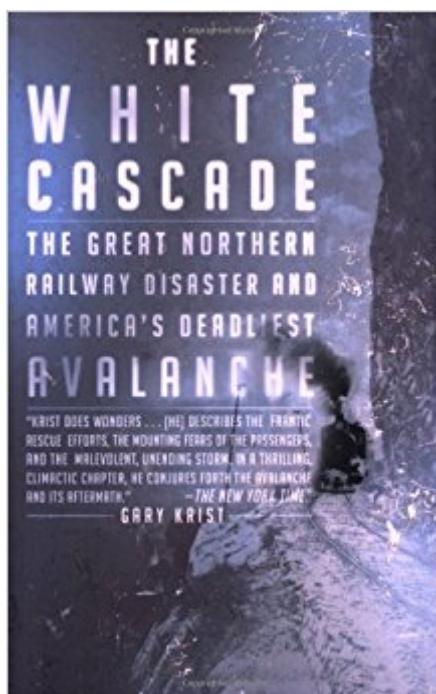


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# The White Cascade: The Great Northern Railway Disaster And America's Deadliest Avalanche



## Synopsis

"Krist does wonders . . . [He] describes the frantic rescue efforts . . . and the malevolent, unending storm. In a thrilling, climactic chapter, he conjures forth the avalanche." — The New York Times

In February 1910, a monstrous, record-breaking blizzard hit the Northwest. Nowhere was the danger more terrifying than near a tiny town called Wellington, perched high in the Cascade Mountains, where a desperate situation evolved: two trainloads of cold, hungry passengers and their crews found themselves marooned. For days, an army of the Great Northern Railroad's most dedicated men worked to rescue the trains, but just when escape seemed possible, the unthinkable occurred: a colossal avalanche tumbled down, sweeping the trains over the steep slope and down the mountainside. Centered on the astonishing spectacle of our nation's deadliest avalanche, *The White Cascade* is the masterfully told story of a never-before-documented tragedy.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In February 1910, a massive blizzard trapped two trainloads of passengers high in the Cascade Mountains. Crews from the Great Northern Railway worked around the clock to rescue the trains stranded on the edge of a precipice near Wellington, Washington. Then an avalanche half a mile wide descended from the pinnacles, forcing the trains and their passengers down the mountainside. Bodies were scattered all over the area, some buried as deep as 40 feet. The last body was found in July, 21 weeks after the avalanche. The lost passengers included business leaders, women, and children, but nearly two-thirds of the 96 fatalities were trainmen, railway mail clerks, and track

laborers. Many others were injured and a few were unharmed. Krist's research includes documents such as telegrams and diaries, newspaper articles of the time, court affidavits, and corporate archives. To his credit, Krist has avoided using any invented dialogue or other undocumented re-creations. The book is an astonishingly rich chronicle of this catastrophe. George CohenCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"Mr. Krist does wonders...Adopting a restrained, documentary tone, he slowly builds a picture of massing natural forces and helpless humanity, brought closer and closer to catastrophe with each tick of the clock. The pacing is expertly judged..." -- The New York Times Gary Krist's smart page-turner, "The White Cascade," documents [the Wellington] disaster with verve, humanity and purpose...The results couldn't be more pleasing, as Krist crafts a tale of drama and compassion..." -- The Los Angeles Times "Engrossing...Krist's chapter on the aftermath of the avalanche--the blood-reddened snow, the ever-fainter cries for help, the heartbreak of a mother pinned on top of her slowly suffocating infant--is utterly gripping, all the more so for his restrained style. Equally riveting is the courtroom drama that ensues..." -- The Washington Post "Crisp and compelling...In his first excursion into nonfiction after three novels, Gary Krist pieces together court transcripts, corporate records, newspaper reports and personal accounts into a gripping man-vs-nature narrative of the deadliest avalanche in American history...Krist paces this ominous tale to fuel suspense." -- USA Today "Gary Krist has written what is surely the most complete and authoritative account...Krist provides a gripping hour-by-hour narrative...." -- The Seattle Times "What a wild-eyed, horrific, brilliantly written story Gary Krist tells in *The White Cascade*. You almost feel like you're a Great Northern Railway passenger in 1910, coping with the blizzard-from-hell. Jack London would be proud of this riveting nonfiction accomplishment." • "Douglas Brinkley, Professor of History at Tulane University and author of *The Great Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, and the Mississippi Gulf Coast*" "The White Cascade brilliantly recreates one of those terrifying moments when human ingenuity runs up against the fierce power of nature. Gary Krist doesn't simply describe the Great Northern Railway Disaster. He takes you up the mountainside, settles you into the trapped Pullman car, and makes you feel the fear closing in around you. That's storytelling at its finest." • Kevin Boyle, author of *Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in the Jazz Age* "It is always a great gift when someone tells a long forgotten story, but it is especially so when the drama is this astonishing, and the writer this talented. Gary Krist weaves a spider web of a tale, drawing the reader in, until they

feel as though they too are a passenger on Seattle 25, trapped in one of the world's most dangerous places, in one of history's most savage storms. The White Cascade will keep you up at night, and not just from its unsettling end--you won't be able to put it down. Susan Casey, author of *The Devil's Teeth*

