

# MOUNTAIN PROFILE

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FORBIDDEN PEAK | FOREST MCBRIAN

# The Forgotten Mountain

**I**n the valley far below, a pale river of cloud toils westward. It eddies and clings to nameless, ink-black pillars. The Cascade River falls through the dark somewhere beneath. A vast forest spills in all directions through the night. I long to be down in the silence, beneath that river of cloud, among the darkness of hemlocks and red cedars. But instead I am lacing my boots on the moraine crest where the last trees give way to rock, ice and starlight on Forbidden Peak. Around me, serrated ridges tear the sky from the horizon. ¶ In the oily shadow of the glacier to the south, the curves of each crevasse mimic the arc of the moon. The light appears everywhere at once, inescapable. I've spent much of my adult life haunting the quiet valleys of the North Cascades, and yet I can't quite describe the sense of exposure that begins in these mountains at the last ragged hemlock of tree line—as though there is nowhere to hide.



**A**T MY BACK, A WAVE OF GNEISS rears up from the earth. The horn glows against the black tide of the sky. Its crystals glint in the light of the bone-yellow moon. Ribbons of snowmelt shine in the darkness.

For over a hundred years, this mountain has stood like a beacon at the edge of two worlds: the lush red cedar rain forest of the west slopes and the spare, dry ponderosa woods of the east; the wildness of the soaring alpine crests, and the built world of Seattle. For ambitious alpinists intent on wild, remote walls, Forbidden Peak offered a sort of high-level training ground. Here were routes of beauty and challenge, without the tedium and uncertainty of brushy cross-country approaches. In contrast to other North Cascades peaks, climbers never had to bushwhack to reach Forbidden: Indigenous people and later miners had established trails and roads long before the first mountaineers took an ice axe to its slopes.

After a restless night above tree line, I feel uneasy in the heat of this late summer morning. My client, whom I'll call "Robert," and I stop within minutes of leaving our camp to strip our top layers down to T-shirts. With the sprawling uncertainties of our climb ahead, I breathe and force myself to see what is present: patches of moss, jeweled with waterfall spray; petals of dwarf fireweed and pearly everlasting quivering in our headlamp beams.

Robert works in a Ford lab in Detroit. We met in Marblemount, Washington, where a weathered wooden sign welcomes you to the "Entrance to the American Alps." Most years, residents here will see twice the rainfall of Seattle. The small town is just two hours and seven stoplights away from a metropolis of four million, and yet it has none of the usual commercial kitsch of a national park gateway. It's a practical kind of place where you can buy a machete at the gas station and a burger from the local buffalo farm. On the neatly trimmed grass beside the ranger station, Robert had laid out his gear with the precision and efficiency of a worker on an assembly line.

Now, as we leave the stream, I draw out each stride in that exaggerated way that a guide must when the day ahead may be long. Robert walks a little haltingly, as if grappling at each step with some question, the shape of which I don't yet understand. This early in our time together, I am already influenced by my desire to stand on top of this peak with him. I will have to be careful not to push him too far, not to get greedy. On the West Ridge, the most dangerous passage is likely to be the rappel route down the Cat Scratch Gullies, which weaves through steep, rock-strewn terrain at the end of the day—a place you want your wits about you. But this mountain has withstood so many appetites, and it may yet have something to teach about the notion of *enough*.

## Wild Mountains

I GREW UP IN PORTLAND, Oregon. As a teenager in the late 1990s, I was immersed in stories of ecological collapse. Amid the endless patchwork of clear-cut timberlands running up and down Cascade foothills, a few logging companies still sought to chop down ancient trees with the help of the Forest Service. The Willamette River was one of the most polluted rivers west of the Rockies. Near my home, it joined the Columbia, another river dammed and dredged into sedation. There was so much to escape. I preferred to live in the fantasy

worlds of novels and the seemingly faraway realms of high mountain peaks. When I read *The Lord of the Rings*, I climbed into the tall cedar in my backyard and gazed out on Mt. Hood, the elegant, symmetrical volcano that rose like Tolkien's Lonely Mountain east of the city. Soon I began to read every book on mountaineering I could find in my local library: *Could such worlds of wild, primordial beauty really exist?*

Late in high school, I came across Tom Miller's photos in the 1964 book *The North Cascades*, and I realized they did—and they weren't far from me. The black-and-white images appeared to document another planet. Vast and tormented architectures overwhelmed the human figures dressed in the kind of simple clothing my grandfather might have worn at a coal camp: grubby cotton tees, rumpled fatigues, tall boots. I imagined following them into that other world, retreating into its seeming wholeness. But I also read the *Earth First! Journal*, as well as the writings of Aldo Leopold, Muir and Thoreau. And I wanted to believe that we could heal this bleeding world by engaging in activism and lessening our consumption. I became a vegan. When I turned sixteen, I bought a bike instead of a car. In 1998 I lived in a tree for a month so that it wouldn't be killed and sold.

As I fought to avoid feelings of despair and hopelessness about the fate of the environment around me, the pictures from Miller's book resurfaced again and again in my imagination. I wanted more than anything in the world to become a climber, but I knew that mountains, too, could be killed and sold. I couldn't bring myself to buy a single carabiner because I'd seen a photograph of an aluminum mine in Chile, the earth eviscerated. I couldn't own a heap of crampons, nuts and hexes—I couldn't sacrifice someone's beloved mountain.

Desire, even a desire for mountains, can bend one's convictions. Throughout college, I hitchhiked, rode my bike and recruited partners with cars to get to the mountains or the crag. But casual, occasional climbing wasn't enough for me. The first time I drove up the Cascade River Road, it was the summer after college and I'd been driving for barely a year. The make of my car, a beater 1984 Volvo (*volvo*—Latin for "I roll"), seemed to match my exultant sense of freedom. I climbed the East Ridge Direct of Forbidden in perfect solitude. Air rose past my heels, first hot on the sunny side, then cool as the route wove among the tall gendarmes. The exposure had nothing ominous about it for me then, only buoyant joy. Testing each hold, I wondered at the connection of my soft, trembling body to the immovable mass of the stone, an intimacy I'd dreamed of for so long. My car had contracted time and space so that I could enter the world of the guidebooks I'd read and reread. The heart of the North Cascades was within reach on a day trip. During the drive home, I rolled down the window to watch a sow bear lead her yearling up the hillside, and still I arrived in time for dinner. I could immerse myself ever deeper into my fantasy, even if its delicious simplicity wouldn't last.

## The Way Through

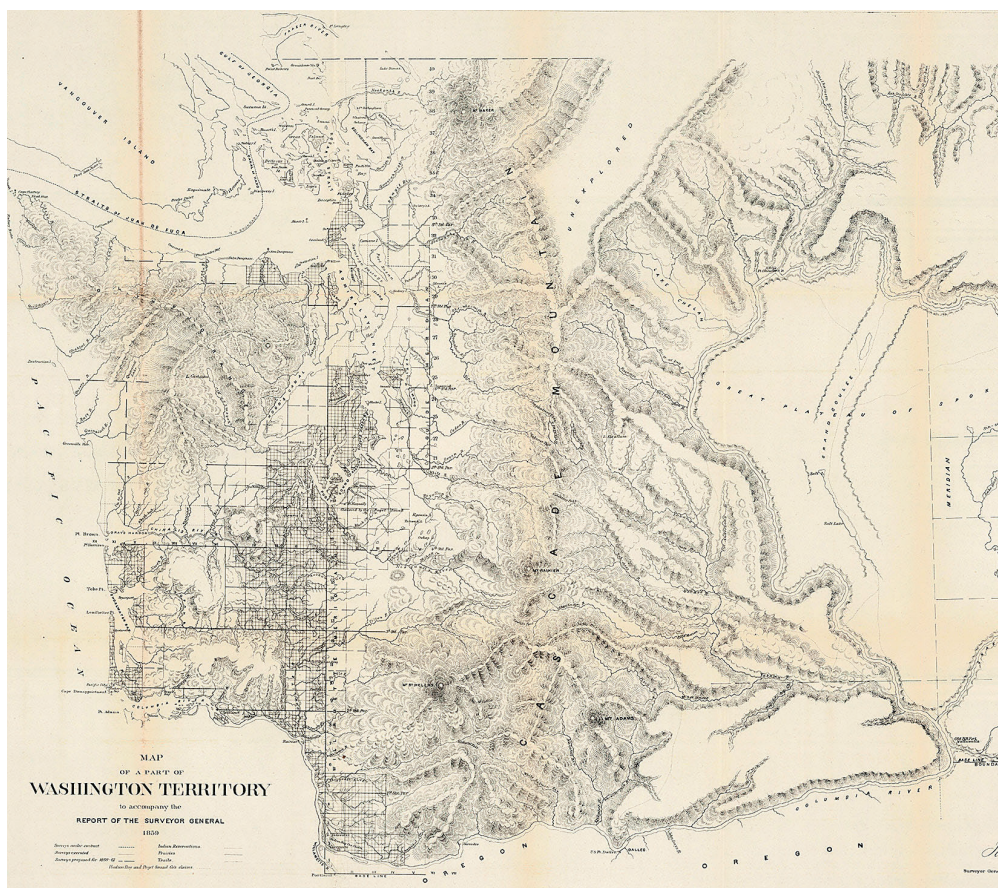
FOR MANY MILLENNIA, storms have carved this range, heaping snow on the uplifted land until it ran in rivers of ice and cut valley walls as tall as 6,000 feet. Roughly midway between Seattle and the Canadian border, the Skagit now flows through a break in the western foothills. From above, forests and farmlands appear tiled neatly around its sinuous ribbon.

Forbidden Peak lies in the North Cascades, a portion of the Cascade Range with radically different character from nearby, well-known volcanoes such as Mt. Hood and *təqwʊʔbəd* (Mt. Rainier). During the Pleistocene, thousands of years of snowfall built an immense carapace of ice, which flowed and shaped basins and spines from raw igneous and metamorphic rock. Today a series of large cirque glaciers persist along the crest. Forbidden, carved by the ice, is now a blade of its own surrounded by precipitous massifs. You can't see the mountain from any navigable waters or any modern settlement. But you can glimpse it from the North Fork Cascade River Road. Although the washboarding and the dust get rough by late summer, it's only a three-hour drive from Seattle. The road is there, in large part, because of Cascade Pass—a weakness in the crest of the range sought by both Pacific storms and human travelers. It began as a footpath over 8,000 years ago; the mule trail from the parking lot to the tree-line campsites is pushing 150. If you look carefully enough, traces of those who came before emerge from forest and tundra.

Indigenous people have traveled through the pass for thousands of years. According to the oral histories of Skagit and Sauk tribes, it was a thoroughfare and well-known trade route for groups moving between the dripping rain forests of the Skagit and the fragrant ponderosa woods of Lake Chelan. On the east side of the pass, the river draining the crest is called the Stehekin, a Salishan name that can be translated as “the way through.” High routes such as Cascade Pass shortened journeys between communities on the western coast and the eastern arid interior—and provided access to vast huckleberry fields in the tundra slopes along the way. Upper Skagit peoples and those of other tribes around the North Cascades hunted goats, elk, grizzly bears and mountain lions in the high country.

In his *Cascade Alpine Guide*, Fred Beckey repeated a misconception prevalent in the mid-twentieth century that Indigenous people “had little practical reason to spend much time in the far reaches of the Cascades.” In the 2000s, however, a team of archaeologists led by Bob Mierendorf of North Cascades National Park uncovered black circular hearths and chipped stone tools from the glacial soils at the pass. They dated a number of artifacts to over 9,000 years ago and traced their manufacture to places as far away as modern Oregon. Late-nineteenth-century maps produced by Indigenous guides likewise indicate that people traveled on foot among the high valleys of the North Cascades much more intensively in pre-contact times than they do today. Nearly every notion of “first” in this range is suspect.

The first colonial maps of the Pacific Northwest depict orderly,



gridded settlements around tidewater. East of the Salish Sea, the grid dissolves into hachures evoking rugged mountains with scarce place names. Rivers that run west from the North Cascades appear to arise from impossible, and impassable, topography. The 1859 United States Surveyor General's map of Washington Territory shows the northern crest of the range as a blank swath extending down from the Canadian border—the label reads, simply, “UNEXPLORED.”

Such ignorance didn't keep white settlers from extending their claim up to the crest of the range in the 1855 Treaty of Point Elliott. Under relentless pressure from waves of arriving settlers, dozens of signatory tribes ceded the land between Seattle, Canada and the North Cascades to the US in exchange for guaranteed reservation lands. Native negotiators also reserved for themselves and their descendants the rights to continue using customary hunting and fishing grounds. (Native activists are still working to make the US uphold their end of the treaty.) Not only had the settlers not mapped the rugged lands along the high crest, but they'd also imagined it as a boundary between Indigenous nations where no such border really existed. Instead, many Indigenous communities traveled through this region and relied on the rich resources in this part of their homelands that was accessible for only a few months each year. Forbidden Peak, along with its burgeoning glaciers, the vast forests draped across the mountains and the metallic veins beneath—all came under the claim of the

[Opening Spread] **Forbidden Peak (8,816'), Buckner Mountain (9,114') and Mt. Goode (9,199')** within Washington's North Cascades. According to the [National Park Service website](#), there are over 300 glaciers within North Cascades National Park. The

region is “the most heavily glaciated area in the United States outside of Alaska.” Jason Hummel | [This Page] *Map of a Part of Washington Territory, 1859*. The word **UNEXPLORED** appears in the northern reaches. Courtesy David Rumsey map collection

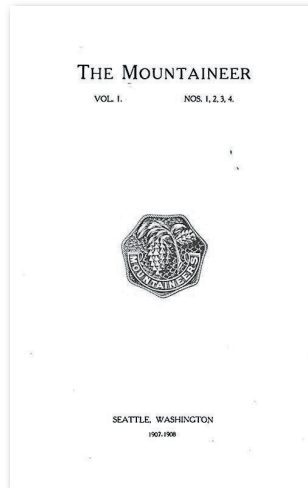
US, even though at least one local tribal leader, Chief Kiyahud of the Miskaiwhu, had refused to sign the treaty.

