

Mountaineer

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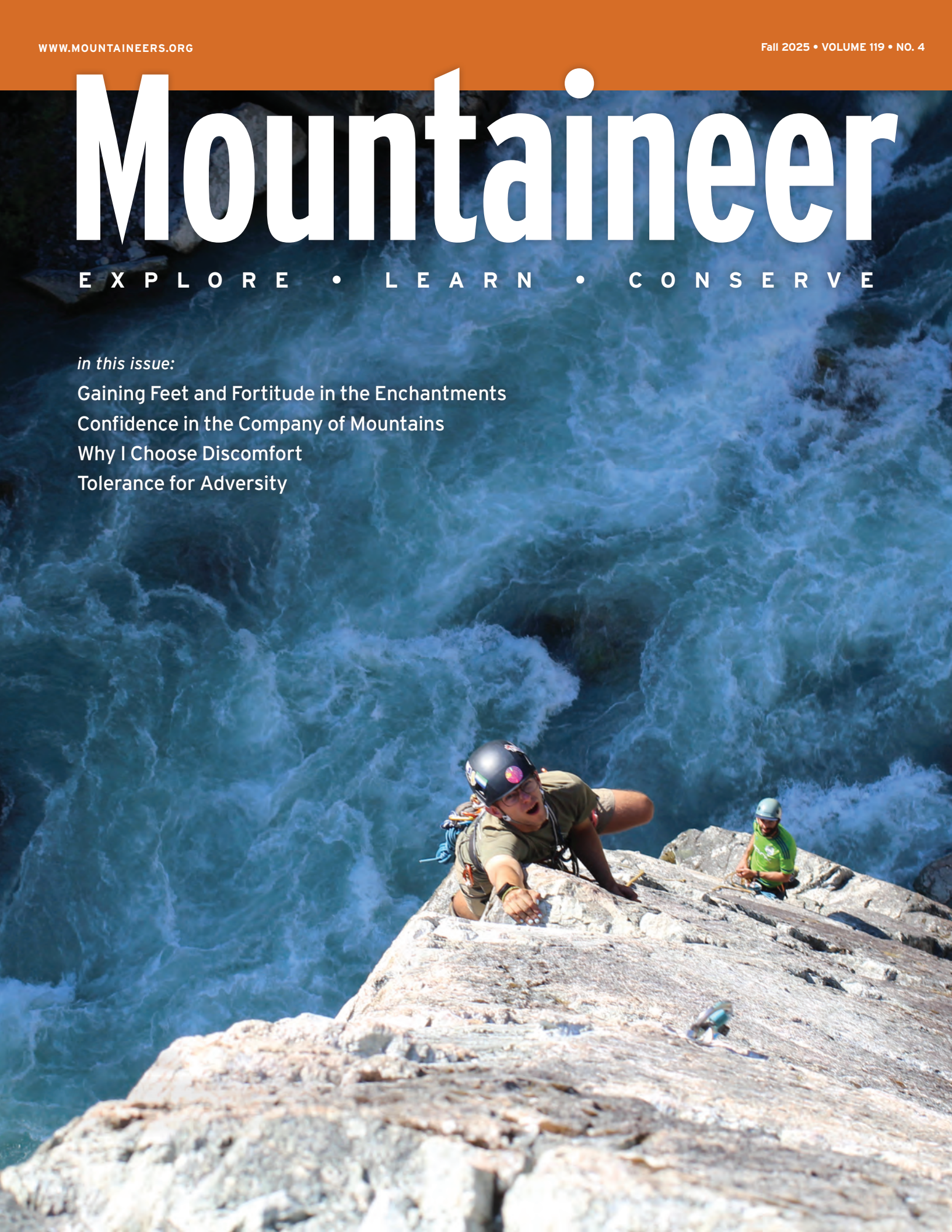
in this issue:

Gaining Feet and Fortitude in the Enchantments

Confidence in the Company of Mountains

Why I Choose Discomfort

Tolerance for Adversity



Fall 2025 | Volume 119 | Number 4

The Mountaineers enriches the community by helping people explore, conserve, learn about, and enjoy the lands and waters of the Pacific Northwest and beyond.



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On the cover: Mountaineers youth instructors Ben Stevens (left) and Seth Davis (right) climbing Star Chek during a Youth Programs outing to British Columbia. Photo by Hank Stein.

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Crevasse rescue practice. Photo by Iris Lieuw.



Photo by Rick Meade.

Many of the outdoor skills we teach are perishable. These skills are often in response to an incident, are used infrequently, and require periodic review and practice. Good examples of perishable outdoor skills include glacier crevasse rescue, wilderness first aid, and avalanche companion rescue. As responsible recreationists, we take many measures to avoid having to use these skills in real-life scenarios, but when incidents occur, our calm and skillful response can literally mean the difference between life and death.

I recently helped instruct at a Glacier Travel and Crevasse Rescue field trip for the Basic Alpine Climbing course. Many students had never traveled on a glacier, and virtually none were proficient at crevasse rescue. Similar to doing wilderness first aid scenarios, complete with fake blood and bruising, practicing crevasse rescue is stressful. When someone yells “falling!” as they are lowered off the lip of a crevasse while their partners hold the “fall” with an ice axe arrest, adrenaline starts pumping and hearts begin to race. The clock is ticking! But with each practice, the confidence of the students grew.

Watching students become more proficient at a skill like crevasse rescue over the course of a weekend field trip is inspiring. By the end of the course, I would have trusted any one of our Basic Alpine students to rescue me if I fell into a crevasse. Many of those students will return next year to help instruct, and some will even go on to become climb or course leaders.

The cycle of embracing new challenges, learning, developing proficiency, and then helping others acquire those same skills has been the core of The Mountaineers volunteer-led outdoor education program for nearly 120 years. It’s exactly why leadership development is one of our top organizational priorities and why Volunteerism is one of our core values: “we foster lifelong connections - developing leaders who continue our legacy of outdoor education, integrity, and action.”

To the thousands of amazing volunteers who support our students and our community - thank you! You are the lifeblood of The Mountaineers.

Tom Vogl

Tom Vogl
The Mountaineers CEO



The Mountaineers is a nonprofit organization, founded in 1906 and dedicated to the responsible enjoyment and protection of natural areas.

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Sunrise over Neve Glacier. Photo by Skye Michel.
Right: Two of Neve Glacier's resident glacier worms. Photo by Kate Goldenring.



Skye Michel
skyem@mountaineers.org
Photo by Karen Grubb.

Shivering against berating winds and biting through the stubborn density of a frozen energy bar at 3am isn't the most comforting way to start the day for someone who isn't a morning person. But I don't wish to be anywhere else.

Around me, friends rustle in their tents as they prepare themselves for today's destination: Snowfield Peak, a fairly easy objective compared to yesterday's nine hours of bushwacking and scrambling over 6,400

feet of elevation gain. With blistered feet, bug-bitten arms, and the elated enthusiasm wrought by sleep deprivation, we begin our approach to Neve Glacier.

The sun rises with us, turning the clouds pink and the snow golden yellow. I look at my feet and notice thin black threads, barely an inch long, blanketing the snow's surface like the floor of a hair salon. Peeking closer, the glacier worms twitch, their movements barely perceptible. Some rest on the snow in isolation, while others cluster like stars in groups.

A block of ice wouldn't seem like an ideal place to harbor life, but the worms line our path in abundance. Found across the glaciers of Alaska, British Columbia, and the Pacific Northwest, they've adapted to withstand frigid temperatures by utilizing a protein that protects their body from freezing, according to research done by the North Cascade Glacier Climate Project. They rise to the glacier's surface at dusk, maybe to feed on algae and pollen, maybe to stargaze, and retreat downward at dawn to avoid the heat of the sun.

While amenable to cold temperatures, they can't withstand much below freezing, using the insulation of dense snow and ice to prevent them from confronting a colder climate. They also can't handle much above. I think back to a recent conversation with a friend who witnessed glacier worms - brought from the alpine to the frontcountry - mysteriously disappear within the melting snow, their cell membranes dissolving against the higher temperature. Maybe delicate, these worms are resilient, making a life in a challenging landscape and eschewing conditions that most would find favorable.

I look up to see morning's alpenglow illuminate the surrounding peaks. Delighted by the view, I hardly notice the pain of sore feet or the rumbling of a stomach that can't handle another sour gummy. Ahead, our rope lead warns of a crevasse. Like the worms, we are adapting to an unusual landscape and discovering our capacity to withstand and even feel at home in an environment that challenges us.

The stories in this edition explore similar themes, revealing how life's trying moments - whether expanding our capacity for discomfort, revealing our limits, or somewhere in between - encourage us to evolve in our understanding of ourselves and what we are capable of. Sometimes we come out broken, sometimes better, sometimes reluctant to return to the comforts we once clung to. Whatever the obstacle, and whatever the lesson, we emerge, the new day a reassurance of our resilience.

Skye Michel

LAST SEASON'S TOP TRIP REPORT PHOTOS



Intermediate Alpine Climb, Kautz Glacier, Isley Gao.



Backpack, Loowit Trail, Susan Shih.



Day Hike, Pinnacle Peak, Kathy Kemp.



Day Hike, Eagle Peak, Lisa Elliott.



Glacier Climb, Mount Garibaldi, Martin Fisher.



Rock Climb, Exit 38, Matt Davey.



Backpack, Mount Rainier, McKenzie Campbell Davies.



Alpine Scramble, Seymour and Yakima, Rochelle Garcia.



Whitewater Packraft, North Fork John Day River, Robert Kaye.



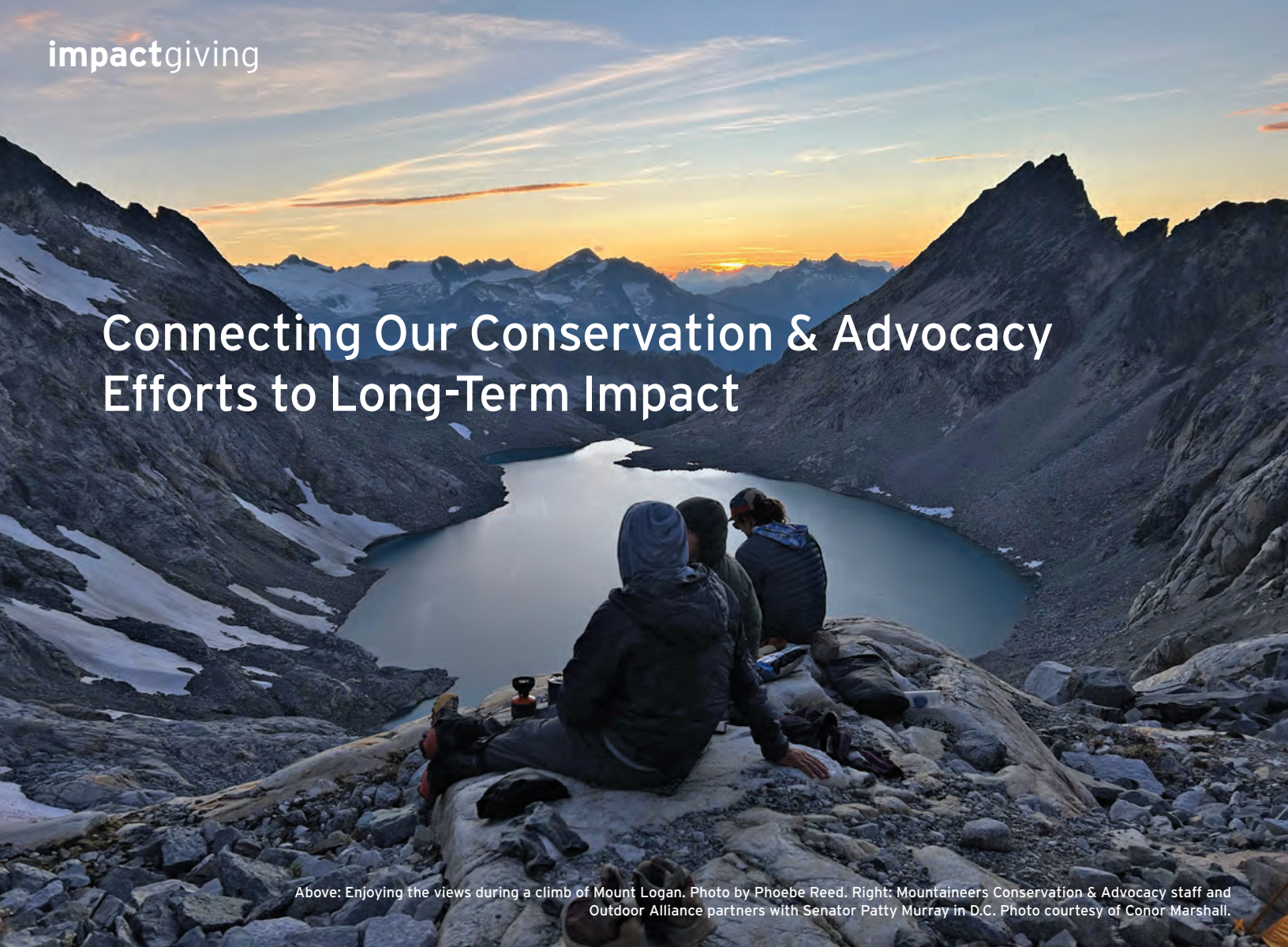
Ski Mountaineering, Koma Kulshan/Mount Baker, Sohaib Haider.



Glacier Climb, Mount Rainier, Joshua Walther.



Global Adventure, Peru's Cordillera Huayhuash, Colin Chapman.



Connecting Our Conservation & Advocacy Efforts to Long-Term Impact

Above: Enjoying the views during a climb of Mount Logan. Photo by Phoebe Reed. Right: Mountaineers Conservation & Advocacy staff and Outdoor Alliance partners with Senator Patty Murray in D.C. Photo courtesy of Conor Marshall.

In building a culture of philanthropy at The Mountaineers, we’re always seeking ways to communicate clearly and concisely the importance of our mission to funders. This work requires a deep understanding of the connection between our daily efforts and long-term impact.

Recently, members of our Community Engagement team undertook a Theory of Change exercise to examine our Conservation & Advocacy program. The exercise guided us through pinpointing challenges; proposing solutions; identifying our inputs, activities, and outputs; and establishing desired outcomes and impacts. Results highlighted how the efforts of our staff and volunteers directly connect to our mission and strategic plan, and recognized The Mountaineers as uniquely qualified to create tangible, lasting change for our community and the natural world. These findings strengthen our case to external partners and help us ensure that every charitable contribution and volunteer hour is strategically invested for maximum impact.

Let's pull back the curtain and look at some key components from this exercise.

Understanding the starting line: Premise & problem statements

Every effective initiative begins with a clear understanding of the challenge it aims to solve. For our Conservation & Advocacy program, this means articulating the conservation and outdoor recreation issues we focus on through education, stewardship, and advocacy.

Our access to public lands is under threat because public lands themselves are under threat. These vital spaces face critical challenges, including chronic underfunding of land managers, drastic cuts to the land manager workforce, increased visitation, climate impacts such as wildfires and flooding, extraction policies of lumber harvesting and mining, and public land sell-offs to private interests.

Charting the course: Proposed solutions

Once we define the challenges, we identify the specific strategies and interventions we can employ to address them. These are our “proposed solutions” – the core of our programmatic approach.

