

Four Days in Paradise: C. V. Piper and the Muir Expedition of 1888

by Donovan Tracy

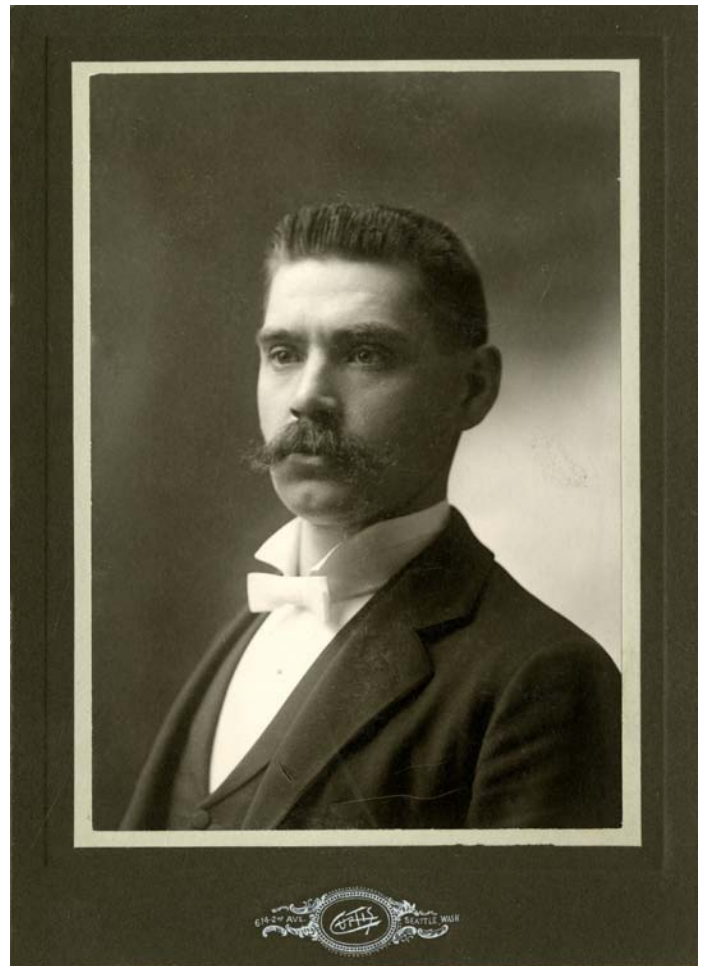
Midday August 12, 1888 John Muir came upon a meadow and experienced his first close encounter with The Mountain. He later recounted the moment: “Out of the forest at last there stood the mountain, wholly unveiled, awful in bulk and majesty, filling all the view like a separate, newborn world, yet withal so fine and so beautiful it might well fire the dullest observer to desperate enthusiasm. Long we gazed in silent admiration, buried in tall daisies and anemones by the side of a snowbank.”¹ He had arrived at Camp of the Clouds, east of a small hill now known as Alta Vista, on the southern flank of Mount Rainier.

Fifty-year-old Muir was in the Northwest to gather materials for his latest book *Picturesque California, the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific Slope*. He had settled into retirement on his California ranch and his days of inspired writing had ceased. However, he plunged enthusiastically into this new project, returning to the wilderness world he loved. While he hadn't planned on climbing Rainier, he was a man who had known mountain fever before, and given the opportunity he wouldn't resist a summit attempt.²

Fortuitously, a local mountaineer had organized a party to attempt an ascent from the mountain's south side. Having failed twice to summit in 1886 and 1887 via the northeast slope, Edward Sturgis Ingraham was determined to make it to the top, and much to his delight John Muir agreed to join his party.³ He liked to be addressed as Major Ingraham in deference to his rank in the Washington Territorial National Guard. Ingraham was an established figure in Seattle where he was the first Superintendent of Seattle Public Schools (Ingraham High School is named for him). Because Muir's book focused heavily on artistic images, he needed a photographer and the job went to Arthur Churchill Warner, who would receive notoriety as the first to capture a photograph from the summit of Mount Rainier. Also included in the party was a young botanist, Charles Vancouver (C. V.) Piper.