When Swiss mountaineer and topographer Henry Custer explored the Cascades region during the Northwest Boundary Survey in 1859, he relied on local Indigenous people, such as the Stó:lō guide Thiusoloc—as well as their maps—to lead him through the terrain. In *A Stó:lō Coast-Salish Historical Atlas*, Daniel Boxberger and David Schaepe noted that Thiusoloc’s maps “provide evidence of extensive Aboriginal use of high-mountain resources and frequent long-distance travel through the North Cascades along well-established transportation networks.” From the Salish Sea, non-Native farmers, loggers and miners followed rivers inland toward new resources. In 1878 settlers dynamited an immense logjam on the Skagit River. Now that the waterway was free to pass by boat, settlers explored upstream in increasing numbers. With these incursions came more conflicts with Indigenous residents.

In August 1882, a small troop of soldiers rode out of the summer heat into the Stehekin River valley. Lieutenant Pierce and his detachment were under orders from the US Army to “obtain such knowledge of the country and its occupants as may be valuable at present or in the future to the military service” in the Skagit Valley. They followed a footpath through sweetly fragrant pines and Douglas fir. As mountains closed in, they clambered across broken timber and muddied snow where avalanches had run months earlier. Finally they stood with their horses amid the quivering lupine and red paintbrush of Cascade Pass, looking down into the chasm of the upper Cascade River. Ribbons of mist curled past lingering snows. A high, serac-laden wall blocked the sun to the southwest. To the northwest, what would later be known as Forbidden Peak appeared as an ominous fortress of dark walls above a confusion of blue ice and red stone. Worn by millennia of use, another footpath fell toward the forest below.

In his report, Lieutenant Pierce concluded that these mountains would provide a sufficient barrier to prevent the Indigenous tribes of the east and west slopes from uniting. The following year, upon reading his report, General Sherman wrote that it was in the “national interest that the timber and minerals of that Region should be brought within the reach of the Emigrants who will throng to Oregon and Washington Territory as soon as the Northern Pacific Railroad is completed.”

New settlers were already thronging; one of Pierce’s own party noticed glittering flakes in a stream west of Cascade Pass. Within a few years, he’d staked his claim, naming it “Soldier Boy,” presumably after himself. (Forest Service surveyors would later apply the name to the stream that drains the eastern edge of the basin below Forbidden.)



In 1889 miners staked out another claim where the high alp slopes give way to red, oily rock and sprawling seracs, naming it “Boston.” In the trade language known as Chinook Jargon, later used by some white settlers to broadcast their identity as Pacific Northwesterners, Boston was a term for white Americans.

In autumn of last year, I sifted through the archives of the General Land Office, now held by the Bureau of Land Management, to find traces of early visits to the high country around Forbidden. Maps of initial mineral claims show long, slender parallelograms that follow ledges of promising metallic galena, overlapping one another in elaborate geometries that belie the convolutions of the land. Surveyors couldn’t place stakes or cairns at some corners, which lay on glacial ice. Miners

blasted several tunnels into bare stone in Boston Basin and hauled it by mule eastward across Cascade Pass, down to the Stehekin River, and thence by barge to Lake Chelan. Steamers brought it down the Columbia to Wenatchee. Then railcars on the Northern Pacific Railroad took it to Tacoma, where smelters reduced it to copper, iron, lead, gold and arsenic. Exploratory mining proved to be tedious and financially precarious work, in part because of the remote location. But the faint prospect of growing markets and easier transport kept the miners committed. Their roads and trails, meanwhile, invited visitors who would see more in these mountains than wood and metal.

Just over a decade after the Pierce expedition, the first major mountain club appeared in the Pacific Northwest, as well as the first proposal for a national park in the North Cascades. Early tourists rode on horseback up mining trails. In the decades to come, Forbidden and the wild peaks around it would be coveted and claimed alternately by miners and sawyers and by city-dwelling conservationists from the burgeoning Pacific Northwest climbing scene.

## Nesika Klatawa Sahale

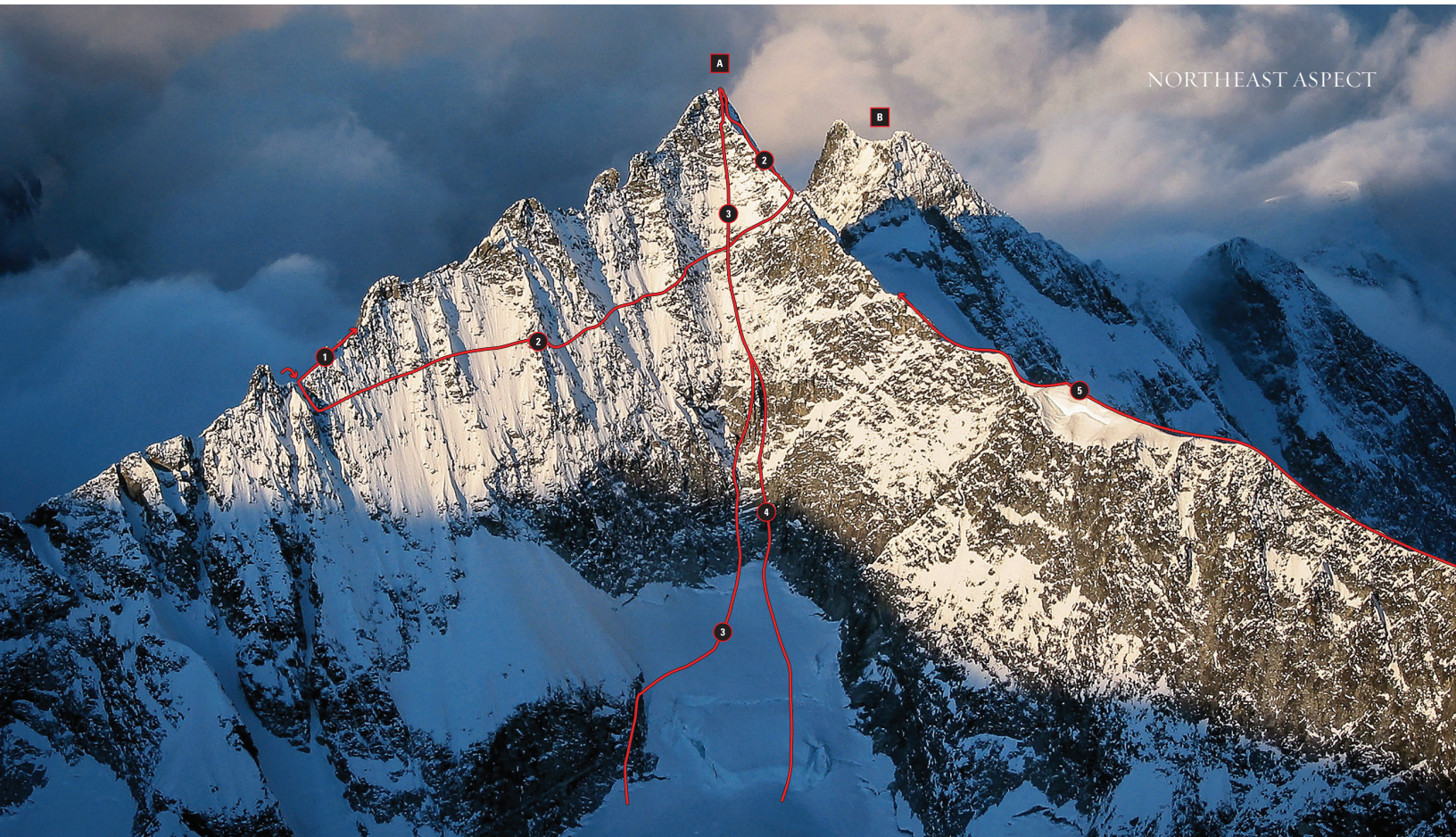
IN JULY 1894, A CROWD of 193 men and women gathered on the blustery summit of Mt. Hood. Long wool skirts and knickers mingled with leather boots and tweed sport coats scented with pipe tobacco. Tall alpenstocks bristled from tightly spaced rope teams. On a clear day, you might have been able to see barges coming and going near the area where Portland filled the peninsula between the Columbia and Willamette Rivers. Back then, the city population was nearing 100,000, rivaling Seattle in size.

On that July day, the summit swirled with cloud and drizzle. Beyond the wall of fog, the wild mountains extending north and south from Mt. Hood were still very much in the minds of these climbers. They’d answered a newspaper ad placed by postal worker

[This Page] *The Mountaineer*, 1907. Courtesy The Mountaineers | [Facing Page]

**A** Forbidden Peak **B** Mt. Torment **C** West Ridge notch **1** East Ridge Direct (III 5.8, 1,200', Beckey-Cooper-Gordon-Hieb, 1958) **2** East Ridge (III 5.0, 1,600', Bell-King, 1949) **3** Northeast Face 1960 (III, 1,200', Cooper-Ferguson) **4** Northeast Face 1967 (III 5.7, 1,200', Bedrick-Davis) **5** North Ridge (IV 5.6,

1,000', Beckey-Schwabland-Wilde, 1952) **6** South Buttress of the West Ridge (III 5.7, 1,400') **7** Cat Scratch descent **8** West Ridge (III 5.6, 1,200', Anderson-Beckey-Beckey-Crooks-Lind, 1948) **9** South Face, West Side (IV, 1,600', Fix-Schoening, 1950) **10** South Face 1968 (IV 5.8 A3, 900', Langdon-McCarthy) **11** South Face 1977 (IV 5.10, 900', McCarthy-McKibben). John Scurlock (both)



NORTHEAST ASPECT



SOUTH ASPECT

William Steel inviting like-minded men and women to join him in founding an organization devoted to exploring and protecting the mountain landscapes of the Pacific Northwest. The club would later lend their name to a mountain that had disappeared: Mt. Mazama, which had exploded around 8,000 years ago. Over time, the giant hole that remained filled with rain and snowmelt and became known as Crater Lake. Members of the Portland-based Mazamas mountain club would also devise a motto in Chinook Jargon: *Nesika Klatawa Sahale* (We Climb High). Membership in the group required climbing a glaciated peak, explicitly by human power.

The concept of a club built around conservation, recreation and access wasn't new or unique, but it was wildly successful. The Sierra Club had formed in 1892 in part to defeat an initiative to reduce the size of Yosemite National Park. The Mazamas now coalesced around Steel's ambition to establish a national park at Crater Lake. Implicit in their mountaineering and their activism were two assertions: that climbing a mountain with your legs and lungs was morally superior to riding to the top in a train or car, and that a maximum number of people should have the opportunity to do so. They resolved the tension between these ideas by supporting solutions that appeared to offer compromise, especially when it meant weekend climbers might have new opportunities in the Pacific Northwest. Thus, for example, they'd oppose a tramway, but they'd build a trail from a roadhead to a tree-line lodge. A quasi-military hierarchy pervaded their summer-time expeditions, including "scouts" and buglers. Chapter members tracked proposals within the Forest Service and Department of the Interior, and they sent delegates to local and national meetings with land managers.

In July 1899, the Mazamas made their first club outing to the Cascade Pass area. The journey from Portland to their base camp in Horseshoe Basin took six days of travel via train, steamship and foot. Early one morning, twenty-eight climbers left camp for a peak that rose to 8,681 feet due north of the pass. The diminutive mountain, which they believed to be unclimbed, sat at the southern end of the long ridge extending from the Eldorado plateau through Boston Peak and the yet-unnamed Forbidden Peak. Ahead, one of the trip leaders, E.W. Young, scouted for a path up a "steep bench of rocks," as club member Paul Hedrick reported in *Harper's Weekly*. "His feet slipped, and he shot downward across the snow field at terrific speed." Young slid 250 feet before a tangle of krummholz caught him, just before he would have dashed himself across the boulders below.

After witnessing Young's dramatic slide, eleven climbers decided to stay behind while the rest continued on, over an immense snowfield and a narrow spine of rock, to the summit. At the top, the group encountered an unparalleled view into the vastness of the North Cascades. An unsigned comment in the 1903 issue of the Mazamas' journal made a note of "Ridge after ridge of glacier ridden mountain crests stretching out into the white silence." Club secretary Ella McBride smashed a bottle of wine over the summit rocks as she announced the peak's new name: "Sahale." Like other mountain club members of that era, McBride sometimes looked to Chinook Jargon and local tribal languages for names that would distinguish the Cascades from mountains elsewhere in the country. In the years to come, Sahale became a classic initiatory alpine climb in the area, repeated frequently as the club members returned to explore and dream of a

park befitting the landscape.

But the Mazamas' climb of Sahale wasn't a first ascent. Government surveyors had often climbed high but accessible peaks to refine maps of the area—to serve the miners who were busy exploring and cataloging the range. The surveyor who preceded the Mazamas on Sahale didn't name the peak, but he wrapped the summit block in white cloth to form a target that could be sighted from a distance with a theodolite. In their own language of chiseled crosses and cairns, miners encircled Forbidden with boundary lines intended to secure imagined wealth; their gaze focused on ledges and veins of promising ore. Decades later, climbers would still find traces of their presence in the North Cascades. In *High Worlds of the Mountain Climber*, Pacific Northwest conservationist Harvey Manning noted, "It gravels a man, as he hammers a piton into a crack during a daring lead, to suddenly spy a vein of quartz chipped by some prospector of sixty years ago."

Even so, the miners left no record of a name for the peak. The neighboring mountain, slightly higher than Forbidden and more visible from the adjacent cirques, formed a better landmark for their compass bearings. They'd named that landmark "Boston Peak." Although Forbidden was relatively easy to reach by foot, getting a view of its dramatic northern flanks was not so easy. And so it stood, unclimbed, unmarked and unnamed on any map for a while longer as both recreational and industrial exploration accelerated around it.

## Forgotten Mountain

IN 1906, A GROUP OF SEATTLE CLIMBERS got together to form their own club in the tradition of the Mazamas and the Sierra Club. Unlike the first Alpine Club founded in London, which admitted only men, more than half of the original charter members of the Washington group were women. In a foreword to the first volume of *The Mountaineers'* annual journal, *The Mountaineer*, club president Henry Landes remarked that the group "is an association of kindred spirits who love the out-of-doors and to whom the wildwood, the flowery mead and the mountain fastness afford a rest, a solace, and an inspiration." The aim of the organization, Landes continued, was "to render a public service in the battle to preserve our natural scenery from wanton destruction, and yet make our spots of supremest beauty accessible to the largest number of mountain lovers."

