



# ROUND AND ROUND AND ROUND WE GO

THE MAZAMA HISTORY OF ROUND THE MOUNTAIN ON MT. HOOD'S TIMBERLINE TRAIL

by Rick Craycraft

**T**he first mention in the *Mazama Annual* of the Timberline Trail was in 1937. In what was essentially a sales pitch by Forest Service supervisor Foster Steele, the trail was introduced as a modern wonder. Steele describes it as a “hat band” fashioned at timberline around Mt. Hood, replete with stone shelters with steel roofs and fireplaces to comfort and protect weary long-distance hikers. Built between 1934 and 1938 by the Civilian Conservation Corps (at a cost of \$10,000!), the original trail was 35 miles long and incorporated parts of the then Oregon Skyline Trail. Shortly after its completion, an *Oregonian* headline proclaimed, “High School Boys Hike Around Hood in 2-day Jaunt.” This is considered to be the “first ascent,” when these lads went 36 miles in 47 hours.

The next year, the Mazamas appeared on the trail in an official capacity and made their first run at circumnavigating the mountain. Organized by Al Maas and Ed Hughes, this undertaking involved 40 people and looked remarkably similar to the Mazama events of the far future. In four days and three nights, the party made

a loop from the newly-built Timberline Lodge to Ramona Falls, Cairn Basin, Gnarl Ridge, and back. Pack horses were the order of the day then, hauling camping equipment and food so the hikers could have the luxury of day packs.

The Second World War curtailed Mazama activities for a while after that.

But in 1944, looking for adventures closer to home, original hike member Harrie Jennison organized another go at the trail, this time over five days, and 56 people signed up. With Jack Nelson as the leader, this group was highly organized, again using pack horses and having a single person, Anna Tienken, prepare

Above: Mt. Hood from Sunshine Shelter  
Photo by Harrie Jennison, VM2001.007 Mazama LHC

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**Above:** Members of the first Mazama trip around Mt. Hood on the Timberline Trail, 1939.

**Right:** Mt. Hood from Cooper Spur, 1939

Photos by Harrie Jennison, VM2001.007 Mazama LHC

the evening meals. Long-time Mazama librarian Martha Darcy also contributed by showing up at various supply points along the way with treats for the dogged hikers. According to the account of this version of the Round the Mountain (RTM) hike, the party encountered a washout on the far side of the mountain and responded by all hands pitching in and building a makeshift bridge in “40 minutes.”

Post-war Mazamas were back at it again in 1946. Twenty-four hardy folks braved the elements and several years of neglected trail maintenance, having to cross the Sandy River on a log and improvising the route on some of the far-flung sections of the trail. Even though leader Jennison’s account in the *Annual* was flowery and upbeat, party member Edna Sinclair, in conversation with archivist Jeff Thomas, later called the experience “chaotic.”

Just a couple of years later, bad luck and the trail’s lack of refinement plagued the Mazamas again. Unreliable horse packers and relentless poor weather caused this

attempt at an RTM to be cut short. The experience resulted in the Mazamas backing off a bit from such a complex and daunting undertaking. It wasn’t until 1954 that any organized attempt ventured onto the Timberline Trail. C. L. McFarland and Paige Newton chronicled this foray in the *Annual*, with Ray Davis designated as leader. This time, what amounted to an all-star cast signed up. Fifteen years after the initial event, Maas, Gerding, and Jennison were back for another try, along with trail veterans Martha Darcy, Edna Sinclair, and Fred McNeil, the man who wrote the first definitive history of Mt. Hood. Alas, Northwest weather won yet another round, as the party encountered thunderstorms and early-season snow, cut short the last leg.

Another decade passed until the Mazamas considered going around Mt. Hood again. In 1964, Dorothy Bergstrom



and George Francisco had 47 people turn out, and things seemed to go reasonably smoothly. In 1957 a Mazama Youth project did hike the whole trail, but only as part of their conservation outing. And, in 1976, there was an all-women outing launched, covered in the *Mazama Annual* by Marjorie Burnham, which started and ended at

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**Above:** Evelyn Nielson rests and views Mt. Hood at Clark Canyon, 1939  
Photo by Francis Kies, VM2001.007 Mazama LHC

Cloud Cap Inn. Whether this was considered an official RTM attempt is unclear.

Then, in the Trail Trips Committee report in the 1981 *Annual*, the committee mentioned that they had added “something new” to the hiking regimen of that year. This innovation was called the “Around Mt. Hood in One Day” hike. Twenty-four souls showed up to take up this challenge. Unfortunately, the hike fell on August 10, at that time the hottest day in Portland history at 107 degrees. All the participants finished without incident, but the stragglers took nearly 24 hours to reach the finish line.

Despite the inherent dangers of doing the hike, it was repeated the next year and took on the title of Super Hike II. The 39 people that signed up mostly wore running shoes, light clothing and no packs. The Trail Trips Committee had decided to completely enable those participating with meals, water, and snack stations all along the trail. They also put a 17–18 hour limit for all to finish. Everyone did. This approach was taken for two more years. Sixty-one and 55 people, respectively, had the fortitude to join, although in the second year, 1984, only 30 completed the trail. Leader Austin Leach’s terse assessment of the 1983 event was “too hot.” In any event, due to the collective trampling of the trail, the Forest Service requested that the Mazamas put an end to this insanity, and the Executive Council heartily agreed.

In 1993, Billie Goodwin tried to resurrect this tradition, but the September weather did not cooperate and the hike was called after 25 miles. Five years later, Sean Smith framed going around the mountain as a Trail Trips backpack and took six people with him.

Just when it looked as though the Round the Mountain (RTM) idea might fade into Mazama history, Tom Davidson took over as the chair of the Trail Trips Committee. With considerable urging from Bob Miller, the father of the Mazama Street Rambles, Tom decided to make over the RTM with a less heroic overtone. In the intervening years the Wilderness Act had been passed, limiting groups on the trail to a maximum of 12 or fewer. The new, improved event would consist of three days of section hiking, with transportation provided for the participants back to the Mazama Lodge for hot meals and soft beds. The first year, 2006, Tom recruited three hike leaders, who delivered this product to 34 intrepid hikers. This incarnation was titled the Annual Timberline Trail Hike.

Each succeeding year, as this innovation found its feet, a new person would emerge from the participants to coordinate the following year. The number of attendees continued to grow. In the fifth through seventh year of operation Jean Cavanaugh, then Jean and Sojo Hendrix, stepped in, and wrote a manual for the operation of the RTM. After that, in Tom’s words, “We’ve never looked back.” In 2006, hikers and organizers worked around destructive washouts. In 2011, the hiking was affected by the Dollar Fire. The whims of weather and geology have had to be factored in several times over the years. Only the COVID-19 pandemic derailed the event altogether. By the present, the number of successful Round the Mountain events since 2006, has surpassed all the other collected endeavors under this banner all the way back to 1939. We may not be quite as spartan as our forebearers, but we hold to the same tradition, only with showers at the end of the day.