View of the mountain from the Alta Vista trail slightly to the west of the site of Camp of the Clouds. Shown here are *Castilleja parviflora* var. *oreopola* (magenta paintbrush) which was collected by Piper in the vicinity on August 13, 1888. PHOTO: DONOVAN TRACY, AUGUST, 2018



This formal portrait of Piper was taken by the renowned Seattle photographer Edward Curtis in his studio on Second Ave. It's believed the date is Sept. 15, 1897, the day he married Laura Maude Hungate; Charles was age 30, Maude was 26. PHOTO: EDWARD HUNGATE COLLECTION OF C. V. PIPER MATERIALS, WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

It is not entirely clear how, or why, the 21-year-old Piper and his friend Norman Booth were invited to join the party. Perhaps Piper's active involvement in the Young Naturalists' Society (YNS)⁴ caught the fancy of the major. Young Charles had been studying botany since age ten and would occasionally agitate his large family (he was one of nine children) by bringing home specimens of skunk cabbage and other odoriferous plants. Like all early members of the YNS, he began his involvement in the organization as a teenager and was very enthusiastic about studying natural history and collecting the flora and fauna of the Puget Sound area. Piper was the dominant collector of plants in the group and hundreds of his mounted specimens from that period are held in herbaria today (over 275 were collected prior to the expedition).⁵ In 1885, Piper received his Bachelor of Science degree from the Territorial University of Washington. He must have been excited by the prospect of extending his collecting range to the high country and experiencing the wonders of alpine plants as he boarded the train on August 8 headed for Yelm.

The party was outfitted in Yelm with supplies and pack ponies. The expedition was off to a good start, for it was here that they had the good fortune to meet Philemon Beecher Van

Trump. Van Trump had previously summited Rainier in August of 1870 and 1883 (again in 1891 and 1892). No better guide could be had. Ingraham was heartened, for surely this improved his chances this time to reach the top. He exclaimed, "Before night the microbes that bring on the mountain fever had taken such hold of Van Trump that he expressed a desire to join our party, so when the pack train started from his store the next morning, Van, with his blankets strapped on his black pony, was with us."⁶ Piper began his collecting, which would continue throughout the expedition. He left Yelm with specimens including 20 species of plants.

After four days of arduous travel, where much of the party was in a sickly state, most likely from rancid butter, they reached their base camp at Camp of the Clouds. This lovely meadow above what is now called Paradise was in full summer bloom. Warner lamented in not having the power to describe it but summarized, "At my feet was a bed of flowers such as I never thought could bloom, there were all colors."⁷

Muir's reaction to Rainier's remarkable wildflower display is etched in the granite steps leading from the present-day visitor center toward the mountain: "... the most luxuriant and the most extravagantly beautiful of all the alpine gardens I ever beheld in all my mountain-top wanderings." If this was the reaction of a man who had spent years rambling in amazing alpine environments, imagine the excitement of the young botanist; it's called Paradise for a reason!⁸

On the morning of the 13th, the party began preparations to leave camp and head toward the snow-covered slopes. Warner set up his camera and photographed the group resting in the meadow. Some of the other members of the party, who weren't there to climb, included H. Loomis, Muir's publisher; Indian Henry, a guide; and William Keith, Muir's artist. Dan Bass, an associate of Warner's, who would summit, is not shown. Most notably, however, is the absence of Piper, who was off in this 'Garden of Eden' botanizing. He collected specimens encompassing 45 species before they left camp at 2:00 p.m. About five and a half hours later, they reached a site that Muir felt would provide some protection from the wind since there was undisturbed layer of pumice on the ground. They were at 10,100 ft. elevation, a place Ingraham would name Camp Muir.

