



Shiprock, core of an ancient volcano stands on the New Mexico desert—a challenge to all the fraternity of mountain climbers. Spencer Air Photo.

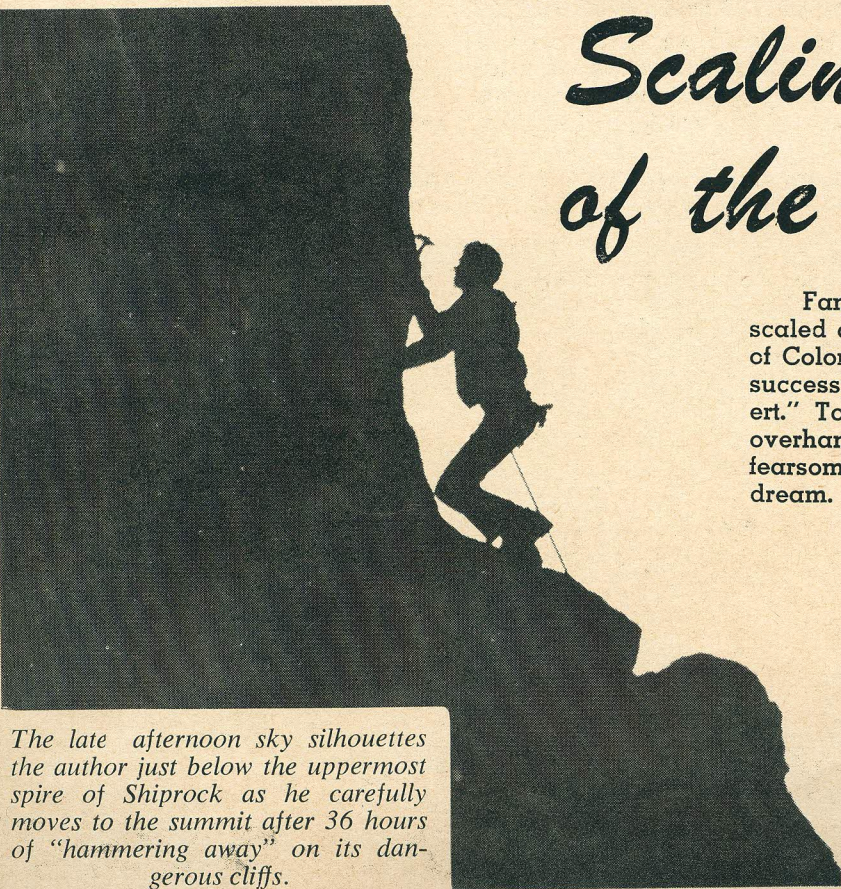
Scaling the Ship of the Desert . . .

Famous Shiprock of New Mexico had been scaled only seven times before these four students of Colorado A&M College made their second and successful attempt to master the "ship of the desert." To stand on its summit they battled its double overhang, the "Horn," friction traverses and its fearsome height for 36 hours, fulfilling a year-long dream.

By DOUGLAS E. KELLY
Photos by Party Members

COOL DESERT AIR freshened our cheeks and filled our lungs as we stood at the base of the imposing ship of the desert, the famous Shiprock of New Mexico.

The first fingers of a rosy dawn stretched from the eastern horizon into the hazel black sky above us as we started our ascent of one of the toughest, most challenging rock climbs in the country.



The late afternoon sky silhouettes the author just below the uppermost spire of Shiprock as he carefully moves to the summit after 36 hours of "hammering away" on its dangerous cliffs.



Equipment used in the climb of Shiprock included 7/16 inch nylon climbing rope, 1/4 inch nylon climbing rope, Bramani soled climbing boots, piton hammer, assorted types of pitons (center), two types of karabiners (upper left center), and an expansion bolt assembly with an expansion bolt drill (upper right center). The group was equipped with seven ropes of over 100 feet each, eight expansion bolts, 50 pitons and 15 karabiners.

Only seven parties of skilled climbers had conquered it. We were embarking on our second attempt. This time we felt conditions were so near perfect we would succeed.

It was May 15 and the weather was cool and cloudy—perfect for climbing. We had an array of equipment, Bramani soled shoes, hundreds of feet of rope, expansion bolts, pitons and more. It was an expensive supply of climbing paraphernalia that had been accumulated as our year-long dream of climbing Shiprock had grown.

The four members of our climbing party, all students of Colorado A&M College, were welded together by a common, driving ambition to scale Shiprock, from previous expeditions and months of climbing practice on mountains near school, from a previous defeat by Shiprock that crystallized our determination.

Most experienced mountain climber in our group was Dick Stenmark, member of the Colorado Mountain club and the exclusive "52 club," restricted to persons who have scaled all peaks over 14,000 feet in Colorado. Upon completion of school he expects to become a ranger with the U. S. National Park Service.

Then there was Erik Barnes, youngest member of our party and a student of veterinary medicine. He

has traveled extensively, around the world last summer, and hopes for a career in South America where there are also plenty of peaks to be climbed.

Jack Morehead was a member of the group, making the climb on a leg weakened by a fracture two years earlier in a skiing accident. Jack, too,

Members of the successful climbing expedition were (left to right): Dick Stenmark, Jack Morehead, Erik Barnes and Douglas E. Kelly, the author.



is a forestry student and hopes to serve with the U. S. National Park Service.

And I was the fourth member. I became interested in mountain climbing in Colorado, though I now live in California where I have just now made a start on the peaks of that region. A zoology student, I plan to do graduate work at Stanford University.

The Shiprock was not a mystery to us as we tackled it. We had studied all available literature on it, discussed it thoroughly with men who had conquered it and examined their photographs.

Shiprock, we learned, has an interesting history. Naturally enough, much of the rock's early story comes as legends from Navajo Indians of that region. They call it *tae-bidahi*, meaning the "winged rock."

According to one legend the rock was a great ship that carried Navajo forefathers from the north—hence the name Shiprock. Tales that Indians seeking refuge from war climbed the rock, I can testify, are grossly exaggerated.

Actually Shiprock is the plug of a volcano. Outer parts of the ancient cone have eroded away, leaving the beautiful 1,700-foot core of igneous rock towers.

Extending out from its base are several long dikes, formed by the intrusion of molten rock into cracks around the formerly active cone.

Hardened and eroded, they remain as long rock-like spokes from the hub of a wheel. Two are especially large, extending almost directly south and west. From certain viewpoints these