By the 1930s, The Mountaineers were holding annual multi-week expeditions to mountains surrounding Seattle. In August 1933, a party of four club members (Donald Blair, Norval Grigg, Arthur Winder and Arthur Wilson) made the first recorded ascent of 8,868-foot Eldorado Peak, a fin of snow-covered gneiss rising out of the broad glacial plateau immediately northwest of Forbidden. In Blair's report of the climb, published in *The Mountaineer* later that year, he described seeing "a high unnamed peak, heavily glaciated, directly to the east" that appeared to reach roughly the same elevation from which they stood on the summit. "There is still a great deal of exploration to be done in this region," Blair concluded, "and it is the belief of the writer that future climbing parties entering this district will be well repaid for their efforts."

The following summer, Blair returned with Grigg and Winder to the Cascade Pass area, this time approaching from the Stehekin Valley. From the summit of Mt. Logan, Blair had a new view of Eldorado

and its southern neighbors. He recognized the peak he'd seen from the northwest last year and he snapped a photo. In their December 1934 account for the club annual, Grigg and Winder remarked on the “knife-like ridge” that ran northward from Boston Peak to an “inspiring... crest.” They called it “Forgotten Mountain.” To accompany their trip report, the climbers included a sketch of major summits, trails and waterways in the Lake Chelan area. “Forgotten” peak didn't appear on their map. “Although two summer outings have passed through this region,” Grigg and Winder wrote, “little has been accomplished by the Mountaineers in its exploration.... There are hundreds of peaks still waiting that have never felt the mark of a nailed boot.... To the work of finishing that tremendous task we are now looking forward. Here are mountains for Mountaineers.”

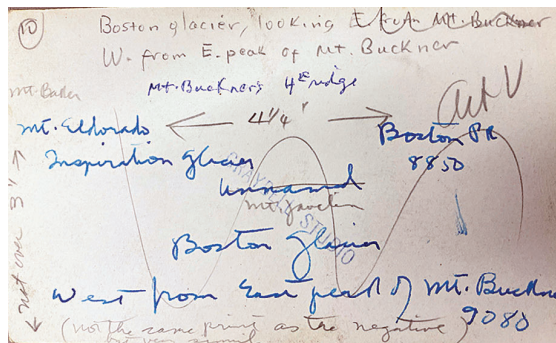
Blair's black-and-white photo of “Forgotten” appeared in *The Mountaineers'* annual the following year. The great bulk of Buckner Mountain looms in the foreground. Sahale Mountain and Boston Peak stretch across the ridge in the background under a haze of smoky-grey clouds. The summit of Forgotten is barely visible at right, like a secret that had finally been let out.

## Unnamed

IN JULY 1934, A FEW DAYS before the trio of club members made their ascent of Mt. Logan, another alpinist was roaming the Cascade Pass area, aiming to make the first known ascents of other nearby peaks. “From a climbing standpoint alone,” Grigg and Winder later wrote in their club journal, “real credit for the exploration of this region must go to Hermann Ulrichs of Seattle, a former Mountaineer.”

As fellow climber Brock Wagstaff recalled in an obituary in the 1989 *AAJ*, Ulrichs began to earn notoriety as a teenage climber as early as 1921, when he made the third ascent of North Palisade in his home state of California. “Having out-paced the rest of his group and without the benefit of the written guide, [Ulrichs] climbed a new route, living on chocolate until he joined his friends two days later,” Wagstaff wrote. “To many of the group, what he had done was nothing less than totally irresponsible, and the actual truth of his story was doubted until another team climbed the mountain and found his name in the register.”

In the years to come, Ulrichs would climb in the Swiss Alps, the Sierra Nevada and the Canadian Rockies before moving to Seattle in 1927. He worked as a chemical engineer and gave piano lessons in his spare time. That same year, Ulrichs joined *The Mountaineers*, but he left the club soon after (he felt it was “a clique,” as he told Karyl



[This Page] Hermann Ulrichs' photo of Forbidden Peak from the summit of Buckner Mountain. The back of the print bears the word *Unnamed* in a cursive scrawl. “I climbed right and left because I loved to climb and I wanted something to do,” he told Karyl Winn in a 1973 interview for the North Cascades History Project. Courtesy University of Washington Special Collections

Winn in a 1973 interview for the University of Washington's North Cascades History Project). Ulrichs climbed alone frequently, or sometimes with one of his piano students. “Despite the condemnation that he was occasionally subjected to,” Wagstaff recounted, “the freedom that Hermann found in this kind of solo adventure can be traced through his climbing career.” Ulrichs never carried a tent, and he used a rope reluctantly.

Initially, Ulrichs was unimpressed with the Cascades, as he told

Winn: “My first impression...was that they were a secondary, secondary range—a nice range, a pretty range, but not very important.” But when he ventured into the northern part, he recounted, “I began to have some real opinions.” In the summer of 1934, Ulrichs and Dan O'Brien made the second ascent of Buckner Mountain (just a day before Grigg and Winder made the third). At the summit, he snapped a picture of Forbidden Peak. In his *Cascade Alpine Guide*, Fred Beckey reported that Ulrichs had considered attempting the mountain—still officially unnamed at the time—via a traverse of the Boston Glacier. It is easy to imagine that photo feeling like a precious secret: an elegant black pyramid rises from a roiling expanse of crisply fractured glacier. The back of Ulrichs' 3 x 4 print bears the word *Unnamed* in a cursive scrawl. According to the *Cascade Alpine Guide*, Ulrichs “called the peak ‘Isosoles’ [sic],” perhaps because of its perfect symmetry when viewed from Buckner Mountain.

In the 1936 *AAJ*, Ulrichs published an overview of the North Cascades, along with a photograph (uncaptioned) of Forbidden, extolling the beauty and possibilities of the peaks. “The most distinctively differentiating trait of the Cascades from other mountain ranges,” Ulrichs recounted, “is this stately and nobly proportioned procession of snowy summits, serene and contemplative, which give a peculiarly personal and poetic charm to the landscape. Wherever the climber goes, he is sure to see in some direction one, if not several, of these lonely sentinels, often floating like a vision or a mirage above the lower mists.” By painting a picture of dramatic vertical relief, Ulrichs created a description that was inviting to a certain kind of climber. He ended his account of the peaks of the Lake Chelan area with a terse summary: “There is a store of very individual beauty and charms to these mountains, but anyone expecting to enjoy the best part of them will have to be prepared to work for the reward. They are not for tourists.”



## The Least Exploited

UP TO THIS POINT in the North Cascades, mountaineers remained focused on first ascents of high, prominent peaks, and especially those already named on maps. Very few of these climbs required protracted exposure on demanding terrain. Climbers still employed the rope simply and sparingly, with no Dülfersitz or other technique for braking one's descent. In an interview for Malcolm Bates's *Cascade Voices*, Norval Grigg recalled inventing methods with his climbing partners using a half-inch manila rope acquired from Pacific Marine Supply. They had neither pitons nor crampons, and Depression-era austerity required that the camp menu be planned down to the penny.

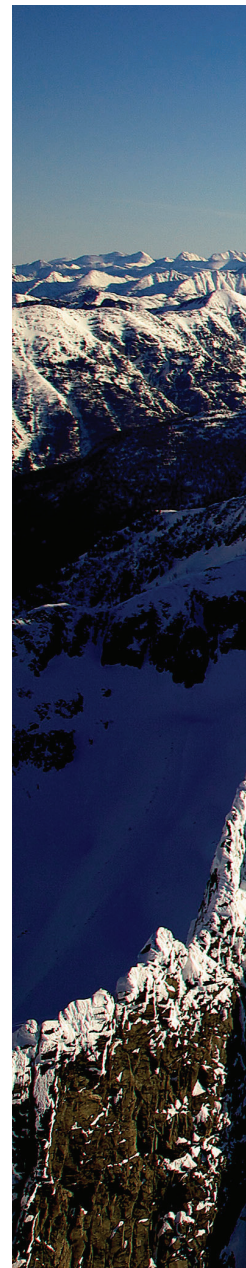
Arriving in Seattle from Bavaria as a teenager in 1925, Wolf Bauer later joined The Mountaineers, where his knowledge and skill with skiing were needed. But as he grew more acquainted with mountaineering, Bauer concluded that the club's technical climbing was "amateurish," as he told University of Washington student Harry Majors in a 1974 interview for the North Cascades History Project. In 1934, after the worst years of the Depression era had started to subside, Bauer launched a campaign to modernize the club's formal training. With German-language mountaineering manuals sent to him by friends, he taught himself "in dark secrecy," he said, and presented lessons to his students in a newly formalized climbing course, including the first rappels ever made in the region. He also corresponded with Sierra Club members who were importing European pitons and were willing to share the craft of their use. (While the hammering of pitons, which could damage the rock, had been condemned in Britain at the time, the clean-climbing movement wouldn't emerge in the US for a few more decades and hasn't yet completely taken hold in the North Cascades. According to the North Cascades National Park's "2021 Superintendent's Compendium," placing pitons within the Stephen Mather Wilderness area of the park is not allowed today because of the potential for this gear to alter "the natural feature" of the rock.)

In 1936 Bauer and his students decided Mt. Goode would make a suitable final exam. Prominent and imposing when viewed from trails in the Stehekin mining country, Mt. Goode was the second-highest unclimbed peak in the range. Bauer's party of five devised their plan from earlier attempts by mountaineers such as Hermann Ulrichs (who predicted in his 1936 *AAJ* article that pitons might be essential to a successful climb), and by Grigg, Winder and Blair, who furnished detailed photos. In Stehekin, Bauer and his students narrowly beat another mountaineering party, also keen on Mt. Goode, on the start of the trip to the trailhead. Because of the competition from other local climbers, Bauer's group had wanted to make their attempt as early in the summer as possible, and the final chimney still shone with spring verglas. He and his students proved Ulrichs right, reaching the summit with the help of the first pitons driven in during a first ascent in the North Cascades. They incorporated other novel techniques as well, such as overcoming a blank stretch using a pendulum. Near the summit, they'd whipped a loop of rope over a flake and ascended using friction hitches.

Bauer's various students went on to make other first ascents in the Cascades. Among them was Lloyd Anderson, who took part in the first ascent of Mt. Triumph, a daunting peak at the edge of the Picket



[This Page] Helmy Beckey (foreground) and Jim Crooks on the West Ridge of Forbidden in 1940. In Fred Beckey's handwritten notes, excerpted in Megan Bond's forthcoming biography, he described his first glimpse of the iconic West Ridge: "The clouds lifted momentarily and the sight we saw awed us. On the opposite side the slope everywhere dropped into a fearfully steep abyss to the valley...far below. The only route to the summit was the extremely narrow, jagged, and snow-covered west ridge." Lloyd Anderson collection, The Mountaineers Archives | [Facing Page] Torment-Forbidden ridge. John Scurlock



Range, in 1938. The same year, he and his wife Mary launched the Recreational Equipment Cooperative (later REI) to procure decent ice axes for their climbing friends. When he set out to decipher a route to the summit of Mt. Triumph's remote twin, Mt. Despair, Anderson took along Seattle-area climber Clint Kelley—and a sixteen-year-old Fred Beckey. Anderson and Beckey got along, and together they set their sights on another mountain that "bore no name, and upon whose precipitous slopes of snow, ice and rock no one had as yet set foot," as Anderson wrote in the 1940 Mountaineers' annual. "This was the description we heard of this peak," Anderson continued, "and the tale fired our imagination." It would be the first recorded attempt on Forbidden.

## The West Ridge

BY 1940, YOU COULD DRIVE as far as Sibley Creek on the Cascade



River—as far as a state project to explore a highway route over Cascade Pass ever got. From there, on a clear day in April, Anderson, Beckey and Dwight Watson tramped for fifteen miles up the miner’s trail. Watson was a veteran wanderer of the Cascades, known for taking in long swaths of wild, little-visited country in his solitary “rambles.” He filled a massive scrapbook with inspirational photos, clippings, devotional poems and mountain recollections. Something of an early backcountry ski bum, Watson opened minds to the ski potential in the North Cascades. (Ski-mountaineering historian Lowell Skoog later applied the name “Watson’s Traverse” to a route that Watson and two others had first skied in 1939 on Kulshan [Mt. Baker] in his honor.)

Just before they broke out above tree line on the way to “Forgotten” peak, the climbers passed a small mining cabin. The next day, they climbed the couloir leading from the Unnamed Glacier to the West Ridge. A lichen-black crest rose into the mist, still swollen with

winter snow. “It gave us a mystic feeling to be above the mists, in a world where black and white were the only colors,” Beckey recalled in *Challenge of the North Cascades*. They retreated through the teeming clouds with knowledge of the mountain’s architecture that not even new topographic maps could have provided.

In May 1940, Anderson went with Beckey and Watson to Eldorado, the glaciated massif immediately across from “Forgotten,” to view the mountain from a new angle. From high on the peak, the men confirmed their choice of a southern approach to “Forgotten”: the north side of the mountain presented long spurs of rock cradling bays of broken glacial ice. “Forgotten” rose thousands of feet out of Moraine Lake, encased in snow and ice. Nothing quite so elegant had yet been climbed in the North Cascades.

In late May, Anderson and Beckey returned to the West Ridge with Fred’s younger brother, Helmy, as well as Mountaineers Jim Crooks and Dave Lind, both energetic explorers of the range.

Marmots whistled warnings to each other amid the melting snows as the climbers walked among the fields of glacier lilies on the sunny side of each moraine. The party camped where the trail faded near the red tailings of an old Boston Mine borehole.

