themselves—which, it is to be hoped, many similar parties will follow in the future." That wish would be realized a decade later, but in the years immediately following their 1915 trip, The Mountaineers themselves were among the very few park visitors to tackle the full length of the new trail.

With the around-the-mountain circuit completed, park officials sought a way to make ranger patrols along it more effective. Several years earlier the park had constructed its first three ranger patrol cabins, simple log structures where staff could "spend a night or a season without the usual annoyances experienced in abandoned mining cabins." Rangers built two more cabins along the route of the encircling trail in 1915, including the one at Indian Henry's Hunting Grounds that still stands today. But in order for rangers to thoroughly patrol the 120-mile length of the round-the-mountain trail, many more such cabins were needed.

When Roger Toll took over as park superintendent in 1919, he developed a plan to build a network of cabins along the encircling trail that could provide overnight shelter to rangers and visitors alike. He wanted the cabins located 10 to 15 miles apart and supplied with the necessary fire tools and equipment. Toll was superintendent for only two years, but his successors carried out his patrol cabin proposal in the decade that followed. Park staff built four new cabins along the western leg of the trail in 1921-22. Constructed with native logs and cedar shake roofs, they were supplied with small cook stoves, dining tables, and sleeping accommodations for two rangers. These remote ranger cabins served as summer residences and work stations for staff in isolated areas, emergency overnight shelters for rangers on winter patrol, storehouses for firefighting and trail maintenance equipment, and as temporary shelters for hikers. When completed, there totaled a string of eight patrol cabins on or near the trail, linked by telephone lines that ran adjacent to the trail corridor.

The Wonderland Trail, as it came to be called, was an essential piece of the park's fire patrol system, reaching as it did into the most remote and heavily-forested areas of the park. Prior to the construction of Mount Rainier's fire lookouts in 1932-34, patrol staff would head out onto the trail after thunderstorms or in periods of dry weather, climbing to the top of the nearest ridge or peak and spotting for smoke. If a ranger saw fire, he returned to a patrol cabin, telephoned his report to headquarters, and then returned to fight the fire—by himself or with a detail drawn from nearby road crews or work camps. Patrol staff stocked each cabin with enough tools, food rations, first-aid kits, and bedrolls to maintain a firefighting crew. Owen Tomlinson, Mount Rainier's superintendent from 1923 to 1941, directed construction of nine more back-country patrol cabins to enhance the system of fire spotters and "fire chasers" already in place. He observed that "the ranger who must carry bedding and shelter, as well as his food, or else sleep in the open in stormy weather, cannot cover much territory."

Mount Rainier's rangers were among the few who traveled the distant reaches of the Wonderland Trail in wintertime. They skied or snowshoed through the backcountry while on the watch for poachers or inspecting the telephone lines. The cabins were supplied with firewood and food rations, "as it might be necessary to stop for several days at one place if caught in an extremely vicious blizzard." Upon reaching one of the remote cabins, they shoveled down through deep snowdrifts to reach the doorway and cleared snow from the chimney before starting a fire in the stove. Rangers frequently found that a pine marten or pack rat had already taken up winter residence in the cabin, and they occasionally encountered the ruins left by a black bear who had raided their winter larder.

To a lesser extent than their function for winter patrols and firefighting, the cabins were also a place of rest and emergency shelter for visitors, particularly during inclement weather. Tomlinson recommended the cabins as shelter for visitors "when caught in stormy weather," and also as "a means for encouraging trail travel." Rangers posted the following notice on the door of the Alta Vista cabin during the 1929-30 winter season:

*This cabin and the equipment and supplies are furnished for the comfort and convenience of ALL hikers to and from Paradise Valley. Leave the cabin and everything in it cleaner than you found them—like a true outdoor man. Don't forget some dry wood and kindling for the next tired hiker.*

As the snow melted in late spring and early summer, patrol rangers used the Wonderland Trail for a multitude of other tasks. They rode or hiked the muddy track in order to restring telephone lines, clear downed trees and debris from the path, repair footbridges and stone cairns, and post trail signs. They led pack trains loaded with barrels of fingerling trout to stock the park's lakes and streams along the Wonderland route. As more and more people traveled to the park, rangers spent proportionately more of their time dispensing visitor assistance and information. By the mid 1920s a small but gradually increasing number of park visitors made their way into the backcountry for short hikes—or for the long trek around the Wonderland Trail.