At 4:30 a.m., they set out for the summit. Warner, claiming to be the only one who was not "sea sick" at Camp Muir, packed his 50 pounds of equipment up the rocky slope and across a narrow ledge of the great rock Ingraham would later name Gibraltar. The summit was reached by 11:45 a.m. with Ingraham determined to be first. Warner, anxious to get the first photo on the summit, set up his camera and framed the group photo. Five are shown with Ingraham raising his hat in triumph. With Warner behind the camera, it meant one member of the party was absent. Again, Piper missed the opportunity to be in an historic image. Exhausted, he lagged behind by about an hour. Van Trump expressed his feelings for him: "I was much pleased by Muir's kindly sympathy for the lad, and with his cheering and encouraging words as he urged the wearied climber to push on to the goal, he meanwhile waiting for him."⁹

Due to Muir's concern about the potential for bad weather, they stayed just two hours, thereby concluding only the third known complete ascent of Mount Rainier.

Descents from mountaintops are often more perilous than their ascents, which was clearly the case for Piper. According to Warner, John Muir was last in the descending party with Piper just ahead.¹⁰ Van Trump had lost the spikes in his



Camp of The Clouds, August 13th. 1888 From left to right Indian Henry. (John Muir.) H.Loomis.P.B.VanTrump. E.S.Ingraham. Wm.Keith.N.O.Booth.

A. C. Warner took this photograph before the party left Camp of the Clouds for their summit attempt. Piper, too busy collecting in the meadows nearby, is unfortunately absent in the historic image. PHOTO: JOHN MUIR PAPERS, HOLT-ATHERTON SPECIAL COLLECTIONS AND ARCHIVES, UNIVERSITY OF THE PACIFIC LIBRARY, ©1984 MUIR-HANNA TRUST



Where's Piper? He lagged behind by about an hour and missed the opportunity to be in another historic image. Warner, anxious to take the first photo from the summit, went ahead without him. Waving his hat in triumph is Ingraham, Muir is seated in the snow and Van Trump is holding his alpenstock. Bass and Booth stand nearby. PHOTO: UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON LIBRARIES, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, WARNER 712E

shoes and slid down the slope with his alpenstock, performing what is now referred to as a “self-arrest,” just before reaching a crevasse. Then, Warner exclaims, “We had all crossed [presumably the ice bridge] save two when another cry made the very blood in our veins turn cold. This time it was Piper.”¹¹ Piper recounts the narrow escape in an article in a 1915 edition of *The Mountaineer*: “When we came to the ice bridge over which the party had crossed the crevasse we were decidedly suspicious of its strength, and after consulting a moment over the matter I decided to put my alpenstock part way on the bridge and jump so as to clear the crevasse. The attempt was perfectly successful so far as I was concerned, but my alpenstock and the whole ice bridge fell into the crevasse. I have often wondered what would have happened if I had attempted to go across the bridge in the ordinary way, as the man who had crossed it shortly before I reached it told me afterwards that he felt the bridge crack under him. It is possible of course that if I had gone across the bridge carefully it would have held all right, and that the breaking was due to the suddenness of the weight put upon it.”¹² The young botanist would live to collect another day.

Ingraham claimed he returned to Camp of the Clouds four hours after leaving the summit; all were in by 7:00. Muir summarized the return: “We were rather weak from want of nourishment, and some suffered from sunburn, notwithstanding the partial protection of glasses and veils; otherwise, all were unscathed and well. The view we enjoyed from the summit could hardly be surpassed in sublimity and grandeur; but one feels far from home so high in the sky, so much so that one is inclined to guess that, apart from the acquisition of knowledge and exhilaration of climbing, more pleasure is to be found at the foot of the mountains than on their tops.”¹³ Surely this was Piper’s sentiment. Remarkably, prior to the end of a hard day, he had added 11 species to his collection.

