

AUDACITY

BY FRED BECKEY



au·dac·i·ty

noun

1. the willingness to take bold risks. the quality or state of being audacious:

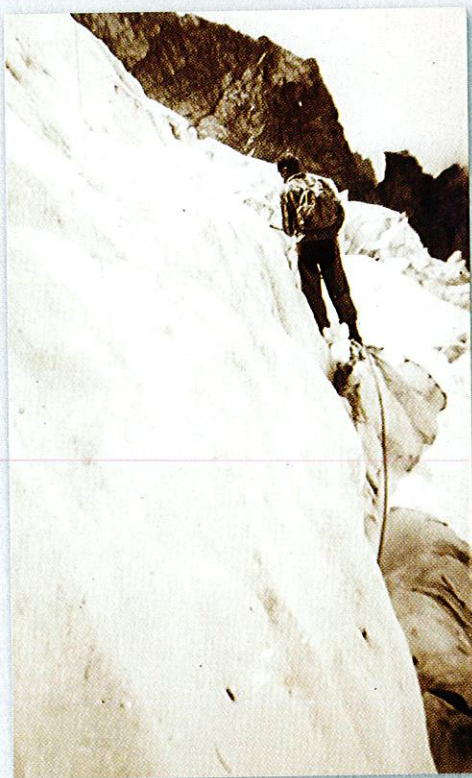
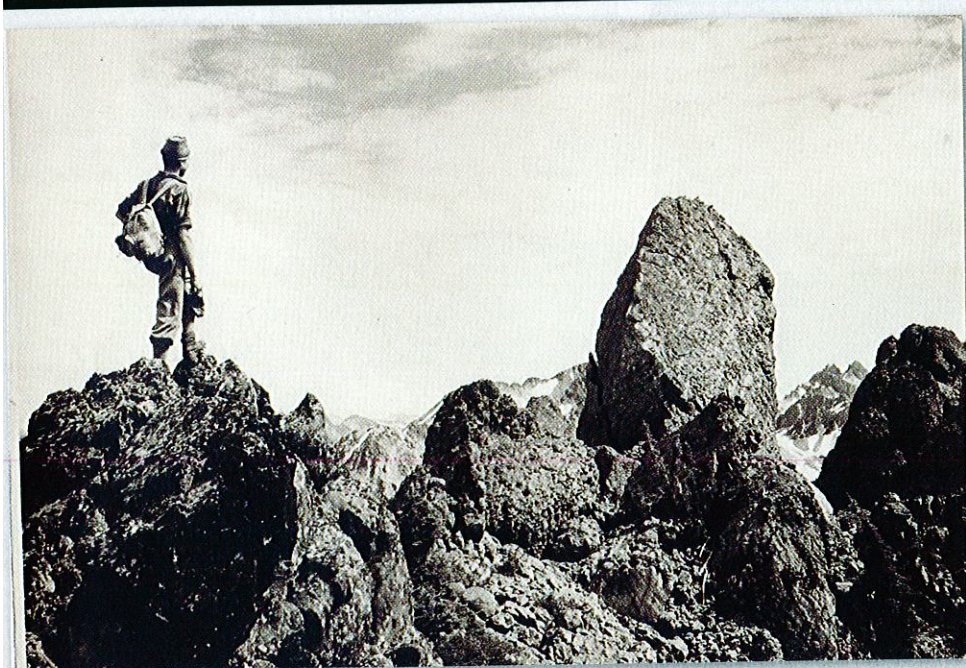
a : intrepid boldness

b : bold or arrogant disregard of normal restraints

2. an audacious act

In 1942 two teenagers set out on one of the boldest adventures of all time: In a sea-to-summit push, they would attempt to climb Mount Waddington, a formidable and remote mountain widely considered the most difficult in North America. Unsupported and cut off from any outside contact, Fred and Helmy Beckey pulled off a masterstroke. Here, for the first time, American mountaineering legend Fred Beckey tells the story.

Mount Waddington's formidable Southwest Face. The main summit is on the right; the route takes an angling line roughly up the center of this face.



Above: Helmy Beckey, Mount Cruiser, Olympic Mountains. In the early 1940s, the ranges of Washington were Helmy and Fred Beckey's backyard. While still teenagers they were among America's most seasoned alpinists, and arguably the most capable. Right: Helmy climbing on Mount Fury's North Face, Picket Range, North Cascades, 1940.