Our Conservation & Advocacy program leverages our long history and standing as the voice for outdoor recreation



and conservation in Washington. Through our coalition work with outdoor partners and deepened relationships with land managers, lawmakers, and tribes, we advance innovative and collaborative solutions that address the protection of and access to public lands with an outsized impact on conservation efforts, state and nationwide.

In our mission to help conserve the natural world, one of our proposed solutions is to educate and engage our community around how to care for and steward the places they love through sustainable and responsible practices, as well as how to take personal action to address the challenges facing public lands.

The fuel for our work: Inputs

Inputs are the resources we need to execute our proposed solutions. This includes everything from funding and Conservation & Advocacy staff expertise to volunteer hours and crucial partnerships. In other words, it's the "what we need" to get the job done. For our Conservation & Advocacy efforts, primary inputs include:

- **Our Conservation & Advocacy Director:** This role leads programming, drives partnerships, executes policy and advocacy campaigns, and supports fundraising efforts that protect public lands and the outdoor experience.
- **Our Advocacy & Engagement Manager:** This role inspires action through conservation communications, develops educational opportunities for our members on policy issues, and engages our community to take action to help protect the outdoor experience.
- **Our Associate Manager of Policy & Planning:** This role builds vital relationships with land managers, leverages those connections for special use permits, and advocates for issues like increased funding for public lands.
- **Our dedicated volunteers and member advocates:** Your passion and time are indispensable for grassroots efforts and amplifying our advocacy. When it comes to advocacy, there's no replacement for constituent outreach.
- **Financial resources:** Funding ensures we can organize campaigns, lead coalitions, and sustain our expert staff.

Our actions in motion: Activities

Activities are the specific tasks and processes we undertake to address challenges and drive our mission forward. This is how we do our work, the day-to-day operations that drive our mission forward. Some Conservation & Advocacy activities

include meeting with lawmakers, authoring advocacy letters on behalf of the outdoor recreation community, and building relationships with land managers to understand their capacity and unique challenges. We also engage our community through blogs, action alerts, and eLearning courses, while enlisting key volunteers and leaders to further engage our members and the wider community.

Measuring our reach: Outputs

Outputs are the direct results of our activities. They are quantifiable measures of what we produce or deliver, indicating the scale and reach of our work. Our Conservation & Advocacy outputs could include the number of comment letters and action alerts sent to members, the number of people who complete Conservation & Advocacy eLearning courses, or the number of meetings that we have with Indigenous tribes, land managers, or lawmakers.

Immediate shifts: Outcomes (near-term effects)

Outcomes are the short-to-medium-term changes that occur as a direct result of our outputs and activities. Desired outcomes of our Conservation & Advocacy work are that lawmakers prioritize action on public lands and recreation issues, Mountaineers members feel more connected to and protective of natural spaces, and members of our community are well-educated on policy issues that directly affect their ability to recreate in the natural world.

The lasting legacy: Impacts (broader, long-term effects)

Finally, impacts represent the long-term changes and goals we strive to achieve. These are the significant, sustainable differences our work makes in the world that directly align with The Mountaineers mission and strategic plan, Adventure With Purpose. Potential impacts of our Conservation & Advocacy efforts include the permanent protection of critical public lands and wilderness areas, increased and sustainable access for outdoor recreation, and a robust, empowered movement of public lands advocates who actively shape environmental policy in Washington and beyond. These impacts directly fulfill our mission to explore, conserve, learn about, and enjoy the lands and waters of the Pacific Northwest and beyond.

The value of understanding our Conservation & Advocacy impact

The Theory of Change exercise is more than a tool for crafting a stronger case for funders – it's a process for deepening our understanding of our work's true value, which ensures that every dollar we raise and every hour our staff and volunteers dedicate are strategically invested to create the greatest possible impact.

This rigorous self-reflection on our Conservation & Advocacy work allows us to communicate to our members and partners that their support isn't just a contribution – it's a direct investment in a clear pathway toward lasting change. Your support helps us permanently protect critical public lands, increase sustainable access for outdoor recreation, and build a robust movement of advocates who actively shape environmental policy in Washington state and beyond. ▲



How the WA Outdoor Community Said “No” to Public Lands Sales

By Conor Marshall, Advocacy & Engagement Manager

Mountaineers scrambling Silver Peak.
Photo by David Bradley.

Hiking and camping at Baker Lake and Lake Kachess on the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest remind me of the intrinsic value of Washington's forests. It can be easy to take our favorite public lands for granted or assume they will always be public. Until this year, I never imagined these places and other cherished national forest areas could so quickly become at risk of being sold off to developers.

As the 119th Congress gained momentum, the usual anti-conservation rhetoric was quickly backed by an unprecedented attempt to privatize public lands that belong to all Americans. Lawmakers sought to sell off federal land to raise revenue through the budget reconciliation process. This effort was motivated by the problematic premise that public lands are simply items on the nation's balance sheet to be leveraged for financial gain.

As Mountaineers, we believe in the many benefits and values represented by conserved and accessible lands and waters, and we know that our public lands are more than parcels to be sold. These special places support our outdoor adventures and connect us to the natural world and to each other.

Public lands sell-offs through budget reconciliation

The initial sell-off proposal included half a million acres of public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Forest Service in Nevada and Utah. This proposal was met with opposition and eventually dropped before the final bill passed the House this spring. As the action shifted to the Senate, public lands sales were on the table again, and this time federal lands in Washington and ten other western states were thrown into the mix.

The first version of the Senate reconciliation bill mandated the sale of between 2.2 and 3.3 million acres of national forest and BLM lands for housing and associated infrastructure. (Wilderness, National Monuments, and other protective designations were thankfully off limits.) Hundreds of millions of multiple-use Forest Service and BLM lands, including Roadless Areas, were up for grabs with very few guardrails.

Mapping done by our partners at Outdoor Alliance showed a dynamic and valuable recreation footprint on these lands: 100,000 miles of trails, 3,405 miles of whitewater paddling, and more than 45,000 climbing routes and boulder problems.

The Mountaineers supports balanced use of public lands, and these sell-offs would have set a harmful precedent for how federal public lands are viewed and managed.

As the state of play for public lands sell-offs became clearer and Washington's public lands entered the fray, it was game on for The Mountaineers and our partners. Nearly four million acres of Washington's national forests and BLM areas were at risk of being sold, including areas around Washington Pass, Baker Lake, Lake Kachess, and The Mountaineers Meany Lodge. Recreation hotspots on the Olympic National Forest that are up for wilderness designation through the Wild Olympics Bill were also vulnerable to sale.

Rejecting public lands sell-offs in Washington and across the country

Washington's recreation community and the state's congressional delegation have proven to be powerful catalysts for outdoor advocacy thanks to deep partnerships,

policy expertise, and thousands of outdoor enthusiasts who speak up for the lands they cherish.

Washington's congressional delegation and members of Congress across the country heard loud and clear from their constituents against the sale of public lands through reconciliation. For example, more than 3,000 action-takers generated 10,000 letters - the highest engagement I've seen on one of our calls to action during my time at The Mountaineers. Our collective advocacy helped spur several Washington members to timely and powerful action on this issue.

Senators Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell made public statements against the proposal, and Representative Emily Randall from Washington's 6th district - a new member who sits on the House Natural Resources Committee - came out early in opposition to the lands sales.

Notably, Representative Dan Newhouse from Washington's 4th district joined four other western Republicans in pledging to vote “no” on the entire reconciliation bill if public lands sales were included - a move that helped make the sell-offs provision untenable and resulted in its removal from the final bill. Over the last couple years, The Mountaineers and Outdoor Alliance have engaged Representative Newhouse



Baker Lake from a Mountaineers youth trip. Photo by Mountaineers staff.

and his staff around the importance of outdoor recreation to the communities of Central Washington, including the Yakima River Valley. Many factors contributed to the rejection of public lands sales, but relationship and community building laid the groundwork for outdoor advocacy and the robust, bipartisan support for public lands we forged together.

Your advocacy gives me hope

The removal of public lands sales from the final budget bill is a big win to celebrate, as well as an individual victory in the wake of a crashing wave of harmful policies for public lands and the environment. The final bill included significant cuts to federal land manager staffing, rescinded previously allocated climate and public lands funding from the Inflation Reduction Act, and delivered new mandates to increase timber harvesting on national forests. These and other problematic provisions will likely challenge conservation efforts for years to come.

Broadscale attempts to sell off public lands will likely return to the halls of Congress at some point. In the meantime, we'll continue to grow bipartisan support for the outdoors and defend public lands from emerging threats, like the administration's planned rollback of the Roadless Rule.

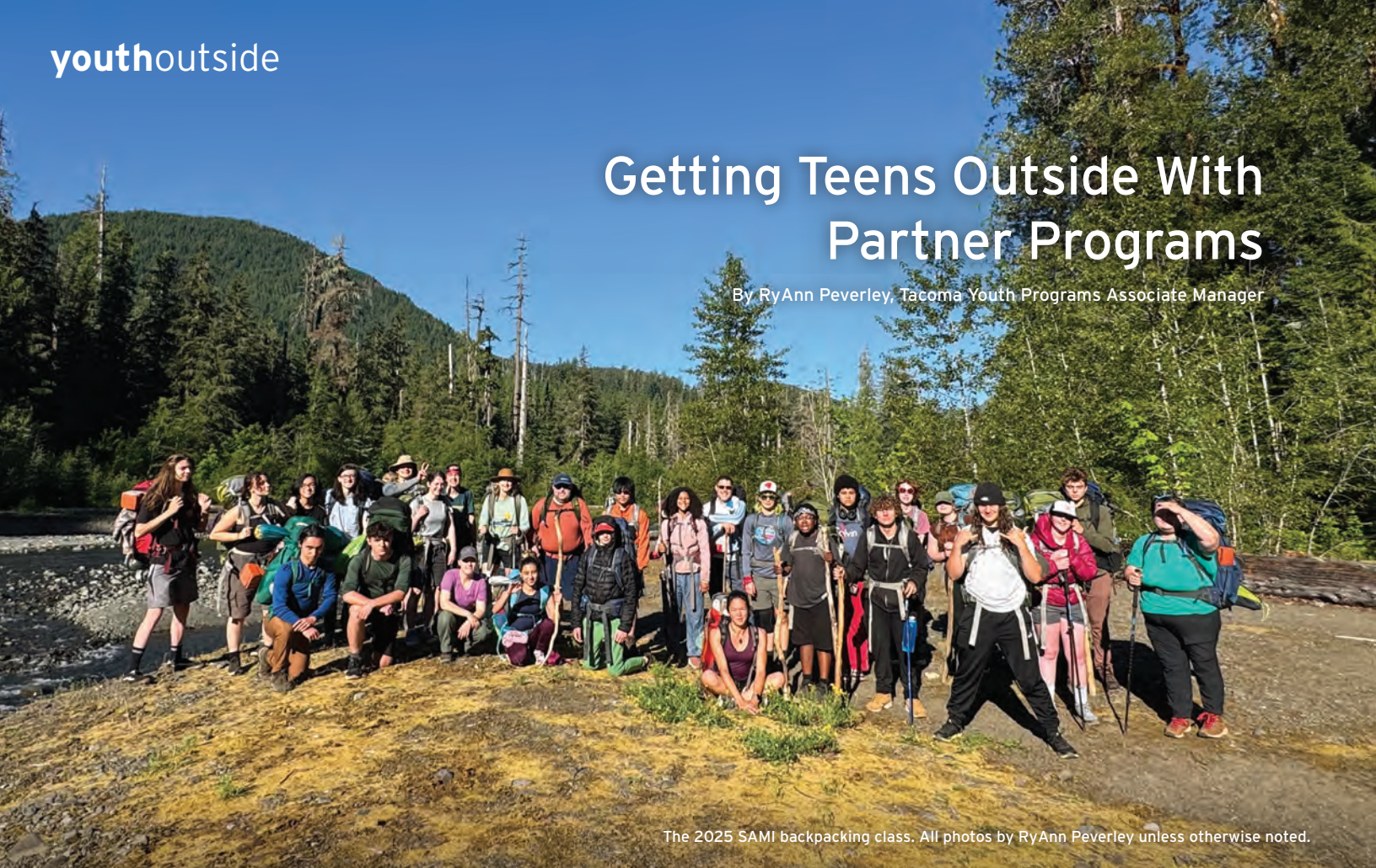
Witnessing the groundswell of grassroots advocacy responses to the threat of public lands sales gives me hope that we can continue to build and refine the advocacy clout of the outdoor community. We helped build Outdoor Alliance Washington and strengthen the national coalition for this very reason: to set the stage for individual outdoor enthusiasts to raise their voices. Our community's advocacy and impact inspire me and my colleagues to keep pushing to defend our public lands. ▲▲

An Evening of Advocacy - Sep 18

To learn more and support our work, join us on September 18 for our signature fundraising event for our Conservation & Advocacy program. Register at: mountaineers.org/AEOA2025.

Getting Teens Outside With Partner Programs

By RyAnn Peverley, Tacoma Youth Programs Associate Manager



The 2025 SAMI backpacking class. All photos by RyAnn Peverley unless otherwise noted.

Two vans, eight tents, 24 sleeping bags, 56 dehydrated meals, and countless packs of oatmeal and jerky is only a small part of what it takes to make a backpacking trip happen for a class of local high schoolers. Most people would think taking 24 teenagers into the backcountry is a big ask, but when that opportunity arose, I jumped at the chance.

This June, our South Sound Youth Program collaborated with longtime partners at the Science and Math Institute (SAMI), a local high school in Tacoma, to offer a backpacking experience for students. This was our third year facilitating the experience, which took place during SAMI’s “micro term,” a week-long period held at the end of the school year that provides students an opportunity to learn something outside of their usual curriculum. The micro term was the perfect amount of time to prepare and take a class of 24 students on a three-day, two-night backpacking trip.

Sparking creativity and trying new things

We kicked off the week with a day of instruction at the Tacoma Program Center and taught students a variety of outdoor skills such as Leave No Trace, water filtration, fire safety, and how to pack a backpack. Thanks to The Mountaineers Gear Library, we were able to outfit every student with the gear needed for a successful, safe, and fun trip. The following morning, we met at the SAMI school campus, loaded two vans with teens and two minivans with gear, and headed for the Olympics.

One of the things I love most about these backpacking trips is seeing the students step into the unfamiliar and connect

with something or someone new. Kayo Charbonnel-Mackley, one of SAMI’s teachers and the original brains of the trip, perfectly captured the “why” behind this program. “There’s something about removing the kids from what they’re used to and providing a challenge that creates different bonds, relationships, and an opportunity for personal growth,” Kayo said. “Besides the work, it’s great to see them engage without technology, and it gives them the time to fill boredom creatively.”

This year’s trip offered many opportunities for the students to fill boredom creatively. We turned group games like Never Have I Ever into a water drinking game to make sure everyone stayed hydrated during the heat; we turned the task of hanging bear bags into a competition to see who could get their line over the highest branch; and everyone enjoyed a reprieve from the warm weather by cold plunging in the glacial-fed river. The trip also provided a lot of firsts: for most of the group, eating a rehydrated meal was a new experience, and many had never slept in a tent before.