Their first attempt ended at a steep tower high on the ridge as a summer storm swirled snow and sleet around them. “Our parkas were stiff and frozen from wet snow, our eyebrows half-frozen with sleet, and our fingers dangerously numb,” Beckey wrote. They retreated to their camp, where tents fluttered amid dense clouds and diffuse sunlight. Although it was storming again the next day, they made rapid progress to their highpoint. “The wind howled, dislodging stones and snow lumps,” Beckey recounted. “The cold was hardly bitter, but it was penetrating. The drifting snow clogged our glasses and filled many rock holds.... With the sun blotted out we seemed to lose our sense of time. Every familiar landmark disappeared, and only now and then did the mist break to disclose some fantastic form on the ridge above.” Lind set aside his tricouni-nailed boots and donned slippers to overcome the tower. A fixed rope sped things along for the rest of the large party. They reached the summit amid blinding cloudshine and found no records of a previous ascent. Belaying carefully back down the narrow ridge, they removed the piton they’d driven at the base of the crux tower. Subsequent parties would replace it. Today, the fixed piton forms both a dubious point of protection and a discrete foothold on a smooth dihedral for those in need.

The team agreed that the name “Forbidden Peak” fit their experience of the mountain, Beckey later explained, citing the veil of cloud that lingered on its flanks throughout their trip. They left the name of “Forgotten,” along with any other previous ones, to history.

## Maintain the Morale

THE MENTORSHIP OF ANDERSON and other instructors within The Mountaineers’ newly formalized climbing course set the Beckeys firmly on their way to become some of the most renowned Cascade climbers of their generation. But any plans for far-off expeditions were soon interrupted by the war that had broken out across the globe. In a November 1941 letter to The Mountaineers, American Alpine Club president J. Monroe Thorington’s words were shadowed with thoughts of the fighting far from home. The AAC was celebrating its fortieth anniversary that year. But, as Thorington cautioned, “For a club to continue, its members must be shown that mountaineering is not just a game for acrobats, but, in its larger sense, is part of a pattern which can enrich our lives. We believe that climbers can also be artists, poets and readers. Our present task is to hold that spirit into better times.”

Wartime rationing inspired a campaign to discourage unnecessary travel in order to conserve tires and gas. Mountaineering clubs focused on shorter excursions close to home. In 1942 the US ended production of civilian automobiles. That year, Mountaineers member May Rosenberg reported in the annual that local hikes were more essential than ever: “Those who are not actually in the armed services are spending long hours in war work in one way or another.... The Trail Trips offer...much needed relaxation and maintain the morale necessary until we are all again hitting the trail together.”

Local Forest Service cabins were coopted to serve as lookouts

for enemy planes. Dwight Watson helped map out ski routes in the local mountains in the event that Axis powers took control of high-way passes. Along with dozens of other Pacific Northwest climbers, Fred Beckey joined the war efforts. He became an instructor with the Tenth Mountain Division, where climbers not only refined new techniques and equipment, but also the public perception of skiing. In an article on his website, Lou Dawson commented that the celebrity of the war unit “contributed more to the legitimacy of ski mountaineering in the United States than any other event.”

Following the war, Washington residents bustled with new energy for skiing, mountain rescue, and increasingly technical climbing. The outdoor industry burgeoned alongside the renewed growth of car ownership, as more and more people drove for weekend getaways in the hills and woods. In 1939 the Andersons had moved their fledgling cooperative to a gas station, and then eventually to its own warehouse space. By the 1950s, Lloyd Anderson would appear in the Mountaineers annual promoting car camping equipment alongside a long, dark Buick.

## Pick the Easy One

WHEN A MOUNTAINEERS GROUP FINALLY repeated the West Ridge in 1946, they came from a camp at Doubtful Lake. Since the 1899 Mazamas outing, climbers had used this eastern approach to Cascade Pass, sometimes traveling by ship for over fifty miles up Lake Chelan and sending their gear ahead of them on pack trains. It was a leisurely method, well suited to the large groups and long intervals of the club’s early days. In the summer of 1947, club members returned, this time driving their cars to the end of the Cascade River Road to meet a horse packer. They failed to attain the summit, but the trip signaled a new era: from then on, climbers would reach the mountain almost exclusively from the Skagit Valley on the west—and they would take their own cars.

The availability of unclimbed terrain attracted climbers from the East Coast as well. In August 1949, George Bell and Harry King of the Harvard Mountaineering Club kicked steps up a hidden couloir angling out of Boston Basin to gain Forbidden’s East Ridge. The dull thrum of running water emanated from beneath the snow. Gendarmes loomed above. On the north side, perched high above the ice of the Forbidden Glacier and raging falls of Thunder Creek, they found a surprisingly inviting path across yellow and grey stone emblazoned with chartreuse map lichen. But the route turned out to be relentlessly loose, dirty and exposed. Its ledges perched above a concave face that steepened for 800 feet to a haggard bergschrund. Though it could be described as a scramble, it would never become popular.

By the beginning of 1950, climbers had made a total of only seven ascents of Forbidden—six of them by the West Ridge. As a self-taught Depression-era climber, Norval Grigg had summed up an approach to mountaineering that valued getting to the summit above athletic challenge. “I always figured that if there was a route up a mountain, pick the easy one. Why turn around the backside and try to find a hard one?” he said in an interview for Malcolm Bates’s *Cascade Voices*. But a new generation of climbers had arrived, and a growing number of them cast their eyes on the steeper unclimbed walls of Forbidden.



## Rock Climbing Fever

BECKEY AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES combined all they'd learned from the prewar Mountaineers climbing course and the Tenth Mountain Division to develop a more systematic approach to training. Seattle climbers established numerous routes near Leavenworth, where a year-round highway gave them access to the rain shadow of the east slope and a chance at dry weather. At crags with short approaches, they worked on developing both free and aid techniques for sustained, steep rock. Most of the remaining unclimbed summits in the Cascades were airy rock spires, and these techniques allowed climbers to reach them. But strong local mountaineers were already shifting their focus away from unattained summits to unclimbed faces that would test their growing technical abilities.

By 1950 the Cascade River Road had been extended for the Johannesburg mine operation. "The mountain summits in the Cascade Pass area are now accessible for weekend climbing," Victor Josendal declared in *The Mountaineers'* annual that year. "A 138 mile automobile trip from Seattle followed by a 3 mile hike on recently cleared trail brings the climber to a good high camp at Cascade Pass." Within this area, Josendal noted, Forbidden Peak composed one of only "two outstanding climbs on good rock."

That same year, over the Fourth of July weekend, Dick Widrig, Fred Beckey, Pete Schoening and Bill Fix hiked up the Boston mine trail, their packs heavy with pitons, carabiners, hammers and enough rope to fix multiple pitches. They were drawn by the daunting south face of Forbidden, an 800-foot wall that rose from a still-living tumult of ice, barely three miles from the trailhead. In the center of the seemingly overhanging face, they searched for weaknesses, but

found intimidating roofs and compact rock, devoid of good cracks for pitons. Just right of the West Ridge couloir, however, they spied a potential line of fissures that led to a deep, shadowy gash hundreds of feet above. It seemed like the most promising path, Widrig noted in *The Mountaineer*, "but even portions of this route looked terrifying from below."

Widrig and Schoening started up the wall first, creeping up along the side of a chimney. "Progress was slow and often tedious," Schoening recounted in the *AAJ*. Much of the wall was overhanging, and only a few ledges offered any rest. At many of their belay stations, they dangled in their harnesses from pitons they'd driven into the wall. They left fixed lines to their high point, just over halfway up the face. That evening, Beckey and Widrig headed back to Seattle. The next day, Schoening and Fix sped up the fixed ropes and cast off into the dark chimney they'd seen from below. Sixty feet from the summit ridge, Schoening wrote, "our chimney petered out in a jumble of overhanging cracks." The next forty feet took Schoening a few hours and five points of direct aid to complete. That afternoon, they stood atop the summit, and its few square meters of flat ground were a welcome relief. Overall, they used thirty-four pitons, establishing a climb that presaged a decade of intense rock development in the range. The next day, Beckey and two Seattleites motored back to the Cascade Pass area, where they met up with Schoening to make the second ascent of Forbidden's East Ridge.

The road extension had transformed the Cascade Pass area into a weekend climbing destination at the same time that climbers were going farther, faster: Forbidden was becoming a training ground. When Beckey, Jack Schwabland and Don Wilde undertook the North Ridge in June 1952, the route was far from stretching their

[This Page, Left] A photo from the North Ridge of Forbidden Peak, likely taken during Jack Schwabland, Don Wilde and Fred Beckey's first ascent of the route in June 1952.

[This Page, Right] Forbidden Peak's North Ridge. In the 1952 *Mountaineers'* annual,

Schwabland commented, "This is probably one of the finest alpine routes in the Northwest... Forbidden is well worth climbing by any of its routes, for it is one of the few big peaks in this part of the country that does not have an easy way up." Fred Beckey (both)

# 1955

## Footnotes from a Distance

CARLA FIREY

I GREW UP IMMERSED in stories and images of climbing in the Pacific Northwest. Maps, slides, journals and paintings of snow-plastered peaks and high meadow tarns from my parents' trips to the beloved Cascade Pass area filled my childhood home.

My father, Joe Firey, started climbing in the Olympic Mountains of Washington as a high school student in the 1930s. Back then, he and a few classmates—his only climbing partners at the time—traveled from Seattle by ferry and train to get to the peaks. On the glaciers of Mt. Olympus, he used hand-forged crampons he made himself.

My parents met on a ski tour in the Sierra when they were both in college. Joan had joined the Sierra Club Rock Climbing Section while studying at the University of California, Berkeley. They married in 1950 and lived in the Bay Area. In September 1952, when I was three months old, my mother and I both visited the North Cascades for the first time. To prepare for hikes around Cascade Pass, my parents devised an infant carrier by cutting two small holes in the bottom of a rucksack for my legs and adding a blanket to support my head and torso.

Within two years, my parents relocated from the Bay Area to Seattle. In 1955, they climbed Forbidden Peak together for the first time. I was three years old, and this time my one-year-old sister and I stayed home in the care of a babysitter for the weekend. That year, they climbed the East Ridge, known back then simply as "Route 2" in the 1953 supplement to Fred Beckey's 1949 *Climber's Guide to the Cascade and Olympic Mountains of Washington*. Today the book's loose, wrinkly green cloth cover barely holds its warped pages together on my shelf.

My parents returned to Forbidden Peak a few times over the years. I remember them describing the North Ridge as "long" and "rotten," but the West Ridge, they said, was a "classic alpine route." Though they didn't do any first ascents on the peak itself, they climbed a number of new routes in the area, often with other couples and friends. As I write this today, I'm looking out over



a miniature mountain range of papers that spans two and a half tables in my home—notes, journals and lists that offer fragments of memories of the decades my parents spent in the mountains.

Their slides from Forbidden Peak depict a bright blue morning above the snow slopes and the dry, blocky slabs and cliffs. My father is wearing custom logging boots that he had made to order in downtown Seattle and augmented with tricouni nails. He and my mother carry the small, straight-head ice axes with long shafts made of ash wood that were common in the 1930s. One of my favorite slides depicts Joan in a mackinaw jacket and Army surplus wool pants, stepping one foot in front of the other gracefully like a dancer down a snow arête.

Among the pages are descriptions of alpine

light that my mother kept for her studio paintings, including the names of colors such as Hansa Yellow Light and Ultramarine Blue. Other notes such as "memory of perfection" and "joy of morning sun" scatter across trip reports. After many climbing and skiing excursions in the Cascade Pass area, Joan felt inspired in 1962 to paint the view of Forbidden I grew up with: this picture hung in the living room, above the piano my mother played as we sang folk songs. The ice of the northwest face appears in varying shades of blue, ranging from almost-black to near-white, evoking snow and rock and shadows in photo-realistic oil paint.

The first "real climb" I did was with my mother in 1964. I'd just turned twelve, and she took me to Pinnacle Peak in the Tatoosh Range, where

we scrambled across big, blocky steps along the ridge. My parents made it clear that I'd need to take a mountaineering course before joining any ascents of more serious terrain. In 1968 I enrolled in The Mountaineers' Basic Climbing Class and signed up for a climb of Mixup Peak near Cascade Pass. I spent the first night cold and soaking wet in my surplus canvas pup tent. I remember the sense of joy while scrambling on beautiful, dry rock that was comfortably third and fourth class, and the feeling of perfect rage when fellow students knocked rocks down on those traversing below.

In 1969 my parents were planning a new, ambitious traverse in a remote part of the North Cascades, encompassing thirty miles of hiking and climbing and over 14,000 feet of elevation gain (not to mention several potential first ascents). They already had a strong group of four, but they decided to bring me along. (My school counselor had alerted them that I'd stopped doing homework for a few of my classes, and they hoped a trip could help me overcome my general bad attitude.) The first day started with hornets and continued with steep alder jungle between cliffs. On the second day of the traverse, my mother and I summited The Needle—an airy spire of Skagit gneiss—while the rest of the group climbed as many of the peaks around the Neve Glacier as the day allowed. Around noon on the third day, we were so soaked and cold that we had to build a fire in order to stop to eat. On the fourth day, we traveled in truly dreadful terrain: what my mother later described in her notes as “grunge” climbing over “sandy ball bearings on friction; unglued holds...unstable morainal boulders.” When we reached the glacial col between the Klawatti and the massive Inspiration Glacier, the view centered on the northwest face of Forbidden. I wondered if I would ever climb something as dramatic looking as that ridge.

Joan described me in a letter that year as “frail, little Carla.” When I first read some of her letters a few months ago, I was surprised to be described as “little”—I'd always thought of myself as sturdy. But in a letter the following year, after I joined her and her friends on another lengthy traverse, she wrote: “Carla was replacing a very strong fellow we wish we had and she was the slowest...but very capable and very

game and a better (technical) climber than I.”

In the summer of 1971, I set out with my boyfriend at the time to climb the West Ridge of Forbidden Peak. We'd planned to link up with friends in Boston Basin. That was where I first met another young Seattle-area climber, Jim M. McCarthy. We immediately engaged in a hostile exchange: a genuinely vituperative argument about the competence of two mutual friends delayed during their climb of Forbidden. You'd never have thought we'd be married some years later.

During the 1970s and into the '80s, I climbed in various ranges in the Pacific Northwest, Canada and Alaska. No longer a frail weakling, I joined my mother and Irene Meulemans on a traverse in the North Cascades. Irene and her husband John were among some of my parents' most frequent climbing partners. Jim also came along. After the trip, my mother wrote a letter to the head ranger of North Cascades National Park: “Between us two old timers, Irene Meulemans and I, we've climbed every major peak visible in all points of the compass. It's great to see all ones' old friends.” Among those “old friends” across the Skagit were peaks she'd climbed or done first ascents on, including Klawatti Peak, Black Peak, Mt. Arriva, Meulefire Peak and several of the Austera Towers.

