

= Reid Blackburn =

Reid Turner Blackburn ( August 11 , 1952 ? May 18 , 1980 ) was a photographer killed in the 1980 volcanic eruption of Mount St. Helens . A photojournalist covering the eruption for a local newspaper ? the Vancouver , Washington Columbian ? as well as National Geographic magazine and the United States Geological Survey , he was caught at Coldwater Camp in the blast .

Blackburn 's car and body were found four days after the eruption . His camera , buried under the debris of the eruption , was found roughly one week later .

After his death , Reid was praised by his coworkers and friends alike . They spoke of his talent and enthusiasm , as well as his sometimes " acerbic " sense of humor . His wife , Fay , concluded that he had died doing what he loved .

= = Life = =

Blackburn was born in 1952 , the son of an engineer who possessed " a fixation on figuring out the way things worked " . He loved the idea of photography , once equating it to " painting with light " . He was an accomplished photographer , and had received accolades from the Associated Press for his photographs . Blackburn also authored a book on outboard hydroplane racing .

Blackburn attended Linfield College in Oregon . He began working at The Columbian newspaper in 1975 as a photojournalist . It was there that he met his wife , Fay Mall , who worked in the newspaper 's display advertising department . The two dated for several months before marrying in the summer of 1979 . Blackburn enjoyed hiking and loved the outdoors .

= = Assignment at Mount St. Helens = =

According to coworker and photo editor Steve Small , St. Helens was Blackburn 's favorite mountain . They climbed it together several times , and referred to it as " the Sleeping Beauty of the Northwest . "

Blackburn first became interested in the possibility of an eruption at Mount St. Helens in March 1980 , when a series of earthquakes rocked the volcano . Having already climbed the mountain , he was intrigued by the situation and was eventually assigned to document the activity of the volcano for his outdoor skills and his meticulousness . By May , he had begun camping out at the volcano as a joint project to take pictures of the volcanic phenomena for The Columbian , National Geographic , and the United States Geological Survey .

Despite being assigned to stay on the mountain only until May 17 , Blackburn opted to stay a few more days . Blackburn was situated near Coldwater Creek , 8 miles ( 13 km ) from the volcano , on the day of the eruption .

Early on May 18 , an earthquake measuring 5 @. @ 1 on the Richter scale struck the region , creating a massive landslide ? -0.6 cubic miles ( 3 km<sup>3</sup> ) of rock that released pressure on the volcano 's crater , causing an ejection of steam . Just seconds later , Mount St. Helens erupted laterally ( from its side ) , sending supersonic pyroclastic flows ( very hot clouds of gas and volcanic ash ) into the forest below .

= = Death = =

Blackburn was killed when a pyroclastic flow enveloped the area where he was camped out . His car was found four days later , surrounded up to the windows in ash with his body inside . The windows had been broken and ash filled the interior of the vehicle .

In early June , National Geographic photographer Fred Stocker recovered Blackburn 's camera from debris 2 @. @ 5 feet ( 1 m ) thick . The film was not salvageable , as the intense heat from the eruption had corrupted the negatives .

The 1980 event was the deadliest and most destructive volcanic eruption in the history of the United States . A total of 57 people are known to have died , and more were left homeless when the

ash falls and pyroclastic flows destroyed or buried 200 houses . In addition to Blackburn , notable resident Harry Randall Truman and volcanologist David Alexander Johnston were killed .

= = Legacy = =

After his death , friends and coworkers of Blackburn came forward to compliment his pleasant character and his talent . Friends described Blackburn as having " an impishness his friends came to expect . " Coworker Mike Prager called Reid " one of the funniest and most talented journalists in the Pacific Northwest " who " made his job look easy , he was that good . " Tom Koenninger , editor of The Columbian , described Blackburn 's humor as " wry " and sometimes " acerbic " , but elaborated that Blackburn was " gentle , displaying aggression when it was necessary for him to get close to a subject he was photographing . " Commenting on her husband 's dedication to photography , Fay Blackburn remarked , " if Reid were alive today , he 'd probably be back on the front line seeking to capture the latest chapter in the mountain 's evolution , in spite of the risk . " " Reid loved that mountain . He climbed it , hiked it , skied it . " She added that he died doing what he loved .

The National Press Photographers Association awards a competitive scholarship annually in Blackburn 's honor , worth \$ 2000 . In 2005 The Columbian offered an internship to applicants for the scholarship in memory of Blackburn .

In December 2013 , a roll of undeveloped film containing pre @-@ eruption shots of Mount St. Helens was discovered in Blackburn 's archives at The Columbian . The photos , taken by Blackburn during a helicopter photo shoot of the mountain the month before the eruption , were successfully developed over 30 years after Blackburn 's death , and remain journalistically important as a record of the pre @-@ eruption landscape .