Helmy, 16, and I, 19, were ambitious teenage brothers with a plan. We would scale Mount Waddington, the monarch of the Canadian Coast Range that had repulsed 16 attempts and been deemed impossible before it was finally climbed in 1936 by two of America's foremost alpinists, Fritz Wiessner and Bill House.

Wiessner's strength, abundant skills on rock and ice, and boldness (he had said he was willing to die for a worthy objective) had resulted in a victory on July 21. His and House's success on the 2,540-foot southwest face so astounded the mountaineering world that it made the headlines of the *Illustrated London News*: "The Unclimbable Mount Mystery Climbed at Last!" (At the time, Waddington was known as Mount Mystery, which implies, correctly, that little was known of the mountain.)

Wiessner and House were praised for their conquest of "one of the world's most formidable mountains." Wiessner himself said that the climb was no pushover and recounted a frightening event, when "fragments of ice and rock hurtled down at short intervals from the summit ridge." He added, "Seldom in my 20 years of mountaineering have I climbed a mountain which made such heavy demands on climbing knowledge, on nervous energy, and on daring."

When I read Wiessner's remarks, I knew that Waddington was the perfect climb for two Seattle teenagers—six years later in 1942, my brother and I pitched our small tent beneath Waddington's massive southwest face.

Huddled under our canvas shelter Helmy surveyed our stark surroundings and asked, perhaps rhetorically, why no other team had attempted the climb after Wiessner.

I knew why but kept quiet, not wishing to undermine Helmy's confidence.

Helmy broke the silence to remind me that just four years ago I had climbed Mt. Olympus with the Boy Scouts. Dressed in my pajama bottoms, I had wandered around, poking at the glacier with a long alpenstock, eventually finding my way to the summit. Now look where we were!

Our small tent was a haven, but it could not shelter us from our preposterous position. We were in the midst of a sprawling mass of dangerous glaciers, nearly 30 miles from an empty tidewater inlet in the remote

Coast Mountains of British Columbia. If something happened, we had no radio to alert others for rescue. If we did not return, no one would even know what had become of us. If one of us were injured, the other would have to hike out to the inlet, get the trapper Jim Stanton who had a cabin there, then contact climbers in Vancouver and hope that they could arrange a rescue.

I tried to rationalize. We had the finest equipment available, the same gear used by Helmy and his three companions during the first ascent of South Howser Tower in the Bugaboos the previous year. Our boots were leather, ¾ height from the local bootmaker Currin-Greene. These we had fitted with Tricouni edge nails, as was popular among loggers and volcano climbers. For tools, we each had a hickory-shafted ice axe with a straight pick, adze and spike. Our hinged crampons from Europe were state of the art with front points modeled after Eckenstein's design, and I imagined were similar to those used by my heroes Merkl and Welzenbach on the north faces of Chamonix.

Thus outfitted, Helmy and I had climbed difficult first ascents in the North Cascades including that of Forbidden Peak in 1940, one of the "50 Classic Climbs in North America."

Still, it was difficult to relax. The creaking

and groaning of the icy bergschrund above us foretold the hazards that awaited. Sun-loosened ice and rime that had clung to the rock walls nearly half a mile overhead clattered down. The demons had not forgotten to frighten us.

Helmy and I were just boys, really, and probably should have been studying or working on careers or chasing girls. None of that interested us and when you are young you think you have unlimited time to figure out life. For now, we would climb. In my youth I was also self-centered and assertive, especially so when the goal was a serious climb such as Waddington. While I knew that Helmy and I, despite our experiences in the Cascades, couldn't match Wiessner's resume of great climbs in the Alps and on Nanga Parbat in the Himalaya, I also knew Waddington was humanly possible—it had, after all, been climbed. It could be climbed again.

Growing up in the Seattle area, where my father, Klaus, had a family medical practice and my mother, Marta, was an opera singer, I was a loner and avoided school and social activities. I also found high school team sports and their rules meaningless. Skiing and ski touring were more to my liking, keeping me fit and giving me valuable mountain experience. For adventure, Helmy and I built flimsy rafts and paddled across Puget Sound.

At some point during my school years I resolved to live my life on my own terms, fulfilling my wishes, dreams and ideas. I realized that I would need to work to finance climbing, but that I would take my chances with that—my plans and goals could not be hampered by making money, parents, teachers or friends.