Fostering autonomy and self-confidence

At the heart of our Partner Programs is teaching young adults how to be autonomous and empowering them with skills that extend beyond the outdoors and into their daily lives. For example, one of the SAMI students, Elias, loved the trip because “it was the perfect balance of freedom and structure.” “I’d never been backpacking before and I feel like I got to try everything that I wanted to experience with my friends,” they



Left: RyAnn with a packed van, ready for the students. Photo by Kristina Cirillo. Right: Students cooling off at the river.



offerings but were so popular among students that we were asked by SAMI to extend the program to an entire semester-long curriculum.

Now three years into this partnership, I’ve witnessed how powerful it is to use backcountry experiences as an avenue to show kids just how much they’re capable of. I love having the opportunity to empower others to safely and responsibly partake in outdoor activities. And I also love being able to instill a love of advocacy and community in the next generation. Plus, the chance to go on really cool adventures is always a bonus. I’m excited about what the future of this partnership holds, and look forward to continuing to offer transformative outdoor experiences for South Sound youth. ▲

shared. “I felt confident with what was happening because of the instruction I got, without feeling like adults were forcing me to do things I didn’t want to do.”

Many other students shared inspiring insights into why they chose to partake in the program. While sitting around the campfire, one student named Julia shared, “This trip gave me an opportunity I’ve never had, because backpacking is something that my family doesn’t enjoy... I got to try out backpacking without having to invest the money and get everything together on my own, and I got to go with friends and know that I would be safe. Plus, it was great to have the trip planned for me.” Another student named Adrian said, “I really liked this trip because I got to spend more time outside, which I love, and I got to be away from my phone which is a big distraction in life. I also got to wake up early and experience things instead of rot in bed.”

One of my favorite things about running these trips with SAMI is that the programs are about more than just getting kids outside. We help them build connections and community. We help them push outside their comfort zones and grow their self-confidence. Partnering with organizations like SAMI enables us to not only build outdoor and personal skills but also instill a love for the natural world and inspire the stewards of the next generation.

The power of outdoor learning

Since 2022, we’ve been partnering with SAMI to provide additional courses outside of our usual end-of-school-year backpacking trips, including rock climbing classes to teach students skills such as belaying, tying knots, rappelling, and climbing techniques. These classes originated as month-long

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Tolerance for Adversity

By Jeannette Stawski, Mountaineers Books author

Overboard adventures in Costa Rica. Photo courtesy of Jeannette Stawski.

Excerpted and adapted from The Outdoor Leader: Resilience, Integrity, and Adventure by Jeannette Stawski (February 2024). Published by Mountaineers Books. Reprinted with permission.

Navigating the unknown, the uncomfortable, is a primary task for all outdoor leaders. The ability to tolerate challenging times and people is an asset. Change and challenges require the ability to move seamlessly from a determined, communicated, and vetted plan to one that navigates unforeseen (but time- and resource-anticipated) components. It’s vital to lean into and embrace adversity with confidence and to withstand doubt (self-doubt and that of others). Being okay with not being okay, and showing this to those who follow, is key. Being vulnerable and transparent as a leader allows others to find the strength to withstand that which may not have been anticipated.

Costa Rica Chicas

In 2019, I co-facilitated a once-in-a-lifetime learning expedition to Costa Rica that was intentionally designed for women leaders working in outdoor recreation and education. This adventure made me think a fair bit about being brave. Being outside without the comforts of technology – or climate control, and without a reliable means of transportation – requires confidence and a willingness to face uncertainty. There is a beauty in that, in which the unknown lies around the next corner and the process is filled with wonder.

In our first four days of adventure, we had swung from ropes into jungle rivers, had seen waterfalls and volcanoes, SUP’ed on Lake Arenal, and whitewater-rafted. Day five moved us away from volcanoes and into the jungle as we headed toward the Atlantic side of the country.

Moving through discomfort and facing fear

The rain brought a mixture of emotions – first was the feeling of not wanting to be wet, but then, after realizing we were about to be kayaking, came the feeling of acceptance that being wet was bound to happen anyway. The temperature was comfortable, and the rain was moderately heavy – nothing to be concerned about, we felt, until the lightning and thunder started. Many on the trip were outdoor instructors, and they mumbled about best practices and not wanting to be on water in a lightning storm. The other participants who were leaders, but not in an outdoor context, were unaware of these issues and unconcerned, but they were open to actively and respectfully following the outdoor instructors. After some discussion among our group, we justified our decision by noting that the dense foliage around and hanging over the river would mitigate our exposure to the electrical storm, so into the boats we went.

Down on the river, it was hard to hear each other. The group of kayaks was pretty spaced out, and from my perspective the guides didn’t seem too concerned about, well, anything. One participant, who also had experience guiding groups and was comfortable on her kayak, went on ahead while I stayed back to be the sweep.

We were still in shallow water when I heard the first screams after a kayak capsized. It was the dumping, not the depth, that caused the cry. The sit-on-top kayaks were incredibly tippy, and a strong stroke or leaning too far out of the boat resulted in capsizing. As I came up on Jill, I found her drenched but standing in only a foot of water. The river was that depth most of the time but grew to four feet at the deepest channel – you had to navigate away from the sandbars into the channels



The Costa Rica Chicas. Photo by Victoria Lopez-Herrera.

to avoid getting stuck. Getting out of a sit-on-top kayak can be awkward and walking on a river bottom can be unnerving, but Jill was a trooper and I helped her get back in her boat. The rain continued. We floated easily down the river, with our convoy stretching farther apart.

However, kayaks were now flipping over frequently. Most participants felt a mixture of surprise and fear, shouting when they fell into the water. But for one participant, it was also emotionally challenging. After she flipped out of her single kayak, we decided as a group to pull off to the side to talk about why this was happening and what to do when it did. This participant had had a negative experience on a prior kayaking trip, nearly drowning when her boat capsized. So the two of us decided to share a tandem kayak. We had enjoyed a good connection on the trip, and I was happy to help comfort and reassure her, given my experience working as a river guide. Off we went on what was now a leisurely float trip, drifting downstream in the rain, dipping in our paddles to move away from shore or into deeper waters.

And then it happened. Coming around a corner, the light dimming from heavier rain and a thicker canopy, my partner and I found many overturned kayaks. Women yelled from the water, and there was general mayhem. My partner and I paddled to catch up to assess the situation – the Costa Rican guides were farther downstream. We joined forces and worked to make sure everyone was indeed out of the water – found and not trapped.

Some participants were freaked out. One, Nicole, recalled, “Our [tandem] boat dumped again. When I came up, I was trying to push up the boat because I thought my partner was stuck under it. Then I got stuck between a downed tree or branch and the boat.” With her face out of the water but the current tugging at her, Nicole began screaming for help, panicking, until someone came and pulled her out. She said that her partner felt awful about the capsizing, as if it had been her fault, though of course this was far from the case – they’d all been abandoned by the so-called guides.

The kayak trip was all over the place – people being upset about the flip and pinning, the absent guides, the decision to be on the river during the storm. At this point, the only thing



Having Type 2 fun while canyoneering in Ecuador. Photo courtesy of Jeannette Stawski.

I could do was to get everyone into their boats and floating downstream to the take-out.

Processing challenging events

Once off the river, the group circled up to process the day’s experience. More than a dozen amazing women came together with wet hair, some with red eyes, some with arms around another, and one missing a flip-flop. Each person talked about what had happened. For some, the focus was on the events of the kayaking (mis)adventure; for others, it was on how they felt in the aftermath. We all checked in with each other. This adventure marked the biggest leap several had taken in their lives: they’d felt uncomfortable and exposed, but also alive in a new, vibrant way, having to trust ambiguity and being without the normal constraints and comforts of their lives back home. After the expedition, I became even closer with the members of the trip.

In discussions more than a year later, Nicole remembered, “When I got back to our room, Victoria asked me what happened. I broke down. She stood there, looked me in the eyes, and cried with me. There was no judgment; she just listened, loved, and supported me, and she let me have my feelings. It was amazing. Looking back now, I can identify so much of what went wrong. Sometimes I feel embarrassed about the meltdown, but mostly I accept that what I experienced was traumatizing, not just for me but for the whole group. It was a turning point for me, in some ways. From my lens, this part of the trip was the first time we were pulled from significant comfort.”

Individuals can process a common experience differently – both positively and negatively. I saw this with the women on the kayak trip, who started processing it right after it happened, then again in a group debriefing, and years later when they reflected on impactful moments in their lives. At the time of the flip, some responded with action and others with emotion, while others remained unaware of the potential risks. In the group debrief, many shared how the experience felt to them in the moment, with one member connecting the potential loss of a participant to the recent loss of a family friend. Years later, when many of the women connected over breakfast, at least two stated, upon reflection, that the Costa

Rica trip was the space and time that allowed them to make significant changes to their lives, including career change and starting a family.

It should be noted that leaders also process events themselves! Following a situation that the group has navigated, leaders will not only personally process and internalize their experience but will need to be intentional about helping and often facilitating the group's experience. After our kayaking debacle, I focused on the group's need to process right after we got off the water, and I recall how important it was for me to create space for each person to share. Then, afterward, I processed the event as an individual, exploring my feelings and understanding of the day's events.

How a leader's tolerance for adversity affects others

One thing became clear to me after the Costa Rica expedition: a leader's ability to tolerate challenging times and people can also be a liability. There is a very fine line between tolerating some discomfort, especially when you help cause it (as our river guides had), and ignoring things that are uncomfortable or even unsafe, to the detriment of those you lead.

Being on water during a lightning storm, as we were in Costa Rica, is always a bad idea. Water conducts electricity, and being in the water or on it in a boat can be a recipe for disaster. (A good rule of thumb is to not be on or in water until thirty minutes after you hear the last peal of thunder.) In Costa Rica, as the head leader of the trip, I should have done more to set aside my own tolerance for risk and adversity and instead queried

members of the group as to where their threshold lay. However, by not voicing concern for getting on the water, especially as an experienced river guide myself, I chose Compliant Leadership – low care for myself and a low commitment to the group. Ultimately, it was not the best decision to go, and we were lucky that things didn't go any worse. ▲▲

REFLECTION EXERCISE: EMBRACING ADVERSITY AS A LEADER

- It is paramount for leaders to assess what is and isn't working. When things don't go as planned, which complementary abilities will you need to modify your efforts?
- Which outdoor experiences have required you to assess your ability to tolerate adversity? What did you learn about yourself and others?
- It is easy to avoid things that make us uncomfortable. Identify an area you are intentionally avoiding. Can you become more comfortable with being uncomfortable?
- What do you turn to when things become challenging? How do you acknowledge the discomfort yet still find a way to navigate through?
- What is your biggest fear in becoming an outdoor leader? What are you doing to address this fear?

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Why I Choose Discomfort

Lessons From Cold Mornings and Muddy Trails

By Jessica Hirst, 19-year member

Jessica somewhere in Idaho, happy to be free of the Midwest rains. All photos by Jessica Hirst.

Winter darkness lies thickly outside my bedroom window as the world rests in a deep and quiet stillness. My body nestles deeper into the flannel comforter, creating a barrier against the air's chill, when a rude chirp sounds from my cell phone alarm. I reach out one arm to hit snooze, then slip back into a dream. My phone chirps a second time. By the third, I know I have to toss aside my warm cocoon of blankets and step onto the cold, wood floor.

An hour and a half later, I'm standing at a muddy, blustery trailhead with a heavy pack and talking about wind and snow conditions with my scrambling group as we prepare to ascend Silver Peak near Snoqualmie Pass. The tops of the surrounding fir trees blow back and forth against a slate grey sky as an icy blast of drizzle hits my cheek. Shivering, I pull the hood of my puffy coat up tighter and think about all the sane people back in the city who are cradling warm mugs of coffee from the couch while calmly watching raindrops splatter against their windows.

As a hiker, scrambler, backpacker, and cyclist, I sometimes wonder why I consciously choose to engage in activities that involve a high degree of discomfort. Sure, part of the

reason is to experience expansive views of fall foliage that can only be seen from the top of a mountain, or silent, snowy, untrammelled slopes glinting in the low sunlight of winter. But do I also find value in the experience of discomfort itself?

Choosing discomfort, reluctantly

I'm not exactly someone who takes easily to discomfort. I often think that if I could choose, I would spend most of my life on the couch eating cheese and watching funny videos. I'm cautious by nature – my palms sweat and my stomach churns when driving through rush hour traffic, let alone when navigating a rocky ridgeline or an icy summit push. I've always wanted to be a fearless free spirit who's up for anything at a moment's notice, but in reality, I'm more of a hermit with an adventurous streak – one that I've had to work hard to nurture over the years. (Maybe that makes me a Hobbit?)

Despite my inclination for comfort, the summer after high school I chose to ride my bicycle across the U.S. with a student tour group. The experience involved many long, exhausting days climbing and descending steep hills, riding across barren plains into never-ending head winds, and getting soaked by monsoon rains after sleeping at soggy campsites. It wasn't



Clockwise, from top left: Finding balance on Granite Mountain. Making steady progress against the wind on Silver Peak. Beneath an all-day downpour in Kansas, with our rain jackets sticking to our bare arms.



always – or even often – fun in the moment. On the first night of the trip, I cried in my tent and doubted whether I'd made the right decision.

For the first month, I was the slowest rider in the group. I held my own, and eventually got faster, but it didn't come easily. By the second month, when my muscles were stronger and my tan lines were stranger, I knew I was doing the right thing. Eventually, the Rocky Mountains emerged out of the flat Colorado plains, glowing huge and white against a blue sky. Working for that sight over so many miles made the moment feel powerful and ethereal in a way it wouldn't have from a car. When the trip finally ended and we dipped our bike tires in the Oregon ocean, I'd never felt happier.

These days, I still find myself dipping into discomfort: scrambling (or sliding on my butt) down steep, muddy, overgrown slopes using veggie belays, despite my fear of heights; standing on top of frigid, windy ridgelines while soaked in sweat from the climb and quickly pulling on layers; or spending yet another gloomy Saturday enduring a conditioning hike up Mt. Si as I question my decision, switchback after switchback. But when I emerge from the forest streaked with dirt and scratched by tree branches, I feel like I did something.

Discomfort as growth

Why does it feel satisfying to push through something physically demanding? And why do those experiences feel so

difficult (both physically and mentally) in the moment and in the days leading up? (Anytime I have a challenging adventure on the horizon, I tend to dread it long beforehand.)

As someone who seeks out comfort and safety, I've wondered whether I'm just trying to prove something to myself, which might be true, but I think my adventure-seeking involves something more. In Buddhism, attachment to comfort – like attachment to anything – is seen as a source of suffering (*dukkha*). According to the Four Noble Truths (Buddha's teachings on the nature of suffering and the path to liberation), suffering arises from craving (*tanha*), which includes the desire for pleasure, ease, and security. While comfort itself isn't considered inherently bad, clinging to it or avoiding discomfort at all costs can lead to a cycle of dissatisfaction and a fear of change.

When thinking about resisting discomfort, my cross-country bike trip comes back to mind. One early morning, we woke up somewhere in the middle of Kansas to rainwater streaming into the bottoms of our tents. An all-night downpour had created a mini river through camp. As the water soaked through our sleeping bags, we hastily changed into bike shorts, stuffed everything into our panniers, and dismantled our tents. By the time we finished, the rain hadn't stopped, and we were all soaking wet.



Taking a break before riding toward a giant rain cloud.

