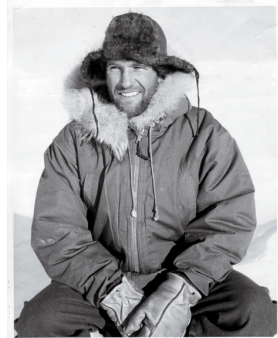


ANTIQUES & COLLECTIBLES

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RIGHT, Bradford Washburn explored Earth's most extreme climes. BELOW, Washburn's *View of the Matterhorn*. To see his photos of New Hampshire's Presidentials and to order prints, go to: washburngallery.org. Visit Boston's Museum of Science online at: mos.org



An Eye for Nature

Bradford Washburn's camera captured Earth's most spectacular formations.

BY CATHERINE RIEDEL

Art is born of the observation and investigation of nature": Cicero said it, and Bradford Washburn lived it. A pioneering mountain climber, pilot, map-maker, geologist, and founder of Boston's Museum of Science—Washburn was all of these. This New England-born explorer was also a prolific artist behind the lens of a camera, capturing some of the world's most spectacular nature images in stark black-and-white.

Mountains, glaciers, rocks, and snow; crevasses, shadows, storm clouds, and sunlight: These were Washburn's subjects. His work took him to the highest peaks and some of the most remote regions on the planet: Alaska, the Yukon Territory, the Alps, and Mount Everest. Cold and austere, grand in scale and infinitesimal in detail, these pictures convey a silent and dreamy peace, while still eliciting that unsettling pit-in-the-stomach, weak-in-the-knees feeling of vertigo. As an avid hiker and would-be climber, I'd say they're the closest thing to being there.

Henry Bradford Washburn Jr. was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1910. When he was 11, his family rented a house on New Hampshire's Squam Lake for the summer, and he made his first ascent up Mount Washington. Two years later, he received his first camera, a Kodak Brownie. In high school, Washburn explored more of the White Mountains and at age 16 wrote his own guidebook to the Presidentials, which included 39 of his own photographs. While still a teen, he hiked in Switzerland and wrote *Among the Alps With Bradford*, published in 1927.

Washburn studied geology and geography at Harvard and during his college years traveled to Alaska. After a failed attempt to make a first ascent of Mount Fairweather, Washburn realized

BRADFORD WASHBURN/COURTESY OF P. SKINNER INC. (LANDSCAPE); COURTESY OF MUSEUM OF SCIENCE, BOSTON (PORTRAIT)

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that his greatest reward was not in the climb itself but rather in the science of exploration: documenting, mapping, and photographing what he saw.

In Alaska he pioneered the use of aerial photography, strapping himself and his enormous camera across the plane's open door at 20,000 feet in subzero temperatures. From this unique perspective, with no reference to the horizon, Washburn's camera revealed the abstract beauty inherent in the landscape's glaciers, snowdrifts, and rocks, illuminated by alternating shadows and raking sunlight. These photographs have an M. C. Escher-like quality of optical illusion, where pattern unfolds upon pattern, nearly fooling the mind and eye.

Washburn returned many times to Alaska and led a National Geographic expedition to Canada's Yukon Territory, where he discovered new mountains and glaciers. Then in the late 1930s, he was made director of the institution that would later become Boston's Museum of Science, serving in that role until 1980. Although Everest's summit had eluded him in his youth, beginning at age 70 he led a team of researchers and aerial photographers on a decade-long undertaking, mapping the mountain and creating the world's largest model of it (12 by 15 feet), which now resides at the museum.

Washburn's amazing photographs surface only occasionally at auction, and surprisingly, when they do, they may carry an estimate as low as \$300 to \$500. That hardly seems worth the years of study and grueling physical effort required to capture those moments on film. But "let each man exercise the art he knows": Aristophanes said it, and Bradford Washburn lived it. 📷

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