In 1980 Joan died at age fifty-one of malignant myeloid leukemia. After she passed away, I inherited her paintbrushes, artist pencils and paint tubes. I began using them to fill in the view that was missing for me: it seemed unimaginable that the paintings Joan had planned to do would be left undone, now that she was gone. Nine years later, I completed my bachelor's in fine arts (doing very different work from my mother's—I preferred the motion and rawness of expressionism over the drama and elegance of photorealism—but still mostly landscapes).

Jim and I continued to climb with my father and his friends on occasion. In 1991 I was eager to repeat the traverse I'd done with my parents in 1969. Dave Knudson (a frequent partner on Firey family trips) and I talked the Meulemans into joining us. I took my mother's compass with me, along with the tiny, light blue stuff bag that she'd sewn for it. Irene and I often paused amid high meadows banked with flowers and remembered

[Facing Page] **John Meulemans and Joe Firey near Trapper Mountain, southeast of Cascade Pass. John and Irene Meulemans and Joe and Joan Firey climbed together often, and they were known for exploring the North Cascades in the 1960s and '70s.** Joan Firey

how entranced Joan had been by them. One evening, I woke in the middle of the night to curtains of aurora borealis in the north sky. The next morning, I tried to record the shades and columns of light, the small sketch an echo of my mother's many painted skies—the real emotive backdrop of the mountain landscape.

We ended our traverse at the summit of Eldorado Peak, where I saw, once more, the view of Forbidden that matched my mother's painting. From the summit, a mesmerizing field of suncups foregrounded rows of blue ridges that spread out in all directions. During this trip, I sketched more than a dozen small drawings on soft blue and grey paper, every line and marking of pitch-black graphite or white pencil attempting to capture the spaces around me: the air in the roaring cirques of the McAllister Glacier, the intense sky near at hand, the depth between long ridges of ice. Among the marginalia, I wrote: “How so many deep shadows pointing north could be seen[!]...like the sensation I have when I pick up my pack and leave. I wonder what I've forgotten, and realize I've picked up all my stuff; it's the place that I've attached to. But I can't pack it.”

All these trips to the North Cascades, many with one or both parents, now encompass footnotes of splendor and of miserable difficulties; all shared by companions, some still here and some not. There are the fond memories of running freely along ridgetops between great boulders split open, and there's the reality of traipsing with a heavy pack full of carefully weighed necessities stored in plastic bags. When I peer into the slide film that was exposed in the light of those very days and places decades ago, I see the framed moment. The footnote I hold now is very real, yet it is but an infinitesimally small slice of time. The following year while climbing in the Northern Pickets, I wrote: “This is where they [my parents] came when we were left behind. I imagine them in their wool and cotton clothes camping here. They loved these mountains and so do I, but in a different way. For me they are not as much a liberation as a return.”

capacities. Beckey and Schwabland had made their way through the chaotic icefalls of the Price Glacier on Mt. Shuksan in 1945, and Beckey had climbed on massive glaciers in Alaska and the Coast Range—the prospect of crossing the Boston Glacier gave them little pause. Leaving their overnight gear in the basin, the three made their way to Sharkfin Col, rappelled into the damp shade and headed north, “zig-zagging through a confusion of crevasses” to reach the North Ridge, as Schwabland recounted in *The Mountaineer*. For the next seven hours, they climbed on a narrow fin between two great, ice-filled cirques. An unsigned note in the 1953 *AAJ* suggested that the ridge “is perhaps one of the most alpine routes in the United States: a half-mile narrow and very jagged rock crest sweeps up to the pointed summit, and on both sides is relentless exposure.” As the rock steepened near the summit, they removed their boots and slipped into tennis shoes.

Descending via the West Ridge, they made the first traverse of the peak. Schwabland’s account ended with a neat tally of some remaining unclimbed problems, and an invitation: “The Northeast Face, which would be a fine rock climb of up to, perhaps, 5th class, and the plunging, snow-plastered Northwest Face, which appears to be a real challenge. We would like to say that we think Forbidden is well worth climbing by any of its routes, for it is one of the few big peaks in this part of the country that does not have an easy way up.”

### “We Had a Rather Cool Bivouac”

IN THE BLUE DARKNESS of a summer morning, Ed Cooper and his sister followed a guide up crumbling pillars, across exposed ledges and through a narrow chute beside seracs. More than other popular routes on t̄əqwʉʔbəd, the Gibraltar Ledges seem to possess an aura of intrigue: the route invites you up. I climbed it in college, terrified and lonely on a February day. For Ed, the climb was an epiphany, as he later told me, an initiation into a calling. He soon transferred from Cornell to the University



[Photo] **A** Forbidden Peak **B** Boston Peak **C** West Ridge notch **D** Forbidden Glacier **E** Sahale Mountain **1** North Ridge (IV 5.6, 1,000', Beckey-Schwabland-Wilde, 1952) **1a** Northwest Face of the North Ridge (IV 5.6, 1,200', Teasdale, 1973) **2** Northwest Face (IV 5.8, 1,600', Beckey-Cooper, 1959) **3** Northwest Face of the West Ridge (III, Gordon-Harrah-Sturdevant, 1954) **4** West Ridge (III 5.6, 1,200', Anderson-Beckey-Beckey-Crooks-Lind, 1940) **5** East Forgotten Spur (III 5.8 A1, Skoog-Skoog, 1989) **6** West Forgotten Spur (III 5.7, 1,000', Skoog-Skoog, 1989). Jason Hummel







[This Page] **Walter Sellers at the bivouac site during his and Ed Cooper's first ascent of the Torment-Forbidden Traverse, July 1958. "We took day packs," Cooper told *Alpinist*. "We did not bring sleeping bags. We spent a fairly comfortable, if cold, night huddled together for warmth."** | [Facing Page] **Fred Beckey below the Northwest Face of Forbidden Peak. Cooper and Beckey made the first ascent in July 1959.** Ed Cooper (both)

of Washington to have more access to mountains—and to climbing partners.

On a street in Seattle one day in 1954, Cooper saw a man carrying an ice axe, and he ran across to chat him up. Soon, he and Walter Sellers were headed to Mt. St. Helens in the rumble seat of an ailing Model T. The glacier they climbed would remain a popular training route until it was obliterated in the 1980 eruption. After the climb, Ed stayed behind, avoiding the epic that Sellers had on the return trip. "The [Model T] died...halfway back to Seattle," Cooper told me. Cooper had arrived in the North Cascades just as the role of trains, boats and horse packers began to fade in local mountaineering. "There were times that I didn't have a car, but I didn't like hitchhiking. For the most part I talked people into going climbing with me," Cooper said.

In 1958 Cooper and Sellers went to Mt. Torment with no stove, but a handful of pitons and fancy new parkas. Ed also carried a Voigtlander frame camera. And, critically, he had a new car. "I had a Chevy Powerglide, which I hated, and I was threatening to drive it over a cliff when I was through with it," he said. Mining operations had extended the road to the Diamond Mine, perhaps 500 feet above today's trailhead. Sellers climbed in blue jeans and a long-sleeve collared shirt—tucked in. He wouldn't have stood out leaning against Cooper's Powerglide outside a Dick's burgers in Seattle—or working in the Johannesburg mine across the valley. His black engineer's boots crackled in the thick lichen, and his long ice axe rattled along, hanging from his packstrap. A red parka hung awkwardly from the schoolbag.

On their way to the long wall that connects Forbidden with Mt. Torment, the two crossed the Taboo Glacier and its jumble of eroding geometric snow blocks, cast off from perched slabs high above. A faint smear of dirt hinted at a couloir left of Mt. Torment's south face. Closer up, they noticed a deeply incised, eroded dike. They slithered

between the final snow finger and the rubble of the dark cleft. The only way out of a final notch required a long reach to a shelf of rock and a strenuous mantle, with no protection in sight. Their route then wrapped around the mountain, following an unlikely ledge system that overlooked the chasm of Moraine Lake. More dikes of black rock alternated with pale, almost cement-like rock. They emerged onto the summit of Mt. Torment—named by the team who first climbed it one hot summer day, with only a single orange to quench their collective thirst. With little thought to having forged a new route, Cooper and Sellers carried on down a steep bowl of loose gravel, moving carefully with no option for a belay. A long rappel led them onto the north side of the mountain, where a hanging glacier offered a change from the uncertainty of often-fractured stone.

Somewhere on the sinuous spine that leads east toward Forbidden, they stopped for the night. "We had a rather cool bivouac," Cooper recounted. "We had our parkas, which kept the upper part of our bodies warm, and the lower part just got cold. So we thawed out in the morning and carried on." As they approached the West Ridge notch, where Anderson, Beckey and Watson first stood eighteen years before, the ridge narrowed and the stone changed. The characteristic, angular blocks of solid Skagit orthogneiss allowed them to relax a little and take in the view.

As you imagine Forbidden in the 1950s, you must remember that there was no national park, and only rudimentary guidebooks. "We didn't see a single party up there—not on the trail, not on the road, not when we came down," Cooper said. I could hear how much he cherished that solitude. He described how a friend climbing nearby Cascade Peak once flinched mid-step at a percussive noise he took for rockfall. The sound was gunfire—a hunter mistook him for a mountain goat. On other days, Cooper recalled, you could hear the pinging and rumbling of miners.

## Difficult of Access

ON THE TRAVERSE FROM MT. TORMENT, Cooper had time to study the Northwest Face of Forbidden. Ed's photographic eye drew him to landscapes where perennial snow and ice could fill the frame. He was also competitive, and he and Beckey knew that others had attempted the route. In Tom Miller's *The North Cascades*, a 1954 photo appears to show a climber low on the face. Miller, whose wife Nancy was the first woman to climb Forbidden (by the West Ridge that same year), made it a third of the way up with Mike Hane before being stopped by steep rock and forced into an unplanned bivouac. Tom Miller described their night in *Cascade Voices*: "We anchored in on a sloping slab and went right to sleep. Of course we'd wake up whenever we'd slide down and the rope would go tight. By about 2 a.m. it got too cold to sleep so I amused myself by singing and banging the rock hammer on the rocks for accompaniment. I can't sing worth a damn.... Mike said it was his worst bivouac ever."

In July 1959 Beckey invited Ed Cooper for an attempt on the 1,600-foot Northwest Face of Forbidden, with the central pillar he first saw from Eldorado Peak's Inspiration Glacier in 1940. If at the time Fred Beckey had had his pink Thunderbird—Ford billed it as “America’s most individual car”—it might have raised some eyebrows in Marblemount when they arrived. The North Cascades Highway hadn’t yet been completed, and tourists were still an uncommon sight in the small town.

The climbers started late in the morning from the Diamond Mine. Their rubber soles bit into smooth red slabs as they climbed past the deep boreholes of the Boston claim, where glide avalanches mingled their fine-grained pale blue snow with the coarse turquoise hues of ancient serac ice. In his *AAJ* report, Beckey qualified the climb as “difficult of access,” but they knew the way and moved quickly. They encircled the mountain, crossing to the Boston Glacier and repeating the approach Beckey had followed with Schwabland and Wilde in 1952. From the toe of the North Ridge, they struck out into unknown terrain, heading down amid the criss-crossed crevasses of the Forbidden Glacier where its currents converge and fall toward Moraine Lake. In the failing light, they chopped steps up an icefall to gain the west side of the spur. After 300 feet of climbing, they “chose the mossiest of four reasonably suited bivouac spots.”

In the early morning, pale grey orthogneiss bit like blades as they hand-traversed a narrow arête. The wall reared up, and they swerved into a rotten gully veined with ice. Loose blocks flew down into obscurity, scattering sparks. Grateful to leave behind the red, crumbly rock of the gully, they continued on increasingly solid gneiss, cloud grey and compact. In places, perfect incut holds appeared in the skin of black lichen. In others, progress required a “combination of Bramani-friction [a reference to Vitale Bramani, the Italian climber who first designed Vibram rubber soles] and laybacks against exfoliation flakes,” Beckey recounted. On the final snow wall—no longer a year-round feature on the face—the climbers had to dig through wet snow to gain purchase in the underlying ice.

Speaking with Cooper, I could feel his pride in the Northwest Face. When I asked him why he kept going back to Forbidden, he told me, “It had all the elements of a peak you’d like to climb, you know, it was glaciated on all sides...and the name.” I didn’t have the heart to inform him that the Unnamed Glacier on the south side has all but disappeared. Climbers now have to go out of their way to set foot on it. Cascadian alpinist Tom Hargis told me he recalls seeing the Forbidden Glacier on the north side reach near to Moraine Lake in the early 1960s. The glacier has since retreated several hundred feet.

The ice patch on the Northwest Face is gone now. To come close to replicating the experience that Beckey and Cooper had over sixty



summers ago, future climbers will have to look for a different pattern in the seasons and the storms. A winter ascent of the route, when it happens, may provide a glimpse into that past.

### The Road Dead-Ends in Paradise

THE SOLITUDE THAT COOPER, BECKEY and other climbers enjoyed during the 1940s and 1950s on the North Fork of the Cascade River was also not guaranteed to last. The mining claims and resultant roads that rendered Forbidden accessible to them also meant that further roads, mills and trams were a distinct possibility.

In her book *Crown Jewel Wilderness: Creating North Cascades National Park*, Lauren Danner chronicled a decades-long effort by citizen activists not just for the creation of a national park, but for a new kind of wilderness park that would prohibit the construction of any roads or the growth of any extractive industries. A proposal for a North Cascades National Park first appeared in a Chelan newspaper in 1892. It already reflected what would be recurring conflicts among proponents of tourism promotion, conservation and resource extraction economics. By 1897, with the creation of the Washington Forest Reserve, the region came within the purview of the federal government.

Dramatic changes had arrived in the sixty years since: Seattle public works dammed the Skagit River, mineral exploration and production mining wore deeper into the range, and logging companies systematically cleared most accessible slopes. In *Challenge of the North Cascades*, Beckey's account of Forbidden's first ascent included references to picturesque buildings "left over from mining and homesteading days," even though patented claims continued to be valid in 1940. Ed Cooper recalls passing heaps of tailings under the Taboo Glacier in 1958. Across the valley, one could not make out the cables of the Johannesburg mine tram or the ore shafts that inspired the road below.

