



Desert Peakers named this peak "Whipple I" after spotting from its top a higher summit still in the California range. The hikers missed a second time before victory on Whipple III.

Three Tries to the Top of the Whipple Range

One hundred years to the day after Lieutenant A. W. Whipple camped beside the California range which today bears his name, members of the Sierra Club hiked to the mountains' highest peak. Two false summits were reached before they finally stood on top. Here is the story of a persevering group of mountaineers and the army officer who played an important role in the scientific delineation and recording of the geography of the West.

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Map by Norton Allen

WASHINGTON'S BIRTHDAY dawned chilly but clear at Chambers Well in the southwest foothills of California's Whipple Mountains. It wasn't a pretentious campground, only a wash where half a dozen cars of Sierra Club mountaineers had stopped the night before. Our weekend goal was the highest point in the Whipples, a small desert range 4131 feet above sea level lying

in a crook of the Colorado River 35 miles south of Needles, California.

Sleeping bags hugged the sandy desert floor like so many brown cocoons, stirring to life as their occupants tumbled out. Fires flared in the half-light as boiling coffee, bacon, corned beef hash, frying eggs and palo verde smoke perfumed the crisp cool air.

It wasn't easy crawling out of down bags into the cold. But once bundled

in shirts, sweaters and parkas, huddled close to small cooking fires and sipping hot coffee, everyone soon was awake and cheerful.

As I packed a noon lunch into a plastic bag, a small figure came scrambling over the rocks, a miniature mountaineer, complete with hooded parka, mittens and knapsack. "My name is Betsy Bear," she volunteered. "What's yours?" She was four, she said, and was "a Desert Peaker just like Mommy and Dad," Bob and Emily Bear.

Light was beginning to silver the spines of giant cholla cactus on the west bank of the wash when Leader John Delmonte called: "starting in 10 minutes!" Right on schedule, 6:30 a.m., he started up a draw with 23 hikers in tow.

Assistant Leader Barbara Lilley fell in at line's end—a hard assignment for

a girl who usually leads the pack. On Friday evening Barbara had picked up Ned Smith, Bryce Miller and Monte Griffin in San Diego, driven most of the night, climbed all day Saturday in the Turtle Mountains, joined us Saturday evening at Chamber's Well for the Sunday climb in the Whipples and planned to drive home Sunday night and be back at her office desk Monday morning! "I'm more alert on the job," claims Barbara, "after a strenuous weekend outdoors."

Judith and Jocelyn Delmonte, 9 and 11, scrambled up the rocks right on their father's heels. Behind them strung Bernice and Walt Heninger, two middle-agers who can still outclimb many youngsters, Dick Kenyon, photographer and U.C.L.A. student, Jack Hudson, a Los Angeles fireman, Willard Dean, vice-chairman of the Desert Peaks Section, and others.

We found no trails. It was evident that miners had scratched here and there for gold and copper, and it was probably they who had dug Chambers Well, a hole in the ground with moisture showing. According to a U. S. Water Supply Bulletin, the well was fouled by dead animals and abandoned. We found no other water on our climb.

In spite of our grumblings at getting out of bed, early morning on the desert repaid us. We soon were warmed by the scramble up the draw, and the fresh air was exhilarating. No colorful sunrise this morning; it was too clear. The sun splashed over the ridge, glancing off yellow palo verde bark and the red metamorphic rocks on the slope.

Over the next rise we crossed a clean-swept plateau hard with tiny volcanic mosaic, then over several more, separated by gentle rises, and up a slope dense with man-sized cholla. We all were familiar with this cactus porcupine and advanced warily, trying to avoid the ferocious spines. We had met cholla often on desert hikes but never in such sizes or numbers. None of us escaped unscathed. Jeans, socks and boot-leather were penetrated. Walt Heninger produced tweezers and promptly became the most popular man in the party.

On a volcanic outcropping we paused to dig out the needles and to appreciate the breeze that fanned the ridge. Our eyes followed the thread of the Colorado River below. Cut off on the east by the soaring ridge, it curved around the north side of the range, then around the south. High in the blue a jet whined, pouring out a vapor trail. Two agave stalks, leaning out from the slope, framed what Jack Hudson decided from his topo map was Parker, Arizona.