When I was 14, I began climbing with the Boy Scouts in the Olympics, from 1937 to 1938. In 1939, I climbed under the guidance of The Mountaineers and Lloyd Anderson, who had founded the climbing-gear coop Recreational Equipment Incorporated (REI) during the Great Depression in 1938. Anderson and I, with Clint Kelly, made the first ascent of the remote Mount Despair, my first, first ascent. By the summer of 1941, at the age of 18, I yearned for exploits beyond the Cascades—a long wilderness expedition to an invincible mountain fit my agenda.

Alaska and the Yukon provided such objectives, but were too far away. Back then, there were still numerous challenging climbs in the western United States and Canada, but they didn't match my

obsession. My study of maps and alpine journals brought the difficult Mount Waddington, less than 400 miles to the north, into focus.

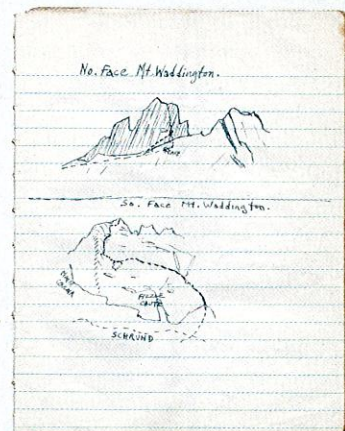
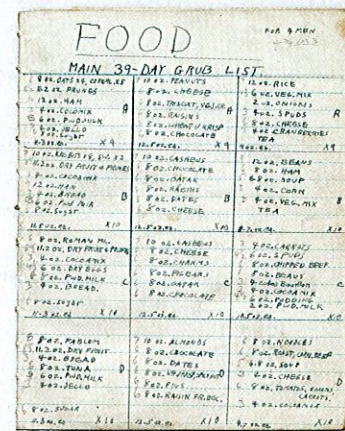
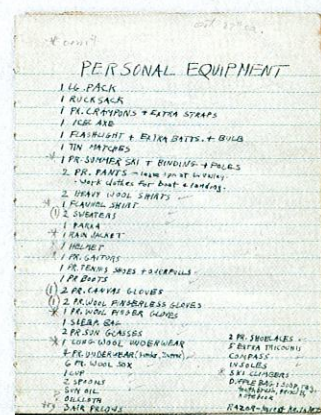
Helmy and I continued to train in the Cascades, and with each new climb we steeled our nerves and gained confidence. We tangled with thick alder brush and the infamous devil's club. We climbed over slippery fallen logs, endured pouring rain, and suffered wet clothing and soggy sleeping bags. We climbed in any sort of weather and became accustomed to remoteness. Challenging first ascents in the Picket Range and a victory on the Mox Peaks bolstered our resolve. A certain calculated risk created momentum. We were ready for Waddington.

Waddington, at the height of 13,185 feet in Canada's Coast Range, is the loftiest peak between Mount Rainier in Washington and Mount Fairweather on the Alaska-Yukon border—a distance of over 1,000 miles.

The Coast Range, a ribbon of peaks that define nearly the entire western seaboard of Canada, were bypassed by mountaineering expeditions on the way to Alaska and the Yukon, where the behemoths of Mount St. Elias and McKinley were the prizes. Fur hunters and gold seekers were familiar with the region's inland pathways, but seafaring explorers were blocked by virtually inaccessible, abrupt frontal peaks.

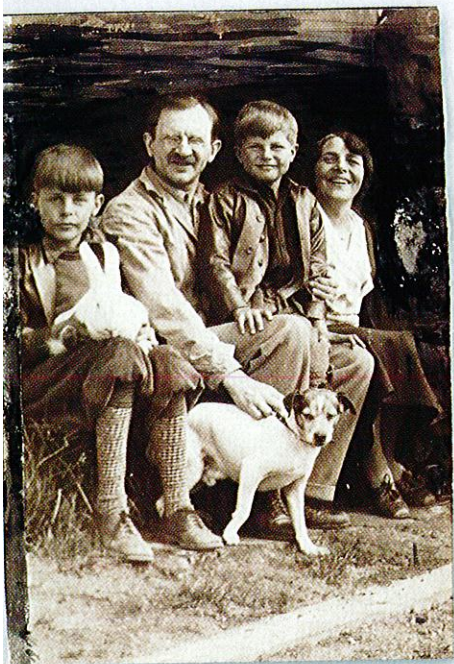
The high mountains and glaciers remained unexplored and unmapped until the summer of 1922—57 years after the Matterhorn had been climbed—when Captain R. P. Bishop sighted a mountain of over 13,000 feet. He carefully triangulated what would eventually be known as Mount Waddington, after Alfred Waddington, who attempted unsuccessfully in the gold-rush era of the 1860s to build a road from the coast to the interior through the Homathko Canyon at the eastern foot of Waddington. Bishop's report was, however, shelved in government offices and remained unknown to aspiring mountaineers even though the mountain lay only 175 miles from bustling Vancouver.