The next day they moved the camp to a lower elevation, most likely to Paradise Valley, for better protection for the weary climbers. The mission of the expedition was accomplished, but Piper continued to roam the slopes looking for prime specimens to round out his collection. Not since the British doctor William Fraser Tolmie had there been such a concerted effort to collect plants in the shadow of the majestic mountain. The 20-year-old Tolmie was employed by the Hudson Bay Company and stationed at Fort Nisqually near Tacoma. His short trip in the late summer of 1833 into the northwest corner of what is now the national park took him to Mount Pleasant, where he collected with a focus on medicinal uses. He gathered specimens representing 42 species of plants; many had yet to be identified or named. Perhaps the most well-known is *Micranthes tolmiei* (aka *Saxifraga tolmiei*, or Tolmie’s saxifrage).¹⁴

Like most early field botanists, Piper probably used a vasculum to store and to transport his collections. A vasculum is a flattened cylindrical metal (most likely tin) container with a lengthwise hinged opening and a leather carrying strap. Based on the quality of the specimens that are preserved in herbaria today, it is apparent he was a diligent collector and was careful about protecting his specimens. He may have used wet leaves to help separate and preserve his plants in the vasculum. It’s not clear whether he knew the extent of his endeavors during the four days in paradise as he couldn’t have been familiar with all these plants (several had just recently been found by other field botanists, particularly Howell, Suksdorf, Cusick, and Hender-son). His vasculum was brimming with a wide assortment of alpine plants he had collected at Camp of the Clouds, with specimens representing 58 species. He possessed asters (*Symphyotrichum*) and daisies (*Erigeron*), louseworts (*Pedicularis*) and penstemons (*Penstemon*), pussytoes (*Antennaria*) and pussypaws (*Cistanthe*), bistorts (*Bistorta*) and paintbrushes (*Castilleja*),

Piper Collections: Camp of the Clouds and Paradise Valley, August 13–16, 1888

<i>Anemone occidentalis</i>	<i>Gentiana calycosa</i>	<i>Oreostemma alpigenum</i>	<i>Ranunculus eschscholtzii</i>
<i>Antennaria lanata</i>	<i>Heuchera glabra</i>	<i>Oxyria digyna</i>	<i>Rhododendron albiflorum</i>
<i>Athyrium distentifolium</i>	<i>Juniperus communis</i>	<i>Pedicularis bracteosa</i>	<i>Ribes acerifolium</i>
<i>Bistorta bistortoides</i>	<i>Leptarrhena pyrolifolia</i>	<i>Pedicularis contorta</i>	<i>Rorippa palustris</i>
<i>Caltha leptosepala</i>	<i>Luetkea pectinata</i>	<i>Pedicularis ornithorhynchos</i>	<i>Saxifraga austromontana</i>
<i>Calyptridium umbellatum</i>	<i>Luina hypoleucea</i>	<i>Pedicularis racemosa</i>	<i>Smelowskia ovalis</i>
<i>Cassiope mertensiana</i>	<i>Lupinus lyallii</i>	<i>Penstemon procerus</i>	<i>Sorbus sitchensis</i>
<i>Castilleja miniata</i>	<i>Lupinus latifolius v. subalpinus</i>	<i>Penstemon rupicola</i>	<i>Spiraea splendens</i>
<i>Castilleja parviflora</i>	<i>Lupinus sericeus</i>	<i>Phlox diffusa</i>	<i>Triantha occidentalis</i>
<i>Erigeron acris</i>	<i>Micranthes ferruginea</i>	<i>Phyllodoce empetriformis</i>	<i>Valeriana sitchensis</i>
<i>Erigeron glacialis</i>	<i>Micranthes nelsoniana</i>	<i>Phyllodoce glanduliflora</i>	<i>Veratrum viride</i>
<i>Erythranthe caespitosa</i>	<i>Micranthes tolmiei</i>	<i>Polemonium californicum</i>	<i>Veronica cusickii</i>
<i>Erythranthe lewisii</i>	<i>Mitella breweri</i>	<i>Potentilla flabellifolia</i>	<i>Xerophyllum tenax</i>
<i>Erythronium montanum</i>	<i>Monotropa hypopitys</i>	<i>Primula jeffreyi</i>	
<i>Eucephalus ledophyllus</i>	<i>Nothocalais alpestris</i>	<i>Pyrola picta</i>	

shooting stars (*Primula*) and monkey-flower (*Erythranthe*), gentian (*Gentiana*) and lupine (*Lupinus*), and even the larger hellebore (*Veratrum*) and beargrass (*Xerophyllum*), all in all from 23 plant families. While today none of these would be thought of as rare or unusual for a Mount Rainier meadow (most can be found in today's wildflower guidebooks¹⁵), he must have been pleased with the extent of the collection and the opportunity it afforded to expand his knowledge of the flora of the northwest.

