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Conquering Our Greatest Volcano

THE FIRST ASCENT OF MOUNT WRANGELL, ALASKA

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FOR eight years the virgin summit of Mount Wrangell had called me; Wrangell, which bears the palm on this continent as an alp and a volcano in one, and has always typified, more than any other mountain in Alaska, all that is remote and fabulous in the North.

Open the map of Alaska. The contours that mark mountains appear heaviest in three places. Farthest west lies Mount McKinley; away to the east, Mount St. Elias. Look between them, some two hundred miles from each and a hundred miles north of the Pacific Ocean. There, in the valley of the Copper River, rises Mount Wrangell, surrounded by ten peaks, each more than 12,000 feet in altitude, and 14,005 feet high itself.

A rugged coast range walls it from the sea. That and tales of Eldorados, and a massacre of Russians by Indians at its base in 1848, for more than a generation isolated the Wrangell region with a fascination and a dread. Then John Bremner, prospector, spent the winter of '84-85 alone with those murderous natives and found them abject, and in the spring Lieutenant H. T. Allen passed along the volcano's base. The argonauts of '98 captured the valley, and with them

I was the first to make and record a visit to its slopes.

Years ago two Copper River Indians went up to "look-see" the Wrangell crater. They never returned. Thus to emulate them meant death, of course, which is no tradition, such as all great mountains have, but a very live belief among those Indians to-day. And with St. Elias and McKinley climbed, Wrangell was the next high-mountain challenge in Alaska. In the name of science it should have been the first, for on Wrangell alone, outside the antarctic continent, can you study the relation of an active cone to a great ice-cap.

On July 9th last I landed in Valdez on the coast, with an alpine outfit and the hope that my friend, William T. Soule, Jr., was still in the interior. A bitter October eight years ago he and I had camped together in the McKinley range. I reached him now by the Signal Service telegraph; and with the scent of cottonwoods and the roar of glacier streams riling my blood, in a day I had bought an old bay mare to carry my grub and blankets and was hitting the trail through the coast ranges. I footed it over the passes and across the swamps, travelling mostly in the luminous nights, because for the

two hours that the sun sinks below the horizon in July frost sometimes numbs the fiendish mosquitoes. Billy was to meet me on the 15th at the Tonsina River, eighty miles inland, at the edge of the Copper River basin. He turned up promptly, and next day, riding his buckskin cayuse turn about, we hit the long trail that leads east from the telegraph, across Copper River, and not quite touches the southern slopes of Wrangell, still fifty miles away.

At last we could study the volcano over the burned and mean spruce forest. There it lay, surely the whitest, widest dome-shaped pile on earth. In Mexico, Popocatepetl is higher, but extinct; the Colima volcano is lower, and neither one is alpine. And while during the ten years that Kah-Una-Lita ("The Smoke Mountain," as the Copper River Indians call it) has been known to white men it has belched neither mud nor lava, its crater is often aglow for days, and it steams incessantly, sometimes sending vapor three miles high and filming over hundreds of square miles of the Copper valley with ash.

Then only a plume of steam coiled from the summit, where an inky nub marked the crater edge. Below glittered a world of black pinnacles and crinkled *séracs*, the ice-cap prolonged through deep valleys by five great glaciers. Three of these—the Chetudina, Cheshnina, and Long Glaciers—might be routes to the top, and we were aiming for a prospectors' cabin on the Cheshnina stream, as a base to reconnoitre from; for on a virgin alp, in the North especially, you cannot climb through cloud or falling snow. Snow-line is at 6000 feet, which gives you 8000 feet of travel—equalled only in the high Himalayas—and often in summer storms hide the great peaks for weeks at a time.

At five o'clock next morning we slid down the big clay bank to Doctor Billum's ferry on Copper River. Billum is a medicine-man. He keeps his people in subjection by foretelling attacks from the Yukon Indians, and tales of white men thirty feet high, with dogs' faces, who haunt camp.

"Ah—! Ha—!" he gaped at our temerity toward Wrangell. "Kah-Una-Lita—" and turned to explain dramat-

ically to his folks. Then he said to us with vibrant solemnity: "No good. Mebbe so *halo* [not] come back. Mebbe so *die*!" And helped to stone our horses into swimming the wide Copper.

