



These are the Sierra Club climbers who reached the top of Avawatz.

Our plans for the ascent of Avawatz Peak in California's Mojave desert began to take form in January, 1949, when Henry Greenwood, chairman of the Desert Peaks Section of the Sierra Club assigned to Walter and Bernice Heninger the duty of scouting the trip.

During the Christmas holidays they made a preliminary climb from Cave Spring. It was late in the morning before they got away from their base camp and at 1:30 they realized they would not make the summit in time to return that day. Not being equipped for an overnight camp they turned back. They had under-estimated the mountain.

Five months later they tried again. This time they took Highway 127 out of Baker, California. They left the paved highway at Salt Spring and followed a rough but passable road past Sheep Creek Spring to the cabin of John and Adelina Smith and started their ascent from this point. They did not go to the top at this time, but they found what they considered the best route to the summit.

When they gave their report to the Section program committee the Avawatz climb was scheduled for the Thanksgiving holidays in 1950. Fritz Sloman was named as leader.

Late on Thanksgiving day a dozen cars rolled into the rocky parking space near the Smith cabin, and in response to the invitation of John and Adelina began unloading their camping and climbing gear for an overnight camp.

The Smiths came to the Avawatz Mountains 16 years ago with two daughters, 10 and 11 years old. They came in search of relief from asthma for Mrs. Smith and one of the daughters. And John had his eye on the gold

We Climbed

There are many mountains higher than the Mojave desert. But no one knew much about the Sierra Club decided to make the story of what these mountaineering Califo

in them thar hills. He is a native of Michigan and has mined in Colorado.

A couple of old ruts left by the Avawatz Salt and Gypsum company led their truck up the wash to the present site of their cabin. They found there an old dugout in the hillside. Later



John and Adelina Smith have a little mine on the slope of Avawatz range. They've been here 16 years.

Avawatz . . .

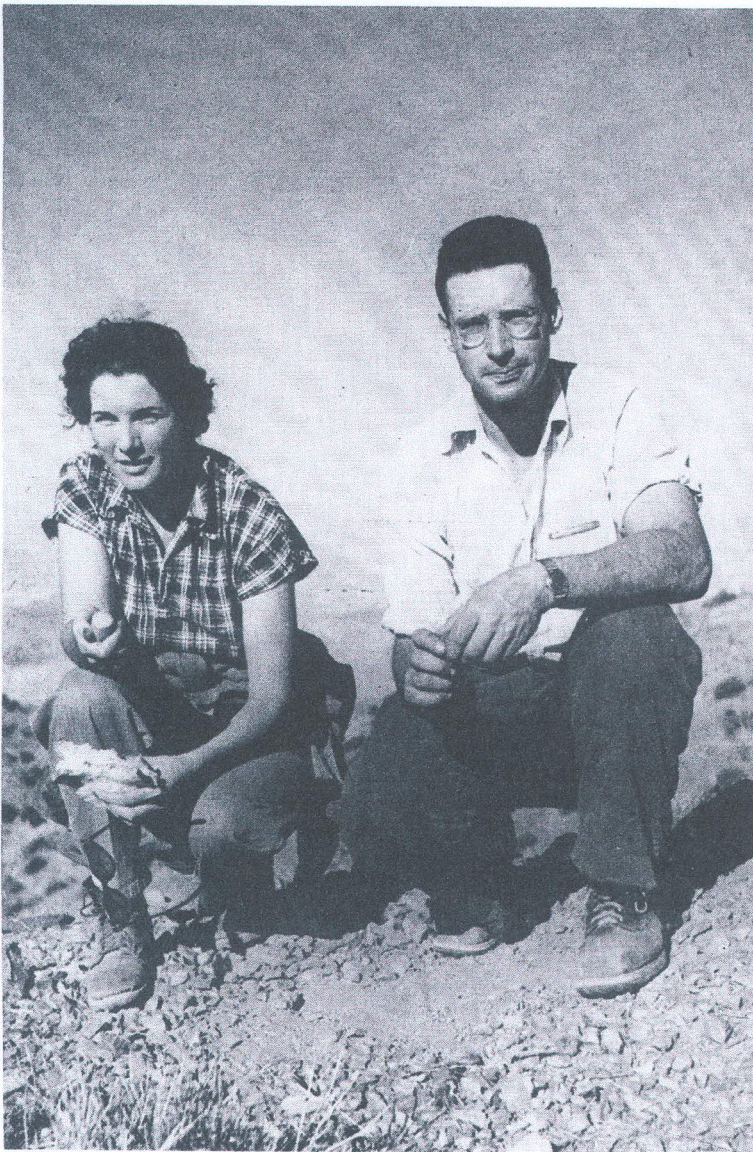
an Avawatz Peak on California's
out Avawatz, and so the climbers
6200-foot ascent—and here is the
rnians do on such an expedition.

they were told that it had once har-
bored a still.

The Smiths pitched a tent and began
building a cabin. Rocks from the wash
were handy materials and they hauled
in lumber and other necessities with
the truck, a little at a time.