In 1957 area conservationists—many of them climbers—formed the North Cascades Conservation Council (NCCC). One of them was Polly Dyer, a Seattle-area Mountaineer and environmental activist who, among other accomplishments, was instrumental in grassroots organizing to protect a portion of Washington's Olympic coastline from highway development. Howard Zahniser, the executive secretary of the Wilderness Society, heard Dyer describe the Olympic's ragged coastline as "untrammelled" (defined in *Merriam-Webster* as "not confined, limited, or impeded"), and he later used that word to summarize a major concept of wild places in a draft of the Wilderness Act.

The same year that the NCCC was formed, conservation firebrand David Brower produced the film *Wilderness Alps of Stehekin*, which contrasted the idea of a community of nonhuman life and scenic grandeur with the national hunger for raw materials: "Would America have to go without much to leave its finest wilderness unspoiled?" he asked. The footage takes the viewer on a flight over the heart of the North Cascades. Ragged crests and perched glaciers give way to tailings and a stripped-out valley bottom at the abandoned Holden copper mine. For a moment, the viewer considers a dark future, should the range be given over to industry. Then Brower's cherubic children appear, scampering in meadows as an unseen youth choir sings "The Happy Wanderer." They are framed against snows and swirling clouds at Cascade Pass—Forbidden is just out of view. As Brower and his family drive up the Stehekin River in a Jeep, on another leg of their vacation, he draws his satisfaction: "The road dead-ends in paradise."

The Sierra Club funded showings of Brower's film in cities and towns across the Pacific Northwest, including those in Chelan County, where some of the timber industry activists were loudest. In the 1964 coffee-table book *The North Cascades*, Tom Miller featured several incredible black-and-white photographs of Forbidden. Dee Molenaar added ink drawings, and Harvey Manning wrote about the wonders of the landscape and the arguments for a national park. The book was effectively hardbound propaganda. "What the boot and ice ax cannot do in a century," Manning cautioned, "the bulldozer and chainsaw can do in an hour. We watched one valley after another go into cutting circles; and then, reaching high meadows, found no safety there, either, watching helicopters go back and forth, carrying corporation miners to their core-drilling sites."

Those two dead ends that Brower referenced in his film—the Stehekin River Road and the Cascade River Road—perhaps best exemplify the unique evolution of national park land management priorities in the North Cascades. Since the late 1910s, the Park



Service had worked with the Bureau of Public Roads to help Americans access the parks—and to experience them from their car seats. The possibility of connecting the roads across Cascade Pass had risen again and again in the pre-park years. Lowell Skoog told me that he recalls encountering a man puzzling over his map outside an RV one day in the 1980s near the Cascade Pass trailhead. The map appeared to show an improved two-lane road over the pass. Such a road never existed except on paper. Instead, legislators had approved improving the Route 20/North Cascades Highway that was already established between Washington Pass and Rainy Pass. Manning was among those who opposed the enhancements to that road, which he viewed as too much of an incursion into once-quiet places. In his own history of Northwest conservation, also titled *Wilderness Alps*, he declared, with his typically acerbic humor, "When the world supply of petroleum dwindles near exhaustion, as it is scheduled to do in the lifetimes of people driving Winnebagos and SUVs, perhaps nobody will laugh when the suggestion is renewed to convert the North Cascades Highway to a bikeway, with separated lanes for boots and hooves.... Until the ribbon of pavement that divides a wilderness is rolled up and put away, by all means, enjoy your drive."

Still, with no new roads built in the park, most visitors would be concentrated in national recreation areas that would function as "wilderness thresholds." Although early plans included trams and a cogwheel train within these thresholds, continued opposition from the NCCC, in addition to budget concerns and other pressures, eliminated even those concessions. As David Louter wrote in *Windshield Wilderness*, "At North Cascades, the Park Service attempted to take into account the changing expectations about and new pressures on

national parks, and to redefine the popular meaning of parks as places in which automobiles had little influence.”

In 1968 President Johnson signed the bill establishing a 504,000-acre North Cascades National Park. Not everyone celebrated. Although official wilderness designation came much later, many in Washington felt the park might put resources out of reach for all but a tiny elite. Climbers have emerged as the core of that elite, and the growth of beaten trails in tundra areas suggest they are among the most high-impact user groups. They also tend to retell a favorite story about the resource question: that the geological makeup of the range doesn't favor mining. Rowland Tabor—a USGS geologist whom I interviewed in 2014 for an article on the Picket Range—suggested a different view: that the park and adjacent wilderness areas were designated just in time to avoid a run on their considerable mineral resources. Of the half-dozen mining buildings along the North Fork Cascade River in the 1950s, just one still remains. The mining tram on Johannesburg is gone. It's all too easy to imagine that mining never happened here, and a dangerous mistake to imagine that it could never happen again.

Today, I can see that the establishment of the park is only one step toward a culture of stewardship—that my introduction to the North Cascades coincided with the close of a brief, celebratory fantasy of limitless wild exploration. But as with many other “wilderness” initiatives driven by white conservationists at the time, most advocates for the creation of North Cascades National Park didn't prioritize including the voices, history and rights of the Indigenous people who had long stewarded the range. In a 2021 *Atlantic* essay, Ojibwe author David Treuer argued that the best way to address the history of Native dispossession in America's national parks would be to give them back: “For Native Americans, there can be no better remedy for the theft of land than land. And for us, no lands are as spiritually significant as the national parks. They should be returned to us. Indians should tend—and protect and preserve—these favored gardens again.”

## A City of Despair

BY THE EARLY 1960S, THE MOUNTAINEERS were no longer the sole provider of formal climbing education in the Seattle area. But even the new options at colleges and scout groups still leaned heavily on their manual, *The Freedom of the Hills*, which spread technical knowledge beyond the realm of oral tradition. Within the club, multiweek group expeditions ceased to be the chief form of exploration. “The summer outings finally died out when roads and cars made places more accessible,” recalled Mary Anderson in Malcolm Bates's *Cascade Voices*. Climbers took more weekend trips instead. When longer club excursions occurred, families maintained separate car-based camps in place of the communal commissary of the early twentieth century. Although The Mountaineers' courses were still popular, climbing, like much of American social life, was becoming more individualized.

Among those forming their own itineraries, Joan and Joe Firey had begun exploring the Cascades and Coast Range in the 1950s. Soon after settling together in Seattle, they joined The



[Facing Page] A miner loads ore on an aerial tram high on the slopes of Johannesburg Mountain in the early 1950s. In the distance, Mt. Torment (left) and Forbidden Peak rise above the North Fork Cascade River. The North Fork Cascade River road is visible near the lower left corner of the photo. Bob and Ira Spring Collection, University of Washington Special Collections | [This Page] Joan Wilshire Firey, *Forbidden Cirque*, oil on panel, 24 x 39 in., 1962. Painted from slides the artist captured during one of her many adventures in the North Cascades. Courtesy Carla Firey

Mountaineers and recorded the first of many first ascents. They brought their daughter Carla up to the Sahale Glacier when she was just a baby. I recently went to visit Carla and her husband, Jim M. McCarthy (no relation to the East Coast climber and former president of the AAC, Jim P. McCarthy), at their Ravenna bungalow. In their living room, Joan's painting of Forbidden kept drawing my attention: based on a photograph taken from the northwest, the spurs and turrets of Torment stack up, one behind the other, like leaves of a book. At the rear of these sheaves, the summit of Forbidden quivers with the sharpness of teeth but also the gentle curves of bone. It is the kind of painting you want to walk into, though not entirely without hesitation.

For Carla and many Pacific Northwest climbers, the Cascades were a world unto themselves. "We had no idea what was going on in the Greater Ranges," Carla told me as she and Jim spoke of the late 1960s and 1970s. "We were just doing some climbs." First ascents—and a sense of adventure—were available close at hand. A few hours' drive could guarantee you utter solitude. In July 1971, Carla was heading to the West Ridge of Forbidden when she met a young climber she didn't recognize from Mountaineers' circles—a tall man with a mop of curly, sandy-colored hair and a slight scowl. It was midday, and Jim and his partner had already completed their ascent of Forbidden Peak. "She was a very disagreeable person," Jim recounted, and they both laughed. (The pair started dating in the autumn of 1972.)

Jim had learned to climb as a student at Highline Community College five years earlier. By the summer of 1966, he was making routine trips to the Cascade Pass area, learning how to read alpine terrain from whomever he could pack into his Volkswagen Beetle.

In the summer of 1968, another strong Cascades climber, Jim Langdon, suggested that he and McCarthy head up for a new route on the south face of Forbidden Peak. Langdon was a vibrant, enterprising alpinist who climbed with Al Givler and Jim Madsen, elite climbers pushing technical rock standards in the Cascades. Known for his dark sense of humor and his endurance, Langdon sometimes climbed all weekend, made it back to the car at 2 a.m. and showed up at work Monday at 8 a.m. When Langdon suggested they team up for the new route on Forbidden, Jim hadn't yet climbed the peak itself, though he knew about the 1950 south face route. Langdon and Jim did their best to stay well away from the already-established line—the pair wanted to realize the vision that Beckey, Schoening, Widrig and Fix had come here with: a direct line up the face. When Jim and Langdon stepped off the Unnamed Glacier, however, the formidable central portion of the south face presented no plausible cracks to use to protect an initial pitch. They began to knit together overlaps and corners farther left. Time evaporated into the warm summer air, and darkness fell as they reached the ridge crest. They wove their way among the silhouettes of the upper West Ridge until they found a ledge and settled in for the night. Far to the north, a lightning storm provided a vision of something like warmth. In the morning, they descended into the coolness of the valley as daylight came over Cascade Pass.

By the time Carla and Jim met, Seattle was experiencing a steep



economic downturn. As Erik Lacitis reported for the *Seattle Times*, the airline behemoth Boeing—the largest employer in the Seattle area—had recently laid off 60,000 workers. Unemployment skyrocketed to 13 percent, more than twice the national average. A 1971 article in *The Economist* titled "City of Despair" painted a grim picture of daily life in Seattle: "The city has become a vast pawnshop, with families selling anything they can do without to get money to buy food and pay the rent."

"It was kind of a lost decade," Carla said, and then laughed. "But that's probably why a lot of climbing got done." Jim concurred: "People were living in communal houses; I did tree-cutting and remodeling work to feed my climbing habit." Then he laughed, and added: "Would the last person leaving Seattle—turn out the lights?" This is a reference to a famous billboard erected near the airport in 1971 by hungry real estate agents who, during a decline in property values, welcomed prospective buyers to the city with the grim joke. "So many climbers I know were so sure that they were going to end up destitute; but they all did all right," Jim said.

Jim and Carla returned several times to Boston Basin, sometimes with Carla's parents. The pair did a number of first ascents together including (with Brad Fowler and Jerry Barnard) the Corkscrew on Burgundy Spire, a devious route to one of the range's most difficult summits. Jim was still dreaming of a direct line on the south face in 1977, when he returned to Forbidden Peak with Craig McKibben. They inspected the daunting step in the slabby rock above the glacier's edge again. This time, Jim saw what might be a way: a break in an overlap beside a blue streak of copper. But to get there, they'd have to commit to an initial glassy slab, surgically free of lichen and without spots to wedge in nuts for protection. (The Unnamed Glacier had lost considerable mass in the past 100 years and exposed this new stone to the world.) In our conversation, McCarthy was emphatic that the route isn't too hard—only two passages approach 5.9 or 5.10. But the second-pitch overhang is no place to fall. "You would probably die," he said, capturing his generation's matter-of-fact relationship with runout climbing. I can count on one hand the number of climbers I know who have climbed either route on the south face.

## Reach as High as You Can, Pull Down 'til It Hooks

DURING THE WINTER, the North Cascades retreat deeper into their isolation. Rangers will gate the Cascade River Road at Eldorado Creek in November or December. Most years, a lowland snowstorm will sooner or later close the road many miles below that point, and the deep shade of the valley will preserve those drifts, sometimes into the spring. The mining road access that climbers traveled in the 1930s remains, but it leads to a different world. For the next five to six months, heavy snows will pummel the range and multiply the complexities of alpinism—leading to exhausting trail breaking and buried crack systems, and increasing the risks of hypothermia, white-out and avalanches. Forbidden, the perfect weekend outing, becomes a remote expedition.



When Joe Catellani and Jon Corriveau made the first winter ascent of Forbidden Peak by the West Ridge in 1981, they had a growing Cascades winter climbing tradition to draw on. The pair met when Joe replied to a 3 x 5 note card Jon had posted at the North Face store in University Village looking for a climbing partner for Alaska. Joe had spent time in the early 1980s climbing winter routes at Snoqualmie Pass, near Seattle, where Interstate 90 and ski area roads allow mountaineers to target weather windows on modestly sized technical ascents. Those repetitions gave him insight into the damp, temperamental maritime winters of the Cascades.

They saw their window for Forbidden in early February 1981. A warm period followed by cold high pressure meant low avalanche hazard, a high snow line and good travel conditions—often without the need for skis or snowshoes. The Cascade River Road was bare of snow all the way to the Boston Basin trail. Above, they encountered only patchy snow until timberline. They camped below the south face, the grey-ochre stone glowing in the sun.

In the morning, they kicked crisp steps up the West Ridge couloir to reach the notch at dawn. Each with a single ice axe, they began deciphering the ridge. In an email to me, Catellani recalled the novelty of drytooling, which he hadn't done much before: "There was one-to-two feet of faceted snow on the north side of the ridge. Reach as high as you can, pull down 'til it hooks, wallow up with your feet, dig a trough with free hand. Occasional hold for free hand. Probe to one side or another if not getting a hook." Closer to the crest, they found better snow, where rime and sunshine had hardened it. They dug patiently to access the dark stone beneath, and then followed seams until they found a crack where they could place a nut. Around them, scales of rime skittered down toward the shadows of Moraine Lake.