That night we camped at Horse Creek, almost within shadow of the volcano. We were tired, and it came on cold. Perhaps this, or perhaps being at the brink of our uncertain business, keyed me to that acuteness which whoever enters the white, unknown places is always so baffled to express. At exactly midnight by our dollar watch I waked from a dream, vivid with horror, that my mother was dead. I went to sleep again. Just two hours later a voice outside the tent aroused us. A stranger had arrived in camp. An Indian was complaining, "*Hiyu* [very] cold, *hiyu* cold." Billy, starting up, exclaimed, "That's Jo Bell; I know his voice," and went outside the tent. I heard them talking together. When Billy came back he said, "Jo's just got here with a telegram for the Weber boys." They and their partner, Von Zeiple, were encamped on Cheshnina River, for which we were bound. "Another Indian brought it from Tonsina, and Jo took it on from the crossing. Bob Weber's mother is dead in Valdez." . . . Telepathy? Maybe. The savage, awed by the white man's tragedy, travelling toward me through the wilderness night, each of us having the same goal—the very imperfectness of the transference somehow confirms it.

So Jo joined us on the trail. We left it where it pitched down to Kotsina River, and climbed to the treeless tundra. Clouds veiled Wrangell, and we asked Jo, who had hunted sheep along all the five glaciers, which was the easiest to travel. All he would answer, and that sullenly, about climbing Wrangell was: "What's-a-matter Cheshnina? What's-a-matter Cheshnina Glacier? All right, I think." We camped above its stream, and he went on to the Webers'. At midnight we heard them outside, on their long tramp to the coast. "That you, Billy?" called a voice. "It's too bad—" began Billy. "Well, such things has to happen," came back cheerfully, passing on in the grim half-light across the waste.

From the Cheshnina flats we explored a small stream leading straight toward the



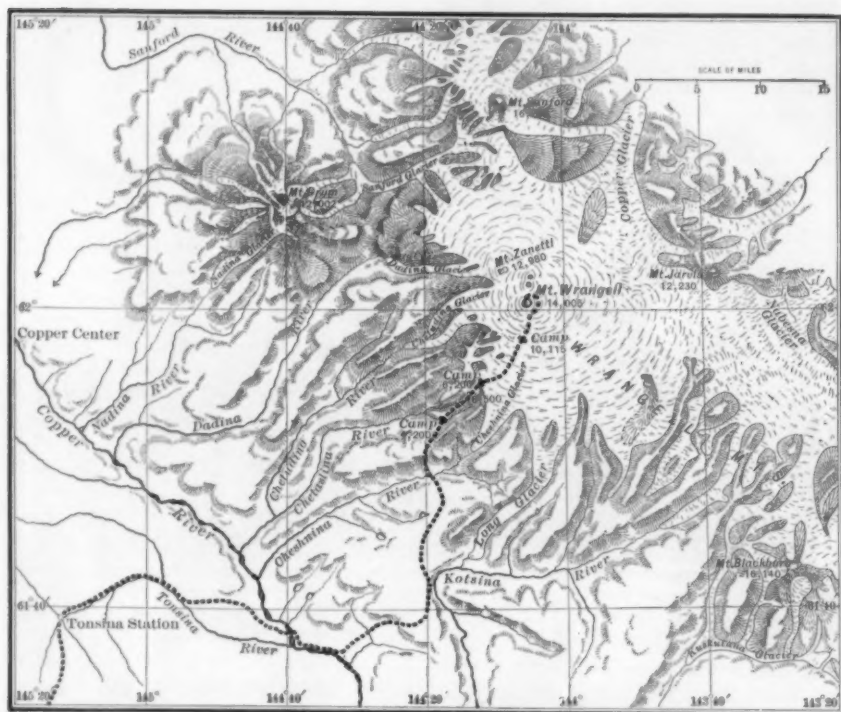
MOUNT WRANGELL IN ERUPTION
 Photographed by W. C. Mendenhall, U.S. Geological Survey

mountain, into foot-hills. All day in deep snow, struggling through a blinding storm, we at length reached a 6500-foot ridge. Below to the left, northwest, we made out a high mesa draining into Chetaslina River, whose glacier was too steep to travel. Left bare, as a lip of the Cheshnina had retreated, the mesa joined its ice cleanly, at a point far above its terminal moraine. From the edge of the ice there to the summit of Wrangell was seven miles in air-line; by Long Glacier, twelve. That night we stopped at Von Zeiple's cabin. He, too, favored the Cheshnina Glacier as gained from the Chetaslina mesa; so, after baking six pans of bread next day, for the mesa was far above tree-line, we reached it by crossing a divide, and camped over the lip of a small canyon, at 4200 feet, still five miles from the eternal ice.