Rain pounded my shoulders and water rolled down my back as we huddled around the map to assess our route. We had no choice but to squint through raindrops and ride – soaked to the bone – to our next destination. As mud splattered my legs, I felt myself tense up as though the rain was something to just get through until we could finally – maybe – find a dry place to stop. But then I realized that tensing up wasn't helping. I could either resist what was happening, or I could accept it, and for some reason that realization made me laugh. Suddenly, the rain seemed almost funny, along with the crazy idea to ride across the country.

In that moment, I let go of my desire for things to be a certain way. I accepted them as they were, which made the day a lot better, even though the rain never stopped.

It would have been nice if after that moment I never resisted discomfort again and lived happily ever after, but of course that's not how it worked. After that trip, I flaunted my strange tan lines proudly for a while, walking around like a mismatched tiger and feeling like I had in fact proved something to myself. But eventually the tan lines from my gloves, helmet straps, and socks faded. What remained was a small but important inflation in my capacity for discomfort.

When is discomfort too much?

We've all heard the warrior mantras: *Suck it up, buttercup. What doesn't kill you makes you stronger. If you are going through hell, keep going.* Is it true that suffering in itself builds character?

A few summers ago, while on a group hike up Sourdough Mountain in the North Cascades, I felt more tired than usual. I was recovering from an ear infection, but since I was on the mend, I hoped I would perk up with a little fresh air.

But Sourdough Mountain is unrelenting. The terrain is steep and long, and my group was moving at a fast pace. I was training for a bigger trip later in the season and stubbornly wanted to keep up, so I pushed myself harder than my body wanted to go. By the time we summited, I was nauseous. I collapsed on a rock and tried not to puke. Descending, I had to keep my eyes locked on the trail or the nausea would get worse.

Did that extra element of pain help build my character? I



Getting blasted by snow while approaching a ridgeline on Silver Peak.

suppose it's good to know that in situations where I need to push myself hard, I can, but I likely could have met my training goals just fine without pushing the pace so much. I was glad to have finished the hike, but I probably could have done myself a favor and gone at a slower pace, even if it meant not meeting my pacing goals, staying with the group, or trying to prove myself.

Experiences like these have helped me realize that there's a difference between productive discomfort and unnecessary misery. A life that's too easy and comfortable can feel boring and stifling. We need to be able to tolerate discomfort to have interesting experiences. But in the outdoors, it can be tempting to get attached to the suffering itself, as though the suffering is what's most meaningful.

Discomfort is a part of life, and the more we can embrace it without glorifying it, the happier we'll be.

Why I keep choosing discomfort

Back on that blustery Silver Peak scramble, my mind complains loudly – as usual – for the first hour or so about not being home in bed. But then, I get into a rhythm of footsteps and breath and feel my muscles come to life. We crest treeline and are met with whipping winds and an enormous concave bowl arcing toward a higher ridgeline. Snow blows in wispy gusts as I focus on moving forward, feeling tiny next to the surrounding slopes.

A few of us voice avalanche concerns, and our group stops to assess, eventually determining that the snowpack is stable. Though my legs feel shaky from nerves, I feel confident in my group's assessment and climb higher, while leaning into the wind and fighting deep snow for every foothold until we make it to the top of the ridgeline. Behind me, the clouds lift to reveal the Cascades, gleaming as if scrubbed clean.

As I approach the trailhead later with tired muscles, I feel accomplished and happy. The discomfort was worth it for the chance to feel what my body can do, experience the wild expanse of the backcountry, enjoy the company of others, and carve out a little more tolerance for cold, fatigue, apprehension, and life's inevitable tribulations. Naturally, I am even happier that evening back on the couch with a hot bowl of soup. But as a Hobbit, that's just how I roll. ▲



A Wonderland Trail Mix-Up

By Jan Fite, retired clinical psychologist, writer, and wilderness chef

Mystic Lake Ranger Cabin, where Jan and Mic would eventually get doused in snow. All photos courtesy of Jan Fite.

The Wonderland Trail is not for the faint of heart, but what happened to us on the trail would make anyone's heart skip a beat.

The word "wonderland" conjures images of a fairyland, Disneyesque. But don't let that name fool you. In actuality, the loop is 93 miles, with elevation gains and losses equivalent to climbing Denali: 27,000 cumulative feet of elevation gain and 27,000 cumulative feet of elevation loss. It's not a piece of cake.

On the trail, you can see everything from trail runners slurping electrolyte gel and whizzing past to circumnavigate in three days, to inspiring 70-year-olds making their steady but sure climb. As for us, we chose to savor our experience by hiking ten days and nine nights, and carrying elaborate backcountry meals to fuel our six- to nine-mile days.

Trail meals worth a chef's kiss

My husband, Mic, is an "all-I-need-is-a-toothbrush-and-a-peanut-butter-sandwich" kind of guy. Not me. Mic packs light, whereas I need my creature comforts. Even more importantly, I love backcountry cooking. No lightweight, freeze-dried, stir-boiling-water-into-a-foil-bag food for me. Our meals included pasta primavera, angel hair pasta with smoked salmon and pesto sauce, Thai coconut noodles with shrimp, chicken with curry couscous and mandarin oranges, peach crumble. And wine! You get the idea...

Which brings me to our decision to cache two boxes of food rather than carry nine days' worth of luxurious camp meals on

our backs. The first four nights we'd carry food, then pick up Cache 1 on day five, and Cache 2 on day seven.

To prepare our caches, we weighed each excruciating ounce of food on a scale, set out a package of Ziploc bags and ingredients on our kitchen table, then carefully bagged and labeled each meal: breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Then, a week prior to our hike, we put Cache 1 and Cache 2 in cardboard boxes and set out for a several-hour drive to Mt. Rainier National Park.

Caching our camp meals

The Park Service provides two options for caching food: 1) mail it in advance, or 2) drop it off in the park. To be safe, we decided to drive to the park and hand-deliver our two caches.

Delivering Cache 2 to Sunrise was easy enough. As the ranger took our food, we felt assured it would be in the appropriate location when we arrived. Next, we headed to the Wilkeson Wilderness Information Center to drop off Cache 1.

The planning instructions sounded simple: just drop off the box. When we arrived at Wilkeson and took our place in line, it was still early in the morning. Upon seeing our food box - containing three days' worth of precious survival supplies - the volunteer ranger told us to "Just put it over there." She pointed to a shelf, and within one second, moved on to the next person in line.

We eyed our box sitting on the shelf and wondered what would become of it. The plan, as we understood it from the ranger's explanation, was that the day before we arrived at



the Mowich Lake Ranger Station, the on-duty ranger would take the supplies out of the cabin and place them in a metal corrugated lidded garbage can behind the ranger station.

At that moment, one of my favorite mantras, "Make room for emergencies," whirled through my head. I had read earlier about two intrepid hikers who carefully followed similar cache drop-off instructions. When they arrived at the pick-up spot, their chache was alarmingly missing. Worried about meeting the same fate, I put together an emergency box to be delivered by my brother when he met us at Ipsut Creek Campground.

Making dinner friends

Summiting Tahoma (Mount Rainier) is a mountaineer's dream, but to me, hiking its perimeter was a much more intimate experience. I loved it.

The first night, Mic and I arrived at Devil's Dream after 6.5 miles of switchbacks and rugged climbing. Whoever named the campsite Devil's Dream wasn't kidding - it was eerie, dark, and muddy. We comforted ourselves by cooking a big batch of pasta primavera and pouring ourselves a generous cup of red wine.

The only other soul at our campsite was a solo hiker named Denise. We offered her our extra pasta primavera but she declined, explaining that she needed to eat her food to reduce the weight of her pack.

Jan and Denise with heavy packs and bandaged knees west of Berkeley Park.



Top: Jan and Mic ready to begin their trek after acquiring permits. Left: Finding shelter from the rain at the Sunset Park Patrol Cabin, Golden Lakes.



Denise had a large backpack, opting to carry all her meals on her back for the entirety of her trip. She had packed a hardback copy of *War and Peace*, as well as ten packages of instant oatmeal. *What an interesting and resilient woman*, I thought to myself, grateful that I had warm cinnamon buns to look forward to for breakfast.

Apprehensive about hiking alone, Denise asked if we could hike together. Over the next few days, we became close trail companions, helping each other through washouts, trail diversions, and various weather conditions such as rain, sleet, and snow. And, of course, we ended each evening together enjoying a rewarding camp meal.

A soggy surprise

No doubt about it: our hike around Tahoma was phenomenal. Each day brought another view of the mountain. And with each day, we could feel ourselves growing stronger, as well as more eager for our cache pickup.

The Wonderland is as exhausting as it is phenomenal. Most days found us dropping 3,000 feet only to climb 3,000 feet back up to another ridge. And the unrelenting rain didn't help. With four solid days of rain from Devil's Dream to Golden Lakes, we were thoroughly soaked. Each grueling step was eased by the thought of clean t-shirts, cushy fresh socks, and - most importantly - blackberry-rich cabernet (to be sipped by firelight) nestled in our cache box.

At noon, we spotted the Mowich Lake Ranger Station, circled around it like hungry wolves, and found a corrugated metal trash can complete with lid behind the cabin. *At least they didn't put our food in plain sight for others to sift through*, I thought to myself. We held our breath and lifted the lid.

The can was empty! Only bits and bobs of throw-aways, detritus left behind by others tossing extra weight, were left at the bottom. Supply rejects. Moldy power bars were not quite what we had in mind for dinner.

We peered into the can in disbelief. Had we missed something? We rummaged through the can over and over, then boldly

knocked on the ranger station door. No answer. That's when we began to lose it.

At this point, soggy clothes were the least of our worries - that missing cache represented three nights without food, toilet paper, film, fuel, batteries, and fresh socks. We waited around for as long as we could, until we had no option but to continue hiking before night fell. Dejected, we plodded along, pulled forward only by the thought of the emergency box waiting for us in my brother's car.

The bite at the end of the tunnel

I love quiet. It's one reason why I love backpacking. But never have I been so happy to hear the sound of traffic. Gradually, the light of a distant campfire, welcoming souls, and a battered box came into view.

When I met my brother's eyes, I blurted "Where's that box!?" Being the kind souls that he and his partner are, they saw our dog-tiredness and bandaged knees and immediately began setting up our tents and helping us out of our packs and soaked clothing.

Then, and what I remember best, my brother ripped open that emergency box and poured us each a glass of wine.

The reason for our missing cache remains a mystery, but Cache 1 was mailed to us once we returned home, and the bottle of wine was more aged!



A full pot of pesto pasta with smoked salmon and cabernet.

If you're interested in backpacking the Wonderland Trail, visit nps.gov/mora/planyourvisit/the-wonderland-trail for more information on route details, planning tips, and most importantly, caching food. ▲▲

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Gaining Feet and Fortitude in The Enchantments

By Heidi Walker, 21-year member

Autumn-touched larches kissed by morning sun blaze against the dark shadows of the mountain. Crystal-blue skies arch over our camp as Colchuck Lake glitters through the trees. I sit in my tent hugging my knees, crying.

My friend, Mary, had invited me and another friend, Anna May, on a private trip through the Enchantments. I jumped at the chance to finally see this fantasyland of white granite, blue lakes, and golden trees. But during the time between invitation and adventure, I lost my home, my marriage, and my dog. With the losses, my sense of self depleted. I passed the days feeling like I had cotton in my ears and warped glass over my eyes.

Now, the Enchantments hike has finally arrived, and I don't feel up to the task, or like being good hiking company for Mary and Anna May. I feel afraid I am going to let myself – and worse, my friends – down.

Pushing my limits on Aasgard Pass

Outside my tent, I hear movement. I wipe away my tears and peek out to see Mary. We exchange good mornings and set about our routines as Anna May joins us for breakfast. If they notice my reddened eyes, they don't say anything. While Anna May and Mary talk about the route, I look up the mountain toward Aasgard Pass and feel sick.

Anna May had previously expressed her own uncertainties about the trip, but Mary radiates confidence. Having hiked the Enchantments a few times, she encourages us both while explaining the trail up to the pass. Still apprehensive, I remind myself that Mary would never take me anywhere dangerous. I swallow my dread – as well as the last of my granola – and finish tearing down camp.

Mary's instructions are clear as we begin our ascent. "Stay left of the cleft. Follow the trail markers. Past the cleft, there will be a decent trail. We'll regroup occasionally to check in." What we all knew but left unspoken: left of the cleft is safe. People have died right of the cleft.

Approaching Aasgard Pass is a constant confrontation with one over-sized boulder after another. My booted toes search for small ledges to help hoist myself and my pack. The sharp rock edges scrape my shins as I scramble. My muscles soon turn to rubber, and my brain grows tired as I push from one boulder to the next.

I feel a nagging fear that I've gone the wrong way and look behind me for my friends. Mary and Anna May are below, working their way through the boulder field. I turn forward again and see a cairn.

Often seen in deserts, tundra, and the alpine, cairns are used as waypoints in wilderness areas to mark trails that might be inconspicuous or non-existent for habitat protection. *Nice. Some relief I've followed directions correctly*, I think. Soon, I'll be celebrating with my friends at the top of the pass.

Having spotted the first cairn, I figure I can follow them without having to think much about the route. I've followed cairns in a similar manner before and found it to be a fun game of hide-and-seek: stand at the cairn, and scan the landscape for the next.



Anna May (left) and Mary (right) pose for a triumphant photo after cresting Aasgard Pass.

Sometimes, people build extraneous cairns when none are needed, thinking it's a challenge or a work of art to stack rocks. The extraneousness is unfortunate for the exact reason of what happened next...

I continue hiking from cairn to cairn and steadily climb upward. Loose rocks slip under my feet with each step, making me slide backward. I resort to clawing my way up the hill, until eventually, a cliff stops my progress.

I'm lost, unable to discern which direction to go as I tightly grip the scree to prevent myself from sliding further downhill. Shaking from exhaustion and fear, I find a sturdy rock to rest and discover that Mary and Anna May are no longer behind me.

Tears well up as I choke back sobs. The trail is far more dangerous than I had imagined. Why would anyone want to scramble up loose scree where one misplaced step could mean tumbling downward to severe injury or death? Had I gone the wrong way?

Just a year before, I believed I had been living my dream – married to a man as adventurous as I, in a comfortable home, playing in the mountains on weekends with the best trail dog a hiker could hope for. But like these cairns, I had followed the wrong path and the life I was pursuing slipped away. Where was I to go from here?





View of Prusik Peak over the turquoise waters of Inspiration Lake.

I look for a marker that might indicate I am on trail and quickly learn I'm not. To my left, I spot a stack of rocks resting beside a well-defined dirt path. I take a couple steadying breaths, then slowly shuffle my way across the scree to the trail, where I sit until my friends catch up.

Cresting ridges and befriending goats

We continue up the pass and scramble over more boulders when I begin to sense I'm being watched. I look up to see a little, white-furred face peering down at my progress. The young goat watches me struggle with my pack over a rock, then hops with ease to a new rock. "Show off," I mumble.

As I crest the pass, I wait on a boulder and watch amused as the kid hops up and down the rocks. What I presume to be its mother rests on a knoll above. I breathe a relaxed sigh. Despite a harrowing ascent, I've finally made it into the core of the Enchantments. *Maybe I am capable of more than I think*, I reflect as I enjoy the view.