In 1907 army engineers Hiram Chittenden and Eugene Ricksecker recommended the construction of a bridle trail suitable for tourist travel around the slopes of Mount Rainier. Ricksecker described his idea in a letter to the secretary of the interior in October of that year:

*A trip around the mountain in the vicinity of the snow line, traveling thru gorgeous hued flowery parks, and touching each of the mighty glaciers, would be fraught with exhilarating pleasure absolutely unique in its entirety, and it is suggested that a bridle trail with easy grades be built along the West side first in order to join the two routes, Nisqually and Carbon.*

Chittenden believed such a trail was "absolutely essential to the proper policing of the park and very necessary for the convenience of tourists if they are really to have access to the attractions of the park." Both engineers agreed that the trail should be built with "a view to widening it into a wagon road at some future time."

Despite these early designs for tourist use of the trail, mountaineering groups and patrol rangers were virtually the only travelers on the as-yet-unnamed encircling path prior to 1920. The national park did not promote the trail as a recreation resource, and the route was not in sufficient condition to serve as one. Some portions of the passage were merely remnants of old mining tracks. One section of trail running between the Carbon Glacier and Moraine Park was so steep and rough that it was dubbed the "devil's ladder." A park official noted that the encircling trail was "not suitable for tourist travel" and suggested that the administration spend more money on trail improvements in order to establish a "tourist pony service" around the mountain.

Over the next several decades the park initiated various structural and administrative changes to make the trail more attractive for recreation to everyday visitors. The first steps involved shortening its overall length and repairing its roughest sections. In 1916-17 work crews constructed a cut-off trail from Mowich River to Crater Lake (now known as Mowich Lake), which reduced the length of the encircling trail by 15 miles. Because funding for the project fell short of what was needed, the district ranger in charge decided to skimp a bit on the food rations for his crew. When Superintendent Reaburn heard of this, he warned the project head that the desired quality of work could not be achieved on such "cheap grub." In 1918 Congress made \$15,000 available for trail improvements throughout the park; several sections of trail were relocated and reconstructed at a maximum grade of 15 percent.

Stephen Mather, director of the newly-established National Park Service, reported that by 1918 the encircling trail was in excellent condition for travel but was rarely used because very few visitors took the sort of vacations necessary "to make this wonderful tour comfortably and satisfactorily." "The circuit," as park officials called it, was still too long and required too much time to complete." Mather wanted the park to promote round-the-mountain trips so as to "stimulate a demand for this kind of travel." Work crews accomplished additional trail repairs in 1919, and several parties, including another contingent from The Mountaineers, made the journey around the mountain that summer.

The name "Wonderland" was first attached to the trail in 1920, at a time when Superintendent Toll and the park concessionaire began a concerted effort to promote it as a tourist destination. The Rainier National Park Company issued a publicity bulletin in June 1920 that advertised the "new Wonderland Trail" as one of the highlights of any trip to Mount Rainier. The company offered a guided saddle and packhorse trip along the western and northern sections of the trail. The following year the Rainier National Park Company put out a separate brochure devoted to its Wonderland Trail outings, calling them the "most glorious trip[s] in the world." The excursions around the mountain took 12 days and 11 nights; guides prepared the campsites ahead of time in the scenic subalpine parks. The trips catered to the inexperienced mountain traveler: the company supplied all of the necessary camping gear, food, and other equipment, and mounted their guests upon "well-fed, sure-footed" horses that "the novice may ride with comfort and security." The entire cost of the trip was \$123.50 per person, with discounted rates available for larger groups.

Toll, an avid hiker and climber, endorsed and aided the concessionaire's attempts to develop the Wonderland Trail for visitor use. He gave a romantic account of the trail in his unpublished "Wonderland Trail of Mount Rainier National Park," and described the merits of the 95-mile-long passage in his 1920 annual report. More importantly, Toll initiated a number of concrete measures that made it easier for visitors to follow and enjoy the trail. He ordered signs placed at the beginning of each trail segment and at trail junctions to guide hikers and riders as they traveled. The signs also gave the direction, distance and elevation of nearby peaks and other geologic features in the park. Toll directed the installation of small metal trail markers every tenth of a mile along the trail, with the exact distance from the trailhead inscribed on them. These new components made the path more accessible to the general public, not just the domain of rangers and experienced mountaineers.