For three days we waited. For a week we had not seen an acre of Wrangell's snows; for a month more we might not. We had only green willows to burn, and often were an hour raising a blaze to warm the beans. The tent got messy as an Indian camp. It all seemed hopeless. Scant grass grew here, and at night the

horses back-trailed across the pass to the Cheshnina flats—a twelve-mile hunt through the drizzle every day to find them. On the 24th a heavy snowfall all but swamped the tent. But one night we heard a sparrow singing, and down the canyon a gold-white cloud rested upon a melting plain of indigo and azure. Clearing! We tied Buckskin to a willow bush at bedtime; but at four o'clock I awoke and heard no horse-bell. Outside, no Buck. He and the mare had wandered back to the Cheshnina, to spoil our first clear day, perhaps our chance on the mountain.

I was mad enough. But Billy tore after them, and I climbed the mountain above the pass. Yonder towered the vast dome, clean virgin world that it was. And there was our route: to join the ice at a big cornice, to curve north, around and above the hanging ice Niagaras that fed Chetaslina Glacier. Just below 10,000 feet, were two outcrops of black rock and a giant *bergschrund*. There the glacier plunged between splitting walls of ice into a valley wofully crevassed, as I knew. But in two steep pulls it touched the crest of the great dome,



MAP OF AUTHOR'S ROUTE TO THE SUMMIT OF THE WRANGELL VOLCANO

the edge of the old active area, from which the live cone rose like a tooth on its southwest quarter.

Billy appeared with only the mare, for Buckskin had sprung both his fore shoes. Without a saddle we packed her with a week's bread, pemmican, etc., blankets, tent, tarpaulins, and making a heavy meal of beans, were off at last over the rocks and snow of the mesa. Two hours, and we looked dizzily down a gorge upon Chetaslina Glacier. Inky clouds pursued us, level with their tops, and beat us in the race for the first deep snow-field; prisoned us there an hour, blinded even behind our smoked glasses by the glare. Onward, and the poor mare slumped in deeper and deeper, floundering pitifully; and taking to the slivered rocks, they tore and mashed her feet. At last a long slope finished her, and we raised the tent and lit the spirit stove at 6200 feet, just under the ice cornice. Overhead the great dome curved. In the

east flashed Mount Blackburn, higher than Wrangell—yes, by 2000 feet, yet dominated by it; extinct, and neither at the heart of the range nor bearing such intense glaciation as surrounded us. The low sun boiled through rainbow vapors from the dim glaciers far below. The coast alps seemed set so low and near on the pale horizon that we might have touched them.

Snow tickling the tent awoke us. Little enough we slept, from the cold, and worry that the mare could not back-trail to grass, poor hoof-gruelled, foodless thing! Twice in the night she stumbled across our guy-ropes. But when the flakes burned orange and it cleared she had vanished. We ate, dried tent and tarpaulins on the lava, cached half our pemmican (three pounds) and the horse-cinches, packed the rucksacks—light stuff like blankets in the bottoms, heavy, like grub, camera, alcohol, on top.

Onward two hundred feet we were

above all bare rock, with the ice-cap underfoot. There on a lava knife-edge below, like a statue, with her head sunk forward, stood the poor beast. In leading her down we should have lost the precious clear day. We both said, "Why, there she is now," and turned away, with feelings numbed and consciences tainted.

Then—the tuckering climb, up, up, hour after hour; over white wastes which blaze in deceitful grades and suck you in waist-deep, exhausted and cursing. Hour on hour. Your face feels aflame; off a second with your black glasses, and your eyeballs sear. You try to lose yourself in far-away thoughts, to count your steps—four hundred, five hundred—between each rest, to judge the puny hundreds, thousands, of feet you have risen above the flat 6500-foot peak across the mesa, over the crinkled snake of Long Glacier. We never spoke. At each rest I worried for fear that the plug was out of the alcohol can, jammed it down, sniffed the pack. Then onward, slinging the rucksacks on our backs like coal baskets.

We made tea at one o'clock. The stove burned unprotected in the windless glare.

We were at the lower of the twin cliffs, with the great *bergschund* over the swell ahead. Forward again in an hour; soon the black lip of a fumarole, wavering steam, appeared high to the west. "Why, make that in three hours, easy," gasped Billy. But no. Till five o'clock we toiled under our curse of Sisyphus. Then the way narrowed between the splitting ice-cliffs. Down from their blue facets were streaked the crevasses, countless, veiled with treachery by a film of snow. Every step onward now must be tested with the tent pole, in the chance of gaining no space safe or level enough to camp on. So we threw down our packs and pitched the tent against the wall of a *sérac* with a great grinning chasm on its face, at 10,115 feet.