Don Munday was more of a visionary than other Pacific Northwest mountaineers in the 1920s. His survivalist achievements included pioneering brush and windfall choked valleys, the crossing of torrential streams, and the handling of a boat or canoe in highly dangerous waters. His able wife Phyllis followed him with Amazonian

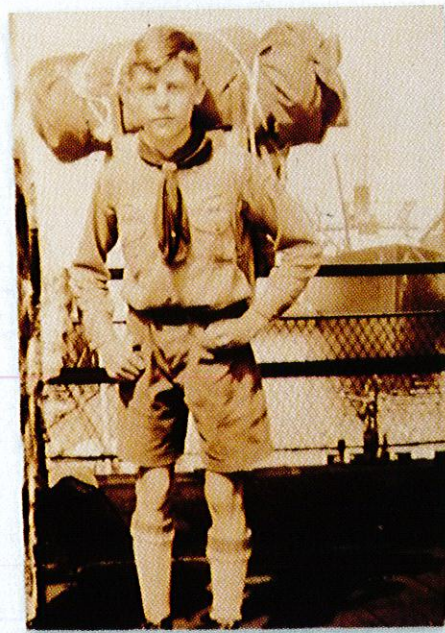


Lists and sketch from Fred Beckey's diary. After graduating from the University of Washington with a degree in business administration, Beckey worked various jobs including delivery-truck driver, advertising sales rep and cartographer.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY FRED BECKEY



Left: Beckey family in Seattle, 1933. Fred (with rabbit); his father Klaus, a family practitioner; brother Helmy; and mother Marta, an opera singer. Above: Helmy Beckey, age 20 or 21. Right: Fred Beckey began climbing as a Boy Scout, and later took courses from The Mountaineers under the guidance of Lloyd Anderson, who had just founded the climbing-gear coop, Recreational Equipment Incorporated (REI).



strength: She once shouldered an 80-pound pack across a wobbling felled tree at a dangerous river canyon.

The Mundays, curious whether the Coast Range held a yet unmapped supreme altitude peak, climbed Mount Arrowsmith on Vancouver Island in 1926 to have a look. Their outing was rewarded: The sun shone on a dazzling lofty mountain far to the north that rose well above other peaks.

They and companions boated up an inlet and with an almost divine intensity approached the mysterious mountain. Tangled vegetation, slippery log jams, swirling torrents, and crossings on insecure felled trees made for exhausting progress. Once out of the valley, Munday's party then made an ascending route to the northwest, reaching the Waddington Glacier. Backpacking onward, they arrived at its source, "Mystery Pass," at about 9,100 feet.

From that high perch, they saw Waddington and its defiant armor of glaciers and rock walls, stunning in its majesty. The peak revealed itself from base to crest, culminating "in a great slender tower tipped with snowy plumes" Munday wrote in *The Unknown Mountain*. Further reconnaissance revealed a more direct route, raising their enthusiasm to a boiling point, but the summit remained elusive.

Survivalist tactics proved necessary when they approached the mountain again

in 1927. Cutting and foraging a path in the forest toward Waddington was exhausting—a prelude to many miles of glacier travel, and they still had not worked out a feasible route to the summit. The great mountain's broad configuration was deceptive and drew the team northward toward the flank of the summit tower. Their hardy effort concluded on the snow and ice shoulder of the Northwest Summit.

Munday returned the next year and adeptly led with ice axe and crampons and reached the snow-capped Northwest Summit. Here the climbers gasped, shocked by a most astonishing sight: The true summit tower lay beyond, less than a hundred feet higher, but towering above an impossible gap, wreathed in rime and ice feathers. In the thin air their dream lost its momentum.

The Mundays tried again in 1934, as did other suitors to Mount Waddington, one of whom died in a long fall. An innovative Winnipeg team made superior route choices on the northeast face but were driven back by snow-plastered rock and storm. In 1934 and 1935, six strong parties made attempts and consistently failed. Pundits asked, "Can Waddington be climbed?"

