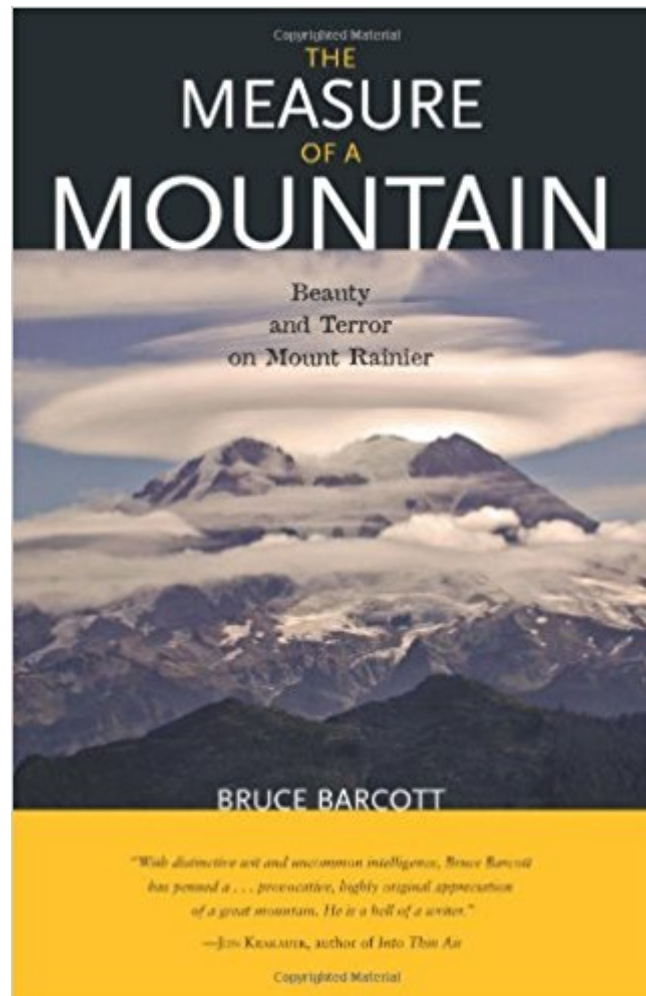




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The Measure Of A Mountain: Beauty And Terror On Mount Rainier



Synopsis

In *The Measure of a Mountain*, Seattle writer Bruce Barcott sets out to know Rainier. His method is exploratory, meandering, personal. He begins by encircling it, first by car then on foot. He finds that the mountain is a complex of moss-bearded hemlocks and old-growth firs, high meadows that blossom according to a precise natural timeclock, sheets of crumbling pumice, fractured glaciers, and unsteady magma. Its snow fields bristle with bug life, and its marmots chew rocks to keep their teeth from overgrowing. Rainier rumbles with seismic twitches and jerks—some one-hundred-thirty earthquakes annually. The nightmare among geologists is the unstoppable wall of mud that will come rolling down its slopes when a hunk of mountain falls off, as it does every half century (and we're fifty years overdue). Rainier is both an obsession and a temple that attracts its own passionate acolytes: scientists, priests, rangers, and mountain guides. Rainier is also a monument to death: every year someone manages just to disappear on its flanks; imperiled climbers and their rescuers perish on glaciers; a planeload of Marines remains lodged in ice since they crashed into the mountain in 1946. Referred to by locals as simply "the mountain," it is the single largest feature of the Pacific Northwest landscape—provided it isn't hidden in clouds. Visible or not, though, its presence is undeniable.

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Customer Reviews

Mount Rainier, North America's biggest volcano, looms over Seattle like an invitation to... adventure? Disaster? Discovery? It's all of the above for Bruce Barcott, a Seattle writer who captures the mountain from multiple angles in this luminous biography that defines Rainier's

landscape to be like none other on the continent. By turns witty and introspective, Barcott's trip to the top of the glacier-clad peak is filled with history, scientific observation, and a divided personal attachment that struggles to make sense of the mountain and its effect on the surrounding land and people. *The Measure of a Mountain* is a literate, entertaining view of a totemic Northwest landmark.

