

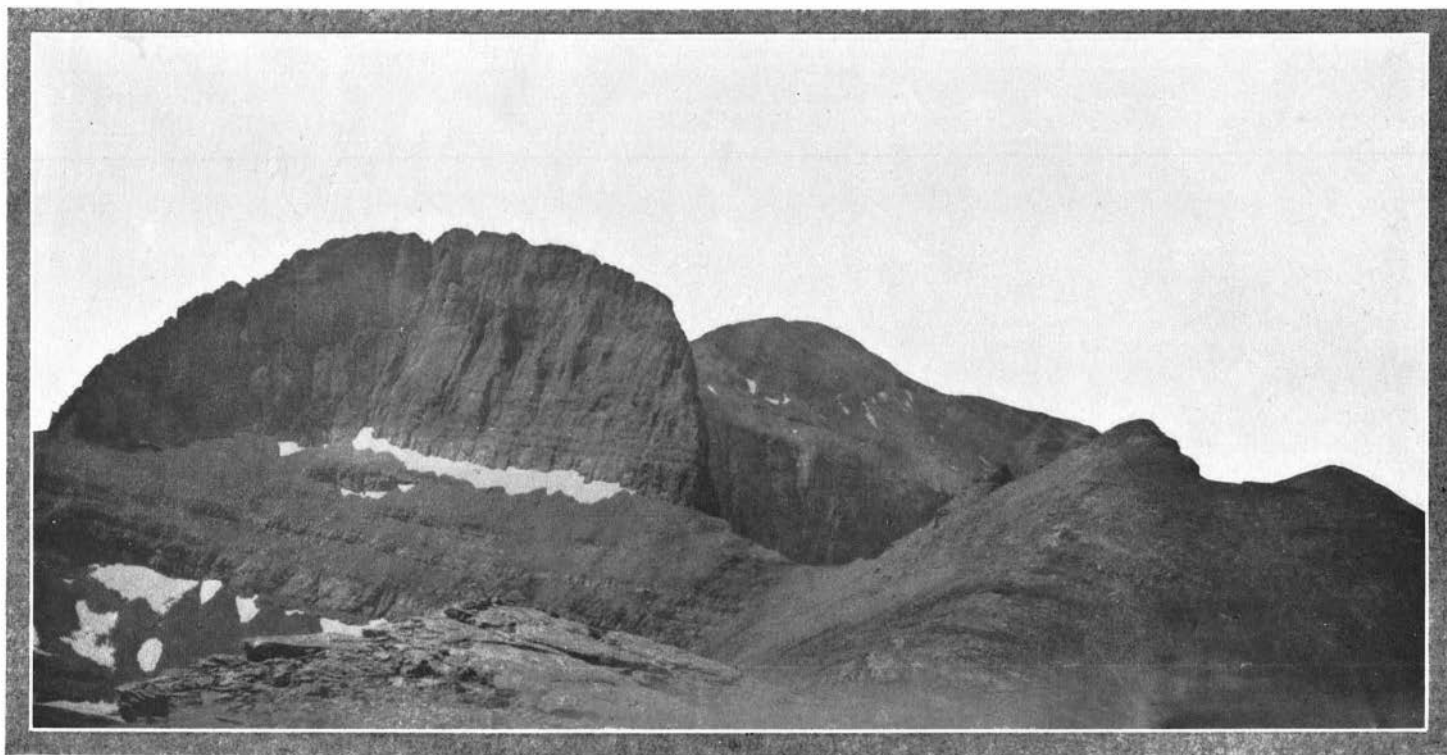
EIGHT DAYS ON MOUNT OLYMPUS IN THESSALY

WINONA BAILEY

WELL, the climb of Mount Olympus presents some difficulties," replied Mr. Morris, "and yet there are certain things that can be done." And he proceeded to tell us of a monastery, a favorite resort locally, situated somewhere on the ancient mountain. Mr. Morris is the American Consul at Salonica and Mrs. L. R. Frazier and I had called on him, both to report our presence in that part of the world and to ask for information about Mount Olympus. When we insisted that being mountain climbers we could be satisfied with nothing short of the summit he told us that some young men in the employ of the American Standard Oil Company in Salonica had climbed the mountain in the summer of 1921. With them at that time, and now working at the same place, was a native Greek, but an American citizen, Marsiotis, by name, a thoroughly reliable fellow whose home was at Litochoron, a Greek village at the foot of the mountain. If he could be secured to go with us everything would be simple and safe. Mr. Morris declared that tales of brigands on Mount Olympus were all tommy-rot, but said that after twelve years of war the Greek army was weary and desertions not uncommon. If any deserters happened to be lurking in the mountains he could not be certain how they might treat foreigners. On that account he would request that gendarmes be sent with us.

The next day we called at the office of the Standard Oil Company where Mr. Rawles, one of those who had climbed Mount Olympus the previous year, gladly told us what he knew and outlined what assistance we would need. Marsiotis, who proved to have been a resident of Seattle for many years, with a service record as sergeant of Company L, 161st Division, wanted very much to go with us but could not be spared just at that time, greatly to his disappointment and our own. To him, however, and to Mr. Rawles we owe the delightful hospitality and faithful service enjoyed during eight days on Mount Olympus. Through them we found a host, an interpreter, and a guide, three men whose superiors we have not seen among mountain folk anywhere.

A telegram to Mr. Calacanis, a merchant in Litochoron, and a letter to Mr. Zourzouris, cousin of Marsiotis, and for some years employed in the mills in Seattle and Hoquiam, brought these two men to the station to meet us when the train pulled in at 11 o'clock the morning of July 29. Presently, mounted on mules and accompanied by these new friends and a young gendarme, we took the road toward Litochoron and Mount Olympus. The railroad from Salonica south follows near the shore of the Gluf of Salonica, and Litochoron like many other Greek towns lies four or five miles back. After riding half an hour or so we