The National Park Service took several other steps to accommodate Wonderland Trail travelers in the early 1920s: the park published maps showing the location of trailside shelters, obtained more accurate distance measurements, cleared downed trees and brush from the trail, erected boulder cairns on the glacier and snowfield crossings, and built footbridges over marshes, creeks and rivers. Rangers cut a "distinctive official blaze" into trees, so that visitors would not be misled by the old trail markings carved by miners, sheep herders and surveyors. Fortunately, the park service decided that the latter practice disfigured the trees too much, and discontinued it after a short time.

W. H. Peters, Toll's successor as superintendent, sought to do even more to make the trail more appealing to tourists. Peters wanted to relocate large segments of the trail so that hikers and riders could avoid traveling through the densely-forested areas of the park, as they did on the current route:

*This trail, to be a scenic trail, should be relocated and reconstructed at an elevation...of approximately 2,000 feet higher. Such a location would take the traveler around the snouts of the various glaciers and through the wonderful subalpine flower zone, and would enable him to command wonderful views from almost every foot of the trail.*

To make the trail even more accessible to those who did not wish to be bothered with the upkeep of pack animals, he suggested that the Rainier National Park Company build four or five "tent hotels" along the Wonderland corridor, which could provide foot travelers with food and lodging. The notion of building permanent camps in the backcountry, complete with wood-frame tent structures and dining halls, might strike today's hikers as a tremendous intrusion. But then, carrying all of one's gear in a 1920s backpack was, at best, a spine-and shoulder-wrenching endeavor. Peters viewed all of these changes as logical ways to make the Wonderland circuit a popular hiking trip.

The backcountry tent hotels never did materialize, but the popularity of the Wonderland Trail continued to increase during the 1920s. The Department of the Interior published annual information circulars about Mount Rainier that included a map and several pages of detailed trail descriptions. Hikers and riders could use the circulars to determine the exact distance between campsites, the elevation of passes and ridge tops, the location of streams and other water sources, and the best spots to obtain views of glaciers, waterfalls and flower meadows. Visitors could learn more about the Wonderland Trail in Floyd Schmoie's *Our Greatest Mountain: A Handbook for Mount Rainier National Park*. Schmoie, the park's naturalist, presented a straightforward route narrative as well as his own grand depiction of the trail experience:

*Every hour it opens to the fortunate visitor vistas and distant views, intimate glimpses of growing things, and sketches of wild animal life that to anyone mean hours in Wonderland—a natural God-made Wonderland of forest and snow, wildflower, field, and mighty cascade.*

Owen Tomlinson made many more changes and improvements to the trail during his tenure as superintendent (1923-1941), though at times a lack of funding made it impossible to keep the trail in first-class condition. After a detailed inspection of the trail in 1924 he reported that many sections of the circuit had become badly eroded and that many of the bridges and puncheon crossings (log slats laid down over muddy ground) required repair or replacement. Tomlinson emphasized both the recreational and the administrative functions of the trail, and believed that the Wonderland's "great scenic value" would lead to its development as a popular hiking and saddle trip.

Tomlinson gave increased attention to proper engineering of the trail. Because a good deal of the earlier trail maintenance had been conducted in "an amateur sort of way," he ordered the district rangers to closely supervise all future trail work. He also established specific trail standards: widths of three to four feet, grades not to exceed 15 percent, trails canted to the inside edge (to channel water into drainage diversions), etc. This emphasis on standardization eventually drew criticism from some observers who suggested that hikers found the variations in the width and grade of the path more interesting. After seeing the Wonderland Trail in the 1930s, a former park superintendent remarked: "There is nothing more monotonous to man and beast than a long constant grade."

