

**ADDITIONAL PRAISE FOR THE FIRST
EDITION OF NOT WITHOUT PERIL**

"*Not Without Peril* is an outstanding addition to the literature of mountaineering. Howe's work gives us a masterful, riveting, and meticulously researched account of some of the most tragic encounters with the wrath of the White Mountains. These stories are made even more chilling because of the accessibility of these mountains to the recreational hiker."—Donna Urey, President, New England Booksellers Association

"This should be required reading for anyone who will be—or has already gone—hiking in the mountains."—Nelly Heitman, *Foreword Magazine*

"Howe tells the stories straightforwardly, deftly blending in the historical and geographical information needed to make them complete. *Not Without Peril* makes a memorable, informative, and ultimately sobering read about the high peaks of the Northeast."—*Sentinel & Enterprise*, Leominster, Mass.

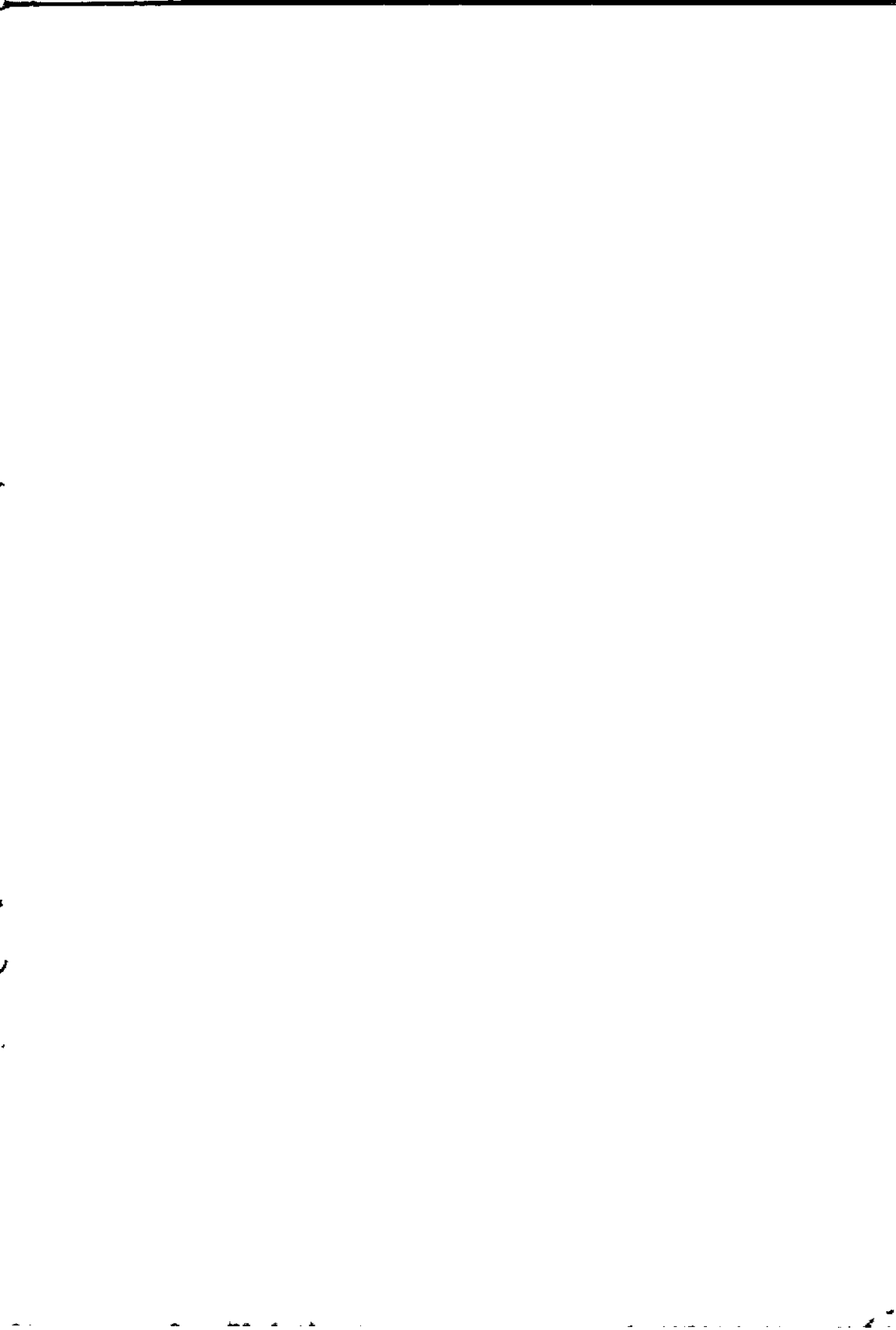
"Between the excellent prose, the interesting historical details and the riveting accounts of misadventure, *Not Without Peril* will be appreciated by anyone with an interest in outdoor recreation or in the Presidential Mountains of New Hampshire. Reading about these mountains is gripping."—*The Bridgton News*, Bridgton, Maine