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TWO SUMMITS OF MOUNT OLYMPUS

View looking southwest from the foot of Ilias. At the left is seen the east face of Stephan, while through the saddle appears Scholion separated from Stephan by a chasm probably 2,000 feet deep forming the head of a valley leading off to the northwest.

began to distinguish the village on a little bench at the very base of the mountain near the opening of a deep canyon. This canyon, back of its narrow entrance, broadened somewhat into a valley and led alluringly on and up to great crags, the loftiest part of Olympus. We were all excitement over the novelty of the situation, the beauty of the mountain, and speculation as to which of several points visible was the highest and how we could get there.

In two hours Litochoron was reached, a village without streets. A few moments clicking along narrow, winding, cobble-stoned passages, a final halt before a gateway in a stone wall and we were ushered into the home of Mr. Calacanis. After introduction to various members of the family, mother, wife, sister, children, the welcome was completed with the customary, charming little native ceremony of serving guests mastic, confection, and Turkish coffee.

It was too late to start for the mountain that afternoon but we got Zourzouris to agree to go with us as interpreter and to furnish mules, and he in turn engaged as guide the only man, probably, in all that region who was thoroughly acquainted with the mountain. Commissary was made ready, black bread, native cheese, boiled eggs, rice, watermelons and staples like salt, sugar, butter and canned milk.

We got up at three the next morning and at four rode out of town. With us was Zourzouris on foot, a lad of sixteen or thereabouts to help with the mules, and an extra pack mule. A half-mile or so outside we dismounted and awaited a rendezvous. Soon through the twilight of early morning appeared several figures, a guide, two gendarmes, and several people bound for the monastery. Gradually, as the sun came up over the gulf, the troop wound its way up the hills lying to the north of the canyon. The trail was often steep, always rocky, but the mules placed their dainty feet carefully and with the encouragement of frequent shoves and blows and constant shoutings, kept steadily upward.

After about two hours the first rest was called at a strange hill-top village. Here in little huts made of boughs was the summer home of a nomadic tribe known as Sarakatsianos. Their government is tribal, with a chief. In the winter they stay down on the plain, in summer they bring their flocks up to this hill, and do their spinning.

