

Mount Shasta Collection

First Ascent Narrative

The Daily Herald (San Francisco)
Monday, August 28, 1854
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First Ascent of Shasta Butte -- Interesting Narrative

On the 14th inst. a party of eight made the first attempt to reach the summit of the celebrated Shasta Butte, or Mount Shasta, the highest peak in California, and about five times as high as Mount Diablo. Mr. E.D. Pierce, one of the party, furnishes the *Yreka Herald* with the following interesting narrative of the trip:

We camped at the base of the mountain, on the south side. On the morning of the 14th, we turned ourselves loose for the trip. The first three miles we found to be easy of ascent; it took us two hours and a half to accomplish the next mile; then came the tug of war. We were obliged in many places to climb from crag to crag as best we could. The least mistep, or the detaching of the smallest piece of rock upon which we were obliged to cling for life, would have gently lowered the adventurer from three to five hundred feet perpendicularly upon the rocks below. Believe me when I say, that each one of the party, when scaling the dizzy heights, turned deathly pale, and I assure you that most of the pale faces were of long duration. From this onwards, we were obliged to exert ourselves to the utmost in the way of jumping, thumping, etc. to keep from freezing, for the wind was piercing cold. The next obstacle in our way was the frozen snow one-fourth of a mile, which we were obliged to pass over, being as smooth as glass, and almost perpendicular. Here we were obliged to spell each other, and cut notches or steps with our knives. Thus we climbed on the first bench, some four miles up.

The next six miles we found to be very steep and difficult to ascend; so much so, that we were obliged most of the way to proceed on all-fours. In many instances our upward course was rendered both difficult and dangerous from the fact that we were obliged to climb over loose detached rock, which was liable at any moment to start off in the shape of an avalanche, with our little party as outside passengers -- a journey from which there would have been no return. The second bench or peak, some seven miles up, we found to be composed of a very hard red cement or lava, which has every appearance of having been forced up by subterranean fires. In this vicinity we discovered three beautiful lakes, one in an old crater on the westerly peak, one amidships, and one on the side of the easterly peak.

The third bench or peak we found to be composed of a coal black cement or lava, of a sandy nature, intermixed with quartz and burnt glass -- and here, lo and behold, we came in sight of the topmost peak which we found to be the most difficult by far to master, from the fact that it is the steepest by far, and in going ahead three feet we slipped back four; and in order to make the raffle at all, (as the boy said about going to school on ice,) we were obliged to turn round and go backward, and here it was that we found the atmosphere getting too light for comfort, which was fully demonstrated in different ways, such as spitting blood, head ache, and being obliged to rest every few feet, etc., etc. In fact, some of the party made motions to go no further. But our motto was neck or nothing. By the way, one of the party, N. Davis, lost his breath once. He made three efforts to regain it, and he allowed that if he had not succeeded the fourth time, he would not have tried it any more. After many a desperate struggle we all reach the heights of Mt. Shasta, at half-past 11 o'clock A.M., which we found to be in the shape of a mammoth stack of chimneys, with barely room enough for our party to stand upon. Here I pause for the want of language to describe the beauties of the surrounding scenery.

Not the pen of a ready writer ever can give you the most distant idea of the grandeur and sublimity of the face of nature, as far as the eye could reach. Imagine for yourself mountains rising back of mountains, large and small, in the most beautiful disorder and confusion, interspersed with beautiful luxuriant valleys, all well watered with fine mountain streams, with here and there a crystal lake or pond, and all this seemingly encircled by the Coast Range, like onto a mammoth corral. All this and much more could be scanned at a glance. Who could look down from the towering heights of Mt. Shasta upon the noble and wonderful works of nature and of nature's God, without being strongly impressed with reverence and awe!

After a few necessary preliminaries, precisely at 12 o'clock we unfurled the Stars and Stripes, and raised the standard to its long resting-place, amid the deafening cheers of the little multitude. Cheer after cheer followed in quick succession, as the Flag of Liberty floated proudly upon the breeze, until we were too hoarse to give utterance to our feelings. Thus our task was accomplished, and after partaking of a little refreshment, and taking a long, lingering and silent look at the surrounding scenery, with one award we commenced the descent. Not a hundred yards west of the summit we found a cluster of boiling hot sulphur springs, about a dozen in number, emitting any amount of steam, smoke, gas, etc. The ground for some fifty yards around, we found to be considerably settled and completely covered with sulphur, and the rocks are hot enough to cook an egg in five minutes. The earth has the appearance of being a mere shell, and mighty thin at that. By the way, this made us think of the lower country, we read of. After reconnoitring here for some time, we concluded that it was best for us to leave for fear of accidents. After descending some two miles, we came to a ravine of snow, and being somewhat fatigued and in a hurry to get clear of the smell of brimstone, we set sail in the following manner:

The grade being on an angle of some 75 degrees, and the top of the snow soft, we sat ourselves down on our unmentionables, feet foremost, to regulate our speed, and our walking sticks for rudders. At the word, off we sped inside of 2:40, and the like I never saw before in the shape of coasting. Some unshipped their rudders before reaching the quarter, (there was no such thing as stopping,) some broached to and went stern foremost, making wry faces, while others, too eager to be the first down, got up too much steam, and went end over end; while others found themselves athwart ship, and making 160 revolutions per minute. In short, it was a spirited race, as far as I can see, and that was not far, for in a trice we found ourselves in a snug little pile at the foot of the snow, gasping for breath. After examining a little, we found that some were minus hats, some boots, some pants, and others had their skins bruised, and other little et ceteras too numerous to mention. No one knew what time we made the four miles in; however, it was concluded by all that we were not over five minutes and a half on the snow. Thus ended the incidents of the day, and we arrived in camp at 3 o'clock P.M.