As Mary drinks her morning coffee atop a boulder for the view, our nanny decides to check out the nearby vegetation.

I pull out my bag of snacks and the crinkling inspires the nanny to stand, then hop down the knoll my way to investigate. Attuned to human activity, she knows the sound of a salty treat. We circle the boulder together, like a game of musical chairs - her licking her lips, me trying to keep the boulder between us - when Mary and Anna May crest the hill. Mary shouts at the goat, who retreats back to her hill as I join my friends to celebrate our accomplishment.

Our faces beam with smiles, but we don't have much time to rest. The day's end is approaching, and we still have a mile to hike over granite and steep, late-season snow before setting up camp.

We slowly make our way and marvel at the scenery: lakes reflecting clear skies, yellow larch needles contrasting beautifully against the celestial blue. Our camp is tucked next to a small, serene lake lined with larches at the base of a cliff. The site is perfect, but as the sky darkens and I settle into my tent, my fears from the previous night and this morning return. I had gotten myself lost today and could have gotten hurt. Will I be able to safely navigate my way out of the Enchantments?

Like the night before, I fall asleep with tears in my eyes.

A test of faith and friendship

I awake the next morning to the sound of mountain goats. The nanny and her kid had followed us to camp. They wait close by as we relieve ourselves after a night's rest. To her, we are walking saltshakers, but our salt comes in liquid form. I love goats, but I have no interest in sharing. I try to shoo the nanny away, but she remains persistent and laps up my morning urine.

Our day is short as we skirt around a series of lakes with names like Inspiration, Perfection, and Leprechaun. First, we edge our way across a granite slab that rises above the lake where we slept. The cold, autumn weather had frozen seeped water across the surface of the granite in patches.

Mary leads the way. She steps onto the rock and suddenly slips, sliding down the ice so quickly I worry she's about to plunge into the lake. I immediately start calculating her rescue - how I'd tolerate the frigid water and remove her pack from weighing her down - when she reaches out and grabs hold of a small tree growing next to the rock slab.

"Are you okay?" I call.



Goat fluff can easily get entangled in the needles of larches.

My heart races as I watch Mary find bare rock, then crawl back up along a different path.

"It's just icy in that one spot," she calls. "Once you get beyond that, you'll be ok."

My panic begins to rise. I look at the slab of rock in front of me and eye where the sun is beginning to warm the granite. I spot a bare patch, hold my breath, then step forward. Solid. I scan for another bare spot and step. After a few more movements, the ice disappears and I eventually reach Mary. I turn back to check on Anna May, who hasn't moved.

"I'm going to go the other way around," Anna May says.

"There is no other way around," Mary replies.

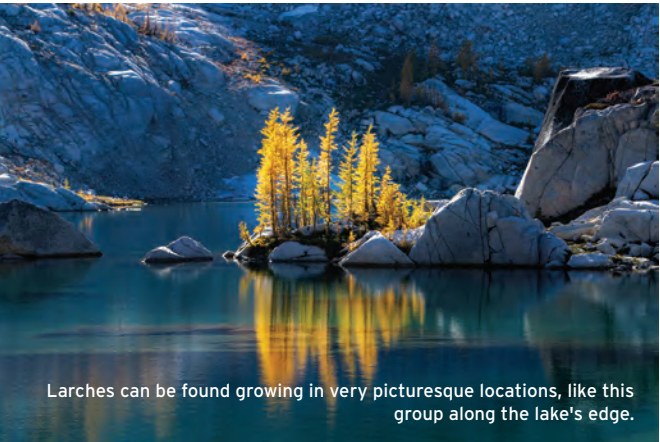
Anna May looks at us, despondent, and I can tell that her fear is preventing our words from registering. Without a second thought, I gather my courage, drop my pack, and walk back across the icy rock.

Using my trekking pole as a pointer, I show Anna May where it's safe to step. She lifts her foot, then puts it back down in the same place. I point at the bare spot again and say, "If you put your foot here, it's safe." She doesn't move.

Like Anna May, I'm nervous one of us might slip down the mountain just as Mary did, but I don't let it show. Finally, I get on my hands and knees and tell Anna May to give me her right foot. After some hesitation, she obliges. Gently, I guide her foot with my hands to the bare spot on the rock and hold it steady. Anna May cautiously transitions her weight. Then, I do the same with her left foot. After a few more guided movements, Anna May passes the icy section and I follow her off the rock.

Caution transformed to confidence

The rest of the day is thankfully uneventful as we stroll through



Larches can be found growing in very picturesque locations, like this group along the lake's edge.

golden forests of larches and blue lakes. Fallen needles create designs that dot the edges of the water. We reach our camp next to Lake Vivienne with time to explore the lakeshore and marvel at the view. We also notice our friend the goat and her kid resting on a hill near camp, but she affords us more privacy this evening.

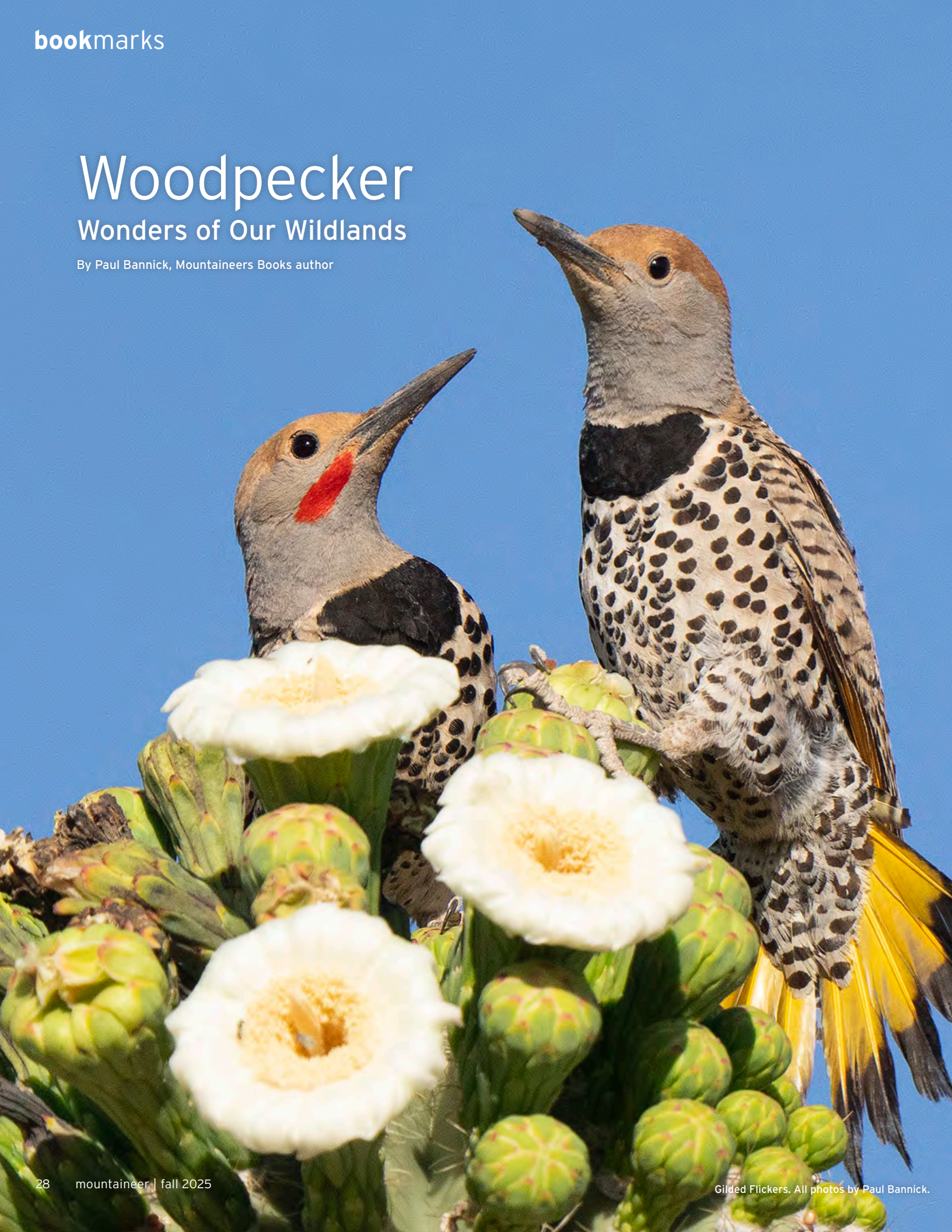
As I tuck myself into my sleeping bag at night, I reflect on the events of the day. In spite of uncertainties, I was ready to jump into a lake to help Mary, and in spite of my fears, I helped Anna May across the icy rock. In the future, this trip will be what often comes to mind when I think about camaraderie and overcoming fear. Somewhere, I had found the strength to help my friend and help myself - a strength that would propel me forward with confident anticipation for whatever possibilities await.

I fall asleep content and happy, knowing that whatever presents itself tomorrow, or in life, I will be up for the task. ▲▲

Woodpecker

Wonders of Our Wildlands

By Paul Bannick, Mountaineers Books author



Hispaniolan Woodpecker.

Woodpeckers hopped into my life in an unexpected place. As a young boy of eight or nine, I peered impatiently through the kitchen window into the backyard, waiting for the drizzle to stop so I might escape my tame suburban home to a wilder place where I could watch more than American Robins.

Suddenly, a presumed robin caught my attention. As it bounced closer, the polka-dotted breast, giant bill, bright red mustache, and veins of orange on the tail and wings revealed it was a male flicker! With what seemed like an explosion of red feathers, he was gone. From that moment on, I read everything I could about flickers and other woodpeckers, and I realized how patience, attention, and curiosity could make the common sublime. Instantly I became a woodpecker enthusiast.

Since that day, the call of the woodpecker has led me on many journeys from my backyard to distant continents and inspired me to rise before the sun so that their syncopated drumming might allow me to find them, follow them, and learn about their mysterious lives before they disappear back into the trees. My fascination has only grown over the years as I noticed that no matter where I was in North America, as long as there were large live or dead trees or cacti and surrounding natural landscape – whether the boreal forests of Alaska or the tropical forests of the Caribbean islands – there was at least one species of woodpecker to trigger my



Pale-billed Woodpeckers.



Above: Cuban Green Woodpeckers. Left: Northern Flicker Intergrade.



wonder and help me better see the richness around me and the woodpecker’s role in enhancing it.

Woodpecker diversity brings wonder to us all. What other family of bird or animal might we see a few or several related species of on a single walk? So many related birds of different sizes, patterns, colors, markings, crests, and calls coexisting in what could superficially be seen as a single landscape defies our perceptions of what constitutes a habitat and its boundaries.

Whenever I observed multiple species in a particular location, I learned how each pursued different prey, on different species of trees, at different heights. Their choice of where and when to nest also varied. The needs of each individual species helped me see a variety of habitats where I had previously seen only one, and assisted me in more clearly understanding the factors that enable their survival.

Since woodpeckers live in every treed habitat in North America, their life stories are in many ways the stories of our wildlands. Every woodpecker alters its own surroundings in ways that create homes for friends and foes, improve the health of natural systems, and even benefit human beings. To witness this ourselves, all we need to do is heed the sounds, follow the flashes of color, and observe the vitality that follows in their wake.

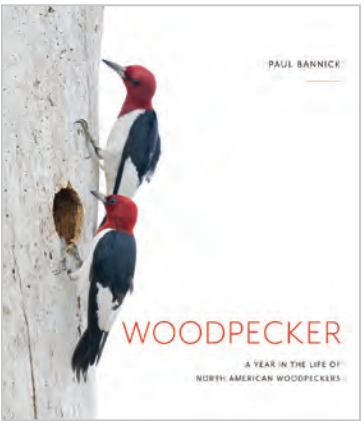


Northern Yellow-shafted Flickers.

My book *Woodpecker* contains an exploration of the lives of the forty-one species of woodpeckers in North America, from the Arctic to the Caribbean, through four annual life phases, covering how they attract mates and create nests, how they find food for and raise their young, how the fledglings leave the nest and gain their independence, and how the birds survive winter. Along the way, I discuss the species-specific habitat components that woodpeckers need to successfully navigate each of these life phases.

In telling the stories of these woodpeckers, I focus my lens, narrative, and anecdotes on the species and behaviors that are most representative, while also highlighting interesting exceptions and contrasts. I look most carefully at species that represent the most threatened or sensitive habitats. I hope that by sharing intimate images and stories from the more secreted moments of their life histories, I can motivate people to better appreciate their critical role in enhancing our natural world and perhaps inspire the long-term protection of these birds and the habitats that they rely upon.

Excerpted and adapted from Woodpecker: A Year in the Life of North American Woodpeckers by Paul Bannick (September 2025). Published by Braided River, an imprint of Mountaineers Books. Reprinted with permission. Woodpecker is available for purchase at our Seattle Program Center Bookstore, online at mountaineersbooks.org, and everywhere books are sold.



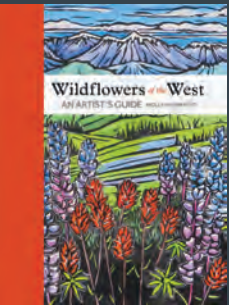
Join Paul for a talk at Town Hall Seattle on October 8, or catch him at one of his other events. Learn more at mountaineers.org/authorevents or paulbannick.com.



Eventually a Sequoia

By Jeremy Collins

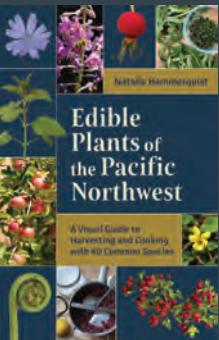
Based on Jeremy Collins’ extensive, art-filled travel journals, *Eventually a Sequoia* is an inspirational and vivid exploration of the natural world and how it can empower an individual to grow, change, heal, and thrive. Collins’ art and curiosity take him to endangered corners of the world, where he captures stories in visceral form from the lush and winding Amazon to the high mountains of Nepal, and from the remote rivers of Alaska’s Arctic to California’s soaring redwood forests. Part memoir, part manifesto, *Eventually a Sequoia* is an invitation for all of us to develop a deeper appreciation for the natural world and our place in it.



Wildflowers of the West

By Molly Hashimoto

Beloved Washington author and artist Molly Hashimoto brings her unique blend of vibrant illustration, engaging natural history, and intimate personal reflection to this exploration of the ephemeral beauty of wildflowers. Find exquisite golden columbines emerging from talus slopes, vast meadows of sky-blue lupine, scarlet displays of ocotillo in the southwestern deserts, and sunny blooms of glacier lilies as they herald the approach of spring. *Wildflowers of the West* will inspire you to look more closely at the blossoms you encounter with an eye to nature’s artistry.



Edible Plants of the Pacific Northwest

By Natalie Hammerquist

When stumbling across a leafy green or ripe berry, many find themselves asking, “Can I eat that?” Now no one has to wonder with *Edible Plants of the Pacific Northwest*. This beginner-friendly guide invites readers to discover the unique and wondrous bounty found in the natural world around the Pacific Northwest. Through highly visual guides that highlight common lookalikes and potential hazards, readers will develop the skills to identify what they see with precision and determine whether it’s a friend or foe. Recipes throughout the book include rose-petal jam, dock-seed crackers, and huckleberry sorbet, so anyone can enjoy wild eats year-round.