From the village the trail led through very pretty open pine forest around several hills. About ten o'clock a stop was made for lunch, the first food we had had that morning. The next order of business was a nap. After that, four or five hours' riding, often over trail so rocky and steep that we had to dismount, brought us by mid-afternoon to a wood-cutters' camp at an elevation of probably 5,000 feet. A rude shelter had been formed by leaning slabs against a high rock. Some feet below was a tiny spring. Our own camp for the night was a small space

under another overhanging cliff. From this lofty ledge one looked down on the red roof and white walls of the monastery of St. Dionysius, 2,000 feet or more below, in the valley. Farther in the distance at the mouth of the valley lay Litchoron. We later found that from every high point the eye was invariably attracted first to the monastery, then to the town and after that to the graceful curve of the shore line.

Near this camp the trail ended; the summit of Olympus was not visible. How were we going to proceed? Next morning, July 31, leaving camp on foot, accompanied by Zourzouris, the guide and two gendarmes we skirted the hill back of camp and got on to the main ridge forming the north side of the valley. In two hours we were above the trees in open park country covered with grass and flowers and had our first vista of the heights with clouds playing about them as in ancient days. To the right was a bare cone with a monastery on top, the objective for the day, according to our guide. This point has long been called Hagios Ilias. It was the climb made by the young men from Salonica in 1921 and is apparently the point ordinarily reached by those who say they have climbed the mountain. There remained a somewhat tedious climb along one side of a sharp ridge before reaching the base of the cone of Ilias. Here a spirited discussion took place. On another ridge evidently higher than Ilias was a cairn. Asking if that was the highest part of Olympus and receiving an affirmative answer we declared that was where we wanted to go, we did not care anything about Ilias. But our guide said it was impossible to get to that place without a rope and we had no rope. He would take us next day where we could see the top. "We do not want to *see* the top, we want to *stand* on the top," said Mrs. Frazier. "That is what we came for. Why make this long trip from camp again, why not climb today?" But it seemed to make no impression on the Greeks. The climb of Ilias proceeded.

The monastery proved to be a hut built centuries ago with thick stone walls and stone roof so low that one could not stand upright in the dark interior. It was empty except that a lighted match revealed a picture of the prophet Elias. From this top by careful sighting it was judged that the rock ridge where the cairn was must be three or four hundred feet higher than Ilias. This ridge the guide called Stephan (accent on the last syllable) which seems to be a contraction of the Greek word *stephanos*, ridge or crown.

We lunched that day in the saddle between Ilias and Stephan, looking across a tremendous chasm, the precipitous head of a valley coming in from the northwest. Facing us, one side a sheer perpendicular cliff, was Scholion. This was the peak climbed by Messrs. Farquhar and Phoutrides in 1914* from the west. It is very nearly the same height as Stephan and another point out of view from the saddle. (This height is given by certain

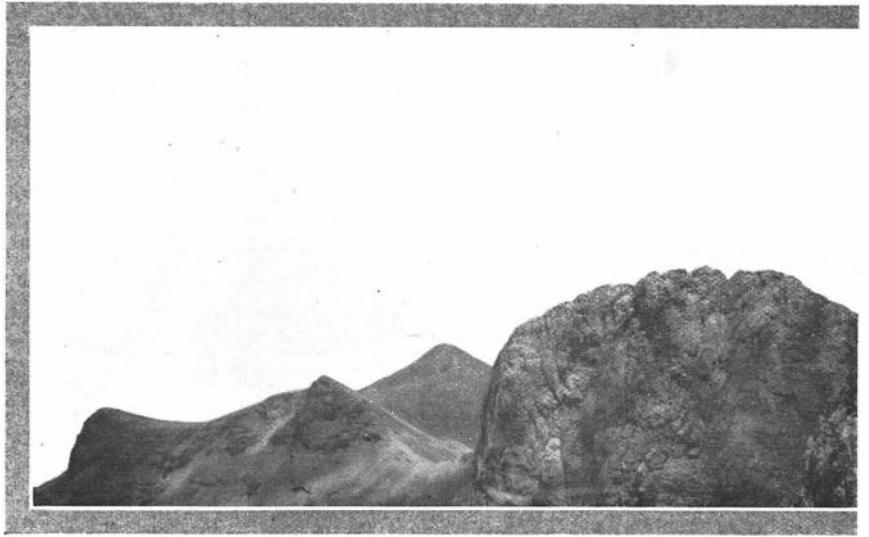
* See *The Mountaineer*, Vol. XIV., 1921, page 46.