"Nick Howe has tramped virtually every inch of Mount Washington's surface, and with this book he becomes its preeminent historian. That he happens also to be a graceful and charming storyteller is pure bonus. *Not Without Peril* is a compulsively readable thriller—actually, a series of thrillers. It will hold equal fascination for mountain lovers and flatlanders and for anyone who enjoys a good read."—John Jerome, author of *On Turning Sixty-Five*, *The Elements of Effort*, *Stone Work*, and *The Sweet Spot in Time*

"In essays that preface each episode, Howe examines the odd circumstances that surround it and the occasional ripple effects of death in the mountains."—D. Quincy Whitney, *The Boston Globe*

"Fans of outdoor disaster and unpleasantry, as well as collectors of New England mountain lore, will find Howe a generally satisfying guide to New Hampshire's dark side."—*Kirkus Reviews*





*T*here have been joys too great to be described in words, and there have been griefs upon which I have dared not to dwell, and with these in mind I must say, climb if you will, but remember that courage and strength are naught without prudence, and that a momentary negligence may destroy the happiness of a lifetime. Do nothing in haste, look well to each step, and from the beginning think what may be the end.

—EDWARD WHYMPER, who made the first ascent of the Matterhorn with six others in 1865. On the way down, four of his companions fell to their deaths.

NOT WITHOUT PERIL

150 Years of Misadventure
on the Presidential Range
of New Hampshire

Tenth Anniversary Edition

NICHOLAS HOWE

Appalachian Mountain Club Books
Boston, Massachusetts

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Foreword

ALMOST A DECADE HAS PASSED SINCE I FIRST READ NICK Howe's wonderful book, *Not Without Peril*. I had, for several years, been reading the accident reports in the mountaineering journal *Appalachia*, so I was quite familiar with the dangers that lurk in our mountains. But whereas the accident reports consist of a rather dry summary of the events, followed by an analysis of what went wrong, Nick's book tells a series of fascinating tales. In spite of the fatal outcome of almost every chapter, the tone of the book is never morbid.

For the last five years I have been writing the accident reports of *Appalachia*, and I have become even more familiar with the perils of the White Mountains in the process. Some aspects of people's misadventures there seem to have changed since the earlier years that Nick describes, but others seem to have remained constant.

The biggest changes are the disappearance of guides (and of summit accommodations), and the post-World War II embrace of winter hiking. More subtle is the widespread understanding, among the community of regular hikers, of the dangers in the mountains. I suspect that few hikers today would, like "Father" Bill Curtis in the late nineteenth century, write in their trip notices that "This outing will not be canceled or postponed due to inclement weather."

On the other hand, much has not changed. The mountain weather is as unpredictable as ever, and while those who hike regularly understand the dangers, many casual visitors do not. Too many people simply do not think; every year the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department "rescues" at least half a dozen hikers who started out late in the day with no lights. When the sun sets they use their cell phones to call for help.

You can see the similarities and differences by comparing the story of Frederick Strickland, the first recorded fatality on Mount Washington, with contemporary mishaps. Strickland was an Englishman who, at the age of 29, was visiting America. At the end of a long tour of the country he returned to Boston in October of 1849. According to the *Boston Transcript*, "... he was advised to visit the White Mountains by several gentlemen of science and taste in our community."

