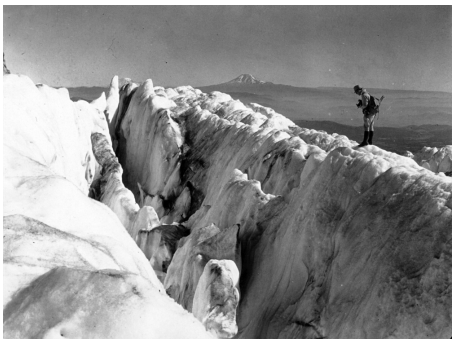
Mazamas



On March 19, 1894, the *Oregonian* announced a meeting at the Portland Savings Bank to organize a mountain climbing club on the summit of Mt. Hood. The organizers were former officers of the defunct Oregon Alpine Club: William G. Steel, Charles H. Sholes, J. Francis Drake, Francis C. Little, Oliver C. Yocum, and Martin W. Gorman. They agreed to name the club the Mazamas, after the Spanish name for mountain goat.

The charter climb was scheduled for July 19. A few days before the event, wagons filled with climbers and supplies rolled from Portland to Government Camp on Mt. Hood. On July 18, climbers moved to Camp Mazama at timberline. *Reveille* sounded at two o'clock the next morning, as ominous thunder rumbled to the south. But the sky was clear, and the group divided into small climbing teams and began the ascent.

The first group reached the summit by nine o'clock. Most of the climbers began the descent in cold wind and threatening clouds, and others straggled up the mountain for hours. Dozens quit, as descending groups advised them to go back. The temperature was about 34° F, and a raw wind chilled climbers to the bone. On the north side of the mountain, twenty-two climbers, guided by H.D. Doug Langille, left Cloud Cap to meet the timberline group on the summit.

The officers staged their organizational meeting on the summit at three that afternoon, as planned. Will Steel was elected president. Vice presidents were E.M. Wilbur, H.D. Langille, Charles H. Chapman, and A.H. Johnson. Charles H. Sholes was elected secretary; Francis C. Little, treasurer; and Fay Fuller, historian. A summit "banquet" was canceled, and the Mazamas played the old mountain game of "run-for-your-life."

Over the course of the day, 155 men and 38 women climbed Mt. Hood. Of the total, 105 became charter members of the Mazamas, the third oldest mountaineering society in the nation.

The Mazamas had annual outings, with members reaching the sites by railroad or steamboat. A commissary kitchen served 200 or more participants. When automobiles enabled weekend trips, outings became smaller and increased to a dozen or more per year.

The annual outing ended in 1970, and since then climbs have varied from local ranges to exotic mountain destinations on every continent. The ascent of a peak with a living glacier remains a condition of membership, which has swelled to more than 3,000.

In 1914, the Mazamas established an office-clubroom in the Northwest Bank building in Portland. In 1923, a Mazama lodge was built near Rhododendron. The club erected a log lodge just east of the Summit Ski Area in 1931.

The Mazamas Climbing Committee was established in 1934 to plan and supervise climbs, leaders, and a climbing school. Until 1963, when paid help was hired, volunteers did all office work. In 2007, the club purchased a permanent office in Portland.

The Mazamas continue to focus on climbing, hiking, and skiing and on encouraging young people to learn leadership skills. The club's three committees work to further the interests of all citizens: Conservation, which works and lobbies for the preservation of natural wonders; Research, which sponsors the study of scientific aspects of mountains; and Adventurous Young Mazamas, which brings teenagers into club activities. By 2008, the club was scheduling over 300

climbs a year, about 800 trail trips with 8,000 participants, and several outings.

Written by John Jack Grauer

Further Reading:

Grauer, Jack. *Mount Hood, A Complete History (July 1975).*

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