The 16th attempt, in 1936, was by a combined Sierra Club-Canadian team that included veteran Yosemite climbers—who were "fish out of water," as Waddington

guidebook author Don Serl told me. They attempted a dead-end route on a south-face spur with a group of eight. As with K2, the more attempts Waddington had, the more mystique and prestige it earned.

Finally, in 1936, Wiessner, with House, who would be on the American 1938 expedition to K2, undeterred by history, sealed Waddington.

In 1942 America had entered World War II, and I would soon enlist and serve in the 10th Mountain Division, but Waddington would come first and to that end Helmy and I boarded a bus from Seattle to Vancouver, our jumping-off point for Waddington. We left with our parents' blessings—it helped that they only had a vague idea of what we were getting into, but even if they had known and objected, I still would have gone.

In Vancouver, we looked up Don and Phyllis Munday. We had previously contacted them for information on Waddington, and they greeted us as if we were long-lost relatives. They treated us to pancakes and maple syrup. I sensed that they were surprised at our youth, energy and nonchalance.

Beneath their cover of cautious enthusiasm, the Mundays seemed eager for us to succeed. Although Helmy and I made nervous jokes about bear danger, the Mundays assuaged our fear, saying that the

bears would bypass us if we slept on the trail. With that, the Mundays bid us good luck.

Armed with new information and fortified by the hot meal, I anxiously looked at my thin wallet. There was barely enough money for food to be purchased in Vancouver and for the two-day steamship voyage to Glendale Cove in Knight Inlet. There we'd transfer to a smaller boat to go up the inlet to its head, our drop-off point for our Waddington approach. Climbing, as I would find out over the next 70 years, is a pauper's sport.

After frugal shopping we arrived at the pier in Vancouver, where longshoremen were busily loading cargo on the steamship deck for the northward voyage. The men were helpful, yet bemused by our plans. We were unlike any passengers they had ever seen. Our cargo of climbing gear, splayed out on the dock, mystified them.

Among the numerous items of equipment not usually seen on expeditions today were manila hemp climbing ropes, a 200-foot reepschnur for rappelling, 18 pitons, steel carabineers, manila rope slings with steel rings, a Primus stove, safety pins for gear repairs and wounds, candles, air pillows and waterproof match tins.

As we packed six weeks of carefully chosen food in our version of the modern stuffsack—paraffined cloth flour bags that held 2.5 pounds per man per day—I became concerned about pesky mice that inhabited the ship. If they got into our meager rations of dried prunes, Pablum, cheese and other foodstuffs, our climb would be scuttled before it began. By luck, someone on board devised a way to hang our food safely out of the reach of vermin. Now, I thought, if we could only figure out how to keep bears out of our food during the forest approach—one gulp and all our food would be gone.

Helmy and I must have appeared as misplaced youngsters on the cannery dock at Knight Inlet, where Jim Stanton greeted us with endless hugs. Stanton, the trapper and guide who had helped with most of the previous Waddington expeditions, was to take us up the inlet to its head, the silt delta of the Franklin River. Then we'd go overland, through dense, wet forest, to the Franklin Glacier and on to Waddington.

Stanton was a prince and introduced us to his fishermen friends, a few of whom wondered why we had brought skis.

We loaded our supplies onto Stanton's salmon trawler. As we pulled away from the dock we peered at the choppy blue-green water. We wouldn't see Waddington until the

gloomy clouds disappeared, so we hoped for blue skies and drier weather as we motored up the fjord. We were on our way!

When the water became too shallow for the trawler, we loaded our supplies into Stanton's skiff. Closer to the shore, we spotted bear scat near the high-tide level. Stanton laughed and said he would fire a shot so the beasts would keep away. We thought of him as our talisman.

A light rain wet the bushes edging Don Munday's old trail as we began the 27-mile approach to Waddington on July 1. Helmy shouldered his overstuffed, 70-pound wood-frame pack, ready to vengefully machete the giant and thorny devil's club stalks. Swarms of mosquitoes and painful bulldog flies tormented us.

The first major obstacles were gigantic wind-felled trees.

"I don't know if it's best to climb over them or try to squeeze under," Helmy said, cursing and scratching his head at nature's version of Jenga.

For the next few days, we slept in soggy tents, cooked in the rain, and carried heavy loads in relays of eight miles through the downpour. Our raingear was top notch but leaked nevertheless and we were constantly wet pushing through the dense brush that was more jungle than forest. "Thick as hair on a dog's back," said Helmy.