When they stood on top, the fine, undulating snow crests of Forbidden's ridges ran out from their feet in three directions, cutting blue from blinding white. If they'd possessed a spotting scope, they might have been able to see a flash of color on the summit of Eldorado. Not for the first time in the Cascades, a single high-pressure system had lured multiple parties. Others made first winter ascents of Mt. Torment and Johannesburg Mountain during the same stretch of fine weather. Due in part to the forecasting and research efforts of the nascent Northwest Avalanche Center, knowledge of the pattern language of the snow was spreading, and more and more climbers were reading along each winter.

### Ski Poles and Spark Plugs

AFTER SKI SEASON WOUND DOWN this spring, I went to visit Lowell Skoog where he lives on a little rise above Lake Washington. Outside his windows, the Cascade crest glistened to the east. When I asked for his notes on Forbidden Peak, Lowell hunched his shoulders in the manner of Igor, the doctor's assistant in Mel Brooks's film *Young Frankenstein*, and said, "Walk this way." The joke confirmed his reputation as something of a nerd. (During college, he'd manufactured a ring from an old ski pole and inscribed it with Tolkien's elvish Fëanorian script.) He led me downstairs, where his collection of books, journals and ephemera tie his two passions neatly together: the Cascades and history. Trophies, silver gelatin prints, ice axes, wooden skis and old Ramer bindings lined the walls. Suddenly all business, he fired up his server and entered a query into his Linux-like console. All his records containing the name Forbidden appeared. A moment later, I had a printed copy of his scanned journals—he has faithfully kept notes on all his mountain trips since the early 1970s—as well as a neat

[Facing Page] Joe Firey with his daughter Carla in August 1969. Dave Knudson | [This Page, Left] Jim M. McCarthy leads one of the dihedral pitches on the first ascent of the 1977 South Face with Craig McKibben. In his *Cascade Alpine Guide*, Fred Beckey commented, "The remarkable ridges are so quintessentially perfect and its setting so

grandiose that Forbidden has a special status in the Cascade Pass area. While there is a definite similarity about the ridges, the faces differ noticeably." Craig McKibben | [This Page, Right] Jon Corriveau on the summit of Forbidden Peak in February 1981, during the first complete winter ascent of the peak with Joe Catellani. Joe Catellani



hand-drawn topo of the Forgotten Spurs.

Lowell grew up in a Seattle family that skied together not just to have fun, but to become excellent. With his brothers Gordy and Carl, he took that tradition beyond the ski lifts of western Washington and into the wildest reaches of the North Cascades. In 1977, when he went to climb Forbidden for the first time, Lowell was powering through university coursework, taking classes all summer in the sixth of nine uninterrupted quarters toward a degree in electrical engineering. It was as if he knew how busy his life was going to be, and he wanted to waste no time. In a few hours of driving, Lowell and friends could be miles from the city, textbooks and upcoming exams forgotten. They climbed the Northwest Face of the North Ridge—the first of a dozen or so times he'd summit Forbidden, a mountain that took on more and more meaning for him each time he returned. He kept climbing, and he kept taking notes. In 1989 Lowell and his brother Carl made first ascents of the Forgotten Spurs: two long, attractive toothed blades that rise to join the Torment-Forbidden ridge out of the steep ice above Moraine Lake. Lowell named the spurs to honor the history, giving it new life.

Backcountry skiing was developing exponentially, and Lowell was driving it forward with long tours that wouldn't be repeated, in many cases, for years. Lowell, Jens Kieler and Dan Nordstrom skied from near Rainy Pass to the Cascade River, finishing with a long climb out of Moraine Lake under Forbidden. In a 1987 write-up about the Thunder High Route traverse for *Climbing* magazine, Lowell commented, "The potential to enjoy terrain that we would hardly notice as climbers is perhaps ski mountaineering's greatest attraction." But he also "wondered if it would be harder in the future to match the solitude we had found. The opportunity for adventure isn't determined by the size of the range or by the number of people who go there, but by one's imagination."

When Lowell and his brother Carl skied the northwest face of Forbidden's North Ridge, he'd been motivated by curiosity to understand

the trend of steep skiing taking hold in the Pacific Northwest. He was already years into accumulating the research that would become his book, *Written in the Snows*. Although it may not have seemed an outrageous proposition to a technically precise skier, I cannot fathom the risk of steep skiing in such a remote place for the sake of research. Though they climbed the North Ridge to the summit before returning to the top of the snow face to begin their ski descent, Lowell and Carl left room for the future. Perhaps one day soon, someone will brave the steep, fluted and occasionally thin northwest face to make a complete ski descent from the apex of Forbidden.

Before we left his office, I spotted two spark plugs on the desk, and I asked if these were for his Subaru—he said he'd lost count of how many he'd owned. He smiled sheepishly and told me they were for his new snowmobile. Like many skiers fond of solitude, Lowell bought a snowmobile in response to the ballooning trailhead crowds at Washington's limited number of plowed access points. It does not feel like a coincidence that in 2022 the second full winter ascent of Forbidden was facilitated by a snowmobile, a tool that will subtly continue to shape Cascadian alpinism.

## The Forbidden Tour

LOWELL CORRECTLY OBSERVED in his 1987 *Climbing* article that Cascadian ski touring was "coming of age," even if it would be slower than he'd thought. Martin Volken had the imagination that Skoog spoke of, and he grew up a few train stops down from Zermatt, where high-mountain ski-tour routes are marked on government maps. Trained in the Swiss guiding program, he brought his technical skill and subtle sense for terrain to a wilderness range that spoke to his love of solitude. Dan Nordstrom, who skied extensively with Volken in the years following his trial by fire on the Thunder High Route, was startled by his measured pace: "I thought, 'When are we going to go super fast and get super tired?'" he recounted when I ran into him in



[Facing Page] **Andy and Mike Traslin** tour across the Forbidden Glacier with **Jason Hummel**. Over email, the photographer told *Alpinist*, “Out of sight, our line descends to Moraine Lake and into a massive cirque overhung by three glaciers, dominated by miles of cliffs thousands of feet tall and summits galore.” Jason Hummel | [This Page] **Carl Skoog** skis the Northwest Face of the North Ridge of Forbidden Peak in June 2003. Moraine Lake and Eldorado Peak are visible in the distance. Lowell Skoog

the Snoqualmie Valley recently. “Guide’s pace,” part of a quintessentially Swiss preoccupation with creating a steady pace and adhering to timetables in the mountains, helped Volken cultivate resort skiers into wilderness-loving ski mountaineers.

In the terrain around Forbidden, Volken saw not just one link in a long traverse, but a perfect loop that started and ended on the Cascade River: up into Boston Basin, through Sharkfin Col, across the Boston Glacier to an unnamed col in the north ridge of Forbidden. Then down the imposing glacial slope to Moraine Lake. Here, hemmed in by massive terrain and a dense rain-forest valley many miles long, a skier is committed. The climb out of the lake is often bony and typically accomplished with crampons on feet and skis on the pack. Above, the Inspiration Glacier poses a labyrinth of crevasses, some of them 200 feet deep. Volken first led the route in 1999, and then made it an annual tradition. As he shaped several generations of guides and ski mountaineers over the ensuing decades, the Forbidden Tour became one of the most popular multiday ski tours in the park.

## Incompatible

ON A PLEASANT AUGUST DAY in 2012, mountain guide Kurt Hicks stood atop the Cat Scratch route. The West Ridge couloir has provided the normal route to and from the ridge crest since 1940, but warmer summers form enormous holes in its ribbon of snow that, melting from above and below, grow treacherous. When the moats and holes become unmanageable, climbers turn to a place known as the Cat Scratch Gullies. (In morning light, these rifts appear like giant claw marks in the mountain.) Climbers use the gullies and intervening ribs of fractured stone, dirt and heather to link the basin with the ridge crest immediately west of the couloir.

In his mind, as Kurt later told me, he sketched out the ideal line for his descent, balancing anchor location with anchor quality to minimize the environmental impact as well as the likelihood of

party-on-party rockfall. But the uppermost anchor—a basketball-sized rock slung with webbing—did not unequivocally promise the minimum strength he was looking for, he said. He used a hand drill to place two stainless steel bolts. He connected the hangers with cordage and began a rappel.

Days afterward, Kurt told me, a ranger called him and informed him that the bolt placement was “incompatible with park management policy,” he says. As *Rock and Ice* later reported, rangers working for North Cascades National Park removed Kurt’s bolts, as well as a pair located at the lowest rappel station. In September 2013, a climber died on their descent from the peak when rockfall from above knocked them off their stance, as a report in *Accidents in North American Climbing* later described. The climber hadn’t been tethered to an anchor. During the body recovery effort, a number of climbers watched a helicopter roar and circle above the wilderness area. A *Rock and Ice* headline asked if the NPS was “complicit” in the death. (At the time, NCNP wilderness district ranger Kelly Bush told *Rock and Ice* that she had spoken with the climbing partner of the deceased and had determined that the events were “in no way related.”) Although some climbers were frustrated with the park service’s summary removal of the bolts, others commented that it’s no one’s job to make the mountains safe. But impact to “the wilderness resource” is a complicated thing. It may be that, over their fifty-year life span, a few bolts on Forbidden might prevent ten rescue helicopter flights.

Of course, manuring technical terrain can have consequences for wilderness—some fear it invites traffic deeper into more remote areas and encourages the unprepared to go where they should not. And yet the whole park was designed on a notion of “wilderness thresholds,” areas where people could experience the wild from its edge. It may be that the evolution of climbing technique has stretched this edge from the parking lot all the way to the summit of Forbidden. However the park decides to manage climbing moving forward, officials may need to overcome climbers’ perception that too few resources are devoted to their concerns. One NPS employee, a passionate climber, told me that “North Cascades doesn’t want visitors because it’s easier to manage a park without people in it.” (The National Park Service had not yet responded to *Alpinist’s* request for comment at the time this article went to press.) While the claim of the NPS employee I spoke to may be hyperbole, it speaks to a sense that climbers have often shared with me—that they long to partner with the Park in developing sustainable, equitable management of Forbidden and other popular peaks.

## Unnameable

AS CARLA OBSERVED, WILDNESS IS a quality we measure, if subjectively. In policy, it’s easy enough to draw a line around a wilderness area, but much harder to steward a subjective experience with any grace. Glitches emerge. Martin Volken once watched from the



MY FIRST GLIMPSE of Forbidden Peak was in the spring of 1975, when Gary Brill and I used skis to climb nearby Sahale Mountain. I was not yet a climber or a backcountry skier. My skis were a pair of old woodies that I'd cut short and equipped with bindings made from coat-hanger wire. The skis were a failed experiment, but I returned home impressed by the forested valleys, alpine meadows and ragged summits of the North Cascades.

I climbed Mt. Rainier later that summer and gained rock-climbing experience the following year on Cascade peaks such as the Tooth, Prusik, Ingalls and Liberty Bell. All these climbs (and more) were done with Gary, a man with a craggy smile and persistent curiosity whom I'd met through my older brother Gordy. Gary was several years older than I was, and more than anyone else he mentored me during my earliest years of climbing and ski mountaineering. Gary had taken a basic climbing course, while my instruction derived solely from books, experimentation and mentoring from older friends like him. Through these informal experiences, I gained technical skills and mountain sense that would serve as my foundation for decades to come.

I was eager to attempt Forbidden Peak when volume two of Fred Beckey's *Cascade Alpine Guide* came out in 1977. Beckey lauded the mountain's "classic horn formation" and "quintessentially perfect ridges." Photographs in the book depicted the peak's chiseled summit from all angles. That July, I set out with Gary, my brother Carl and another friend for the Northwest Face of Forbidden's North Ridge. I was twenty; Carl was just eighteen. We enjoyed a memorable alpine climb with a glacier approach, a steep snow face leading to an ice arête, a spine of solid rock and a traverse over the summit to return home.

Alpine climbing became a passion for me in the years that followed, and I climbed Forbidden a dozen times over the next quarter century. With the exception of the Northeast Face (which never appealed to me, because of its lack of clean rock or a compelling line), I climbed the

peak by all of its ridges and faces.

The allure of Forbidden Peak derives as much from its setting as from its routes. The mountain is in an area of the Cascades where rough and icy summits extend in all directions. In the 1950s, climber and conservationist Grant McConnell described the region as a "sea of peaks... lashed by some cosmic storm, a sea heaving its surface into a multitude of curling, twisted, white-crested points."

While Forbidden Peak exudes a Cascadian aura of ruggedness, closer inspection reveals an inspiring architecture of firm gneiss and generally moderate climbing on rock, snow and ice. The peak became, for me, a family summit—all but two of my ascents were with my brothers Gordy and Carl or my wife Steph.

Steph and I met as engineers working for a company near Seattle. Though she lacked climbing experience at the time, Steph was an active woman with a quick and analytical mind, and she proved well suited to the challenges of mountaineering. Steph and I climbed Forbidden Peak via the West Ridge three months after our first date in 1981. On the approach, we gained 6,000 vertical feet by hiking through steep forest and rambling over a crevassed glacier before we continued up a couloir to reach a bivouac ledge at the West Ridge notch. After we'd spent a breezy night on our own, six other climbing parties converged on the peak in the morning. Within a few pitches, we'd escaped the traffic jam and reached the summit. It was Steph's first belayed rock climb.

Three years later, Steph and I would cross two major glaciers to complete the more remote and technical Northwest Face. The only route that I didn't climb with family members was the South Face, a feature that Fred Beckey's 1949 guidebook described as "glossy" on account of its steep, slabby rock. Most of the rock features on the face are downsloping rather than incut, giving the climb an insecure feeling. Gary Brill and I paired up for that adventure in 1991.

By climbing the Northwest Face and Torment-Forbidden Traverse, I became acquainted

with the alpine cirque above the Forbidden Glacier, on the opposite side of the mountain from the normal approach route. I admired two north-facing spurs on the Torment-Forbidden divide that splay to the right of the northwest face like the spines of a Japanese fan. As far as I could determine, the spurs had been overlooked by climbers.