Billy started to melt snow—"Slow, so's it won't taste burned," he grinned. I went out with the camera, threading my way among the pitfalls (for slight grooves sometimes betrayed them), eastward toward the crisp, snow-streaked hordes of the Kotsina mountains—toy ivory carvings far below. There was Mount Regal (13,400 feet), a sheaf of bright needles;



MOUNT WRANGELL FROM THE WEST, IN ERUPTION
Photographed by W. C. Mendenhall, U.S. Geological Survey

there the ocean of ice-falls mounting in a vast anarchy toward the great Nabesna Glacier. And farther, just north of Blackburn shone St. Elias and his range, its tiny pyramid unmistakable, a strange crystallization in the sky, bubbles floating upon a sea of iridescence. You can't write it. It was all too much to see. And upward, from the ice hanging invisible behind me, plummy clouds stole close like living things.

But that time I stepped squarely into—death! I had taken my pictures safe enough. Returning by the same trail—*crush!* Legs and body were dangling into nothingness, elbows spread and clutching on the yielding snow. During that shred of a second's fall all substance inside my head, all the air outside, thickened into something dense and leaden. All my blood surged outward to surfaces and extremities, but with no flush of warmth. I hung there, looking down at the two slithery green walls converging into doom. Horror was suffocated by a quick anger. "Billy, come here," I shouted, calmly. "I am down a crevasse, down a crevasse." He came out of the tent; knelt near me cautiously. "Where's the edge?" he asked. "You're not on it," I said. "Come a step nearer." He did; and then could grab my left arm, rooting himself in the soft snow. I kicked against the opposite wall, dashed my right arm into the crust, braced every muscle, leaped, wormed myself out.

Neither of us spoke until we were eating pea soup in the tent. "Did you ever snuff nitro-glycerine—the stuff they give for some kind of heart disease?" I asked. "Once I did, for fun. It routs all the blood away from your heart. . . . *That* felt just like it." And I laughed. "It's rot," I went on, "what you hear about your whole life 'passing in review' when you're sinking—facing death. Nothing of the sort. I'm not broken up and shan't be." This with no back-thought that I must screw up courage by talk. The fear of death lies only in its apprehension. Face to face with it anger supplants terror, as when you fight a snake, or strike involuntarily at a being who insults your manhood.

So we drank hot tea, laughing over the responsibility of the tent pole—Billy's socks highest on it, then "the" watch,

then my snow-glasses, then Billy's black felt hat, last my socks and all the whangleathers. At eight o'clock it was freezing hard. Extending the door with our boots, we shut out the magic tiny world away under—all the Copper valley a smear of violet and ochre, a pond shining on the tundra, the burning scimitar of a river course.

We pounded the *névé* to make holes for our hips and tried to sleep. Too cold; and all the obsession of the venture was now focussed and gripped too hard upon my heart. To-morrow, to do the trick, if the clear sky held! And that depended on the stray, mindless drifts of air-pressure and cloud. I trembled, in wave after wave, till I seemed to vibrate against Billy. If he knew the reason, he said nothing. I could will myself to stop, but the effort kept me even from dozing. And if I dozed, I would start up in the ghostly whiteness of midnight, my heart racing on like a fly-wheel that has slipped its belt.

The sun rose smothered and whitish, over whitish cloud-bars. We sigh, turn over, dig snow from under our heads, light the lamp; wait as the slush steams, sings, in the little pot. After *erbwurst* another boiling comes for the tea, as we feel through our frozen and messy duffle for pemmican and shreds of dry salmon. . . . We stretched our legs outside in the first arrows of sunlight, and dropped the tent to get the pole. Light packs to-day, only the stove and camera. We mounted the bulge over camp, entered the sea of crevasses—trapped squarely right off! I went down only to my knees, but we took the warning, and for the next two hours prodded ahead for each step, while our arms ached and ached.

Four trips we made, up and down that 4000-foot slope, now our faces blistering in the heat and glare, now our feet frozen, and every step we had to test first. Follow with our eyes as we would the parallel caverns sweeping down from those tottering ice-spires, recollect as we could their faint scars under the skin of snow, sight and memory always were cheated. Their menace seemed to be designed, a conscious thing.