Strickland traveled to Crawford Notch, where Thomas Crawford strongly advised him against attempting to climb Mount Washington, as a severe early season storm had deposited deep snow on the mountain. He insisted, and Crawford ended up providing him with a guide and horses. Strickland claimed that he did not need any provisions for that long trip, but his host finally persuaded him to take a couple of crackers. He was, as was usual at the time, dressed in street clothes with an overcoat. On reaching the ridge, the guide decided to turn around, as the snow was too deep for the horses. He advised Strickland to return with them, but the latter insisted on continuing. He never did return, becoming the first fatality on Mount Washington. When he did not show up at his destination, a search party went out, and his body was found and brought down.

The first thing that is unchanged is the difference in weather between Boston and the mountains. The latter are farther north, farther inland, and much higher than the city, all of which lead to very different weather. Yet Boston-based outdoors enthusiasts often base their decisions on the weather in the city. The owners of New Hampshire ski resorts complain that, when there is no snow on the ground in Boston, skiers stay home, regardless of how much snow there may be on the mountains. This works the other way around for hikers, especially in the spring. At that time, hikers who have hibernated all winter see crocuses in their yards, head north, and wallow in deep soft snow a few hundred vertical feet up the trail.

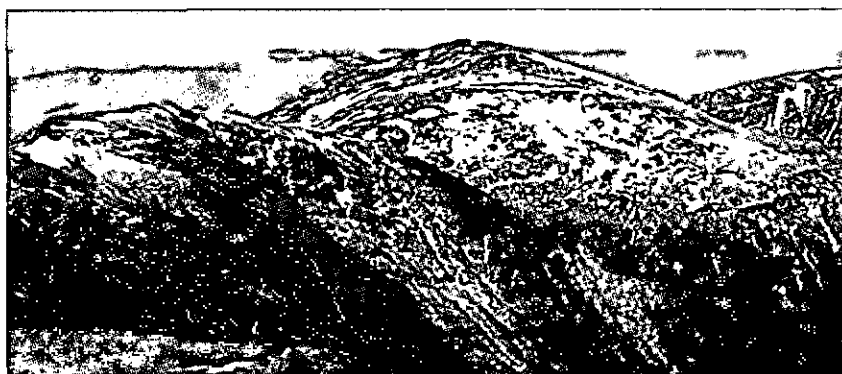
Strickland's guide advised him to turn around, but he stubbornly continued. While guides have disappeared from the scene in the White Mountains, many accidents occur after other hikers have warned the victims to turn around. Unfortunately there is no way to fully understand the decision-making process of those who continue hiking under clearly adverse conditions after having been advised to turn around. Perhaps it is bravado, or simply inertia: We were planning to go to the summit so we will keep going. Hard



The Southern Presidentials, as seen from Mount Washington.



Mount Washington, with Tuckerman Ravine on the left and Huntington Ravine on the right.



The Northern Presidentials as seen from Mount Washington over Great Gulf: Mount Clay is on the left, Mount Jefferson is in the middle, and Mount Adams on the far right.

to tell, and there is little to be learned from the appearances of survivors on TV; they are usually more interested in justifying their decisions than in analyzing them carefully.

I do not know how much the lack of food contributed to the fatal outcome in Strickland's case. Many inexperienced hikers climb big mountains with inadequate provisions, though the most common resulting problem is dehydration on a hot day. Strickland certainly wore enough clothing, though I suspect that he must have been sweating substantially after the horses left and he hiked to the summit. His clothing eventually became a problem when he lost his way down the other side of the mountain and fell into a stream; his pants apparently froze to his legs. The idea of layering and the technology of wicking fabric are clearly much more recent developments!

When Strickland did not show up at the hotel to which Crawford had directed him, two search parties went out, one from each end of the route he had been planning to follow. Eventually his body was found and was returned for burial. This has been an unchanging pattern in our mountains: Whenever someone is believed to be in trouble in the mountains, the local community attempts to rescue him or her. Even today, with the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department overseeing rescue operations, the vast majority of the rescuers are local volunteers. Those who live in the mountains understand full well that, as Benjamin Franklin wrote long ago, "We must, indeed, all hang together, or most assuredly we shall all hang separately."

Yet while our modern rescue groups are top-notch, it is still best not to get into a situation where you require their assistance. Smart preparation before heading into the mountains and wise decision-making once there can help you get home safely. I wish more hikers would learn these lessons and leave mountain dangers for their armchair reading. *Not Without Peril* makes such stories a delight.

Mohamed Ellozy
June 2009