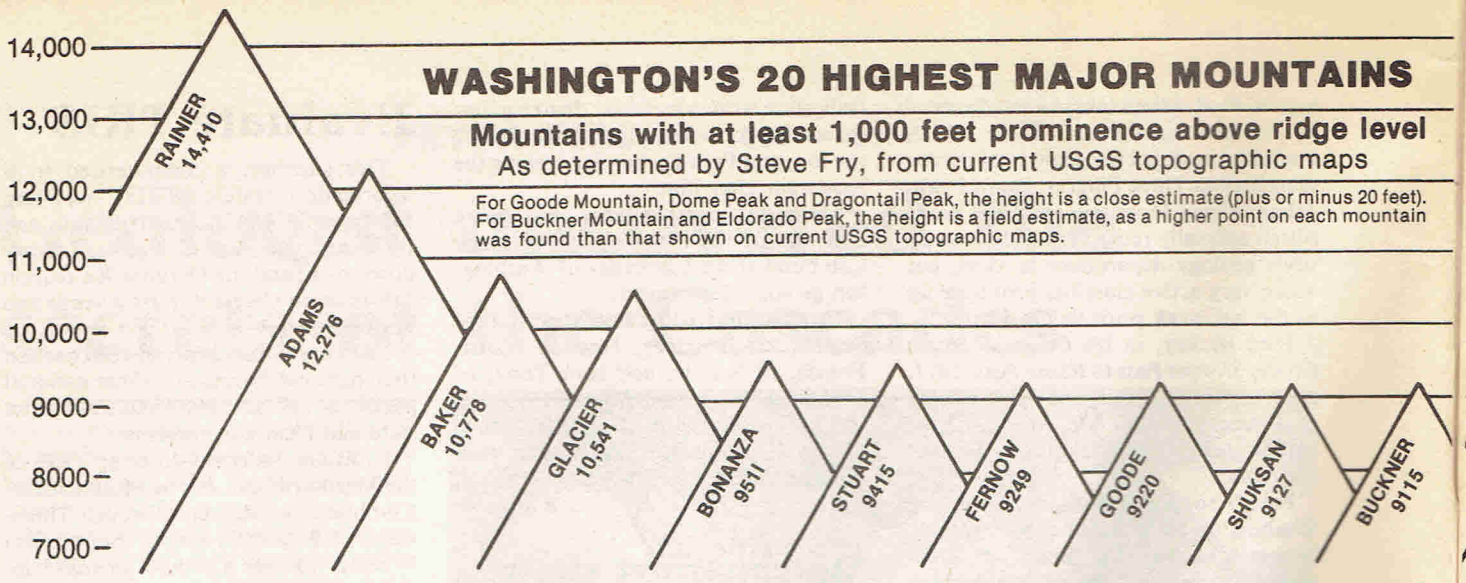


High, higher and highest: Washington's tallest peaks

WASHINGTON'S 20 HIGHEST POINTS

Landforms with at least 100 feet prominence above ridge level
As determined by Steve Fry, from current USGS topographic maps

1	Mt. Rainier	14,410	
2	*Point Success	14,158	Mt. Rainier
3	Liberty Cap	14,112	Mt. Rainier
4	Mt. Adams	12,276	
5	The Pinnacle	12,100†	Mt. Adams
6	Tahoma Cleaver Spire*	11,700†	Mt. Rainier
7	St. Andrews Rock	11,580†	Mt. Rainier
8	The Castle	11,460†	Mt. Adams
9	Cadaver Gap Tooth*	11,434	Mt. Rainier
10	Little Tahoma Peak	11,138	
11	Lower St. Andrews Rock*	11,100†	Mt. Rainier
12	Mt. Baker	10,778	
13	Middle Horn, W. Ridge*	10,580†	Little Tahoma
14	Glacier Peak	10,541	
15	West Pyramid, W. Ridge*	10,460†	Little Tahoma
16	Curtis Ridge Tower*	10,380†	Mt. Rainier
17	North Summit*	10,350‡	Glacier Peak
18	Sherman Peak	10,150‡	Mt. Baker
19	Rabbit Ears*	10,140	Glacier Peak
20	West Sherman Peak*	10,050‡	Mt. Baker

* Unofficial name
† Height is a close estimate, plus or minus 20 feet
‡ Height is a close estimate, plus or minus 50 feet

By STEVE FRY

It seems like a simple question: What are the 20 highest peaks in Washington state? But the answer will depend on how one defines a mountain.