Austrian government maps as 2,985 meters, or almost 9,800 feet). The usual nap followed lunch until about one o'clock when we wakened and, to our utter surprise, were told we were going to climb Stephan, that our guide had been there before and knew the way. The others would wait.

It is now time to say something of this guide with whom we got acquainted in the next few hours. Christos Kakalos, by name, a little fellow, light, nimble, sure-footed, keen-eyed, he had grown up on that mountain, knew every ridge, every trail, every watering place,—few enough of the latter there are in summer. He is now employed as a sort of ranger, keeps an eye on the wood-cutters and a lookout for fires. Full of fun and good humor we found him to be, witty we were told he was. He knew only one word of English, "Winchester," the rifle he carried, the accuracy of which he loved to display. By the end of the trip we had grown very fond of him and learned to trust fully to his mountaineer judgment.

Crossing a coarse talus slope at the foot of a wide snow bank we soon found ourselves at the bottom of a chimney. Christos looked up and said "Kako, kako," (bad). We answered, "Yes, kako," but up he darted. With his little *papoutsi*, moccasins, he would go from stone to stone like the goat he was and then turn and watch us struggle to keep a footing, sometimes suggesting which way we should go, but always darting forward again before we could catch up. Finally we swung around on the firmer rocks of the east side of Stephan and using hands as well as feet came out at last on the very ridge a few feet from the cairn. Christos turned, cried "Bravo!" and shook us both by the hand. His face beamed. We had won, won not simply that summit but our guide. From that time his attitude was changed. He would take us anywhere. "Tomorrow, Mitka," he said. Mitka, now visible, was a sharp point (the word means peak or point) that rose from the other side of the chimney we had come up, but could not be climbed from the chimney.

We now saw why Christos had said he could not take us to the cairn. There it was close by and not more than ten to twenty feet higher but separated from us by a V-shaped chasm, too wide, too deep, too precipitous to be crossed without the skillful use of ropes. We made no further plea to be taken there but suggested building a cairn on our point. Christos gleefully set to work doing the masonry while we did our best to supply the material. When it was completed high and strong we scratched our names on a flat stone, set it up in front and photographed the completed structure. Now from whatever point Stephan, the most conspicuous feature of Mount Olympus, is seen two cairns appear, one on either side of the little notch. The higher one was built



VIEW FROM SCHOLION

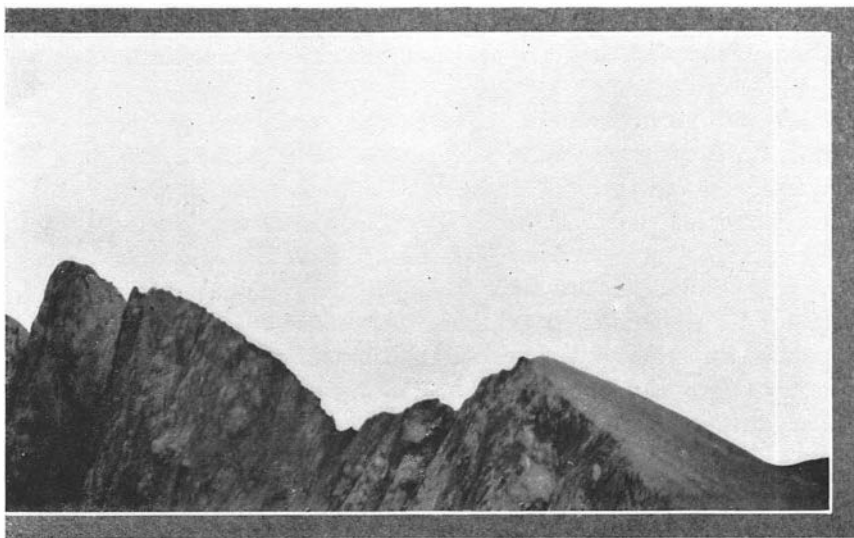
Looking northeast. In the distance the symmetrical cone of Ilias shows through the saddle, in the center the west side of the notched ridge of Stephan, at the extreme right the towering crag called Mitka or Peak Venizelos.