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A Seattle journalist sets out to write a natural history of Mt. Rainier in Washington State but finds that it is a truth universally acknowledged that a man interested in mountains must want to climb to the top. While researching the mountain, Barcott happened to interview Scott Fischer, a climbing guide who shortly afterward perished in a sensationalized accident on Mt. Everest (see Jon Krakauer's *Into Thin Air*, LJ 4/1/97). Trying to make sense of Fischer's death turns the story from a standard natural history into a distinctly anti-macho example of mountaineering literature, as a bookish, gregarious man without any natural daredevil impulses contemplates climbing (or possibly not climbing) the 14,410'. peak. A darkly humorous review of mountaineering memoirs notes that "once an author is on the mountain, there's no limit to what he'll suffer for his reader," but that "unlike any other sport, mountaineering demands that its players die." Although the anecdotes about Mt. Rainier will be of regional interest, this appealing adventure story about a reluctant adventurer will please many readers.

—Amy Brunvand, Univ. of Utah Lib., Salt Lake City

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Southeast of Mr. Rainier is what is now named William O. Douglas National Forest. Reading this memoir makes you feel as if you were hiking along with Douglas. You know the paths, the terrain, the flora and fauna, and the unpredictable weather. He began to hike to overcome a childhood infirmity, but continued after he found companionable serenity hiking, fishing, and camping this part of the Cascades. As an adult, he took a break from his responsibilities as a U.S. Supreme Court Justice and returned as often as he could to these beloved mountains.

The Measure of a Mountain is a mountain climber's book in the same way that Edward Abbey's books are for the desert explorer, it is about the relationship with The Mountain not the climb. Bruce Barcott writes in a way that captures how we in the Northwest engage with Mt. Rainier. There is something about it that draws us back, renews us, and then pushes us away. *The Measure of a Mountain* captures this like no other book, video, or film I have ever seen or read does. I often say that a climb of Mt. Rainier starts when you decide to make the ascent and includes the training,

preparation, and psychological fitness that precedes a climb. This is the story of his preparation. Part of this time before the climb is getting to know yourself and understanding the challenge you have taken on. Mr. Barcott does this by analyzing, studying, presenting, and hiking around Mt. Rainier. The Mountain is none too kind to him in the process, anyone who has been to its flanks more than a time or two will truly understand. I love the end of the fourth chapter where he says "At Mowich Lake, four days into the journey, I quit the mountain. The inexorable moist had crept into the cells of my sleeping bag.....I retired for the winter, beaten." I had been there too. This is the book to read when preparing for Mt. Rainier, not so you can self-arrest or tie a good figure-8 but so you can understand what you are doing. A must-read for anyone who approaches the grand lady of the Northwest.

I enjoyed reading this book and learning much about the various aspects about this grand mountain. Author shares personal stories of backpacking along trails on the lower portions of Rainier.

This is a beautiful "biography" and "love story" about Mt. Rainier. It is so beautifully written that it is hard not to fall in love the Rainier while reading it. So many books on climbing approach mountains as things to be conquered- not this one. Not that this is really a climbing book. As a matter of fact, climbing is an after thought. It makes one appreciate that when one is in the mountains there is a history and life that needs to be respected. Any endeavor in the mountains is that much better when you appreciate the location, past, people etc. that make the mountain more than just rock. Although Barcott is critical of climbing, as a climber I can see some of his points. It is not just about the summit and this book is a reminder of that.

A great read about Rainier but the author would sometimes go off on miscellaneous tangents. Having climbed Rainier we seemed to have had drastically different summiting experiences.

I think if I were stranded on a deserted island, I would want a copy of this book as well as all those Dostoevsky's I've always promised myself I would read one day. Being an avid climber, this is probably my favorite book of all times, and the book I am always sure to purchase as a gift for others to enjoy. This is NOT a climbing guide or a book just for the climbing community (although we love it). This is a book for anyone who loves the Pacific Northwest, mountains, mountain weather, great stories of adventure and tragedy, geology, high altitude bugs, plants, animals, and good humor. Each chapter unfolds an entire diverse topic. You'll find yourself going back and

reading your favorite chapters.

very real to life and bone chilling in places. I've hiked (NOT climbed) this mountain several times. Such beauty! Such daring!

Recommended by a friend prior to going to Rainier. It was an ok read but not one I'd recommend unless you had an interest in going on a guided trip to Rainier.

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