The park's maintenance department followed these standards as they built new sections or realigned the old ones. Major construction work in 1930, including expensive blasting through solid rock cliffs, rerouted the Wonderland around the snouts of the Carbon and Winthrop Glaciers. Travelers would no longer have to cross the unstable and difficult-to-maintain trails over glacial ice and moraines. During the 1930s the Wonderland route was relocated away from the new auto corridors of the Westside road and the Stevens Canyon road. On the west side of the mountain engineers placed the new trail segment at a higher elevation than the original path, closer to its current location and more to the liking of The Mountaineers Club and other hiking groups.

Certain improvements were aimed at making the Wonderland Trail more aesthetically-pleasing and enticing to visitors. In 1929, for instance, the park fashioned an attractive log bridge over the Muddy Fork of the Cowlitz River (at Box Canyon) and built two "trail hubs" out of rustic materials (at Longmire and Paradise) to help orient hikers and draw attention to these trailheads. The rustic building style of the trail signs, bridges, shelters and patrol cabins created a common visual theme for hikers as they circumnavigated the mountain.

Between 1933 and 1939 the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) carried out much of the trail maintenance in the park. Work gangs from the park's six CCC camps built bridges and hiker shelters, constructed new sections of trail, graded and resurfaced damaged sections, performed erosion and drainage control, and "oiled" portions of the path to reduce dust. With the help of the CCC, the park expanded the system of trail shelters along the Wonderland route. The three-sided log structures, situated at numerous sites around the mountain, gave hikers a place to sleep out of the weather. They were usually furnished with bunks, tables and, in some cases, a wood stove. The CCC also erected stone shelters at Summer Land and Indian Bar, both of which



still exist today. The construction of these shelters demonstrated the park's intent to make the trail more accessible and enjoyable to the American public.

In the long run, nothing did more to enhance the trail's status as a recreational destination than did Tomlinson's 1928 decision to designate large portions of the park as permanent "roadless areas." Both The Mountaineers Club and park service director Mather had recommended taking this step, which banned roads, hotels, pay camps and other commercial developments from nearly three-quarters of the park's total area. The decision kept virtually the entire length of the trail corridor free from future road building, thereafter open only to hikers or horse travel. The park had created a de facto wilderness area some 35 years prior to the passage of the 1964 Wilderness Act. The decision ensured that the experience of traveling the Wonderland Trail would remain—and eventually gain renown as—a wild-land adventure.

The trail improvements, hiker shelters, guidebooks and promotional materials attracted a growing number of people to undertake the rigors of a round-the-mountain journey. During the 1920s and 1930s individual hikers and private parties began to tramp the full length of the Wonderland. Some supplied themselves with store-bought Trapper Nelson packs and hiking boots while others tied makeshift bundles to ancient packboards and donned surplus army shoes. By utilizing the trailside shelters and arranging for food caches at the Carbon River, Sunrise, or White River ranger stations, travelers could lighten their packs and increase their pace as they circled the mountain. Hikers still had to carry their own sleeping gear, food, and cooksets, and they endured rain, aching muscles and sore feet in order to reap the bounties of a back-country trip: stunning views, surprise encounters with seldom-seen wildlife, and the satisfaction of accomplishing an exceptional physical feat.

For those unwilling or unable to tackle the trail on their own, the Rainier National Park Company continued to run guided trips around the Wonderland circuit. In 1928, 25 dollars a day covered meals, sleeping accommodations, guides, pack service and the use of a saddle horse. The outings took 12 days to cover 145 miles (including side trips), and offered "endlessly changing panoramas of mountain and glacier, canyon and forest, lakes and rivers," along with "comfortable camps, good food, and cozy sleeping bags." Trail-goers need bring only their own clothing and toilet articles.

The Mountaineers Club returned to hike the Wonderland loop again and again. The trail rewarded club members with stunning views, heart-pounding climbs, and the "haunting presence of the Mountain." For many, the three weeks away from civilization, trusting to their own resourcefulness, provided something more: the chance to live "the life of our pioneer forebears." The idea that a wilderness sojourn could re-create the simpler American past of the pioneers became, for organizations like the Boy Scouts, a prime motivation in undertaking a Wonderland pilgrimage.