in 1921 by Christos when he and Marcel Kurz, a Swiss in the topographic service of the Greek government succeeded in reaching this point.

Camp was reached that night at seven-thirty and we understood that the next day we would cross the valley and climb Scholion and Mitka. But when morning came with it came a man saying that "four bad mans" had been seen down the trail. Zourzouris and Christos claimed they were afraid to go on, and insisted the only thing to do was to go back to the village. There was to be a festival in the village the next day and all the wood-cutters were going down. If we went with them there would be fifteen men in all and these were deemed sufficient for our protection. Protest was useless so, skeptical but puzzled, we consented to go down, stipulating that we must come back again later.

The village was reached early in the evening. Again we were warmly welcomed by the Calacanis family. There followed a call from the chief of police, a very long-faced individual, who took the responsibilities of his position most seriously, a type perhaps of Greek officialdom. He had sent the man up, he admitted, to warn us. He made various promises of sending to the next village for soldiers to come and hunt the "bad mans"; he would go out himself with a party and find them; if he found everything safe we could perhaps go back after two days. It was exasperating but there was nothing to do but submit and wait.

The next day was the festival. By seven o'clock in the morning the entire village was out in a pretty little grove surrounding the Church of the Apostles at the entrance of a ravine just outside the town. A



Winona Bailey

VIEW FROM SCHOLION

Mitka or Peak Venizelos at left. To reach Mitka it was necessary to follow the ridge in the right front of the picture, then climb over the other crags, including the high one next to Mitka.

village picnic it was. The eating began at once and continued throughout the morning, breakfast and lunch indistinguishable. One might write of the hospitality and friendliness of the people, of the folk dancing, the singing and playing, but to us the great cause of rejoicing was the information gleaned after a call at our picnic table by the chief of police that we were to be allowed to return to the mountain the following day. He claimed to have received a telegram from the next town saying ten men were coming to accompany us. That evening came Marsiotis from Salonica saying his father was sick and he had come hurriedly to see him. He told us that the tale of men having been seen on the mountain was all a lie, that there were certain community jealousies and the chief of police had sent the man to get us down from the mountain charging that our interpreter and guide were trying to get money out of us. It was impossible to fathom Greek guile or Greek official ways, so we were content to let mystery remain mystery and to go back to the mountain.

Again there was a morning twilight start and for a while rejoicing, because there was only our own little party, Christos, Zourzouris and the boy. But, alas for hopes! As daylight broke over the gulf we saw half a dozen guns bristling beside the trail and there, awaiting our approach, were six men, variously called gendarmes, police, soldiers. We did not want them, we had not asked for them, but they were under orders and probably did not want to go any more than we wanted to have them. Five were young fellows wearing the uniform of their country, ragged to be sure, while the sixth was an old man in native

garb. The boys we could be friendly with and they got what sport they could from the outing, but the old man remained inscrutable to the end.

Slowly again our cavalcade toiled up the rocky trail through the nomad village, but later instead of turning up the hills to the north, kept straight ahead, passing near the monastery, and farther on following the bed of the valley well up to its head. By three o'clock we came to a camp consisting of a low rude shelter hut belonging to Christos. On this beautiful grassy hillside dotted with clumps of pine we prepared to sleep under the stars on beds of fern. But the "throne of Zeus" was directly above and the "king of gods and men" must have resented the intrusion for just as we had dropped off into the first sweet sleep down came his thunderbolt in the form of a very wet rain out of what had been clear sky a few moments before. As soon as he had compelled us to take refuge in the little hut his wrath subsided but we were too wet to go out again.