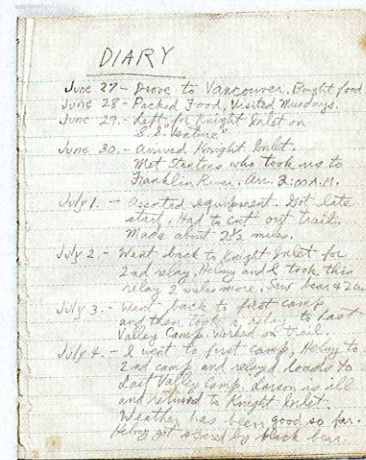
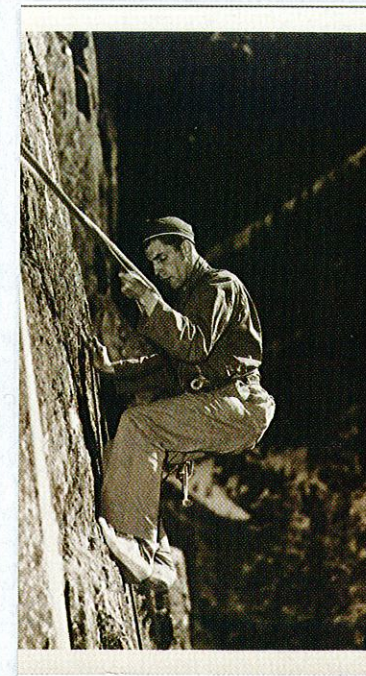
In the limited visibility of the brush, I often thought of grizzlies, as the Waddington area has one of the highest concentrations of the bruins in all of British Columbia. "Where are they?" I mused. Fortunately, Munday must have been right about sticking to the trail, for the bears never bothered us.

My journal entry for July 6: "Carried 70# packs to Last Valley Camp in rain (a Munday campsite). 8 hours. We got thoroughly soaked and were miserable."

Our spirits rose on the following day. The rain halted as we followed Munday's map, taking us along the crusty ice ribbons of the Franklin Glacier that spill from Waddington's western flanks. We sucked on ice chunks for moisture, peering forward for a sight of Waddington.

Our next grueling load placed us in a firm position at beautiful Icefall Point at 6,000 feet, where we could at last get a good look at our intended climb. As we expected, while we had been in the rain, Waddington had seen snow and was too loaded for us to consider a climbing attempt.

We decided to give Waddington time to settle out and clear. While we waited we



Top: Fred Beckey making a pendulum rappel in Tumwater Canyon, near Leavenworth, Washington, after the Waddington climb, 1948-1950.

Bottom: Fred Beckey kept a meticulous diary—a habit that would serve him well through his prolific guidebook-penning years.

Pulling ourselves up the fixed rope was dangerous and exhausting. Our ice axes dangled uselessly. *Just don't lose your grip, I silently repeated.*

A rare photo of the Waddington climb, one of the Beckey brothers in the 800-foot couloir above high camp.

would climb one of the nearby Tiedemann Peaks, an over-zealous idea, in hindsight. As we soon found, the intricate approach of dangerous seracs and crisscrossed crevasses became a vexing danger. Indeed, Helmy hurt his back when he tumbled 25 feet into a crevasse. On July 28, and nearly a month into our excursion, it was my turn to fall into an ice canyon, and I lost a ski as I climbed out. To retrieve it, I had to descend 80 feet on a rope ladder.

Despite the tribulations, which also included suffering through a storm that dropped two feet of snow, and me discovering that I had a nasty knee infection from a devil's club thorn, we did ski to the summit of Mount Munday (11,010 feet), first climbed by the Mundays in 1930, and about five miles from Waddington. From there we set our sights on the big climb.

The beginning of August brought superb omens. Helmy's diary entry was optimistic: "Weather perfect and Waddington looks quite ice free." The time for our attempt had arrived.

After making a final hike back to Knight Inlet for our last load of supplies, we pitched a tent on the lower Dais Glacier below Waddington's southwest face. The day before, to avoid the slushy daytime snow conditions, we had made our last trudge at sundown, winding on crusty snow through a complex maze of crevasses.

Our crampons proved essential among the frozen chaos and we considered ourselves fortunate to have such superb accoutrements. After our harrowing glacier trek, we voted to bivvy early to catch a good sleep and save hot food for the important coming day when the real climbing was to begin.