They infuriated me. We were making very bad time, exhausted quickly in the triple struggle to break trail, climb, jab,

all at once. Through goes the pole into azure darkness. You tear away the crust to size up the hole; jump if it's narrow enough; if not, lay the stick down, and "guessing" the crust will bear, crawl skittishly across. Why weren't we roped? That's no use for only two a-climbing. And the snow grew softer, hatefully deeper. The sun blaze was terrific, shot back and forth by those vivid walls. I would take off my glasses and bury my scorching head and wide-opened eyes into the cold snow. Billy complained of headache and nausea, and we sighed for snow-shoes. If the crust bore for a step or two, "Sh! 'sh!" we whispered, "don't say a word." And at 12,000 feet I got short of breath every ten paces.

We climbed a smooth space, right into a yawning chasm on top. Next, from a steeper stretch, suddenly, on a shoulder to the left, appeared our friend the fumarole, like a black pie in the snow, and now inert. "There's your what-you-call-'em—fumigig," says Billy. It was noon, and we were very near the crests of the ice-cliffs, which joined the slope in lazy undulations. The snow was levelling, with the sky-line very near. All at once, straight ahead, loomed another fumarole, and beyond the horizon. It was a-crawl with gray steam and gave us an acrid whiff. Then—glory!—to the right and nearer, our slope beckoned up to a sharp, long ridge, black as if inked on top, and also alive with moving wisps, like worms, which crept close along its base and were whipped downward in the wind.

My heart leaped. The edge of the old active area! The live crater couldn't be many hundred feet higher. Billy was

breaking trail, but I forged ahead, forgetting short breath, the deepening snow—everything. "That's the longest hike yet without stopping," said he, catching up. I tried to explain why, but the words came tumbled and inexact. Yet never, it seemed, could we cross that deceitful slope. Fascinated, I watched a great

coil of vapor spurt from under a balanced boulder, *willing* it toward me. And where the *névé*, ash-blackened and slushy, withdrew from the black ruff, there where the ice joined the warmth, no thought of a crevassed gap and thousands of feet into perdition ever stirred me. I crackled over the last snow and leaped upon the ash, in that damp and tarnishing breath of the earth's bowels, with a mingled thrill of victory and apprehension that was glorious.



THE HORSE SLUMPED IN DEEPER AND DEEPER

What was beyond? I ran up the ridge of fumaroles and came out. It was two o'clock. Beyond, on the far side, was snow, snow everywhere. A plain, two, three miles across—you could not tell through the refractive haze. The vast, dead chasm was filled chock-a-block, a brimming bowl of ice. Think of it!—13,000 feet and more above the sea, all but tangent to the arctic circle, immutable in the swing of seasons—the world knows no desert like it. Squarely opposite rose two heights, like snowy ranges, though surely no more than 600 feet above us. That to the west was squarish and mottled with cliffs, the eastern one a ridge leading north to a pinnacle. Farther west, through the mists now racing across the levels, flashed intermittently the two white nubs seen from the Copper River to be just north of the

live cone. Thither, but following around the steaming lip on which we stood, it dove under the ice-cap, was slashed by a crevasse, swelled into a flat dome, fronted the living heart of everything.

A curtain of fog was snatched away. A tooth—a gigantic incisor pointing upward—appeared on the southwest rim of the snow desert. To the right, on a fragment of outer slope, ran black ribs, creeping with slow vapors, downward into the *névé*. But except for this the cone was all an oval of darkness. A great cavity was blazoned there, yawning upward to its tip. Streaked and crumbling cliffs wavered behind the concealing steam. In a momentary stillness of the air the shreds of vapor thinned and hovered and drooped along the rims. Then they arose at the centre in hairlike spires, as from a simmering vat. Clinkery cave and corrugation sprang forth in horrid reticulation. The *thing* seemed to suspend its breath like a living being.

The active crater that, and not very lively to-day. The core of fire upon this continent, inscrutable behind these snows

he was saying, and chose a warm, chocolate-colored rock to curl himself upon. He complained how the moist heat chilled him; that he felt "bad. Just like seasickness," and was not hungry. I filled the pot with snow, dug into a nest of vents, and jammed it in the cheesy clay and whitish salts they had formed.

In a while the water was almost boiled. I brought it to where Billy now lay under a boulder draped with fantastic frost flowers, in a pit of warm ashes. I lit the lamp to give the water a boost, and shielded it with the poncho—all this hurriedly, in a fret to be attacking the steaming tooth. The wind was getting frisky. I looked up. For some time I had hardly noticed how the glare from the inner snow-field had grown dimmer and dimmer, how the rumpled floor of cloud at 10,000 feet was furtively ballooning upward. Stumbling across Billy, who lay flat on his face shivering, I dashed out toward the tooth. I stared into nothingness. A subtle, pervading, enervating air had sprung from the south, blending with the fetid steam of the

fumaroles. But it was only three o'clock; surely all would be clear again.

