



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 Californians

found in their 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...

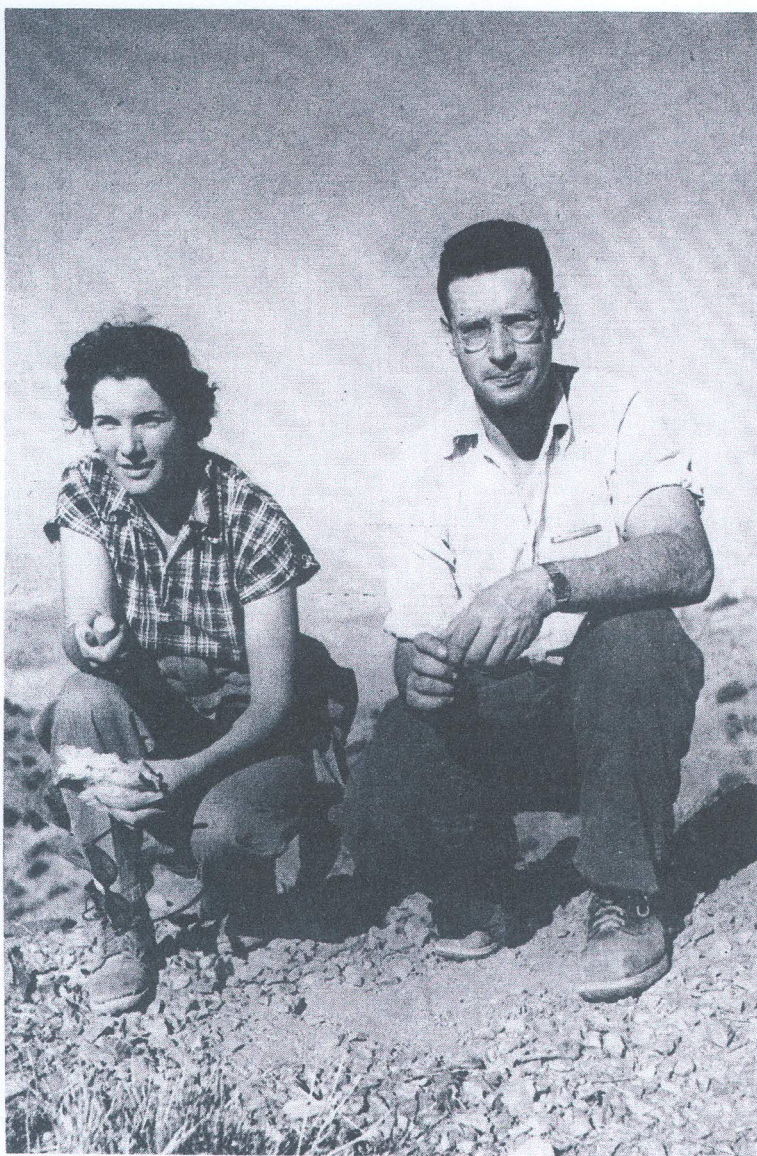
an Avawatz Peak on California's out Avawatz, and so the climbers 6200-foot ascent—and here is the mians do on such an expedition.

they were told that it had once harbored 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 grandparents.

Without outside help, the family developed 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 radioactive minerals but found only traces. Gold is the only pay dirt so far.

The Smiths radiate a youthful curiosity about and a lively interest in the world outside, as well as the desert. 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 spaghetti over a GI gas stove, and Fritz Sloman warmed up a pressure cooker full of pork shoulder with sauerkraut, onions and caraway seed. The campsite 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 previous 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.



and to pull out cactus spines from victims' hides.

At the Upper Spring we took the left fork which is narrow for a short distance. Here grow clumps of real willow. Then the canyon widens to a wash again, its sides rising gently to red-brown volcanic-like ridges. This gentle rise is generously dotted with Joshua trees, smaller varieties of yucca, and beavertail cactus.

Around a bend the formations indicated we were coming to the end of the canyon, and to the foot of some steeper climbing. The lead group had already paused there to consider the routes. Yellow cliffs to the left were deeply furrowed with steep gullies and topped by a craggy summit. Beyond this summit, we suspected, was the peak. To the right was a scree slope. Above the scree slope the ridge ran, in a short arc, toward the top of the yellow cliff.

While the leaders pondered the question of which way to go, the rest of us whiled away the time resting, talking and laughing. Someone wondered where the name 'Avawatz' came from.