Young Desert Peaker Betsy Bear, 4, daughter of Bob and Emily Bear, warms herself over a breakfast fire before starting on the morning's trek.

We climbed and climbed—miles of ridge walking, constantly peering up the soaring line in the hope of catching sight of a summit. "Is it the top, Daddy?" Jocelyn would call each time her father topped a hill. After four hours of climbing, we all waited anxiously for each answer and shared the disappointment when it came.

Suddenly, half a mile away, an appreciably higher point arose across a 150-foot dip.

"That may be it," said John.

"Or maybe just the point from which you can see the point from which you view the summit," qualified pessimistic Walt.

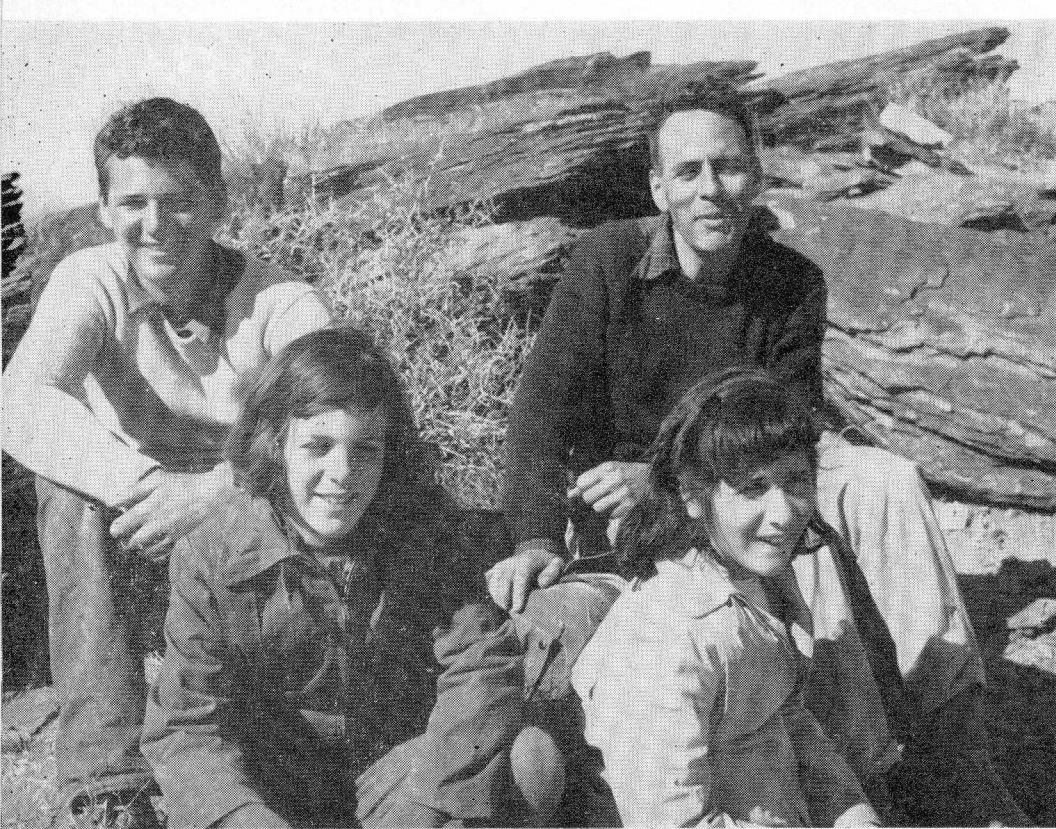
Two climbers decided to stay be-

hind while the rest of us scrambled down over the smooth reddish boulders and up again. On our left the thread of the Colorado suddenly bulged into Lake Havasu, above Parker Dam. Desert peaks usually overlook chalky dry lakes. One of sparkling blue was a novelty.

"If this isn't the top," puffed a climber, "I'm not going any farther."

It wasn't. Again the ridge dipped, swung right and continued to a point higher still.

"We'll leave everything here except cameras and make a dash for it," said John, eyeing the sun. It was already an hour past noon. "I'm afraid that's as far as we can explore today."