John and Adelina Smith—they lived in a tent before this cabin was built.



*Marge Henderson, assistant leader, and Fritz Sloman,
leader, of the expedition to Avawatz Mountains.*

The nearest grade school was 40
miles away, at Silver Lake. Mrs.
Smith, a graduate of the University of
Minnesota, taught the girls at home
until they were ready for high school.
They entered Barstow high later and
were graduated from there. Both are
now married and the Smiths are grand-
parents.

Without outside help, the family de-
veloped a gold mine that keeps them
and keeps them there. Lead, silver,
gypsum and talc have been found in
the Avawatz Mountains. During the
war, prospectors searched for radio-
active minerals but found only traces.
Gold is the only pay dirt so far.

The Smiths radiate a youthful cu-
riosity about and a lively interest in
the world outside, as well as the des-
ert. They talk about retiring to town.
Their desert homestead is so much a
part of their lives that separation will
not come easy.

Before dusk on that Thanksgiving
evening campfires were flickering in
many places along the wash. From the
Casper Casperson camp came the
smell of bacon and beans. Bill and
Marge Henderson broiled steaks on a
sheet of metal. Glen Warner and
Ralph Harlow cooked a mess of spa-
ghetti over a GI gas stove, and Fritz
Sloman warmed up a pressure cooker
full of pork shoulder with sauerkraut,
onions and caraway seed. The camp-
site was backed by a cliff with nearly
vertical strata which was emphasized
by a broad white streak of talc running
from top to bottom.

The veterans of former attempts on
Mt. Avawatz agreed that lack of time
was the main reason for their two pre-
vious defeats. So they set five a. m. as
the starting time on this, their third
attempt. Under a desert moon 24
people started up the wash, Fritz Slo-

man leading and Marge Henderson bringing up the rear as assistant leader. The elevation at the Smith cabin is 1800 feet. The highest point in the range is 6200 feet, so we had about 4400 feet to gain, within a distance of about nine miles.

Adelina Smith had decided to make the climb with us. "In the 16 years we've lived here, I've been all the way up the canyon only once," she said.

The wash was wide open at first.

Gradually it became light enough to see who had come. Fritz Sloman, Marge and Bill Henderson, Bernice and Walter Heninger, were all veterans of previous attempts and were especially eager to make the top this time. Three members of the San Diego Chapter of the Sierra Club were with us: Barbara Lilley, Frances Pierson and Eugene Vinson. From the Los Angeles Chapter: Muriel Pope, Glen Warner, Dorothy Campbell, Eleanor

Smith, Georgie White, Larry Ames, Peggy Fredricks, Bert Baldwin, Ralph Harlow, Elgin Pierce, Louise and Niles Werner. James Bonner had brought two guests: Rosamond Baker, a prospective club member, and Adele Millerd, from Sydney, Australia. Adele is an International Education student this year at the California Institute of Technology. We asked her about the Australian deserts. She said they are very much less accessible than our deserts.

The wash narrowed between smooth walls of white, pre-cambrian marble. Now and then we encountered a little rock scramble up dry falls. As the sun rose higher we welcomed the shade of the canyon walls.

About four miles above the Smith cabin, Mrs. Smith pointed out the Upper Spring, running water from a pipe. Clumps of desert willow grew at this spot and fresh droppings of mountain sheep were all around.

"We estimate we have six or eight mountain sheep back in here," Mrs. Smith told us. "We'd have more if the mountain lions didn't get the lambs. One old ram is quite friendly with Mr. Smith. Allows him to come almost within petting distance. Two years ago the Los Angeles County Museum sent a group in here to get a sheep for mounting. Mr. Smith showed them where to find the sheep. They took an ewe and their taxidermist prepared it right in front of our house. It was lambing time and they took a perfect little lamb out of the ewe and stuffed it too. I understand they're both on display in the American animals exhibit at the Museum at Exposition Park."

The girls wanted to know how Mrs. Smith kept her skin so soft and white living on the desert.

"It's natural," she said. "I never use creams. I guess I'm lucky."

We rested at the Upper Spring, giving everyone a chance to catch up. For most of us the breakfast hour had been too early to enjoy much food. Lunch bags came out of knapsacks and out of lunchbags came oranges, apples, carrots, celery and sandwiches. Sounds like a vegetarian picnic. These foods we especially enjoy in desert lunches, because of their moisture content. Everyone carried at least a quart canteen of water and many carried canned fruit juice besides. Seasoned climbers usually carry, on one-day trips: a sweater or parka, flashlight, dark glasses, matches. The leader is required to carry a standard first aid kit. Niles Werner always carries a pair of pliers for two reasons: to pull out boot nails that give trouble,

Above—Some of the climbers along the route. It took seven hours to ascend 4400 feet to the top.

Below—The bald summit of Avawatz. Joshua trees are seen growing nearly to the top—with a sprinkling of pinyon and juniper.