"We have always assumed it was Indian," Mrs. Smith said, "but we have never been certain as to the origin." Later in Erwin A. Gude's *California Place Names*, I found the following information:

"The name appears on the map of the Merriam expedition (1891) as Ivawatch, a name doubtless supplied by the Indians. It is derived from Southern Paiute *na-hu-watz*, 'mountain sheep.' The use of the prefix *iva* 'white, clear' in place of *na-hu* may imply that the word referred to 'white sheep' (O. J. Fisk). The name was commonly pronounced *a-va-watz* by the settlers . . ."

There is always a great deal of laughter on such trips. We laugh at many things that don't seem funny when one tries to put them on paper afterward. Whether the joke is good or not, doesn't seem important. People in high spirits will laugh at the slightest excuse.

"That must be the old gate we're supposed to pass through," said Bill Henderson, pointing to an old post with a cross-piece sagging from it. That way lay the scree slope.

"The cliff is more direct," was Larry Ames' opinion.

"That may be so, but it's no place to take a large party without ropes," judged Fritz Sloman, the leader. And he started up the scree slope. Half a dozen others liked the looks of the cliff and decided to try it. The rest followed Fritz up the scree, sliding

back halfway every time they took a step. But the scree slope wasn't long and they soon reached a ridge, which climbed in an arc, toward the top of the yellow cliff. Most of the cliff party made it easily, but a few found the last 10 or 15 feet steep and the footing poor. Fritz ran up the ridge to assist them.

We could see by now that we were still a long way from the summit. We couldn't even be sure which ridge led to the highest point.

Fritz and Niles started up the right ridge with Barbara Lilley and Eugene Vinson following. Bernice and Walter Heninger decided to wait until it was certain which was the true summit. Larry Ames and Muriel Pope went up a draw between the two summits and the rest straggled out behind.

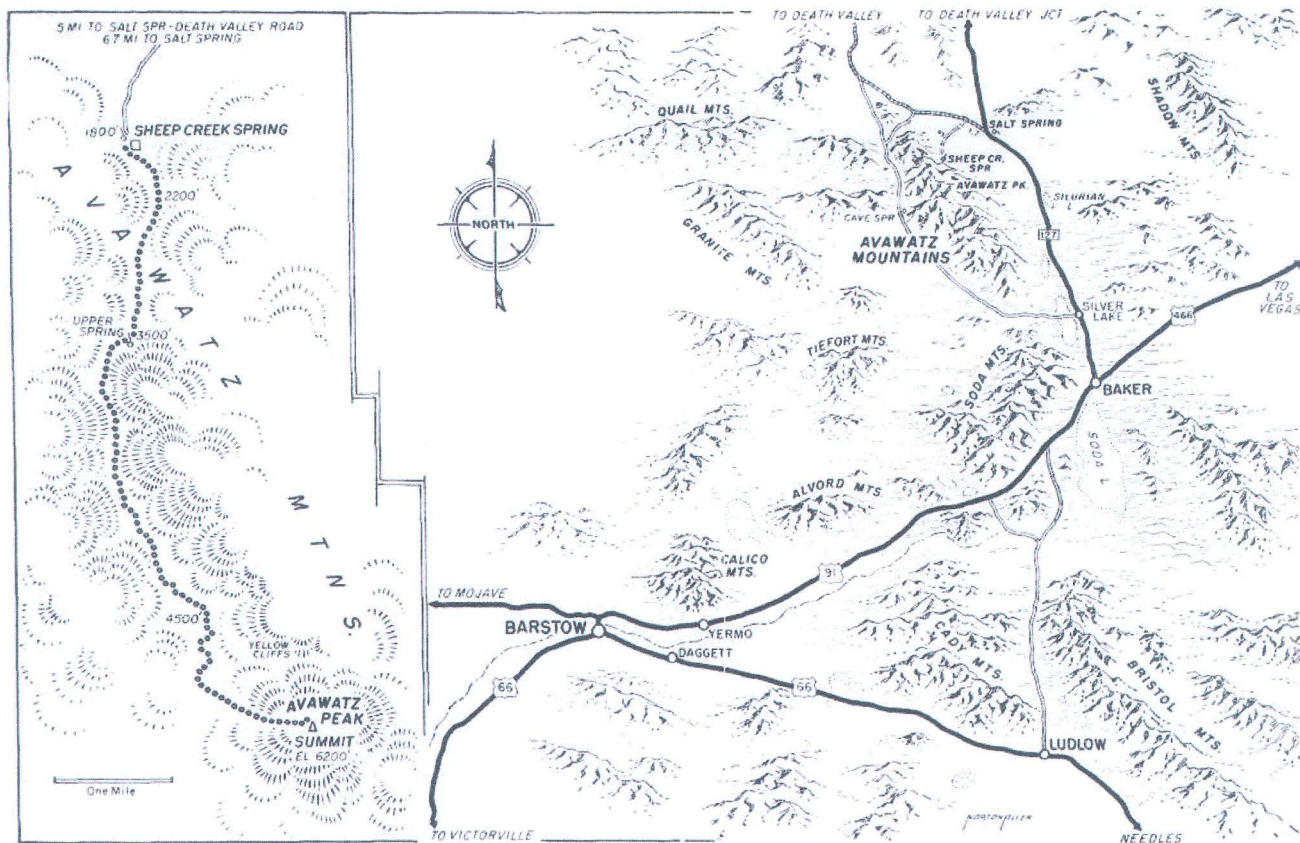
Pinyon Pines decorate the slopes above the scree, and fine large junipers are all over the hills.