The climbing Delmonte family on Whipple II — James, 15, Judith, 9, Jocelyn, 11, and Father John Delmonte, leader.

Eight climbers decided to stay on what we named "Whipple II." The other 14 followed John over great slabs of red rock that had weathered out of the ridge. We swung to the right, pulling slowly up the long steep incline. John's arm swept the air in victory as he topped the point.

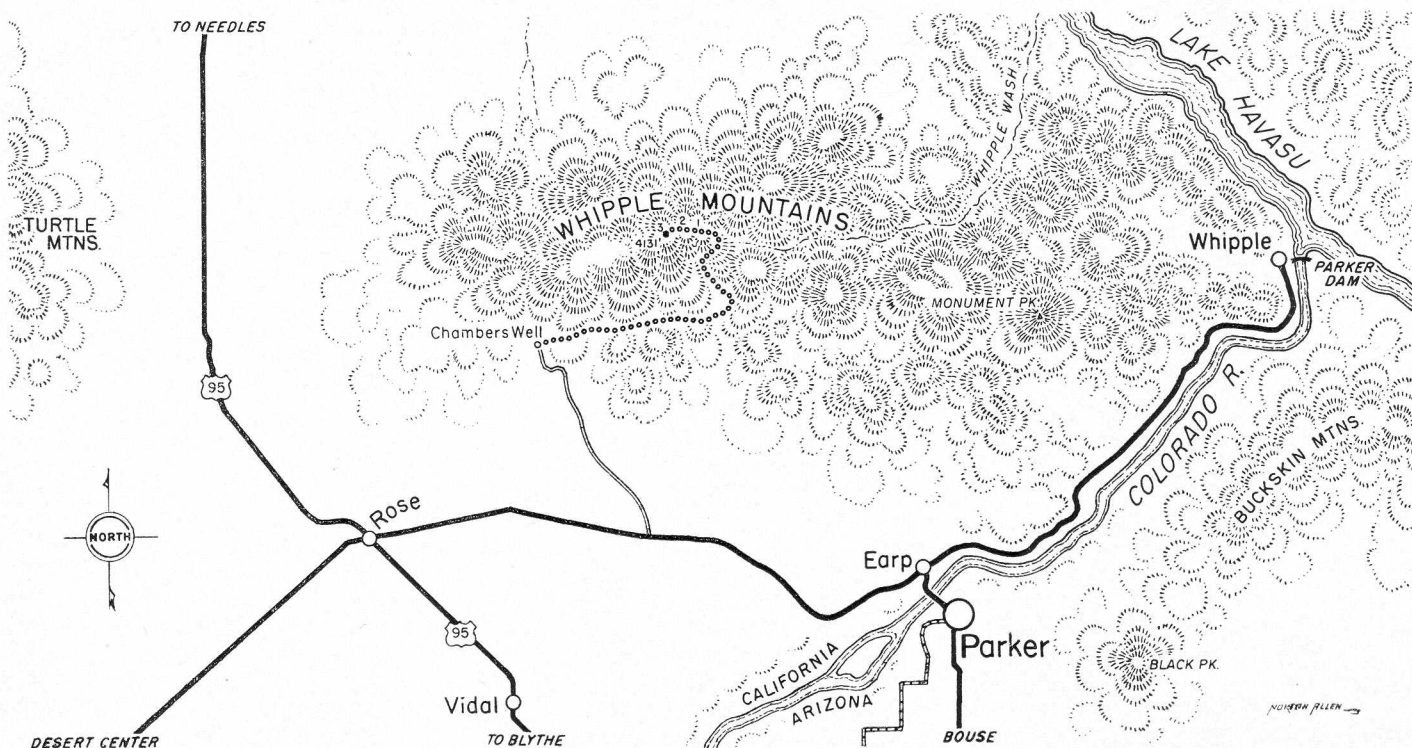
From "Whipple III," 4131 feet above sea level and the summit at last, the terrain fell away in all directions. Lower ridges to the east still blocked out a part of the river's loop around the range. Arizona ranges undulated dark brown as far as the eye could travel.