Tucked away in his vasculum were two plants that had never been collected, and were not only unknown to him, but also to the scientific community. These 'type' specimens become the basis for the identification of new species and the publishing of new scientific names. His 'discoveries' were *Erythranthe caespitosa* (formerly *Mimulus caespitosus*/*Mimulus tilingii* var. *caespitosus*), the large mountain monkey-flower, and *Penstemon rupicola* (formerly *Penstemon newberryi* var. *rupicola*), rock penstemon. Piper was not only expanding his knowledge but contributing to the knowledge base of alpine plants.

Later he would mount four of his *Anemone occidentalis* (western pasqueflower) specimens on two herbarium sheets—a pair in flower and a pair in seed (shown here). In his *Flora of Mount Rainier*, written years later, he expands upon the basic description of the plant: "The curious seed head of the mountain anemone always excites attention, their plumed heads reminding one irresistibly of the caps worn by grenadiers." Today they still excite attention, but the 'mopheads' remind us more of something Dr. Seuss might have dreamed up.

The morning of the 16th, apparently satisfied he had met his responsibilities as expedition leader, Ingraham and his two young companions Piper and Booth set out to return via a much different route. Ingraham, in a short piece in the 1915 *The Mountaineer* entitled "Then and Now" somewhat causally lays it out, "After resting a couple of days at Camp of the Clouds, I decided to return via the east and north slopes. I induced Charles Piper and Norman Booth to accompany me. The first day we swung around to a beautiful park on the east slope, which I called Summerland. The second day we crossed the Emmons, Winthrop, and Carbon glaciers, making camp just after crossing the Carbon. The end of the third day found us in a camp on Meadow Creek about two miles below the meadows. It required another day and a half to reach Seattle."¹⁶ This was an ambitious undertaking requiring able mountaineering, but due to Ingraham's two prior attempts to climb the mountain from the northeast he was likely familiar enough with the terrain to take it on.^{17, 18} His companions probably not quite so much.

Piper may have had some reservations about 'going around the mountain.' He would have been wearied from his harrowing descent two days prior, had a vasculum full of specimens he would have to take in tow, and he probably would have liked to have spent more time with the great naturalist John Muir. They would be without pack horses and the critical supplies they carried. Furthermore, he would have to traverse more glaciers and face the potential of more narrow escapes. All things considered



Piper's herbarium sheet of the *Anemone occidentalis* (western pasqueflower) in seed he collected August 13, 1888. The preprinted label reads "Herbarium, University of Washington, Collection by C. V. Piper, Presented by Young Naturalists' Society." IMAGE COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON HERBARIUM, BURKE MUSEUM

it represented an opportunity to continue collecting and in new terrain.

As the major marched his small troop off to the east he couldn't have imagined that in a few short years the first glacier they crossed would be named for him. The beautiful Ingraham Glacier on the southeast slope was named by I. C. Russell in 1896. Russell was a Professor of Geology at the University of Michigan and performed the early geologic surveys of Rainier's glaciers.¹⁹

On their second day, August 17, Piper collected specimens of nine species found at Summerland including the elegant *Parnassia fimbriata* (fringed grass-of-Parnassus).²⁰ While not rare, it is uncommon enough to be a pleasant surprise; its five white petals are delicately fringed, giving it a lacy look, and its stems have a single clasping heart-shaped leaf-like bract. The lovely plant was first collected by Archibald Menzies in the late 1780s, probably in the lowlands of present-day Washington state. Its addition expanded his collection as the only species from the Celastraceae family.