Fifty Years Ago, and Still Now

A Look Back at the 1975 Mountaineer Annual

By Katy Clark, Member Services & Bookstore Manager

I’m not expecting anything when a box arrives at the Seattle Program Center Bookstore – no return address, no explanation. Inside are old editions of the Mountaineer annuals, the covers softened and yellowed by time. These volumes once marked the rhythm of each year in the club, part record, part reflection. Among the box of annuals is the 1975 edition. I don’t reach for it with any particular intent, but once it’s in my hands, I linger.

What were The Mountaineers writing about 50 years ago? What did they fight for, climb toward, pay attention to? The answer, it turns out, is everything that still matters.

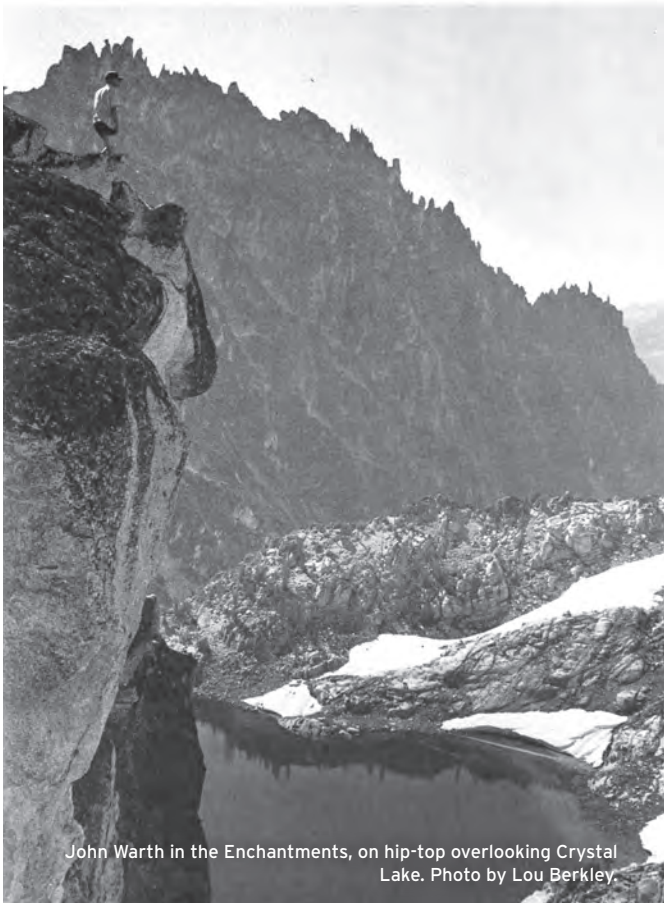
Reading the past, looking toward the future

Between the annual’s covers lie more than a year’s record, a topographic map of a time. No algorithm, no filters, no hashtags – just typewritten dispatches, stark black-and-white photographs, and hand-drawn illustrations.

At the time of publishing the 1975 annual, The Mountaineers stood at the edge of our 70th anniversary. In his essay “Whither The Mountaineers,” then-president Sam Fry reflects on the shape the organization had taken and imagines its path forward. Membership was growing. Trips adopted size limits to reduce environmental harm. Publishing became a growing force, with 30 books already in print. “Where will we be five years from now? Ten years from now?” he asks. His words are rooted in the hard-earned hope of someone who’s seen what fellowship can do. “There is no obstacle,” he writes, “so long as The Mountaineer spirit of goodwill prevails.” It’s a sentiment that could have been written today.

At first, it’s easy to see these pages as a relic. But spend time with them, and the voices come alive: scrappy, sincere, and deeply rooted in the landscapes they moved through and the community they shaped.

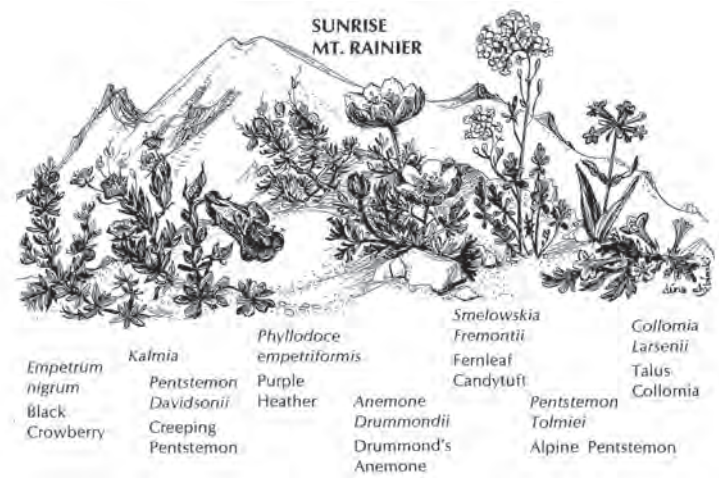
The voices in the annual range from the visionary to the irreverent. In “The Great Big Rainier Jamboree,” Harvey Manning recounts the 1951 “mass summit” of Mount Rainier, in which all 81 climbers reached the top (a remarkable feat considering only 200 people summited the mountain that entire year). Manning, as ever, writes with a twinkle in his eye and boots firmly in the dirt. He recalls climbers stuffing socks into their hats as makeshift head protection on the recently reopened Gibraltar route, which he describes as “a head-



John Warth in the Enchantments, on hip-top overlooking Crystal Lake. Photo by Lou Berkley.



Spirit Lake and Mount St. Helens. Photo by Bob and Ira Spring.



Left: Wildflowers at Mount Rainier. Illustration by Dina Chybinski. Right: A Quinault valley fern. Illustration by B.J. Packard.



smasher.” Co-leader Jim Henry, a logger by trade, showed up in an actual hardhat – “the first hardhat any of us had ever seen on a mountain” – an early nod to modern climbing safety. The story is chaotic, human, and brimming with moments of unpredictable joy, like butterflies a-flutter on the summit. In the final paragraph, Manning reflects on how rare that kind of day had become, even by the 1970s. With summit numbers rising and crowding on the mountain more common, he takes a look at the improbability of it all: three coordinated parties, perfect weather, and a successful summit. “Eat your hearts out, youngsters,” he concludes, aiming his grin at a new generation. A line that, even 50 years later, lands with the same mischievous glint.

A legacy of courage, innovation, and conservation

A brief account from the Administration section mentions the 1975 Annual Banquet, where Jim Whittaker and Dianne Roberts shared the story of their expedition to K2. The story behind their appearance is much more compelling than this passing mention – the team set out to make the first American ascent via the remote and untried Northwest Ridge but was turned back by storms at 22,000 feet. Still, history was made: Roberts became the first North American woman to reach 8,000 meters without supplemental oxygen, a groundbreaking accomplishment in high-altitude mountaineering. The team would return in 1978 to reach the summit.

I turn to page 20 and find an interview with Ome Daiber. “Resting? Baloney!” he says, “I don’t get any relaxation from not doing anything!” Daiber spent over five decades shaping how we explore and safeguard mountain terrain. A Mountaineer since 1931, he made the first ascent of Liberty Ridge on Rainier, co-founded the Mountain Rescue Council, and helped bring organized mountain rescue to the United States. He developed Sno-Seal, created the penguin-style sleeping bag, and joined Bradford Washburn’s 1935 expedition to map the Yukon, an effort later featured in *National Geographic*. He even met his wife, Matie, on a Mountaineers summer outing.

As I read, unexpected corners of curiosity surface: a hoary marmot field study near Mt. Cashmere, a botanical survey

on the slopes of Mt. St. Helens (described five years before its eruption as a “perfect, symmetrical cone”), a geology field camp near Mt. Shuksan while Mt. Baker stirred to life. There’s an expedition to the Garhwal Himalaya, a trip to Latin America, and a meditation on the brevity of alpine flower seasons accompanied by delicately inked illustrations.

As always, woven through each Mountaineers story is a strong conservation ethic. At the time, much of the organization’s advocacy centered on what is now known as the Alpine Lakes Wilderness. In 1975, The Mountaineers presented our recently published book, *The Alpine Lakes*, to Congress. The following year, the Alpine Lakes Area Management Act was signed into law by President Gerald Ford, which designated 393,360 acres of instant and intended Wilderness. This was one of the most hard-fought and significant conservation victories in Washington history.

Who we were, and still are

This patchwork of stories, essays, trip reports, and illustrations is more than archival – not a museum piece, but a mirror. As you read through these pages, you begin to recognize yourself. Maybe your clothes are more tech and your gear is safer... but the GORP in your pocket? Probably the same. And your devotion? That hasn’t changed at all.

We still stand quietly beneath the same peaks.

We still fight to protect the same places that move us.

And that’s why we return to these pages now, 50 years later. Because the past, in this case, is not past at all – it’s part of the living root system from which we draw. These stories are trail markers, annotations on a map, notes scribbled in the margins of our guidebooks. They remind us that to love the outdoors is not just to walk through it, but to be in conversation with those who came before and those who will come after.

We don’t need to replicate 1975. But we’d do well to remember it.

*Tender green of lichen / Beside the brown of old –
White granite rocks in meadows / Mid flowers of red and gold.*

– Bob Dunn, excerpt from “*Splendor*,” page 39, *Mountaineer Annual 1975* ▲▲

Confidence in the Company of Mountains

By Salomé Stähli, 5-year member



A beautiful camp on Wanda Lake on the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT), the trail that reconnected Salomé with her love for mountains, 2018. All photos courtesy of Salomé Stähli.

I watch the little frog at my feet, barely bigger than a thumbnail, and scoop it gently into my small hands. My sister, nearly two years younger than I am, tries to imitate me. I worry she'll squash the baby frog she's trying to catch.

As the frog moves around in my hand, I giggle, then eventually let it go. Near the pond, my mother holds my toddler brother's hand and tries to keep him from the shore, but he continues pulling her toward the water. I catch another frog while my mother watches me with a smile.

Navigating belonging among people and places

I feel safe at this pond. Surrounded by trees, frogs, my siblings, and my mother, I don't have to worry about the kids at school. Just yesterday, my classmates teased me with song lyrics they changed to make fun of my name, my dialect, and my tall,

clumsy body. While they sang, I stared at my feet, and wished I could disappear into the comfort of these waters.

Being left out isn't an uncommon experience for me. That same day at school, I was excluded from a game of jump rope. As my classmates played without me, I hid under the yew trees surrounding the schoolyard and cried. Beneath the branches, I found peace in watching the tiny ants crawl in an almost perfect line to a nearby hole.

Over the years, nature has become a refuge from life's challenges. When my peers make me feel that I don't belong, the natural world and its wonders invite me in. Embraced by the mountains, I don't have to worry about anyone's judgement. There's no one to tease me for stopping to move a snail from the trail so it doesn't get squished. No one to tell me I'm weird for pausing longer than usual to admire a leaf or flower. No one to make fun of what I wear, how I look, or how I move.

But as I become a teenager, the sanctuary of the natural world fades. I receive failing grades in P.E. and repeatedly get chosen last for grade school soccer games. I start to believe there's something wrong with me and my body.

The trail to trusting myself

Fifteen years later in Patagonia, I am setting camp in the Torres del Paine National Park in winds so strong that anything untethered to the ground will be carried away. I feel in over my head, and wonder whether I can handle this popular hike by myself. This is my first experience camping and hiking alone, and I am eager to prove to myself that my body is capable of more than people think.

The next morning, I lift my impossibly heavy backpack onto my shoulders and question how I'll be able to carry all the equipment. Gingerly, I put one foot in front of the other. A gust



Tired after a long uphill to the Mirador Británico in the Torres del Paine National Park, 2015.

of wind nearly throws me into the rocks, but I catch myself with my hiking poles.

The next few days are a test of grit as I drag myself from camp to camp. At times I feel defeated, but moments of natural beauty, like sunlight turning ice masses from white to light blue, keep me going.

For nearly two months, I hike and camp solo until I feel ready to hike the remote Cabo Froward without the comfort of rangers, huts, and other people.

Finding resilience in the natural world

Journeying alone on the Cabo Froward isn't easy. I feel afraid as I fight through tangled, dark forests, and doubt whether I can find my way out or handle the experience on my own. As I navigate between dense trees, across rivers up to my armpits, over slippery cliffs, and through a marsh so deep I nearly lose a shoe, I doubt myself again.

I cry with the rain and let the wind dry my tears. Every time I hit a dead end, I scream in anger - at the trees, at myself - and then eventually... I emerge from the forest.



Standing proud after reaching Cabo Froward, the southernmost tip on the Chilean mainland after a harrowing hike, 2015.



A calm, contemplative morning in the Sierras on the PCT, the trail that healed Salomé from depression, 2018.

Exhausted, I drop my pack and gaze at the wind-battered trees along the coast whose branches, growing only on the downwind side, barely move in the gale. In them, I see resilience that deep down, I know I have too.

Toward the bay, I see the black-and-white bodies of Commerson's dolphins splash and play in the water. With them, I smile. Later, I spot humpback whales, their exhales the only sign of their presence. With them, I exhale. *I did it*, I think to myself. *I completed my first remote route alone.*

I reflect back on my first hike in the Torres del Paine National Park - to when I couldn't imagine completing a week-long popular hike solo - and realize it's time to see my body differently: not for what it can't do, but for what it can.

Back at the hostel kitchen, I eat dinner by a warm wood fire when a man, whose smile lights up his entire face, enters the room and changes my life. We start talking about adventures and he tells me about climbing Mount Rainier with The Mountaineers. At 6am, as he's ordering a taxi to the airport, we're still talking.

"Maybe one day we could go on an adventure together?" I ask shyly.

"I'd love that," he answers, then waves goodbye.

The challenge of feeling at home

Two months later in Seattle, I am visiting that same man, Ricardo. We meet at Fremont Brewing, and I tell him about my dream to do a long backpacking and packrafting trip - one more remote than I've ever done. Intrigued, Ricardo starts researching the best packraft brands that night.

Over the course of a few weeks, he takes me hiking around Leavenworth and snow camping on Crater Lake, and I start imagining what it would be like to call this place home.

I move to Seattle a couple months later, excited by the promise of adventure that this new landscape holds. Ricardo starts a new job, I go back to school, and soon, talk of adventure fades under the weight of books, exams, and long nights studying. My "hikes" consist of walking from my bedroom to my office, and on some days to the school library. I no longer stop for leaves turning red in fall or flowers emerging from their buds in spring. I grow out of place and out of touch with myself and the natural world, and my childhood doubts about whether I belong start to return.

Disillusioned about the uncertain future of my career in this country, exhausted, and homesick for the first time in my life, I



Ricardo and Salomé eating breakfast one morning during their hiking and packrafting trek through Alaska, 2023.

feel lost. The hiker who told Ricardo about remote backpacking and packrafting dreams is gone, replaced by a shell of herself.

Re-inspired at Banff Mountain Film Festival

One evening, my head buried in books and my eyes sore from reading, Ricardo begs me to take a break and join him at Banff Mountain Film Festival. I resist, anxious about falling behind on studying, but he insists.

Sitting in Benaroya Hall, I watch the screen fill with stories of people skiing down impossibly steep slopes, biking through rugged landscapes, and paddling across rivers with waves so tall that they disappear between the barrels. Gradually, I feel something inside me stir. A film titled *Into Twin Galaxies*, featuring three kayakers' attempt to cross Greenland's ice fields and explore an unknown canyon, begins playing and I start to cry.