Those next four hours! I try to forget the bitter years that passed in them. The victory in my hands was snatched away. We were caught blind, marooned two miles above sea in that sky-whirl of arctic fog. I gulped the tea; but Billy would drink none, and made me melt him snow. I would run far back and forth along the hot rim, gazing for so much as motion in the



A HALT FOR DINNER

—so near and easy to scale. First we would have tea, of course; and with a flush of confidence I walked east along the inner rim of the fumaroles. There was Billy, stooping over in the shifting steam, studying the vents, the patches of tiny tents or vesicles in the reddish ash. "Your fumigigs squirt just like clams,"

hateful obscurity, and come upon the tent pole stuck in the ash and lined with a long blade of ice needles. The air was too thin to keep a pipe lit. Crusting my sweater with frost leaves, the steam pulsed, pulsed, silently among the fantastic rocks piled on the ash, moulding, rotting their ancient snow-caps into

crowns and helmets, into dripping icicles and skeleton-handed stalactites. My temples burned. Hope and ambition fought in me with the softer, coward self of retreat and resignation. You see deep at these pivotal times into all effort and all purposes. In a sort of agony I looked back on our long Alaskan track, the distance and strife, the dream and hard fulfilment—ice underfoot, sleepless in the too-still nights far above the world—all stretching, as my diary (written in the fervor of those moments) says, "in one black and blasted smear across travelled seas and continents."

I was schooling myself to face returning down the 4000 feet of crevasses, surrendering all we had won; to lie huddled on the ice, watching, casting all in the balance for fair weather and another try. At five o'clock I set two hours to wait. Oh yes, at six a bright bluish swam overhead, the gale eased, and a greenish-pink light sprang up from below. Clearing! But even to hope was like fighting the inevitable tides. The pain of surrender reached a climax at seven, as it began to snow through the gloom. "We don't want to stay till it fills our trail," said Billy. No; that meant— So at half past we started down, feverish, aching, weary, across the soggy ice edge, into our half-filled, ancient tracks; past the fumarole, down the steep slope into cloud and darkness, among—the crevasses.

There the struggle began. The harder we tried to remember their succession, the more confused we grew. We couldn't tell the tramped places where we had rested from our soundings for pitfalls. Billy would say: "Look for foot-tracks. There won't be any where we crawled along the pole." Suddenly he stopped, violently ill, but talking right

on about how much better he felt. "It would knock anybody, what I've eaten to-day—salmon, pemmican, chocolate," he said.

Then clouds shut in tight, so we were as well blind. We would lose the trail utterly. But we kept right on, taking the pot-luck that makes you shiver to



RESTING AMONG THE CREVASSES 12,000 FEET UP

think of afterward. False courage, yes, but without it one cannot fight the wild at all. Ugh! Sometimes in the gloomy circle about our feet the pole jammed hard, often sugared away into the blue-gloomy depths. Yet finally we rose over the mound where I had slumped through; propped and stretched the snow-swamped tent, laid blankets in the bowl-shaped depression, sodden with tea leaves, which our bodies had made; and soon, too numbed to speak, were breathing out steam over our tea. There below slept the vague, dark land, chill and drenched, as if the rain had just ceased, only to begin again. Pasty clouds flooded the abyss, in streaks, feathers, continents, hanging at all angles and heights, as if in petrification.

Yet we sometimes slept. Toil is no less heroic for drugging the fret for the ideal. It began to snow again. An icy west wind rose and knifed me, till it froze the *névé* packed along the eaves. Then utter windlessness, as uncanny in those upper regions as their lack of oxygen

and life. Oh for some scar in the silence, the steady roar of falling water! Yet—boom! "What's that?" We start up. Oh, a crevasse caving in somewhere, and maybe we are warming another right under us to give 'way next. Or a stray gust flaps a rib of the tent, and you are sure that some being outside is staring at us through the phosphorescent wall.

Daylight, but never the sun. In the pearly gloom and *sfft!* of flakes time leaped from six to noon, from noon to six. We never left our soggy blankets. We ate, dozed—dozed, ate—involuntarily, mechanically. We never spoke, treasuring each drop of alcohol as we filled the stove. Came sunset-time with a blue-opal vividness. We marked it by saying, "It's freezing now," which meant, "Little sleep from now on." For day no longer lapsed into night, nor night into day. That was a lost succession, like our lives up to these moments.



