

PARKS AND THE MAN

HENRY J. BIDDLE

(1862-1928)

A member of the same famous Philadelphia family as Nicholas Biddle, the first editor of the Journals of Lewis and Clark, Henry Biddle graduated from Yale Sheffield Scientific School in 1882, followed by a degree at the Royal Academy in Freiberg, Germany, in the School of Mines. As a young man he did work in anthropology in Florida, New Mexico, and Kentucky for the Smithsonian Institution under his uncle, Spencer Baird, the great American naturalist and the second Secretary of the Smithsonian. Subsequent work for the U.S. Geological Survey brought him to Lakeview, Oregon, and then to Portland, no doubt influenced by his friend and Yale classmate, Charles Francis Adams. By 1880 he had purchased a farm east of Vancouver, Washington, and was very much a part of the civic life of the Portland/Vancouver area.

His interests were farming, botany, archeology, and conservation. He told his sister that his interest in botany was triggered by the beauty of *Penstemon rupicola* which occurs on Beacon Rock - in Biddle's words, "Bright crimson in flower, growing in imperceptible crevices in the face of the cliff, and blooming about the middle of May." It is still there.

His daughter-in-law, the late Mrs. Spencer Biddle, told me that Beacon Rock was the overriding interest of his life. Mr. Biddle not only built the trail up Beacon Rock but one up Hamilton Mountain and a road up Mt. Zion. He maintained his trails, roads, and picnic areas at Mt. Zion (Biddle Butt), Hamilton Mountain, and Beacon Rock as public parks during his lifetime.

The wonderful, meticulously organized photo albums of Biddle's friend, Rodney Glisan of Portland, which are in the Mazanas' library, provide a glimpse of Mr. Biddle and his colleagues out in the wilds of Skamania County. Incidentally, Rodney Glisan left his first name on Rodney Falls in Beacon Rock State Park. The

following excerpt from Glisan's 1917 photo album tells us how it was:

My 2, 1917

6:00 PM Henry J. Biddle, F.H. Brundage, Forest Ranger, and R.L. Glisan left Portland. Arrived Skamaia. Supper at Mess House Beacon Rock.

9:30 PM Left mess tent and climbed the rock. Cement forms on about eight turns of upper trail necessitated climbing straight up to point where trail curves around face of rock. Arrived on summit 11:00 PM. Moon breaking through clouds. Elevation 850 feet. Returned down to cabin base of rock.

May 3

6:50 AM Left cabin mapping out proposed trail to Mt. Hamilton. Went slope to saddle of little Castle Rock and then easterly to Hardy Creek.

8:30 Arrived lower falls. Went up to upper falls and then up ridge through heavy timber to the exposed points on rim. Followed curve of rim upward, securing views of Columbia below.

11:10 Arrived on summit of Mt. Hamilton - elevation 2432 feet. Trulliums were growing in snow patches on summit - very brushy on top and poor view - fine view on rim just below. Built fire below summit and had lunch.

12:35 PM Left lunch place and retraced

route to Hardy Creek and then followed down east bank of creek. Water poured over huge moss covered boulders.

2:35 Crossed old bridge just above Highway and took old road to Highway. Arrived at cabin 3:00, left 3:10.

3:55 Arrived Skamania two miles west and train for Portland.

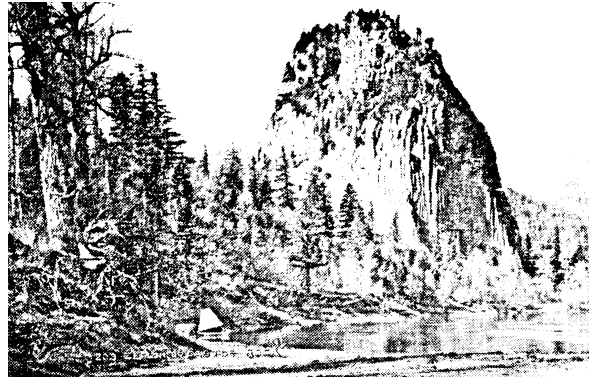
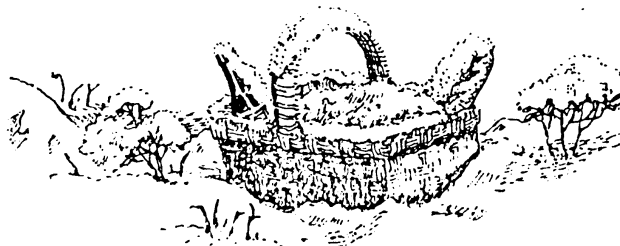


Photo Courtesy of: "Snapshots on the Columbia" by Benj. A. Gifford, 1902 Beacon Rock

Mr. Biddle was a man of action capable of turning his ideas into reality - leaving us both a legacy of accomplishment and an example for the future. (Our next issue will discuss his projects in history and archeology.)

—Nancy N. Russell,
with thanks to the Mazamas.



SAVE THE DATE: FEBRUARY 22, 1986

WINTER PICNIC

Volunteers!! Call Anne Coleman to sign up at 297-7383.
Tables and chairs needed!!! Call Charron at 292-1335.
Tickets available for \$18 at both FOCG office.