We stood on the top of the Whipple Mountains on February 22, 1953. Exactly 100 years before, Lieutenant Amiel Weeks Whipple was camped with his party of engineers, topographers, geologists, astronomers, botanists, artists, soldiers and Indian guides in the Chemehuevi Valley at the foot of the Whipple Range. They were surveying for a railroad which was roughly to follow the 35th parallel from Fort Smith, Missouri, to the Pacific Ocean.

The valley which we viewed from our pinnacle perch was far from desolate when Whipple was there.

"The beautiful valley of the Chemehuevis Indians is about five miles broad and eight or ten miles in length," he reported in his journal, published in 1941 as *A Pathfinder in the Southwest*. "As we ascended the eastern edge, we saw numerous villages and a belt of cultivated fields upon the opposite bank. Great numbers of the natives swam the river and brought loads of grain and vegetables. . . . After traveling between 11 and 12 miles, we encamped upon the coarse but abundant grass of the valley." This was Whipple's Camp 130, February 23, 1853.

One of the members of Whipple's party was young Lieutenant Joseph C. Ives. A few years later, Ives commanded an army expedition of his own, exploring the Colorado River in the clumsy steamer, the *Explorer*. It was he who named The Monument, most prominent peak in the Whipple range. "A slender and perfectly symmetrical spire that furnishes a striking landmark, as it can be seen from a great way down the river in beautiful relief





Final victory on the summit of Whipple III, highest point in the Whipple range. Left to right, standing—Barbara Lilley, Louise Werner, Ned Smith, John Delmonte, Garver Light, Willard Dean, Monte Griffin, Jack Hudson, Bryce Miller, James Delmonte, Walt Heninger, Marvin Stevens; seated—Mary Crothers, Bernice Heninger.

against the sky," he described it in his *Report Upon the Colorado River of the West*.

The peak so impressed Ives that he called the entire range the Monument Mountains. Another of the peaks he called Mount Whipple after his former commander. When the Geological Survey mapped the Parker Quadrangle in 1902-03, it applied Whipple's name to the entire mountain mass in the bend of the Colorado, preserving the old name in Monument Peak.

We would have liked to linger longer on the top of the Whipples. The warmth of the sun bathed our pleasantly aching muscles as we lunched and enjoyed the view. "I ain't mad at nobody," remarked Walt.

Reluctantly we started down. Picking up our companions on Whipples II and I, we jogged down a draw south of the ridge we had ascended.

Suddenly a dry falls stopped our rapid progress. Its granite trough, water polished in some past age, was

marble smooth. The rock climbing enthusiasts enjoyed hugging the slippery wall, groping for foot- and hand-holds. Others found it disconcerting to trust their weight on a tiny knob of stone or a precariously slanting slab on the sheer rock face. With teamwork, all soon were safely down.

Several dry falls later, we found ourselves in a deep, narrow canyon. Deciding we were a little off course, John headed toward a saddle to our right. On its other side, an army of cholla lay in ambush. Sparring with cholla in the fresh of the morning was one thing; attacking it after a long day of climbing was quite another.

But just over the next swell we dropped down into camp at Chambers Well. Mrs. Delmonte had water boiling and invited us to tea. It wasn't long before dinner fires were blazing and plates heaped with food. Oh, the ambrosial flavor of beans, frankfurters, canned peaches and billy-boiled coffee after 12 hours on the trail!

INTERNATIONAL BIG BEND PARK IN PLANNING STAGE

First steps toward expanding Big Bend National Park into an international park spanning the Rio Grande were made at informal meetings between Mexican and U. S. officials in Mexico City. The proposed park has been in the planning stage since 1935. It would join Big Bend's 700,000 acres to 500,000 acres in Mexico. It would be free of all customs and immigration red tape, and tourists could cross from Texas into Mexico without even tourist cards. Texas proponents of the idea believe the addition of spectacular Mexican scenery would draw more Big Bend visitors. And Mexican officials hope that tourists would continue into the Mexican interior. Lon Garrison, superintendent of Big Bend National Park, expressed optimism that the current talks would be successful. He was to step up January 1 in the National Park Service through a transfer to Washington.—*Los Angeles Times*.