Crunchy snow in the morning shadow gave us solid footing for a quick ascent on August 5th to a tiny shelf at about 10,600 feet on Waddington. There, we set up the tent approximately 200 feet below the southwest face proper, and also below a menacing bergschrund that marked the beginning of the climbing difficulties.

"This must be about where Wiessner and House began their climb," I said. Both of us felt strong and filled with desire, yet underlying our ambition were intimidating thoughts of solitude.

Brothers don't always agree, but Helmy and I were in accord that it would be prudent to traverse 600 feet around the bergschrund that cut off direct access to the long, lower ice couloir we were to climb. Once we were above the bergschrund, we could traverse back until we were directly above our tent and anchor a rope. Then, on summit day, we could climb the rope over the bergschrund.

Armed with a few ice and rock pitons and a spare rope, we tightened our boots and crampon straps and began moving onto steep ice. We took turns leading, using front points with hard kicks to get past the bergschrund. There was no moment for inattention, as we

both relied on sharp crampons, good ice-axe placements, and a few ice pitons for safety. If we were slow or became intimidated, our attempt would end here. Given the equipment of the time, our progress was daring while crossing leftward on 50-degree ice to reach the base of the couloir. The rock face above appeared solid, still partially in shadow.

From a sound rock anchor, we fixed 80 feet of rope down the vertical ice face of the bergschrund, then body rappelled and worked our way back to our tent.

The night was nearly windless. We chatted nonsense to keep spirits high. I briefly thought of Mallory on Everest—to me he was a grand emblem of the spirit of man. Perhaps my ruminations would inspire us.

The evening light showed fresh details of the face above us, and also brought solace and confidence. Yet we remained concerned about the strenuous and risky hand-over-hand ascent of the fixed rope. Losing a grip on the rope could result in defeat, even death. Helmy's diary noted, "The night was a restless one for me."

We left camp in the cold shade soon after 4 a.m. on August 6, carrying heavy rucksacks. A strong north wind carried some clouds, but the weather seemed positive. Pulling ourselves up the fixed rope was dangerous and exhausting. Our ice axes dangled uselessly. *Just don't lose your grip, I silently repeated.*

Our crampons bit firmly as we moved up the 800-foot, 50- to 60-degree couloir. The morning shade kept conditions firm except where snow had slid off, exposing hard water ice. Each step required concentration and precision. Here we followed Wiessner's template, angling leftward on the ice. I occasionally stared upward and imagined him to be within sight.

About 1,000 feet above the bergschrund, a dangerous glare-ice band turned steeply around a minor buttress of verglassed rock. The grating sound of crampons biting through and into the rock made both of us nervous. "Watch me," was a repeated warning. One pitch resembled a slushy waterfall, a situation that required careful, unprotected movement.

At midday, we crossed two rock corners, then neared a large triangular snowfield that we had seen from the glacier approach. "The view was most forbidding," Helmy recorded. With less confidence, we might have turned back, but we knew the final face above us had been climbed.

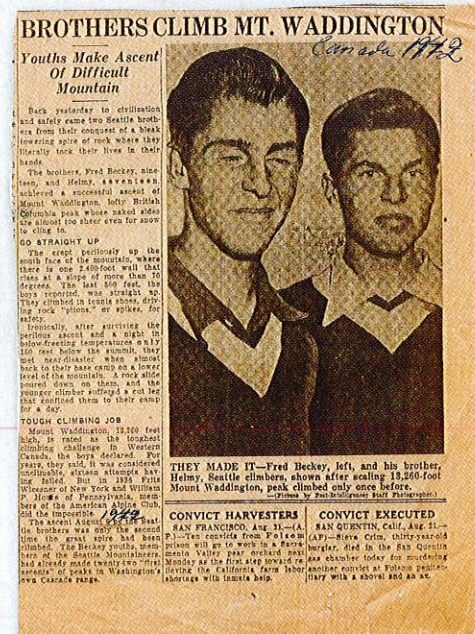
I led leftward on poor high-angle rock. Our nailed boots barely held—tennis shoes, which we carried in our packs, would have been

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as Helmy was retrieving the rappel rope, a speeding rock struck him just above the knee and severed a vein—Waddington's gift for his 17th birthday.

Fred and Helmy made headlines upon their return home for having climbed a "bleak, towering spire."

