

# myADVENTURES with THE EXPERT TRAVELER

## MOUNT ST. HELENS

**T**hanks to our national parks system, there are amazing outdoor adventures to be experienced throughout the United States. Although each park offers its own unique attractions, I was most recently drawn to the great Northwest and an opportunity to attempt a challenging climb of Mount St. Helens.



**Travel Specialist, Gig Gwin** (founder and CEO of Gwin's Travel in St. Louis, Mo.) the most traveled travel agent, having visited every country in the world.

picturesque Multnomah Falls and the Timberline Lodge of Mount Hood. (Stephen King movie fans will recognize the outside of the Lodge from the movie "The Shining.")

Less than a two hour drive north into Washington state will put you near the base of Mount St. Helens. At Jack's Restaurant and Store, fifteen dollars is all you need to purchase your climbing permit, but you'll also want to stock up on plenty of water and an energizing lunch since there is nowhere to stop for supplies on the trail.

Early the next morning, the first leg of your climb will begin on a well-ordered path through huge, stately Douglass firs. After a few hours of steady hiking, you'll emerge into scrub pines and later, the timberline. From this point forward, the terrain is characterized by jutting rocks, large boulders and your climb becomes slow and

gradual. Experienced climbers call this "scrambling." No technical equipment is needed, but this is where your muscles really begin to get a workout.

As you ascend, the view of the Cascade Mountains becomes clearer and more spectacular—particularly Mount Hood and Mount Adams which rise gently and majestically from their green forest base. In contrast to the ever more beautiful view, the climbing from this point becomes its toughest. The loose mixture of pumice and gravel—called "scree"—means for every two steps forward, you slip one step back. On this leg of the journey, I made three



**Top:** Approaching Mount St. Helens. **Above:** A view from the top—the summit of Mount St. Helens. **Right:** Beautiful Multnomah Falls in Portland, Oregon

As most of us recall, early on the morning of May 18, 1980, Mount St. Helens erupted with a furious energy. Although the eruption itself lasted nine hours, the surrounding landscape was dramatically changed in seconds. To commemorate the event, the National Volcanic Monument was created in 1982.

So, I was intrigued when a fellow adventurer invited me to join him on a one-day climb of Mount St. Helens. Some quick Internet research told me this

interesting observations: first, as you work up a sweat digging in to find solid footing, you'll appreciate the cool breezes that come periodically from the never-melting snow fields in the mountain's valleys. Second, the trail is incredibly clean. It is wonderful evidence of the sense of ownership and reverence climbers have for the mountain. Finally, the climbers of Mount St. Helens are no macho boys club. The ratio of male to female climbers is almost one to one.

After five hours of climbing, you'll be ready to congratulate yourself for reaching the summit of Mount St. Helens. Stop to rest and enjoy your lunch as you take in the awe-inspiring view of Mount St. Helens' crater and beyond that, solitary Mount Ranier.

The trip back down Mount St. Helens should take you about four and a half hours and by the end you'll be glad you invested in a good pair of hiking boots. For a guy nearing the big six-oh who spends most of his time behind a desk, completing the climb was quite an accomplishment. But it proves that it can be done. When you reach the base of the mountain again, congratulate yourself for completing a challenging commune with nature by ordering a hearty dinner and settling in your hotel for a well-deserved night's rest. ■

—Gig

### What You'll Need

Visit the following participating Persona® establishments for everything you'll need for your climb up Mount St. Helens—

- ▶ **Bass Pro Shops** 800/951-1000  
www.basspro-shops.com
- ▶ **Cabela's** 800/237-4444  
www.cabelas.com
- ▶ **Hammacher Schlemmer**  
800/283-9400 CATALOG AME  
www.hammacher.com
- ▶ **Herrington** 800/622-5221  
CODE JEYY  
www.herringtoncatalog.com
- ▶ **Lands' End** 800/356-4444  
www.landsend.com
- ▶ **Travelpro** 866/345-9700  
www.journeyware.com

was an opportunity not to be missed since only 50 people per day are allowed to make the exhilarating climb. I'm proud to say I met the challenge and recommend this trip to outdoor-lovers seeking a physically demanding adventure with a worth-every-minute-of-it reward at the end.

Here's a suggestion. For starters, spend a day sightseeing in the "City of Roses"—Portland, Oregon. Tour the Columbia River Gorge,