

Mt. Rainier

The beauty and the terror of our climb



Its height is 14,410 feet, making it the fourth highest mountain in the continental United States. Every year about ten thousand people attempt to climb the mountain but only a little more than half succeed. Mt. Rainier offers thin air, deceptive glaciers and some of the fastest moving weather you will ever encounter. A summit climb will require every bit of physical and mental stamina you have gotten. As an active volcano, Mt. Rainier stands as a reminder of the beauty and power of nature. On June 2007, George, Mr. Chen and I had the opportunity to climb this mountain. Here is the account of our climb.



*By Chi S. Chan
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When the first time I saw the picture of Mt. Rainier, I felt love for it. It inspires in me a feeling akin to spiritual awe: reverence, adoration, humility and of course, **fear**. Mt. Rainier offers me the first technical climb experience and the mountain by far, is the hardest to scale. To reach its base camp, Mr. Chen, George and I had to carry 40-60 lbs climbing gears, foods, personal items and group equipments, hiking continually on a 35-45 degree slope for 7 ½ hours. The physically exhaustion when we reached

Camp Muir was indescribable. We had no shame for not reaching the summit, considering so little technical training we had in New York. The summit of Mt. Rainier, however, will be on my adventure list. I am determined to stand on its peak someday, I know I will and I can.

Bad Weather

On the morning of Saturday June 9, we arose to uncertain weather. We had been watching the weather very closely and we knew the upcoming weather was going to be our main problem. It had been rainy for the two previous days. That morning, we drove to Mt. Rainier National Park Visitor Center through drizzling rain. After discussing our option to the Park Ranger, we decided to delay our climb until Monday. Further bad news was, another storm system would arrive on Tuesday night. That left us very little time to stay at Camp Muir. We previously agreed that we should spend an extra day to rest and acclimatize before the summit push. That extra day of rest and acclimatization can help us stand strong and healthy on the summit. This ideal option seemed to be out of the door now. After we paid the \$30 registration fee, we agreed to check out the condition of the trail, hike as much as we could, perhaps reach Camp Muir to acclimatize. We went back to our car, put some climbing gears to our backpacks and followed one of the professional guided groups heading towards the mountain.

Commercial Guiding

We left Paradise parking lot at 5,420 feet and climbed up to the snow path through heavy cloud. Temperature was around freezing, with light winds and foggy sky. Soon, we caught up with the guided group and its appearance was the most impressive. About ten of them leading by a strong man, who wore bright color



jacket, carried an ice axe, ropes, and helmet, marching towards the mountain. An hour after our climb, we also saw a group of climbers practice self-arrest, belaying, crevasse rescue, and roping on a snow wall. As I watched them, I asked myself, "Shouldn't we do some of those?"



Crevasse self rescued

"Climbing Mt. Rainier is hazardous and requires skill, proper equipment, and excellent physical condition.... Novices are those lacking glacier travel experience are strongly encouraged to climb with a guide service"

I remembered reading this warning message from one of the climbing guidebooks. When I first bought up the idea of climbing with one of the guide services; both Mr. Chen and George dismissed my suggestion right away. Retrospect, I wish I pushed the idea a little harder.

Early Training

I am well aware the danger of climbing Mt. Rainier. The technical skill that I am so lacking forced me to train earlier and much harder. Six months before the climb, I began the hard work out in the gym. I filled my backpack with cans, water, and climbing equipments, wore the rigid plastic snow boots and religiously ran on the step master five times a week. In addition, I continually hiked 18-20 miles with George and Mr. Chen over the weekend. By May, physically I was very strong. As a result, this year 26-mile hike was the easiest year for me. Leaving New York on June 8, 2007, mentally and physically, I was ready.



First Doubt

About two hour after leaving Paradise, we reached Pebble Creek at 7,200 feet. It started to sleet and wet snow followed. The visibility was very poor. George and I watched Mr. Chen being swallowed by the dense fog few feet above us. Beyond Pebble Creek, the board, long and steep Muir Snowfield extends all the way to Camp Muir at 10,080 feet. Certain sections were very steep and a few snow walls required us to scramble. Late afternoon, we began to meet climbers coming down from the mountain and they simply glissaded down those vertical snow walls.

The hike progressed quickly and it was evident the clouds were building for a thunderstorm. The wind picked up and the sky darkened. Right now, George and I were soaking wet. It was on the steep slope that we spotted Mr. Chen struggling with the wind. We called out to each other and sheltered ourselves behind some rocky outcropping. Our fingers were numb as a result of the cold temperature and freezing rain. George made a wise decision to turn back. We hurried down the slope and occasionally,