Fritz and Niles disappeared over what looked like the top. After a little

Above—On the trail to Avawatz Peak. Proper dress for such a mountain climb is—whatever you want to wear.

Below—This is the canyon up which the party came. The going was rough in some places.





they appeared again and signalled us to come on. We relayed the news back. Later Fritz reported that, according to the map, the elevations of the two summits differed by only 24 feet.

By ones, twos and threes they came up. Everybody made it. It took seven hours. We estimate the distance at nine miles. Bill Henderson passed around his binoculars. Off to the east the Silurian Hills seemed to be burying themselves in their own alluvial fans. Far beyond them, in Nevada, rose the Charleston Mountains. Silver Lake and Soda Lake lay dry and white to the southeast. To the southwest, the Tiefert Mountains loomed close, with Bicycle Lake at their feet. In the immediate foreground to the northwest, the other high summits of the Avawatz range cut off most of the view toward Death Valley. From the crown of the Avawatz, one can see almost all the features characteristic of our California deserts.

We enjoyed the top for a couple of hours. Some wanted nothing more than a good drink of water and a good rest. Most of us enjoyed our apples, oranges, fruit juice and candy. Camera fans were busy. Fritz emptied a No. 10 can of tomato juice, removed the

label from the can and passed the paper label around to get everybody's signature. That was the record we left on top, in the cairn placed there by the Geological Survey. In the cairn we found only one record. It had been placed there that very morning, by Don Rappolee, of the San Diego Naval Base. He had made a solo ascent by moonlight and reported seeing two rams.

Going down was like payday. The places that had taken the longest going up, were the fastest going down. Especially did we coast on the scree. In the canyon again, the party broke into groups; some wanted to hurry down; some wanted to saunter. Fritz stayed in the rear to see that everyone got down safely.

We passed a group lingering to take a last look at the yellow cliffs. Down the wash, we stopped to share the peanuts and hard candy Glen Warner and Dorothy Campbell passed us. Later we passed up a couple taping up blistered toes. And so on down the wash and back to camp. And at the end of the day there was a general good feeling that the climb to the crown of the Avawatz was a stimulating and rewarding experience.

ISSUE OF SPECIAL STAMPS ENDS FISHING CONTROVERSY

Distribution of 10,000 special use stamps for fishing on waters of the Colorado river was slated to begin June 28 with Las Vegas sporting goods dealers, who are authorized to handle Nevada fishing licenses, getting priority on delivery, according to Helen Scott Reed, county clerk. Delivery of the stamps, issued by Arizona, to outlying points at Nelson, Overton and Boulder City was expected to be completed before the fishing permits become effective, July 1. The stamp distribution brings to a peaceful conclusion a fishing license controversy that has raged over use of waters of the Colorado river between the states of Arizona and Nevada. Under the special use plan local anglers and non-resident fishermen will pay one dollar for the stamp for the privilege of fishing on waters that form a boundary line between the two states. This stamp will be good until December 30. The fee for the full year of 1952 will be two dollars. Nevada has delivered 20,000 stamps to Arizona officials for distribution. The Nevada stamps are to be attached to valid Arizona licenses, either resident or non-resident.—*Las Vegas Review-Journal*.