

Summ July 16/68

(22-15)1



—Peter Hulbert Photo

MRS. ESTHER KAFER . . . she climbed the highest mountain

THIS CLIMBER WONDERS

Why Do Climbers Climb?

By AUDREY DOWN

Mrs. Esther Kafer is a mountain addict.

The Vancouver housewife has just returned from a South American holiday where she became the first woman to scale the highest peak in Bolivia — 23,012 foot Ancohuma Mountain.

In 1962 she was also the first woman to climb B.C.'s highest mountain — 13,014 foot Waddington.

Asked the old chestnut, "Why does a climber climb?" she said no one can answer that question.

The classic answer is "Because the mountain is there," but that is not true, she declared.

She said that many times while slogging up a mountain she has asked herself, "You fool — what are you doing here?"

AN ADDICTION

Then she reflected, "It's like an addiction. Once you get started you don't want to stop."

Her husband, Martin, an electrical engineer, is also an excellent mountain climber. They both belong to the B.C. Mountaineering Club and he is also a member of the Alpine Club.

Their children, Kathy, 12, and Tommy, 10, also do some climbing but haven't been "hooked" yet.

Mr. and Mrs. Kafer and Dr. Barry Hagen from Prince George climbed with four Americans and four Bolivians.

The climb up Ancohuma took two and one-half weeks, she said. This included estab-

lishing a base camp and then a high altitude camp. The actual assault on the peak from the high camp took two days, with the last night spent in a snow cave.

The only woman in the party, Mrs. Kafer found herself housekeeping in a tent at 18,000 feet.

PRIMITIVE

"It was pretty primitive," she recalled.

Since it took one hour to melt enough snow to fill a cooking pot, and another hour to heat it, water was too precious to waste by washing, she explained.

The menu was tasty enough at base camp. They bought a sheep and, with potatoes and fresh oninos made an Irish stew.

At high camp breakfast was instant cereal served with powdered milk. Lunch was invariably sardines, cheese and crackers. "Dinner" was usually soup and noodles and canned meat, or soup and meatballs.

"It was the same every day," she said. "I didn't mind eating sardines every day for lunch there, but at home I would never touch them."

That altitude was the major problem. The North Americans were constantly sucking hard candy to moisten their throats. Having to breathe through their mouths to take in enough oxygen, their throats were always dry, she said.

NO MISHAPS

They always felt tired at 18,000 feet. They usually slept from 7:30 at night to 7 the next morning, and even then

it was very difficult to get out of the warm sleeping bag.

It even seemed harder to think, she said, so she found it a chore to choose the type of cereal they would have for breakfast.

There were no mishaps even though 1,000 feet of icy rock face was traversed by drawing themselves up step by step on a fixed rope.

The mountain is the third highest in South America.

The Canadians had forgotten their flag so Mrs. Kafer cut up a red bag to get bars and the maple leaf. She sewed these onto her husband's white handkerchief, and this was planted proudly on the peak, along with a Bolivian flag and a borrowed American flag.

They also climbed two other peaks, including a first ascent up a difficult ridge.

Before and after the expedition, the climbers underwent tests for oxygen consumption. The tests were made by Dr. Hagen in a La Paz hospital. He is studying the effect of altitude on glands in the throat which tell the body how deep it must breathe to obtain the necessary oxygen.

BEST THING

The best thing about getting back down off the mountain was being able to take a bath, she said.

"After two weeks we were beginning to really smell."

She recalled that her longing for water contrasted with the feeling she had towards it a year ago. In July, 1967 she was with a party climbing in the Lillooet glacier area near Pemberton when they became marooned by flooding creeks.

They were wading through torrents. It was dark and sometimes they went hip-deep into pools. They were six days getting out, and had run out of food.

EFFORTS FAIL

One creek was too deep to ford. Since Mrs. Kafer was a good swimmer, she tried to cross first. Her first effort failed, and she had to be dragged back by the rope tied to her waist.

She made it the next time, and was able to help the others safely across.

But the result of that ordeal was that they were all afraid of water for awhile.

"When I went to brush my teeth at the sink, I couldn't stand the sound of the tap running," she said.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Kafer were born in Zurich, Switzerland. They came to Vancouver in 1954.

ALSO MONT BLANC

Mrs. Kafer said they go climbing almost every weekend. Although she has also climbed in Europe, including the highest peak there, Mont Blanc, she likes the Coastal Range of B.C. best.

The pert, pixie-faced housewife of 40 has the trim figure of a college girl. She keeps in shape for climbing by running and by doing the 10-B-X exercises for women.

Mrs. Kafer has been climbing mountains for 20 years, but chores around home like fixing the roof are strictly a man's job.

"I am afraid of ladders," she grinned, "I don't know why — but a ladder is not like a mountain."