



*This photograph was taken just below the south summit; upper part of the Pinnacle Ridge runs diagonally across the picture from the left to upper right, showing some of the difficulties encountered on that route, usually underestimated by climbers when seen from other directions.*

Photo by Louise Werner

## ***Baja's Pico del Diablo*** (*Peak of the Devil!*)

BY CRAIG FORREST

One hundred miles south of the border in Baja California, Pico del Diablo, 10,136 feet, dominates the skyline of the Sierra San Pedro Martir Range. Driving south from Mexicali to San Felipe, the entire range looks like any other desert range in California, Nevada, or Arizona. But this range holds surprises: A tropical canyon with a year-round rushing stream that comes from no lake or glacier, and a peak that will challenge the utmost in mountaineering skill and stamina. During the recent Thanksgiving holiday, a group of 23 Sierra Club members (which included some with reputations for incredible stamina) failed to make the summit over a four- and five-day period. Actually, at least five *full* days should be allowed for the climb via the "easiest" route up Canyon del Diablo from the east side of the range. Almost invariably, newcomers to the San Pedro Martir Range will underestimate the difficulties and not get anywhere near the summit on their first try.

Until 1953, the most popular route to the double-summitted Pico del Diablo was from the west over the western plateau, dropping down 3,500 feet at the head of Canon Diablo to avoid the Pinnacle Ridge. During this time, Ed Bernhard of Coronado, California, was exploring the possibilities of a route from the east. After six summer vacations, he found a route directly to the summit from Canon Diablo. However, the route is tricky—any deviation and the climber will find himself in a hopeless cul-de-sac.

To get to the take-off point on the eastern side of the range, drive south from Mexicali 94 miles toward San Felipe to the Kilometer 142 sign where you will find a dirt road leading off to the right toward La Trinidad. Follow this road, but keep to the left at the La Trinidad turnoff, to a dry lake bed and a right turn-off to "Rancho Santa Clara," approximately 40 miles. The road from this point on is private land and you should stop at the rancho and ask permission to use the road, which continues another 7 miles to the mouth of Canon Diablito, about 2,100 feet in elevation.

From the end of the road, traverse right on foot about 2 miles along the foot of the range to the mouth of Canon Diablo. One-half mile up this canyon you will encounter your first of many obstacles: sheer, smooth granite walls narrow to a small waterfall that drops only 6 feet into a pool of water 25 feet wide and about 9 feet deep. Without artificial aid, such as bolts or a ladder, it is impassable and involves a 2- or 3-hour detour over a high ridge on the north wall. Not only does this detour involve third class rock climbing with a pack, but it introduces you to the mental hazard of climbing over long-needed cactus, a frequent encounter in the long route that follows.

The Sierra Club group found a long plank which they carried up to the waterfall, tied a rope to one end, waded

out to their shoulders in the pool, flung the end over the waterfall, and while they held one end in the pool, another pulled himself up the plank with the rope. Once the rope was secured over the waterfall, the others were able to pull themselves up.

Future climbers might consider placing 3 to 6 bolts along the left side of the waterfall, which would eliminate the long detour.

Above the waterfall, there are miles of bushwhacking up the canyon, rock climbing around waterfalls, and boulder-hopping in the streambed. You quickly learn to give a wide berth to catclaw, thorny palo verde branches, and cactus. You pass by waterfalls under which are deep caverns filled with tropical-type ferns and moss.

A few hours above the first waterfall, the canyon divides. Stay in the canyon to the left. After some more bushwhacking, the canyon narrows and you pass through colorfully-stratified rock walls. The canyon divides again, and this time stay in the canyon to the right by detouring up the left wall. You pass by some tall cedar trees, which indicates you are within 3 or 4 hours of Cedaroak Camp, base-camp and a necessary landmark for the following of the Bernhard Route to Pico del Diablo. It is this author's opinion that Cedaroak Camp cannot be reached in less than two days, unless a person travels at night. (Who wants to bushwhack through catclaw and cactus at night?)

Because of the possibility of confusion about the Bernhard route from Cedaroak Camp, the following is the route description given by Ed Bernhard to Louise Werner and which has been followed successfully to the summit of Pico del Diablo:

"Cedaroak Camp is invisible from the streambed. It lies 50 feet above it, on the peak side (left). Look for a large ducked boulder blocking streambed. Continue 200 yards toward a rock wash on the left slope. Camp is adjacent to this rock wash, which is the beginning of the Bernhard Route to the summit. (If you miss it and come to two successive long, thin falls, you have gone 1/4 mile too far.)

"From Cedaroak Camp, it is second class, with now and then a third and fourth class step. To avoid false leads, keep in mind that the summit is never visible until you are almost on it. Before beginning the climb, orient yourself with respect to the invisible summit and the main features of the landscape. Stand on a knoll in the open above Cedaroak Camp, face the rim of the western plateau. Raise your left arm directly in front of you. It should parallel the Pinnacle Ridge which stretches from the plateau to the summit. Make a mental note that the invisible summit lies

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GULF OF CALIFORNIA

VALLE DE SAN FELIPE

PICO DEL DIABLO

CANYON DEL DIABLO

LA ENCANTADA

*An aerial photo of the Sierra San Pedro Martir Range in Lower California. Pico del Diablo is the highest mountain on the peninsula and because of the approach problems is a very difficult peak to climb. Canyon del Diablo starts on the northeast side of the peak and, incredibly, circles around to the west side. There are no lakes, no glaciers, yet Diablo Canyon has a year-round rushing stream of water that disappears soon after reaching the Valle de San Felipe (San Felipe Desert). Photographer is unknown. Identification with the help of Ches Wood.*

*Passage between the two  
Pico del Diablo lies past this defile. A ropeway  
carried if your objective includes the north summit  
by Jerry Gallwas in 1950 to be 20 in  
than the south summit.  
Photo by*