THE CRATER OF MOUNT WRANGELL ONE-HALF MILE DISTANT

Toward two o'clock the next morning I peered outside. Northeast a pure new light arched like an aurora over a bank of ice mist. "Billy—all clear," I whispered, trembling. But he not so much as grunted till three, when I had the soup

boiling. Flick! Flick! the north wind flapped the tent, the fair-weather wind. By half past we had hammered on our frozen boots and stood outside. Hello! There was the pyramid of St. Elias triplicated, raised and magnified by mirage into a string of pearls. And the bank of ice mist burned with an electric incandescence.

Whew! That gale blew. The mercury was at 8°, and four inches of snow had fallen. Through all the repeated upward struggle the crevasses fooled and trapped us worse than ever, the fine snow bit us in sheets and drifting volleys. We had to wait for blast after blast, heads down on the glacier. They filled our tracks; we had to break trail all over again. And I knew, and Billy knew, that he would be sick again. He looped his red handkerchief around his face, complained his feet were freezing; yet, "All right," he said, "after the sun hits us." That

lazy sun! For hours the ashy-white gloom mocked us out of the mouths of all the *bergschrand*, each with a big azure jaw detached and ready to drop. Then, first as an exhalation from the snow itself, then like a blast of needles piercing every nerve, but utterly heatless, the sun touched the snow-fields into a moving plain of stardust. We were under the rim of fumaroles. Straight from the hidden tooth blew continents of icy steam. "Smell—smell sulphur," murmured Billy. "Yes; we'll have to go around it"—from me. And to-day she was mighty active!

Over the rim finally, at just seven o'clock, Billy stumbled to our old ash-pit to thaw his feet. I photographed, though knowing how the films would parody the grandeur. Soon bravely and doggedly, glum with illness, he was ready at my side, and we stepped off into the



LOOKING INTO THE STEAM-FILLED CRATER FROM ITS NORTHERN EDGE

snow of the vast old crater. There was a thrill! Once thousands of feet deep, now brimming with ice, suppose warm spots remained, hollowing out caverns to let us through a pinhole into—Hades? But victory was ahead. It was a wearying fight onward against the snow-laden gale, breaking trail waist-deep toward the great tooth, which now burst madly with whipped steam-clouds. The ice mist clung curdled and stringy to the bases of the bounding peaks, in a light immature and smothered and the cold of the outer spheres. The idea of living organisms here was silly. And northwest in the racing obscurity, Mount Zanetti, the great northern spur of Wrangell, or Mount Sanford, flanking us far away, rose and sank in ghostly refractions.

Quickly it struck me—that we were going down. Our fumaroles were eating upward into the sky behind. We were right under the big hump of snow rising just south of the crater, whose inky rim banded half the sky as the toothed summit sank behind its pulsing steam. Why, now we were at the edge, too, of a vast snow-pit, a funnel-shaped hole hundreds of feet across, all dazzling and unscarred, burrowing down to a point—God knew how far below! Its inner wall was the cone's outer slope, that we had to climb. A dead crater? Likely the live tooth

was its heir-direct. In a moment it yawned below us, a mighty drop; and we were ploughing sheer upward into the ash-tainted and heat-riddled *névé* of our goal. "Look out there!" Billy called, caving through to his stomach in the glazed and broken stuff. He climbed out dripping with liquid ash. Muddy water, oozing from the black rim, rotted and pocked the ice, or seeped through the jagged gaps where it sloughed away from the slope. *Scrunch!*—and heart thundering, panting, and too dazed to feel or care, I caved down into the muck. It froze on me instantly when I had fought out again. Thus we climbed, slipped back, climbed, up that transient, traitorous wall, as it bulged out here in a glossy mud spring, there was caverned with unknowable dread; toiled like beings in a treadmill—one that might explode or crumble in a jiffy into the soul and centre of the earth's secret being; and over us the tented steam, rolling, rolling, all but touched our eyelids.

Then hard ash—chunks of black, breadly lava—a reddish boulder or two—and we stood together at the edge of the main hole. It was cone-shaped, perfectly, 150 to 200 yards across, funnelling smoothly downward in one contracting yawn. I don't remember what we said, how we looked, rooted there in the awful