On the morning of August 4, with Christos and the six soldiers we started for the final climb. Mules helped for a few minutes but soon all signs of trail ceased and on foot we scrambled up the steep south side of the valley. Once up this we came into grassy pasture land, grazing ground for numerous flocks of sheep and goats. One flock was resting on a snow field under the very shadow of Scholion. The entire mountain south and southeast of Scholion is a high plateau rising here and there into peaks all lower than Scholion, which itself rises from the same plateau by an even but steep slope. Before noon we were on top. On this summit has been built a sort of tower, used apparently for triangulation purposes a year or two ago by a surveying party mapping the region. The report of their work we made an effort to get in Athens, but it has not yet been published.

The view from the top of Scholion is startling. The peak itself drops off to the northwest in a tremendous rock wall forming the head of a deep valley, already mentioned. Diagonally across this mighty chasm are seen the forbidding rocks of Stephan and Mitka, flanked by another peak almost as high, all these presenting sheer rock faces 1,000 to 2,000 feet high. Far to the north and east stretches a wide coastal plain bounded by the Gulf of Salonica across which on the dim horizon Mount Athos is outlined. To the south the plain of Thessaly is cut by the river Salambria. Hills in diminuendo lead off west and northwest while southward the view is limited by the great massif of Olympus, which bears the same name as far south as the Vale of Tempe.

The soldiers had dropped behind two at a time until there were only two on top of Scholion. These started with us down the knife ridge that leads east but at the rocky point forming the end of the ridge they, too, stopped and we went on with Christos alone. Turning almost a

right angle toward the north we found the rest of the way all rock work.

A ticklish descent, a ticklish crossing and climb brought us on top of the peak next Mitka. Here we faltered just a little, we had had enough and the rest looked worse. "Can we do it?" we asked Christos. Smiling, he shook his head and answered "Nai, nai" (yes), immediately indicating that when a Greek shook his head he meant yes. If Christos said go, we always went, albeit with trembling hearts. But this time it wasn't as bad as it looked and before long we stood on top of Mitka, our fourth, last, highest and hardest peak. Again Christos cried "Bravo!" and shook our hands. We indicated it was all due to him and he was happy.

The base of the well built cairn had Christos' name printed on it in big red letters and that of Fritz Kuhn, 1921, on another side. Fritz Kuhn is an engineer in the employ of the Greek government and it is his report of the topography of Mount Olympus that we hope to have some day. On a flat rock surface were the words Pic Venizelos. This name seems to have been given by Boissonnas, a Swiss photographer, who first climbed it in 1913*. Christos guided him on that occasion but the cairn they built has disappeared. Christos thought Boissonnas had been up again without him and built this new cairn.

Satisfied now that we had been on more peaks than any previous climber and assured by Christos over and over that we were the only women who had ever climbed the mountain, we started on our descent by the most direct route, the exceedingly steep head of the eastern valley. Part way down we overtook the six soldiers, one of them carrying on his back the skinned carcass of a sheep. This they had bought and killed during the day. Camp was reached about six-thirty and that evening there was a big camp-fire and the sheep was roasted whole. Nothing we tasted in Greece was more delicious.

The trip back to Litchoron on mules was broken next day by a stop of several hours at the monastery of St. Dionysius, whose red roof we had so often looked down upon. Beautifully situated on a little bench above the stream and quite enclosed by trees, a lovely, peaceful spot it is. No wonder the people of the region love it. We were welcomed hospitably by the monks and a room placed at our disposal, where we reclined on beautiful hand-woven rugs.

That night we spent at the home of our genial host, Mr. Calacanis, and the next day waved goodbye to him and his family and to Christos, and accompanied to the station by Zourzouris and our handsomest gendarme took a lingering, regretful farewell of Litchoron and Mount Olympus.

* See *The Mountaineer*, Vol. XIV., 1921, page 47.