By the end of the movie, I catch myself thinking of adventure again. The next day, I nervously suggest to Ricardo that maybe, after the bar exam, I could hike the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) for two months.

"You should go," he says with a smile. "I'll drive you to the Southern Terminus."



Ricardo and Salomé enjoying views of Mt. Everest on the Three Passes Trek in Nepal, 2024.

Nature's invitation back home

Three months later on the PCT, I am sitting on a rock watching silvery green sage brush move gently in the wind as my legs rest from a steep climb. For the first time in months, deep breaths come with ease and my body relaxes in a way I had forgotten was possible. A smile makes its way onto my face. After a generous and rejuvenating pause, I lift my backpack back onto my shoulders and continue hiking.

A month later, Ricardo visits me on the trail with a cake to celebrate my success passing the bar exam.

"You look so happy and relaxed," he says. "And your hands are so dirty!"



Slowly getting used to camping alone above the magnificent Lago Argentino in Patagonia, 2015.

I examine my fingers, black from the desert dust, and laugh. After months on the trail, these dusty hands have become normal, as has the absence of stress, darkness, and doubt I brought with me to the Southern Terminus. I look ahead to the other hikers I've met, my little trail family who helped me find belonging in a country I had failed to feel at home in.

As we settle in for the night, enveloped by the peace of the trail and its visitors, I realize I wasn't homesick for my home country, but for the mountains and the reassurance they offer when I feel like I'm losing my sense of myself.

A promise to myself and the natural world

I return to Seattle with an injured leg but a healed heart and vow to never neglect my love and need for time outdoors. I start exploring the mountains of the Pacific Northwest and make a commitment to solo hike portions of Washington's PCT every summer.

Three years later, Ricardo and I finally follow through on our dream to go on a big, remote adventure together. We leave for Alaska, to cross the entire state on foot and by packraft.

When those moments of doubt or challenge arise, I think back to that little girl scooping frogs by the pond and reflect on how far she's come, and how much further she is capable of going. ▲▲



Returning to Training After Injury

By Leif Whittaker, Mountaineers Books Author & Evoke Endurance founding member

Climbing at Squamish. Photo courtesy of the Mountaineers Adventure Club.

Two days after The Mountaineers asked me to write a column on injury recovery, I suffered a stress fracture in my left foot. Although it was the most ironic injury of my life, it wasn't the first. My medical history reads like a book: back surgery, nerve damage, chainsaw lacerations, a total hip replacement, frostbite, chronic knee effusion, and more. As a coach, I've guided athletes back from broken bones, tendon and ligament tears, high-altitude pulmonary edema, severe Covid, and countless nagging aches and pains. For outdoor enthusiasts, injury is a matter of when, not if, so effective recovery strategies are essential to long-term success. My stress fracture was a chance to retest what I've learned about healing and returning to activity.

Patience beats toughness

Toughness is indispensable in the mountains, but it can sabotage recovery. The most common mistake I see is returning to training too soon. Your body is already working overtime to heal, and extra training stress can worsen the injury and impede the healing process. Pain and fatigue also erode workout quality. In most cases, taking a brief break after an injury prevents a much longer one later. Healing is always at the top of the hierarchy. For many athletes, pain is easier to accept than rest (some of us are hard-wired to blow past stop signs). I suspected something was wrong with my foot after a casual run, yet I did intervals the next day anyway. I'd been running consistently for six months, my metrics were rising, and the workout was on my calendar. I wanted to keep my momentum, and I feared

losing fitness. Even when it was clear I was injured, I kept walking without a protective boot and did strength work that required flexing my injured foot. Dumb, I know. But I've seen athletes of all abilities make the same mistakes. Zooming out your perspective can calm the guilt and anxiety that comes from missed workouts. Use a one-month recovery timeline as an example: would you rather stop training for two weeks, let your body heal, and enjoy quality sessions in the final two weeks, or train poorly for a month and risk a chronic problem? Each injury or illness has its own timeline, but the same approach applies. Patience usually wins.



Rappelling down a waterfall. Photo courtesy of the Canyoning Committee.

Modify exercise while maintaining routine

In the fitness world, routine reigns supreme. Our bodies respond best to a consistent stimulus. Showing up almost every day beats occasional perfect workouts. When an injury limits your options, maintain the routine while protecting the injured area. Shift to pain-free activities that still serve your health and performance goals. Before the fracture, I ran, hiked, and cycled four or five days a week and lifted twice. My weekly training volume was seven or eight hours. With those primary activities off-limits, I strapped on a walking boot and moved into the weight room. I used the time I usually spent on trails and roads to build upper-body and core strength. I still trained five or six days a week, and although my total volume was cut in half, the routine stayed intact. My aerobic fitness fell off a cliff, but strength gains eased my frustration.

Modifying exercise works for the athletes I coach as well. A runner with a swollen knee swapped running mileage for low-resistance cycling, keeping his metabolic engine humming. A climber with a torn pulley dialed up mobility, hiking fitness, and body-weight strength while wearing a finger brace. When impact is off the table, gentle stretching, breathwork, restorative yoga, or physical-therapy exercises can fill lost training hours. Whatever your specific case, a stable routine makes it easier to return to the sports you love once you're healthy.

Pain is actionable data

Keeping a record of your body's response to different stimuli helps you find the sweet spot between enough and too much. Monitor pain, swelling, and range of motion during workouts and at set points each day. Use repeatable gauges



Ice climbing in Canmore. Photo courtesy of Alpine Ambassadors.



Backpacking in the Cascades. Photo by Cheryl Talbert.

– such as rating pain on a 0-10 scale or measuring girth at a swollen joint – to keep your data comparable. Review your records weekly and flag any downward trends that indicate you're pushing too hard. Minor pain is often unavoidable, but increasing pain or swelling means you've exceeded your tolerance and need to back off. Zero pain, decreased swelling, and an increased range of motion signal readiness for more stress. Keep resetting that line as you heal until you reach the ultimate goal of pain-free movement.

Injury is an opportunity to rebalance and reassess

Being told to look on the bright side is the last thing an injured athlete wants to hear. Frustration, grief, and even depression are normal. Sit with those feelings first; then, once the sting subsides, start hunting for silver linings. Overuse injuries like my stress fracture often stem from muscular or functional imbalances. Because of nerve damage in my lower right leg, the left absorbed more impact with every stride. The fracture was a cue to give the weaker side overdue attention. I designed unilateral strength sessions that targeted every muscle in my right leg from the ground up. Wearing the boot protected the fracture while I exhausted the opposite side – maintaining routine and addressing imbalance all at once.

Recovery is also a chance to audit your training. Was the culprit excessive volume, sudden intensity, poor equipment, or sloppy form? What can you adjust to avoid a repeat? I realized I needed new running shoes, a slower build into speed work, and more soft-tissue care like foam rolling and massage. Sometimes bad luck is the only explanation, but honest analysis still gives you agency.

Attitude makes all the difference

You may have noticed most of my advice centers on mindset. A doctor or physical therapist can prescribe protocols, but your attitude toward your body shapes the entire process. As hard as it is during a setback, try to appreciate the miles and memories your body has already carried you through. Yes, it has limitations and occasionally rebels, but it's also an extraordinary vessel – one that will lead you to many more summits if you treat it with love and respect. ▲



The True History of the Mount Rainier Fire Lookouts (Ira Spring Had It Right!)

By Leslie Romer, 32-year member

Above: Tolmie Peak Lookout. Below: Crystal Peak Lookout. Photos courtesy of the National Park Service.

Four fire lookout cabins stand today near the four corners of Mount Rainier National Park: Shriner Peak, Gobblers Knob, Mount Fremont, and Tolmie Peak. Four other fire lookouts served the park for decades before being removed. When I started researching for my second book about fire lookout hikes and histories in the Mount Rainier region, I repeatedly read two different stories about the construction of the Park's fire lookouts. Curious about which story was true, I investigated how some writers might have been misled.

Conflicting histories

Ira Spring and Byron Fish co-authored *Lookouts: Firewatchers of the Cascades and Olympics* for Mountaineer Books in 1981. The chapter on Mount Rainier National Park tells how the initial Anvil Rock Lookout was built by the US Forest Service in 1917, and the rest were built by private contractors or Mount Rainier Park staff between 1930 and 1948. However, at the beginning of this century, the idea that the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) built some of the fire lookout stations in Mount Rainier National Park began appearing in the Park's signs and publications.

The CCC was a well-regarded federal program that provided jobs and training to thousands of Americans in the depths of the 1930s depression. The program served national, state, and local parks and forests by building trails, roads and bridges; extending telephone lines; landscaping park lands; fighting fires; and taking on temporary assignments for rangers and foresters. The CCC introduced the architectural style known as "national park rustic" to state parks and national and state forest buildings, and was known for building many fire



lookout cabins and towers throughout the U.S. between 1933 and 1942.

In 2000, National Park Service staff put signs on the Gobblers Knob and Tolmie Peak fire lookout cabins, crediting the CCC with their construction. While the Tolmie Peak sign has since been removed, a sign was still on the Gobblers Knob lookout when I visited in September 2023.



Above: Gobblers Knob Lookout. Photo by Leslie Romer. Right: Shriner Peak Lookout. Photo by Leslie Romer.

Later in 2023, I attended an exhibit in the Washington State Historical Museum on the history of the CCC's work. The exhibit mentioned "The CCC built 240 fire lookouts in Washington alone." I looked for more details about those fire lookouts in the displays, including information on the lookouts in Mount Rainier National Park, but I couldn't find any. Seven hundred is the approximate number of fire lookouts now thought to have been built in this state. Crediting the CCC for 240 of them, excluding Mount Rainier National Park, seemed reasonable.

Although the Park's fire lookouts were not mentioned in the displays, a Sunday *Seattle Times* article about the exhibit (by Gregory Scrugg, published November 5, 2023) stated, "the CCC built four fire lookouts in the Mount Rainier National Park." The only lookout named in the article was Tolmie Peak.

What the archives revealed

In 2024, I visited Mount Rainier's archives to look for historical documents that would resolve the difference between the two versions of the Park's lookout history. I found details on the CCC's lookout-related work in the Park: they worked on the trails to Mount Fremont, Gobblers Knob, and Crystal Peak in 1933 and 1934; they maintained and constructed many miles of phone lines to fire lookouts, and they may have transported construction materials to the fire lookout building sites in 1934. But, as historian Theodore Catton said in his book *Wonderland: an Administrative History of Mount Rainier National Park*, "The CCC crews were mainly assigned to jobs that required less skill than construction of buildings... Some of [the Public Works Administration] funds were used to hire temporary, skilled workers for building construction.



That was how many of the ranger residences, patrol cabins, fire lookouts, and other... buildings [in Mount Rainier National Park] came to be built."

I also reviewed microfiche copies of a November 1933 contract status report, September 1934 activity reports, and a 1934 construction project completion report. Each detailed a different phase in the construction of fire lookout cabins at Gobblers Knob, Tolmie Peak, Crystal Peak, and Mount Fremont. They identified a local, private construction firm, the American Building Company of Seattle, as the contractor. The agreed upon amount for building the four lookouts was \$5,042.

The details in the historical records matched those in *Lookouts: Firewatchers of the Cascades and Olympics*. Ira Spring, Byron Fish, and Mountaineer Books had it right.

Where the inaccuracy started

How did this misunderstanding develop in modern Mount Rainier National Park records and culture? In his 1966 PhD thesis, *Mountain in the Sky, A History of the Mount Rainier National Park*, Arthur D. Martinson stated, "By 1934, with Civilian Conservation Corps assistance, other lookout stations were operating." Martindale's work is often listed as a source of information on the history of the Park's fire lookouts. In addition, two writers that I contacted pointed to the Park's website as their likely source for incorrect information. The webpages for the Gobblers Knob, Tolmie Peak, and Mount Fremont Lookouts all credit the CCC for their construction; two of the webpages list the incorrect date of construction; and the webpage for Shriner Peak Lookout provides its construction date without revealing it was a highway construction contractor who accepted the assignment in 1932.

When all's said and done, I think the error was built with good intentions, a vague statement that was repeated, and the knowledge that the CCC was actively working in the Park during the 1930s. (Park staff has committed to correcting information on the history of these fire lookouts). ▲

Leslie Romer joined *The Mountaineers* in 1993 to take the Sea Kayaking course with the Olympia Branch. She published her first book, *Lost Fire Lookout Hikes and Histories: Olympic Peninsula and Willapa Hills* in 2021.

The Mountaineers is a volunteer-led community built around sharing knowledge and skills to safely recreate outdoors. We offer courses, activities, and events every season, and members are encouraged to participate in programs offered by any branch.

How to Sign Up for Activities

Step 1

Visit our website
mountaineers.org

Click on the big green 'Find Activities' button, or hover over the 'Activities' tab and choose 'Find Activities.'

Step 2

Filter your search

Define your search using the filter options in the green column on the left. To view activities by location, choose 'Map' in the upper right.

Step 3

Register

Click on the activity of your interest to learn more. If you like what you see, select the orange 'Register' button. You'll be added to the trip roster and receive a confirmation email.

Note: Activities require registration unless otherwise noted. You will also need a current waiver on file with The Mountaineers to participate.

How to Sign Up for Events

Step 1

Visit our website
mountaineers.org

Click on the 'Upcoming Events' button on the left of the main page, or click 'More' and choose the 'Events' tab.

Step 2

Browse for local events

Scroll down to view our most popular events, or choose a branch or program center calendar for more events in your area. Browse through your options, and click on an event to learn more.

Step 3

Select an event & register

Many events are free but require you to RSVP via the orange RSVP button. Events that require tickets will have a link for online ticket purchases.

How to Sign Up for Courses & Clinics

Step 1

Visit our website
mountaineers.org

Click on the big green 'Find Courses' button, or hover over the 'Courses' tab and choose 'Find Courses.'

Step 2

Filter your course search

Define your search using the filter options. You can also search key words in the left hand course search bar, or at the top of our webpage.

Step 3

Select a course & register

Read the course overview to learn more about course objectives and expectations. Once you register, you will receive a confirmation email.

Note: Most courses require that you register a few months before the course start date.

Virtual Education Center

Check out our Virtual Education Center and Calendar, your home base for accessing all our virtual learning tools. Find online activities, events, and classes, and browse our educational resources for outdoor tips and skills. Visit mountaineers.org/courses/virtual-education-center to learn more.

Volunteer With Us

Interested in helping others find community and safely enjoy the natural world? There are many ways to get involved as a volunteer, such as instructing a course, hosting at one of our lodges, or helping at an event. Reach out to your branch chair to learn more about volunteering with The Mountaineers, or visit mountaineers.org/volunteerwithus.

Frequently Asked Questions

What if I'm not a member? Our courses and activities are open to the public. You simply need to sign up for a guest membership at mountaineers.org/join. Guests can participate in two activities for free before joining, and unlimited courses at a higher course cost.