In August 1989, Carl and I decided to check them out. We hiked from the Cascade River Road to Boston Basin and then climbed to Forbidden's West Ridge notch, where rock climbing on the classic West Ridge route normally begins. Here, we stashed bivy gear and descended the Northwest Face of the West Ridge to the Forbidden Glacier. Climbers have used this descent intermittently as a shortcut to the north side of Forbidden Peak, and we found rappel slings at several spots. After three rappels, we reached a steep glacier arm where we backed down by kicking steps in the snow before making a final rappel over the bergschrund.

Next, we crossed below the eastern spur to a little notch above the toe of West Forgotten Spur and climbed two steep and insecure pitches—the second one on rock that seemed to be held together almost entirely by moss. Above, the angle eased and the rock became clean, textured gneiss. On a shortened rope, we motored up the crest with great views across Forbidden's northwest face. The upper spur featured an elegant snow crest and was capped by a pinnacle at 8,200 feet that we passed using a rappel.

Climbing together on a shortened rope, we hurried along the ridge toward the West Ridge notch. Thunder crackled and boomed, and it started to rain and hail. Rocks buzzed. A scent of ozone filled the air. When I raised my head, my hat glowed with static electricity. I kept my head down.

Between Points 8200 and 8400 on the Torment-Forbidden divide, we crawled into bivy sacks, resigned to wait out the storm. Around 8 p.m., as the rain diminished and the light began to fade, we repacked and traversed over Point 8400 by headlamp, and then we rappelled again

to reach the West Ridge notch, where we'd cached our stove and sleeping bags.

Since we knew we could escape down the West Ridge couloir if we needed, we could finally relax. Both hungry after an eventful day, we divided our supper precisely, with hot cocoa for dessert. We decided the weather would have to improve significantly for us to consider descending the north face to the Forbidden Glacier again the next day.

In the morning, when we woke to sparkling frost, clearing skies and a frigid wind, we waited for the sun to hit our bivouac site. Around 9 a.m. we repeated the rappels to the Forbidden Glacier and descended to the toe of East Forgotten Spur. I spotted my wife, Steph, and friends, three miles away, tiny specks climbing the Inspiration Glacier toward Eldorado Peak.

We started up the rock spur, surmounting blocks toward a crest adorned with black lichen. After we reached the crest, another hailstorm forced a delay. We considered bailing and leaving our overnight gear on the peak, but fortunately, the shower was brief. After the rain stopped, I continued on wet rock until I reached a mossy corner that I couldn't climb in my mountain boots. I placed a few cams, stood on them and continued cautiously, getting in a piton and a few more nuts until fingers and knees became "one with the moss" and I could thrutch my way onto easier ground.

At the start of the upper spur, we shortened the rope and began climbing together toward the Torment-Forbidden divide. Clouds were massing again when we arrived at our bivy site in midafternoon, and we decided to forgo the summit of Forbidden Peak and head home. Back in Marblemount, we ran into Steph's group at the Rocky Top Drive-In, known to climbers in those days as the "Good Food" on account of the huge sign out front.

I summited Forbidden Peak with my brother Carl five times, more than with any other partner. The most memorable was the last, in 2003. Carl's career as a photographer got a boost in 1997 when he completed the first ski descent of Mt. Rainier's Mowich Face with three friends. I was ambivalent about steep skiing but wanted to know more about it, so I suggested a ski-climb of Forbidden Peak by the Northwest Face of the

North Ridge, the route we'd first climbed together twenty-six years earlier.

On June 25, we approached the North Ridge by the usual route from Boston Basin over Sharkfin Col. On the Boston Glacier, we puzzled over bear tracks that came down from Boston Peak and disappeared among the crevasses below Forbidden. Carl wondered, "Where was this bear-alpinist trying to go?"

The next morning we left our bivouac on the lower North Ridge and skied to the base of the ridge's northwest snow face. Packing up our skis, we cramponed to the apex of the ridge and deposited them there. I led the rock on the upper ridge in my ski-touring boots. With three pitches of simul-climbing, we got to the summit and back in about four hours.

After resting and recharging a while, we tightened our ski boots and scrambled back to our skis atop the face. Carl planted his skis as an anchor while I cut back and forth on the rope, trying to get the snow to slide. Just an inch or two of the surface layer slid away, clearing a smooth path and sending a sluff avalanche down the face that grew to a torrent by the time it reached the bergschrund.

We unroped and leapfrogged down the slope, with the second skier generally descending a bit to the west (for good pictures) and then cutting back lower down to get out of the fall line. The sun-softened snow was about as forgiving as it could be, but we remained conservative in our skiing. Carl measured the slope angle at around forty-six degrees.

Our plan had been to camp a second night and then ski the Northwest Glacier of Mt. Torment. But when we traversed to look at the route the following day, we found a bergschrund spanning the entire width of the glacier. We abandoned the idea of climbing Mt. Torment and clambered



[Photo] Carl Skoog ascends the snow crest on the upper section of the West Forgotten Spur in August 1989. The relationship between three of the Skoog brothers deepened in the mountains. In 2017, Gordy told Evan Bush for the *Seattle Times*, "We could sense what the other was thinking by the quivering of the rope." Lowell Skoog

up a steep couloir that led us to the Cascade River side of the peak to return to our car.

On the gentle slopes below Mt. Torment, Carl and I experienced my favorite kind of summer skiing—wending between islands of rock and heather, with streams tumbling over bluffs and marmots popping out of their burrows—a tundra landscape released from the grip of winter.

I haven't climbed Forbidden Peak since 2003. My brother Carl passed away in a steep skiing accident in South America in 2005. My wife Steph died in a hiking accident in California ten years after that. My son Tom has grown into a solid mountaineer, and he is eager to climb Forbidden Peak with me. I'm thinking that the family summit may be worth one more visit, preferably something safe and easy.

Torment-Forbidden ridge as a floatplane landed on Moraine Lake far below. A couple disembarked, spread a red picnic blanket and enjoyed a scenic lunch. One skier told me of going to retrieve a food cache he let languish in a tree for fifteen years. When he loosened the hoist line, the painter's buckets crashed to the ground, where they shattered, weakened by the sun. Humbled, he cleaned up the mess, just a stone's throw from the ranger camp in Boston Basin.

Wild or not, Forbidden has become a busy mountain. Included in every climbing guidebook to the North Cascades since Beckey's little hardbound *Climber's Guide to the Cascade and Olympic Mountains of Washington*, the West Ridge often appears as a "Select" or "Favorite" route—and, of course, as one of Steck and Roper's *Fifty Classic Climbs of North America*. Climbers have neglected equally splendid ridges on nearby peaks with longer approaches. The main ridges of Forbidden have slowly become cleaner, the loose rocks peeled off by successive generations. As the difference in rock quality grows, climbers concentrate even more on Forbidden. Increasingly, they tackle the West Ridge (and the six-mile round-trip to Forbidden) car-to-car to sidestep the overnight permit system. More and more climbers attempt the longer routes as well. The North Ridge, the Northwest Face and the Torment-Forbidden Traverse, along with the West and East Ridges, are all growing in popularity—and sending people down the same busy descent.

In 1974, in response to overuse at Cascade Pass, the park proposed closing the last three miles of the Cascade River Road and instituting a shuttle service that would take visitors most (but not all) of the way. Some climbers dissented, as Louter wrote, "because they would be inconvenienced by bus schedules that didn't match their own." Further, they worried that the shuttle might not be in service if they returned late at night, or if they got caught in a storm. Others objected on the grounds that the shuttle plan would limit access only to those who could walk up the final stretch of road to enjoy the scenery. The Park Service backed down. The NCCC decried the failure of the plan and predicted that the traffic jams at the road end would force the issue one day. Judging from the scene during the pandemic summers, they may have been proven right. With the scant parking full, cars lined the roads—or ended up rolling down the steep embankment toward the North Fork. My generation will have to reckon with this problem and consider relinquishing the easy access we've enjoyed over the last seventy years.

## The Eyes of the Future

I HUSTLE UP THE FIRST PITCH of the Cat Scratch Gullies as a pair of young, muscular men scurry up the gully of snow and broken rock below. My client Robert belays, eyes wide, from a heap of aluminum ice axes and crampons twenty meters below me. On a clean granite wall, I might ask the other party to go ahead of us, but on the rubble-strewn flanks of Forbidden, I'll keep my place in line for as long as I can. The parties ahead have already left the Cat Scratch, although at the back of my mind I acknowledge that another team could easily be descending this morning after a bivouac at the notch. I reach a pedestal, and I begin to build an anchor using the sprawling web of cord, knifeblades, and rusting fixed nuts. Then I hear the unmistakable sound of a body bouncing down rock ledges.

The young man is lucky: he fell maybe fifteen meters, shattering his helmet and landing on a ledge where the snowfield overhangs the orange stone. A few other climbers are there when I arrive. We cover the bone ends protruding through the young man's shin, wrap him in my spare jacket, take vitals. Blood covers the cold, wet gneiss in broad stripes that disappear into the dark of the moat. It takes hours on a cloudless day for the helicopter to arrive. My client waits patiently. Later, we hike down to camp and watch the sun set on Johannesburg. In the morning, we abandon our plan to climb Sahale. "I want to go home," he says. "I want to see my wife." We walk slowly down, and I make sure to share my favorite flower—the three long tendril-petals of the wild ginger. We kneel among the cedars at the edge of the abandoned mine road to breathe in the warm scent of it.

On the four-hour drive back to North Bend, I wonder which landscapes, and where, were torn up to provide the steel frame of my Honda. I wonder if the men and the women at the auto plant where it was built have the means to visit the North Cascades. I picture Ed Cooper's Chevy, abandoned near the Aurora Bridge in Seattle. He used to stop by now and then to see the thieves' progress on the chrome and steel, "until one day, it was gone." I think of my grandfather and great-grandfather working in coal mines in Appalachia, building roads into mountains along Indigenous footpaths. I wonder at the sense of loss I feel for this one mountain left unclimbed, of how afraid I am not to have enough, how I dream of more and better access, how everything hinges on our ability to grasp *enough*.

One thing is sure: this story is not over, and it's more complex than any fantasy I dreamed up as a teenager while paging through *The North Cascades*. For nearly a hundred years, Seattle public works has grown and maintained a series of dams on the Skagit River. Construction at Newhalem impacted portions of an Upper Skagit village and other cultural sites, as Upper Skagit member and policy representative Scott Schuyler told *Alpinist*. As *High Country News* reported, none of the dams provide fish passage to "miles of historic salmon habitat," and the tribe is petitioning the city of Seattle to remove the dam. Seattle City Light media relations manager Jenn Strang recently told *Alpinist* that they are "committing to complete a comprehensive decommissioning assessment that answers the question 'Should we consider removing any or all of the dams on the Skagit?'"

In addition to the Upper Skagit, the Swinomish, the Sauk-Suiattle and a host of allies are continuing to assert their place at the heart of the land. The Treaty of Point Elliott is still very much at issue, Scott Schuyler says. "Our Treaty Rights are at risk due to many factors of man-made origin," he wrote in an email to *Alpinist*.

Indigenous peoples' ability to exercise their treaty rights appears threatened, too, by the boom in outdoor sports. According to a report published by the Tulalip Tribes in 2021, "The sheer volume of recreational use in our region threatens to undermine efforts to sustain the health of these same natural areas that are so valued." Increased activity in the backcountry, the report notes, can negatively impact "wildlife, the environment, and... Tribes' ability to access and exercise treaty-reserved rights," such as fishing, hunting and gathering.

Land managers and outdoor enthusiasts still need to do more to ensure the inclusion of Indigenous voices in conservation.





Mountaineers CEO Tom Vogl commented to me in an email, “I’m proud of the work by generations of Mountaineers members, helping protect iconic places such as Olympic and North Cascades National Parks and the headwaters of the Methow River. At the same time, I think it’s fair and accurate to say that historically, our work in conservation hasn’t recognized that Indigenous people have carefully stewarded these places for many thousands of years. While we haven’t intentionally ignored the history of the Pacific Northwest tribes, we haven’t done enough to understand and amplify their traditions and values. As an organization, we’re deeply committed to respectfully engaging with tribes and hope to find common ground in our conservation and recreation goals.”

Where Vogl is working against the historically exclusive implications of a “club,” new groups are rethinking how—and by whom—mentorship in climbing happens. Washington-based nonprofit Climbers of Color (CoC) formed in 2017 not only to change the image of who a climber is but also to create a more inclusive space for becoming a climber. In an interview with Amath Diouf for Melanin Base Camp, CoC co-founder Don Nguyen observed, “People of color don’t occupy these spaces to even a proportional degree, and when they do they are often viewed as the consumer, the user—not the guide, the leader, or mentor.” The organization has attracted and developed a cohort of highly trained and experienced instructors who

offer a different experience from the historical gatekeeping of largely white climbing organizations. In a 2021 interview with KUOW’s Bill Radke, CoC instructor Crystal Hudelson said, “The way that we try to make sure that people feel accepted is to bring their cultural essence into their climbing.”

Terry Tempest Williams said, “The eyes of the future are looking back at us and they are praying for us to see beyond our own time. They are kneeling with hands clasped that we might act with restraint, that we might leave room for the life that is destined to come. To protect what is wild is to protect what is gentle.” For me, my youthful desire to consume those brilliant mountains in *The North Cascades* has given way to an aspiration to act with restraint, to be gentle. That transition will take imagination, because storytelling is so powerful, and I grew up like so many did on the very limited stories available about what climbing a mountain could be. For so long, power to me was owning a car and being free to drive it to the middle of nowhere. But what if instead my power is hope? Rebecca Solnit calls hope “a gift you don’t have to surrender, a power you don’t have to throw away.” I hope I can make something of all the days I’ve spent on Forbidden, reflecting on its secret life; I hope I can find ways to share it. I think of a lesson Crystal Hudelson taught me at a crag not long ago. “Take the time,” she said, “to truly see what it is you are looking at.” Soon it will be time to return to Forbidden, and I promise to take the time. ■

[Illustration] The Torment-Forbidden Traverse, first climbed by Walter Sellers and Ed Cooper in July 1958. Nearly one hundred years earlier, explorer Henry Custer evoked the rugged and remote character of the North Cascades: “No where do the Mountain

masses and Peaks present such strange, fantastic, dauntless, and startling outlines as here.... Had it not been, for the bushes and small trees, which gave us an occasional point of appuy [support], we would have found it impracticable.” Jeremy Collins