ON THE SUMMIT OF MOUNT WRANGELL

silence. It seemed that the whole world, embodied in that soundless steam, was rising and billowing away from us. Then, magically, all vapor cleared away; down from our feet bit a dark, parched slope, bristling with grisly protrusions, or smooth and polished, blemished with ashy crusts and ancient snow, or luminous with converging ribs of a strange whiteness. The earth was holding its breath; and we, beholding its very entrails, held ours—we could not help it. And we glared, glared down to fix the eye of that great funnel. And we saw nothing, ever nothing. Then, maybe from some needle-hole, slowly the chasm filled with a rising tide of steam. We breathed out, stared at one another, and spoke commonplaces, like, "I don't smell anything, do you?" or, "It's lucky we're

on this side. We'd be choked over there." And existence, like a released pendulum, swung forward again on the north wind, in those monstrous globes of steam. We marked the dome of snow to the left, with its twin, jade-blue walls of ice that opened over the pit, and like spectral jaws drooled downward an icy lobe. And the high inner wall of the tooth wavered with kiln-stained, skeleton crags, velvety with steam wisps, dripping with ice flowers like melted tallow, salty and cracked and brittle, splashed with the hues of dead flames and tarnished rainbows, all ready at a touch to mingle and seethe in avalanches.

But the top. We were in an elbow of the crater rim, whence its level shot straight up westward. From the east face of the cone we had to swing around and climb it from the north. A steeper slope, yes, but the thing was sure! Now

time passed like lightning. Again the slippery treadmill of mud and honeycombed ice, but harder and thinner. Trickle spurts right out of the ash and cut little shining courses. An easier grade. Below, black patches swooped with hurried steam, and out sprang the great wall of Chetudina Glacier. Ash everywhere soon, white and crackly with frost flowers, beds and beds of their huge crystals, all burled over with a finer rime that formed ceaselessly and clothed us from head to foot. Then everything plunged down, south into the main universe of steam. I broke into a run. I guess I yelled.

It was exactly ten o'clock in the morning, July 30th, that we reached the top of Wrangell.

"Look out!" shouted Billy, as I jammed the pole down. "Don't—don't do that

again! I felt the whole business shake." Of course it did—the tottering, friable trap! Why we weren't fools enough to go hang over the undercut edge of the crater I don't know. With the wall of steam for background, we photographed each other—the horrid sores from sun and snow burn on our fiery cheeks and lips. I compassed off peaks and directions, sketch-mapped, made notes, all in a frenzied rush, laughing and talking at once, but with a feeling that I accomplished nothing, and that time and "the" watch were racing on with a broken escapement. The pen froze and broke and spewed all over the paper, but I scrawled right on, with illegible blurs and fly tracks, thanking Heaven that we had just spelled out our names and the date and poked them under a slab of lava.

A dappled floor of white and blue opal cloud hid all the world. Miles sheer down, Chetudina Glacier, a very Gehenna of crevasses, plunged under it. We got not a glimpse of the Copper valley, nor at the two-mile-high crest of Mount Drum. Anyhow, what mattered panoramas? North all was clearer, by the twin hazy nubs and the thumb of Mount Zanetti, and Mount Sanford raised by mirage in an orange mist and tilted toward us like a reflection in a concave mirror. And—blessed that we had eyes to see it!—the broad shoulders of McKinley (magnetic west, exactly), like one lighted window of an invisible house of splendor on the uttermost horizon.

Forty minutes of living, and then

downward. Instantly a queer drowsiness flushed me. Ten yards from the summit I could have lain in my tracks and slept. I tottered down to the crater edge and gave a sleepy look in; but there a Thing transfixed me. Was it real, was it a trick of eyes that focussed askew from the glare and gale?—Was it inherent in the dream that from the moment of descending had supplemented life? A thin ribbon, a tremulous blur, rose from the exact centre of the crater; transparent, woven of many threads, like some gelatinous sea growth. I rubbed my eyes. It was still there. Was this a spirit crater, and Wrangell but the figment of a mountain? I shivered, and plunged down the slope.

Ploughing across the white desert to the fumaroles, I had to shake myself to keep awake. "Don' care, don' care 'f school keeps or not," I kept muttering like a drunken man. And far down over the lip of ash, among the crevasses, light fogs settled over and diffused the sun into a white-hot, steely glare. Light so malign was unbelievable. Stalled, the trail lost, we had to plunge our faces into the snow and wait and wait—blind hours which fixed the illusion that reality had ended. Even through our glasses, eyes were jabbed as if with hot knives, and we felt our cheeks scorching. Yet somehow we reached the tent and food and sleep. By midnight I felt quite sane, and, oh, so happy! And still higher than any one in the world who could behold the pole-star so near the zenith, we slept.

Hodiernæ Rosæ

BY ROSAMUND MARRIOTT WATSON

MY eyes are faded, but yours shine so clear.
Looking on you I take no thought of grief—
I wonder if the new-blown roses cheer
Yesterday's roses, withering leaf on leaf.