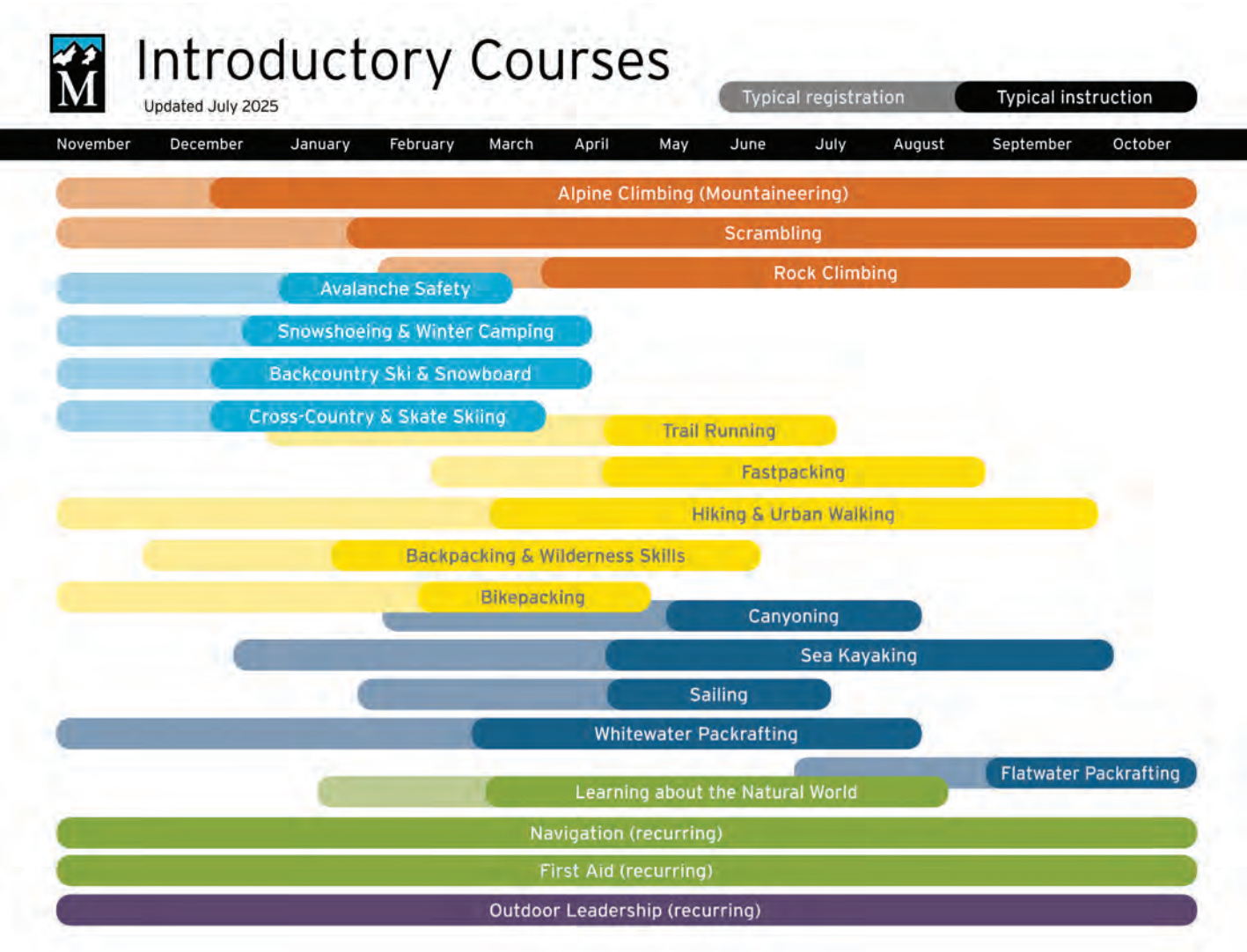
What are some easy ways to get started? Sign up for an activity without prerequisites. These include day hikes, backpacking trips, stewardship activities, photography outings, and occasional sailing opportunities. Also, consider taking a basic or introductory course like Basic Snowshoeing, Introduction to Rock Climbing, or Navigation.

How are events and activities different? Activities are primarily day-long outings that require participants to use skills in an outdoor setting. Examples include hikes, naturalist walks, or snowshoeing. Events are primarily opportunities to see presentations and socialize. Examples include summer picnics, branch banquets, and speaker series like BeWild and the Adventure Speaker Series.

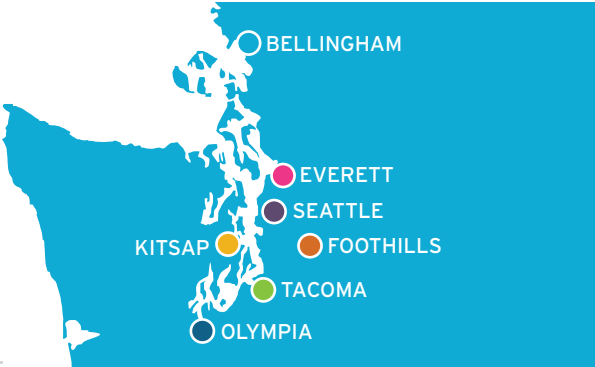
What if I don't meet the prerequisites for an activity? Some of our technical activities have prerequisite skill requirements. If you want to learn the prerequisite skills, we encourage you to take one of our courses. If you already have the prerequisite skills, you might qualify for equivalency. Email info@mountaineers.org and we will help you apply for equivalency so you can participate at the appropriate skill level.

Why do some activities say 'Leader Permission Required'? All our Mountaineers activities are led by volunteers. To ensure everyone on a trip has a set of specific skills, some volunteers require you to contact them in advance to participate. Before signing up for a trip that requires leader permission, please contact the leader. For any questions, email our Member Services team at info@mountaineers.org.

What if the course or activity is full? Sign up for the waitlist! Yes, it works. We have roughly a 10-20% drop-out rate in courses and activities, so spots often become available.



The Mountaineers is home to seven branches, each offering a number of courses and seminars. Our branches also host a variety of events like picnics, film screenings, and guest speakers. Regardless of which branch you join, you can sign up for offerings with any branch. Learn more at mountaineers.org/locations-lodges.



BELLINGHAM

Chair: AJ Schuehle, ajschuehle@hotmail.com
Website: mountaineers.org/bellingham; bellinghammountaineers.com

You'll find the Bellingham Branch tucked alongside the upper craggy expanse of the North Cascades. We enjoy easy access to the peaks that drain into the Nooksack and Skagit River basins. Our close-knit community offers climbing courses, hiking trips, and backcountry adventures in a diverse, inclusive, and supportive environment.

Branch Council Meetings are on the fourth Tuesday of each month. Visit our branch calendar for details.

EVERETT

Chair: Nick Mayo, nicholas.e.mayo@gmail.com
Website: mountaineers.org/everett

Founded in 1911, the Everett Branch offers several programs. As a smaller branch, we value companionship and are excited to meet new members at our in-person events including our Spring Happy Hour, Beer & Gear evening, Annual Awards Banquet, and more. Check our branch calendar for details. Our branch is also known for our unique Lookout and Trail Maintenance Committee, which restored the Mt. Pilchuck Lookout

and continues to maintain the historic Three Fingers Lookout.

Branch Council Meetings are held every other month to discuss new and ongoing initiatives and are open to all. We host a combination of hybrid and fully remote meetings depending on the month. As we ramp up our in-person events and programs, we are looking for talented and passionate volunteers to make an impact. Please reach out to Nick Mayo for details.

KITSAP

Chair: Melissa White, melissa.white@gmail.com
Website: mountaineers.org/kitsap

The Kitsap Branch draws members from throughout western Puget Sound, from Gig Harbor to the Olympic Peninsula, including Pierce, Kitsap, Jefferson, and Clallam counties. Join us at our program center, conveniently located in Bremerton.

Branch Council Meetings are held in January, April, July, and October. Our annual branch celebration is in December, please join us!

SEATTLE

Chair: Craig Kartes, c.kartes@outlook.com
Website: mountaineers.org/seattle

The Seattle Branch began as the sole club location in 1906 when The Mountaineers was founded. Our Meet The Mountaineers open houses are held about once a month and are a great way for new and prospective members to learn about our many offerings. Our branch is also home to the Seattle Program Center, which features a bookstore, indoor and outdoor climbing walls, friction slabs, event spaces, and more.

Branch Council Meetings are held every other month to discuss new and ongoing initiatives. We're growing rapidly and actively seeking people to support our community. Visit our branch calendar for details and reach out to the branch chair if you are interested in volunteering.

FOOTHILLS
(I-90/I-405 CORRIDORS)

Chair: Travis Vermeer, travisvermeer@gmail.com
Website: mountaineers.org/foothills

The Foothills Branch is the club's newest branch, founded in 2004 and encompassing the eastside communities along the I-90 and

I-405 corridors. In addition to our educational and activity programs, we host film screenings, guest speakers, and stewardship events with the Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust, Shadow Lake Nature Preserve, WTA, and other conservation-minded partners.

Our branch is growing rapidly, and we are actively seeking people to support our community - no prior experience required. We invite you to get involved in branch leadership and committees to get our communities outside. Contact the branch chair if you might be interested.

Branch Council Meetings are held every other month (except summer) to discuss new and ongoing initiatives. All branch members are welcome! Visit our branch calendar for details.

TACOMA

Chair: Natalia Martinez-Paz, nataliamp@gmail.com
Website: mountaineers.org/tacoma

The second largest of all seven branches, the Tacoma branch maintains its own program center in the Old Town neighborhood of Tacoma, as well as the Irish Cabin property located near Mt. Rainier. A great way get involved is our Meet The Mountaineers event, consisting of a meet-and-greet and a 90-minute interactive presentation giving you opportunities to learn about our history, our website, and how you can get involved.

Branch Council Meetings are held every six weeks to discuss new and ongoing initiatives and general branch business. Visit our branch calendar for details.

OLYMPIA

Chair: Bob Keranen, bobkeranen@gmail.com
Website: mountaineers.org/Olympia

The Adventure Speaker Series returns on November 5 and continues on the first Wednesday of the month through March.

Branch Council Meetings are held at 6:00 PM on the second Wednesday of the month, alternating in-person and Zoom, though Zoom is always available. Members are encouraged to attend. Contact Bob Keranen for details.

The Olympia Library has many interesting books, bear canisters, and maps available to borrow. For all these resources and more, visit our branch website.

Open to Mountaineers members and the general public, our lodges provide visitors with unparalleled access to skiing, snowshoeing, hiking, and more. The Mountaineers is also home to the Kitsap Forest Theater, a historic outdoor theater showcasing two musical productions a year which are open to the public and a family favorite.

LODGE WEBPAGES Information about schedules, availability, meals, group rentals, and special events can all be found on the lodge webpages. You can also book your stay online. To access our lodge webpages, visit the direct links listed below or go to mountaineers.org, click on 'More' in the top menu, and then click on 'Locations & Lodges' in the dropdown menu.

VOLUNTEER Our lodges and the Kitsap Forest Theater are run by dedicated volunteers, and they can use your help! Visit their webpages to learn how you can contribute to the teams that keep our outdoor centers running.



Baker Lodge

mountaineers.org/bakerlodge

Mt. Baker Lodge, above Picture Lake and near Artist's Point in the North Cascades, is a gorgeous place for a get-away. The lodge is located within walking distance of the Mt. Baker ski area as well as numerous hiking trails.

Stevens Lodge

mountaineers.org/stevenslodge

Tired of the hustle and bustle of the big city? Come for a relaxing getaway in a cabin in the woods. Ski, ride, and explore from our lodge, a short drive from Seattle. Nestled next to the Stevens Pass Ski Area, our ski-in/ski-out lodge is open during the Stevens Pass Ski area's official season.



Meany Lodge

mountaineers.org/meanylodge

Meany Lodge is The Mountaineers oldest winter sports resort, located approximately 60 miles east from Seattle off I-90 near Stampede Pass and surrounded by the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest. Meany Lodge provides a warm family environment for all - perfect for winter and summer adventures alike. During the ski season, the lodge operates a rope-tow on our ski hill for ski lessons, cross-country skiing, and snowshoe excursions.



Kitsap Forest Theater

foresttheater.com

Watch our website for the announcement of our 2026 season - two musicals and a classic for a total of three shows! Our family-friendly shows promise to light up hearts of all ages, and what better way to experience them than at the Kitsap Forest Theater. More information, including tickets and audition dates, can be found online. Tickets make great gifts - consider buying season tickets! We also have volunteer opportunities and offer summer camps for kids.





Name Khalil Taw
Member Since October 2024
How did you get involved? The Mountaineers Adventure Club (MAC)

Khalil and fellow MAC students cross-country skiing in the Methow Valley. Photo by Khalil Taw.

Why do you participate in Mountaineers Youth Programs?
I participate for several reasons. The two main reasons I enjoy participating with MAC are: the number of trips, and the exposure I get to the outdoors and its activities. By far the best reason to participate in MAC is because of the community it builds when outdoors. I truly believe people become their best selves outdoors.

What is your favorite Mountaineers memory?
My favorite experience with The Mountaineers was the winter Ozette Triangle backpacking trip. It was wet, cold, and pretty miserable. But the connections I made on that trip were second to none. My favorite memory on that trip was going out in the middle of the night into shallow waters to look for crabs. It was incredibly dark and super sketchy, but it was so fun holding on to each other for balance and yipping every time we heard a crunch thinking it was a crab. Hank and Josh (our trip leaders) also made very sludgy brownies, which were mushy and more like pudding, but still tasted good. I got a million times closer to everybody on that trip, and I even got to bring my camera and take photos of everyone. (It was Khalil-y an awesome trip!)

What is your favorite outdoor activity and why?
My favorite outdoor activity is backpacking. Not only do you get to visit and sleep in some of the prettiest places in the world, but you also get to be with people in their rawest form. I've always noticed that over backpacking trips people get considerably closer to each other. Maybe it's a survival instinct, but I honestly believe that the connections you make while backpacking are the best connections you will ever make.

If you could give one piece of advice to someone who wanted to spend more time outside, what would you say?
I would say to put yourself out there. I almost didn't apply to join MAC because (given how competitive the lottery is) I thought there was no shot I would get in, and unsurprisingly, I didn't. But after a little while, I got moved off the waitlist. So, to be completely honest, just go for it and get yourself out there. Because the surest way to get rejected is to not try at all.

What things do you like to do when you're not at Mountaineers Youth Programs?
I'm incredibly social - most would probably say that I talk too much. But with the MAC community, you don't need to be talking all the time. Everybody is so accepting and open, especially when doing activities outdoors. MAC feels like a huge family. ▲▲

Lightning round

- Gummy Candy or Chocolate Bar?** Chocolate bar
- Favorite close-to-home adventure?** Snoqualmie Pass/Alpental Area
- What's your 11th essential?** My camera
- Post-adventure meal of choice?** Miso ramen, honey garlic karaage, and pork gyoza from Arashi
- If you could be a rockstar at any outdoor activity overnight, what would it be?** Wilderness photography

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Yoshiko Miyazaki



Jon Dykes/Hilleberg Team



Jon Dykes/Hilleberg Team



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Board & Branch Elections

September 1-22, 2025

Each year we host elections for our Board of Directors and participating branches. At-large Board nominees are endorsed by our Board of Directors for election by members. Members of select branches can also vote for their branch leadership this year.

Voting is open September 1-22, 2025. Check your inbox on September 1 for your ballot. You can also submit a paper ballot or vote online at mountaineers.org/2025elections

Results will be announced October 1, 2025.

Join The Mountaineers Annual Meeting on October 29, 2025 to learn more about our progress on our strategic plan. RSVP at mountaineers.org/2025_annual_meeting



Photo by Becca Polglase.

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