The record provides only one additional collection, *Erysimum arenicola* (sand-dwelling wallflower) on August 18, the day they crossed the north side glaciers. They were safely in Seattle before the main party had reached Yelm. The demanding 14-day excursion with the indefatigable Edward Ingraham was at its end. Back home, Piper would begin the meticulous tasks of cataloging and mounting his specimens. His herbarium sheets have preserved 101 species of plants collected on the expedition. All but three sheets are held at the University of Washington Herbarium.

Piper returned to Mount Rainier in August of 1889, but elected to stay off the glaciers. While collecting with the Rev. E. C. Smith, a trained botanist, and who incidentally summited with Ingraham while there, Piper managed to discover some exquisite new plants of the alpine zone, notably *Castilleja rupicola* (cliff paintbrush) and *Polemonium elegans* (elegant Jacob's ladder). Returning again in 1895 and 1919, his collection of vascular plants from Mount Rainier preserved in herbaria today total 852.²¹

Piper received his Master of Sciences degree from the University of Washington in 1892 and soon after became a Professor of Botany and Zoology at the Washington Agricultural College, now Washington State University.²² After ten years in Pullman, he took a position with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and was recognized internationally for his work as an agronomist²³. Ingraham became one of the leaders to establish Mount Rainier National Park. He stood atop the big mountain six more times.

FOOTNOTES:

¹Muir, John. *Steep Trails, Chapter XX. An Ascent of Mount Rainier*, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1918

²Haines, Aubrey L. *Mountain Fever, Historic Conquests of Rainier*, University of Washington Press, 1962.

³Ingraham, E. S. *Then and Now*, The Mountaineer, Volume Eight, December 1915, The Mountaineers, Seattle (Issue dedicated to Mount Rainier National Park included a brief description by Ingraham of the Muir expedition).

⁴Benson, Keith R. *The Young Naturalists' Society and Natural History in the Northwest*, American Zoology, 1986.

The Young Naturalists' Society was conceived in 1879 by four young men, including Edmond S. Meany (a university classmate of Piper's and later a UW professor), who were completely untrained in the sciences. Over its 25-year history it steadily grew into a bona fide scientific institution by collecting a large number of specimens, organizing expeditions and providing educational opportunities for the public. It developed strong ties with the University of Washington and eventually its functions were absorbed by the University and the newly-formed Washington State Museum (lately named the Burke Museum). On its website the Burke traces its roots "from teenage club to world-class museum."

⁵The database of the Consortium of Pacific Northwest Herbaria and the image collection of the University of Washington Herbarium were used throughout the article in regards to species collection, collectors, dates and locations (Giblin and Legler 2003+). Piper's earliest recorded collection goes back to 1880

when he was thirteen years old and two of his herbarium sheets of that year can be found in the UW Herbarium. Piper's sheets used a pre-printed label with the title "Herbarium, University of Washington, Collection by C. V. Piper, Presented by Young Naturalists' Society." It is not clear when these came into use as part of the mounting process vs. added later to previously mounted specimens.

⁶Ibid. Ingraham.

⁷Warner, A. C. *John Muir's Ascent of Mt. Rainier*, The Mountaineer, Vol. 50, Dec. 28, 1956. Warner's account was in the form of a letter to his father written shortly after the trip. It remained unpublished for 67 years until it appeared unedited in *The Mountaineer*. Aubrey Haines provided an introduction and presumably the footnotes to the letter. Five Warner photographs are included.

⁸Ibid, Haines. The coining of the name 'Paradise' is attributed to Mrs. James Longmire who, with a guest, Mrs. Jameson of Olympia, were brought by her husband to an alpine meadow above the Nisqually Glacier in 1885. She exclaimed "O, what a paradise!" in which Mrs. Jameson replied "Yes, a real paradise." As a place name it's not clear whether the area we now know as Paradise was the meadow they visited or whether 'paradise' was a spontaneous remark referring to the grandeur of Rainier's subalpine meadows. Our group, camped at Camp of the Clouds, may have thought they were in paradise but not necessary at Paradise.