This is a fascinating book about a subject I knew nothing about. I went into this book knowing nothing about mountain railroading, the Great Northern railroad, avalanches, or the Cascade Mountain range. I learned a great deal about all of those topics. The book is well organized and easy to follow - we learn about the Cascades, the history of railroading in the Cascades, the backgrounds of some of the key passengers and railroad employees, the conditions that led to the trains' being stranded, and the conditions that ultimately caused the avalanche. This is followed by a description of the various civil lawsuits that faced the Great Northern railroad after the avalanche, some of the subsequent safety measures put in place as a direct result of the avalanche, and details about the lives of the people who survived and the families of those who didn't. I am giving the book four stars because I felt that it dragged a little bit. The lead-up the avalanche itself took up more than half of the book. The background is necessary to understanding why the trains were stranded in such a hopeless position, but it did get pretty dry in a few spots. However, that being said, it is still, overall, an interesting thriller, and it is a lot more than just a disaster story. It is a disaster story in the context of rapidly changing times in a rapidly changing area. It's got a little bit of everything: labor relations, changing attitudes towards railroads, the role of the railroad tycoon, the beginning of a regulatory environment for an industry that previously operated unchecked, and even, to some extent, a look at how women and foreign laborers were perceived. All of this was interspersed throughout the story, compensating for some of the dry spots in the book and making me really excited to get back to the book once I put it down. Also - two recommendations: 1.) Bookmark the pictures in the middle of the book and go back to them - they are all clustered together and if you look at them all and read the captions, there are some spoilers. 2.) Google the old Cascade tunnel and the Wellington snow shed when you are done with the book - there are some interesting pictures of it as it stands today, and it is interesting to view 1910 structures as they exist today.

Mr. Krist does an excellent job of bringing to life one of the truly forgotten events in American history. His book about the railway disaster of 1910 is extremely well researched and well written. It gives the reader a great window back to not only the disaster itself but also the state of railroading in the western United States in 1910. I strongly recommend this book to both railroad enthusiasts and

history buffs alike. It brings to life a time, and a tragedy that most of us knew little or nothing about. The victims of the Great Northern disaster were real people with real lives who suffered through a horrible event, many losing their lives in the process. Mr. Krist's book gives them life again and introduces them to the reader in a mesmerizing and very easy to read book. I highly recommend The White Cascade to anyone interested in the history of the United States or of Railroading or of great disasters of the past. It will not disappoint.

Gary Krist's meticulously researched "The White Cascade" is a gripping account of the most deadly avalanche in US history, occurring in Washington state in 1910. While I was unfamiliar with this event, as a Seattle area resident I thought this might be an interesting read and Krist certainly delivered the goods. While this could certainly been a dry retelling, Krist is a masterful storyteller and brought this harrowing event to life so vividly that I felt as if I was in the train car with the passengers, experiencing all their anxieties. While there were many in hindsight that blamed human decisions with the scale of the tragedy, the unprecedented storm and generally primitive conditions make it one that is unfortunate, but hardly preventable where it is sheer fortune that more people didn't perish as a result of this epic confluence of events.

The White Cascade: The Great Northern Railway Disaster and America's Deadliest Avalanche, by Gary Krist chronicles the events surrounding the killer storm of February, 1910 in the Northwest's Cascade Mountains. A record-breaking blizzard delays two Great Northern Railway trains as they cross the Cascades near Stevens Pass: a passenger train, the Seattle Express, and a mail train, the Fast Mail. At first it doesn't seem so serious, but as time wears on, the storm's intensity increases. Although Superintendent James H. O'Neill and his men work around the clock, they are unable to clear the way for the two trains to get through. Stranded near the tiny railroad town of Wellington, passengers can do little more than wait it out, hoping their various destinations and projects won't be too inconvenienced by the delay. But the storm doesn't abate, it only gets worse. It leaves so much snow on the tracks that the equipment can't carry it off fast enough. Passengers get edgy as the days pass without relief. Over a six day period enough snow has fallen to bury a two-story house, and still there's no letup. As the weather warms, conditions get more dangerous with the threat of avalanches. Forests surrounding the trains have been thinned from fire, making conditions for avalanche even more likely. Thunder and lightning heighten the danger as the snowfields disintegrate. Gary Krist does a remarkable job keeping suspense high throughout the book. With skill and meticulous detail he weaves local history, the personal lives of passengers and

workers, newspaper accounts and meteorological conditions culminating in a killer avalanche, and finally the inquest resulting from the tragedy. Steam railroad buffs will find this book fascinating with its vivid descriptions of the ins and outs of railroading in early twentieth century. But you don't have to be a railroad enthusiast to enjoy this book-it's a piece of history skillfully presented.

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