At 7 a.m. we began roping off slings set in the rock and occasional pitons. Loose rock slowed us until noon, and indeed rockfall caused by the warm conditions was now our primary concern. Helmy would later write that it was "the most hazardous thing about the climb."

At the couloir, we made long rappels from slung horns, blocks and flakes, or pitons. Each time we pulled the rope we hugged the wall and listened for the terrible clatter of dislodged rocks. Finally, we couldn't risk it any longer and halted to wait for the couloir to go into the shade at roughly 6 p.m. Despite our attempt to descend in safer conditions, later, as Helmy was retrieving the rappel rope, a speeding rock struck him just above the knee and severed a vein—Waddington's gift for his 17th birthday.

Our meager first-aid kit was virtually useless as both of us attempted to halt the bleeding with bandages and clothing pulled tightly around the wound. The delay and the injury marooned us on the loose slope through the bitter night until after daylight. Helmy suffered with little complaint.

At 6:00 a.m. we began the slow, painful 400-foot descent. Helmy dragged his bloodied leg for some four hours while on rappel and belay. After 60 sleepless hours we at last reached our tent and the comforts of our air pillows. Much of our climbing gear was gone, sacrificed for anchors, except for two last pitons as souvenirs.

After two days rest, Helmy was still in much pain but agreed to leave. "I will have to drag my bad leg all the way to the inlet," he said.

And that he did, deserving a medal for his very painful effort over those 27 miles. Mosquito swarms tormented us when we reached the Knight Inlet beach at darkness on August 16. Despite this, our hearts were light as feathers. We had been six weeks in the field on our own and owed God a blessing to still be alive.

FRED BECKEY, 92, is America's most accomplished and celebrated climber. During his 77-year climbing career he has made hundreds of first ascents including routes on Denali, Devils Thumb, Mount Hood, Mount Edith Cavell, Mount Hooker, Mount Deborah, Devils Tower, and, of course, the celebrated Beckey/Chouinard on the South Tower in the Bugaboos. He is also the author of eight books including the popular Cascade Alpine Guide series. For more on Beckey, see this issue's What I've Learned.

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better footwear here. We sought the softer conditions, climbing three snowfield pitches to avoid the iron-hard glare ice that had been exposed by mini avalanches. Without hard hats, we were vulnerable to rocks and ice bombs whizzing from above. *This is not the North Cascades*, I reminisced.

The icy chimney with its loose blocks—the pitch that had unnerved Wiessner in 1936—loomed above us. Intuition urged me to avoid it and to climb the steep slabs to the right. We briefly paused to discuss the options. A wrong decision could cost us time and even success. We pondered the matter, then I changed into my tennis shoes and traversed toward the slabs. Helmy belayed diligently, braced to hold a fall. Fortunately, I didn't slip and soon Helmy was following, but in his boots for better footing on the occasional snow patches.

On the next section, at an icy spot, I inserted my shoes into homemade felt "pullovers," which gripped the ice better than my tennis shoes.

A volley of ice came without warning from above. "Duck!" I shouted. Compared to my Cascade Range and Teton experiences, the climbing was quite demanding. At dry sections, I climbed with tennis shoes for the best friction and at wet or icy spots, I balanced on one foot to lace on the felt covers.

Laybacking up an icy crack, I carefully hammered a crucial piton for security. This solid protection stirred my motivation.

Our earlier decision to avoid the chimney now seemed clever, as our rock-climbing skills suited us to the exposed face. Helmy followed, also trusting to his felt pullovers—nailed boots would not have held on the smooth gneiss.

We followed cracks and stances, taking the line of weakness until I set another firm belay. The summit was not far above when we traversed rightward, merging with the 1936 route. A short steep chimney led to skylight and success.

Helmy changed into his boots to safely reach the snow-covered crest. At about 8:30 p.m. we grinned from the summit, happily scanning the adjacent Tiedemann Peaks, which had a most arresting presence.

Helmy soon found Wiessner's summit register—a waterproof match can—nested within a small cairn. We were spiritually exhausted, but our dream had been realized. We reflected on our success. The climb had taken 16 and a half hours. We had halved Wiessner's time on the final 1,000 feet, but he and House had apparently found better ice and snow conditions lower on the mountain and had summited in 13 and a half hours. Helmy and I descended 150 feet and sat on a small ledge through the calm mystic night, our feet dangling over the edge of the precipice. Darkness was both stunning and frightening. Our thin tentsack and a can of Sterno reduced our shivering, but there was no sleep.