I separate mountains into three main categories: minor mountains, submajor mountains, and major mountains.

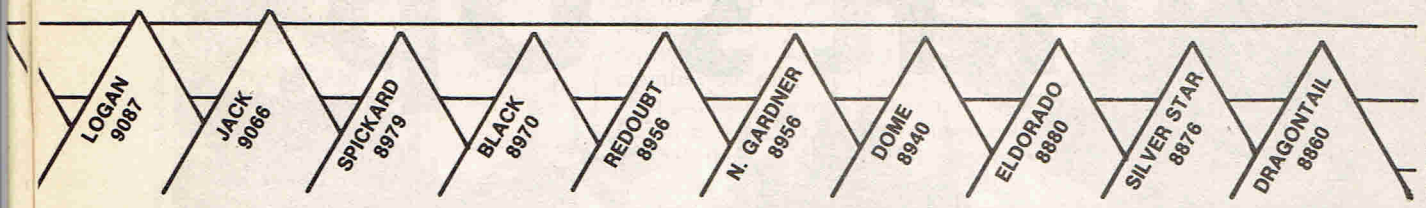
A minor mountain has 250 to 599 feet prominence above the lowest pass separating it from a higher mountain (that is, ridge level). Submajor mountains have 600 to 999 feet prominence above ridge level. Major mountains have at least 1,000 feet prominence above ridge level.

Mountains must also rise at least 1,500 feet above sea level (to exclude seamounts) and have two separate sides which drop 1,500 feet in five or less horizontal miles

Then there are the many pinnacles, spires and points that have less than 250 feet prominence above ridge level, and thus don't qualify as mountains, but that often still draw climbers' interest. Therefore, to satisfy my curiosity and that of other mountaineers, I am providing two lists of Washington's highest landforms.

The table lists the 20 highest points in Washington with at least 100 feet prominence above ridge level. Many of the listed landforms are rather insignificant protrusions, dwarfed by their parent volcanoes. Nonetheless, most of the peaks and points in the table have attracted climbers.