Aside from The Mountaineers, the Boy Scouts of America was the other organization most closely associated with the early recreational use of the Wonderland Trail. Puget Sound-area Scout troops began taking Wonderland trips in the early 1920s, usually spending two weeks in the park traversing some or all of the trail. The hundred-mile circuit around majestic Mount Rainier was the ideal place for local Scouts to obtain their hiking and camping skills, and to live out their Scouting ethos. Life on the trail, according to the *Boy Scout Handbook*, gave Scouts the chance to see their "knightly qualities thrive and grow" and to find "the strength that springs from the good brown earth." The winding course and arduous nature of a mountain trail

mirrored the path of youthful development, along which Scouts traveled "straight to Manhood's splendid and high estate." In setting up camp and practicing woodcraft skills, Scouts could also imagine themselves to be like the pioneers, explorers and prospectors of America's youth.

Since the Scouts were also a service-oriented organization, their hiking trips often included trail projects. In preparation for a 1926 excursion around the mountain, one Scout leader wrote to Tomlinson and suggested that the boys could place weather-tight emergency cylinders—with matches, candles, first-aid supplies, etc.—at designated cairns along the Wonderland route. The Scouts also took on small trail-building projects. In August 1925 a group of Eagle Scouts from Seattle and Tacoma constructed a mile-long section of trail that ran from Longmire to Indian Henry's Trail. Five years later a Seattle troop constructed one-and-a-half miles of trail from Klapatche Park to St. Andrews Park. Thereafter, visiting Scout troops regularly engaged in small-scale improvement projects to go with their Wonderland trips.

The National Park Service and the park concessionaire picked up on the idea that the fresh air, adventure and rigors of a Wonderland Trail trip were just the thing for young boys. In the late 1920s the Rainier National Park Company introduced a "Wonderland Camp for Boys." The commercially run hiking and camping trips enabled boys (Scouts or otherwise) to test themselves on a round-the-mountain journey. The 1929 Wonderland Camp brochure described a "glorious four weeks saddle-horse outing in the Nation's most beautiful playground." The first week of the camp was devoted to preparation and training, the next two weeks were spent riding and hiking the Wonderland circuit, and the last week was reserved for a possible climb to the summit of Mount Rainier. But the Wonderland Trail trip was clearly the centerpiece of the camp. The promotional brochure explained that the experiences of the trail—building fires in the open, cooking over a campfire, sleeping outdoors, washing in clear, cold mountain streams, close association with other boys"—contributed to the "building of tomorrow's men" and constituted "a requisite of every true American."

This notion conveyed in the Wonderland Camp literature—that the challenges of a trail outing built character, self-reliance, and patriotism—echoed the emphasis of the Boy Scout trips over the Wonderland. For decades these attitudes remained an underlying motivation for youth outings around Mount Rainier, whether they were undertaken by Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts, school groups or church groups. The young boys and girls involved in these trips may not have attained these goals, or even enjoyed their time in the park. But it is clear that the Wonderland Trail became, for many people, more than a recreational site; it became a cultural landmark that signified physical challenge, a personal rite of passage, and an idealized re-creation of America's pioneer heritage. The trail was now a cultural construct, as well as a tangible construction of dirt, gravel and rock.

The Wonderland Trail represents several different facets of Mount Rainier National Park's history. The trail was a key piece of the earliest administrative efforts to preserve the park's natural beauty. During its more than 80 years of use, the trail also served as the central mechanism of the old fire patrol system, displayed changes and continuities in National Park Service construction and architecture, and played a part in the emergence of Mount Rainier as an icon for Pacific Northwest outdoor enthusiasts. Accordingly, the Wonderland Trail corridor

was named one of the significant contributing elements when Mount Rainier National Park received National Historic Landmark status in 1997. Like the many dedicated hikers who have completed the entire circuit, the Wonderland Trail has come full circle. The rugged path that

began as an administrative tool to protect the park's natural resources is now a significant resource itself, worthy of historical recognition and long-term protection.

---

*Paul Sadin is a public historian who lives in Seattle. He has worked as a researcher for several recent Washington State History Museum exhibits, including the current Sunrise to Paradise exhibit. He has also spent the past seven summers at Mount Rainier National Park, serving as a seasonal park ranger.*