⁹Ibid, Haines

¹⁰There is some confusion about who was with Piper. Haines says that it was Van Trump who was behind Piper (which makes sense since he wanted to stay longer) and Warner who claims it was Muir (his account has Van Trump ahead and falling on the slope before Piper's event). Muir, in his account in *Steep Trails*, doesn't totally resolve this, for he says, "The descent was accomplished without disaster, though several of the party had narrow escapes. One slipped and fell, and as he shot past me seemed to be going to certain death . . . he threw himself on his face and digging his alpenstock into the ice . . ." (apparently referring to Van Trump's self-arrest). Further, "Another broke through a slim bridge over a crevasse, but his momentum at the time carried him against the lower edge . . ." He doesn't clarify his position in the descent during these events. Piper, however, affirms it was Muir: "On the return of our party from the summit Mr. John Muir and I had for some reason lingered behind." (see *Narrow Escape*). Therefore, it was Muir, not Van Trump, who had to vault over the exposed crevasse.

¹¹Ibid, Warner

¹²Piper, C. V. *A Narrow Escape*, The Mountaineer, Volume Eight, December 1915, The Mountaineers, Seattle

¹³Ibid, Muir

¹⁴Peterson, Arnie. *A Brief History of Plant Collections from Mount Rainier National Park*, Douglasia, Vol. 45, No. 3, Washington Native Plant Society, Seattle, 2021.

¹⁵Tracy, Donovan and D.E. Giblin. *Alpine Flowers of Mount Rainier*, Burke Museum, Seattle. Of the fifty-three flowering vascular plants forty-eight are found in this guide.

¹⁶Ibid. Ingraham.

¹⁷Molenaar, Dee. *The Challenge of Rainier*, 4th Edition, The Mountaineers, Seattle, 2011. In reviewing early ascents of the Emmons-Winthrop Glaciers Molenaar states "All subsequent pre-1900 ascents of this side of the peak were made by a circuitous

approach from the coal-mining communities of Wilkeson and Carbonado in the foothills northwest of the present park.”

¹⁸Meany, Edmond S. edited by. *Mount Rainier A Record of Exploration*, New York, The Macmillan Company 1916. During his 1887 attempt Ingraham is credited with naming St. Elmo Pass, a high mountain pass on the ridge between the Winthrop and Inter Glaciers (p. 319). He may have used this up and over route of the pass in his traverse in 1887 (as opposed to going around what is now Camp Schurman) and perhaps used again in 1888.

¹⁹Ibid. Meany. Ingraham describes his encounter with Russell in his section of Meany’s book: “One time when I was on the mountain encamped at the Camp of the Clouds, Professor I. C. Russell and another man in their shirt sleeves, came tottering into my camp at the early morning. They had been caught upon the summit and had spent a shivering night in the crater. I treated them the best I knew how and they departed. When their maps came out I found that a beautiful glacier had been named for me – Ingraham Glacier.” In 1909 The Mountaineers named a glacier on the mountain’s northwest slope for Russell.

²⁰Other species collected at Summerland include: *Collomia larsenii*, *Dasiphora fruticosea* *Delphinium glaucum*, *Erigeron brandegei*, *Erigeron compositus*, *Mertensia paniculata*, *Monordella odoratissima*, and *Phacelia hastata*.

²¹Ibid, Peterson

²²He attended summer school at Harvard in 1900 and earned a second M. S. degree. In 1921 the Kansas Agricultural College conferred upon him an honorary D.Sc. degree.

²³An expert in the science of soil management and crop production.

Endnote: Both men died in 1929; Ingraham at 74, Piper at a much-too-young 59. They are buried in Lakeview Cemetery near Volunteer Park in Seattle.

For literature cited, visit [/bit.ly/douglasia_46_2](http://bit.ly/douglasia_46_2).

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