However, the two main spires along



Marj Domenowske

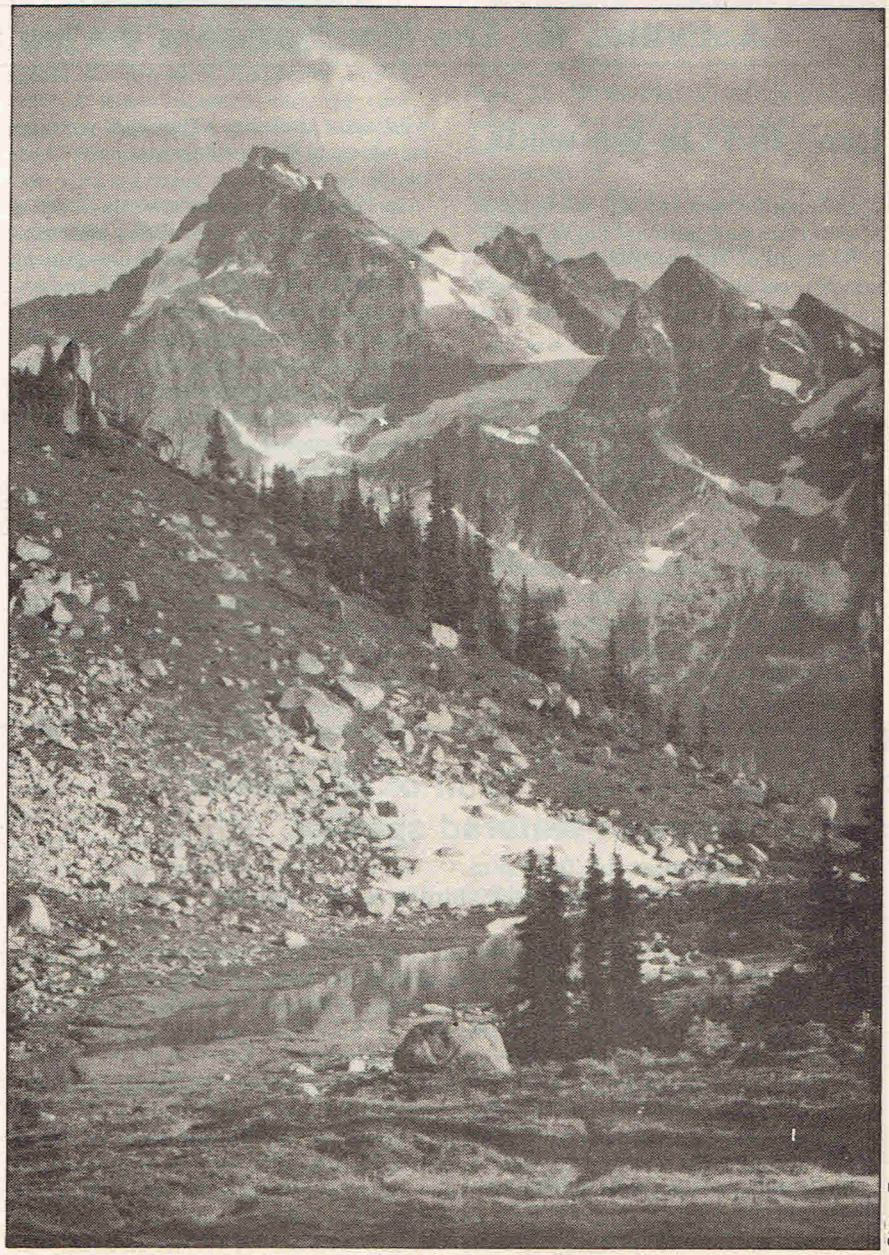
Little Tahoma's west ridge (Nos. 13 and 15) have no apparent climbing record. In fact, because of the very rotten rock on Little Tahoma's west ridge, I wouldn't be surprised if the Middle Horn (estimated elevation 10,580 feet) is presently unclimbed.

The second list, shown graphically above, is a compilation of Washington's 20 highest major mountains. By definition, major mountains are significant peaks, usually being the highest in their local area. Most seasoned climbers probably have ascended a fair percentage of these top 20 peaks. But I am sure that a number of mountain enthusiasts aren't too familiar with Mount Fernow, Black Peak and North Gardner Mountain.

A few high and popular mountains such as Little Tahoma, Mount Maude and Boston Peak don't appear on the second list because they lack sufficient prominence and are only submajor mountains. Each of these mountains is attached to a higher major mountain: Rainier, Fernow and Buckner, respectively. Of course, landforms do not have to be geographically major mountains to be popular with climbers, examples being El Capitan, Snow Creek Wall and Peshastin Pinnacles.

Some warnings are in order for those who plan to climb any of these peaks. First, rockfall danger is present in varying degrees on all of these mountains. Second, these landforms soar far above timberline, and thus could quickly be engulfed in life-threatening storms. Finally, no mountain should be underestimated, and only those properly equipped, trained and experienced should set out for a mountain's airy summit.

■ Steve Fry, a trained geologist, is a data specialist for the Puget Sound Air Pollution Control Agency. Recent articles by Fry on the measurement of mountains appear in Summit magazine, January-February 1987, and Signpost, April 1987.



Steve Fry

Mt. Redoubt in the North Cascades — at 8,956 feet, tied with North Gardner Mountain as the 15th highest peak in Washington state.