

Climbing the State High Points of the U. S.

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EXPEDITIONARY exploration of one's hobbies, whether geographical, mental, or esthetic, is a fascinating pastime. Comparative expeditions stamp the parts of a project into more vivid contrast than the ultra-prevalent practice of cream-skimming. I confess to a weakness for expeditionary collecting: starting 30 years ago with a bicycle tour of high road passes of the European Alps; next, a series of pilgrimages to Sunday sermons at 40 better-known New York City churches; then a literary expedition, which involved reading at least one book of all living authors of note; later a joint violin-playing exploration of 75 famous string quartets; thence to canoeing the rivers within 100 miles of New York, alternated during dry seasons by walking a 1300-mile section of the Appalachian Trail; finally a pursuit of the State high points of the U. S.

I had a flying start, as I had already climbed nine State high points before the thought occurred of attempting a complete project. My first high was Mt. Marcy, N. Y. (5344 ft.) in 1909. That same summer I first visited Mt. Washington, N. H. (6288 ft.), climbing it, seated with a bicycle astride the coal of the rack-and-pinion locomotive tender, afterward enjoying a glorious coast eight miles down the carriage road to Glen House, then a straight-away coast of 15 more miles to Glen Station. This was before the invasion of motors. At that time the first 50 yards of road unwound off the summit at about a 17% grade. My bicycle, however, was safely equipped with two strong brakes, but the coaster brake friction provoked unearthly screeches of protest, accompanied by blue smoke of burning lubricating oil.

My third high came five years later when I did Mt. Greylock (3505 ft.) in Massachusetts and hitch-hiked back to New York City at a time when the practice had not yet become abused.

My fourth and fifth trips, Mt. Mansfield, Vt. (4393 ft.), and Mt. Mitchell, N. C. (6684 ft.), were climbed in 1917 during Sundays off from army training camps. On the descent of Mt. Mitchell my companion and I coasted down the mountain railway on a little truck, controlled by a weak hand-brake. We descended

slowly, picking out en route possible soft landing places, should we lose control and have to jump.

Mt. Katahdin (5268 ft.), in Maine, tallied sixth in 1925 as an interesting interlude during a canoe trip down the West Branch of the Penobscot River. In March, 1928, I checked off High Point, N. J. (1801 ft.), in the N. W. corner of that State.

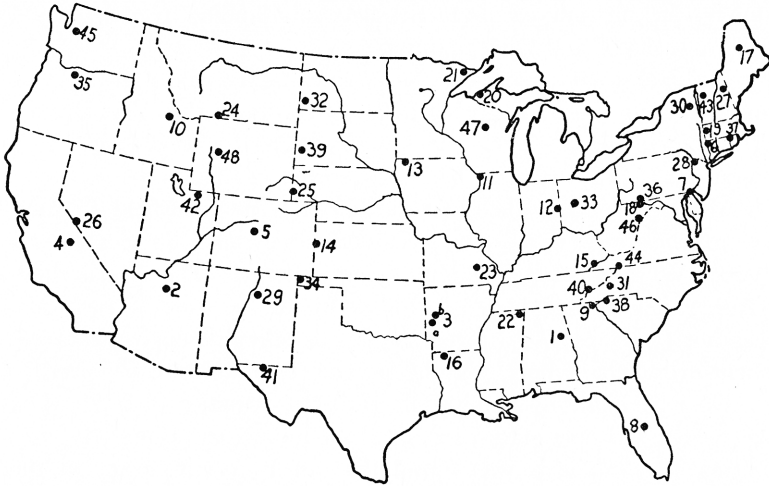
My eighth high, Bear Mt. (2355 ft.), in Litchfield County, Conn., was visited on our week-end honeymoon in September, 1930. What a grimy, delightful, honeymoon! The Appalachian Trail which we had hoped to follow up the N. side of Bear Mt. was not yet blazed, so a direct route was taken through a charred, burnt-over area, where clothing became thoroughly carbonized.

No new highest summits fell until the Summer of 1934 when we visited ten new states during a one-month vacation. By consulting time-tables it was found that an E.-W. itinerary in the Western States enabled the inclusion of more states than a N.-S. itinerary because of the better service on the transcontinental railroads. The first day out we succeeded by dint of careful time-table planning and an expensive taxi ride in covering two highs in one day, Campbell Hill in Logan County, Ohio (1550 ft.), and Greensfork Top in Randolph County, Indiana (1240 ft.). The thermometer was 110° in the shade. There was no one top in Indiana, simply a flat stretch of field averaging about the same elevation. We motored to the general area, said "Check!" and returned to the nearest railroad station.

The following day we captured the noble trophy of Charles Mound (1241 ft.), in Jo Daviess County, N. W. corner of Illinois. As the name implies, the top is only a gentle mound mangily covered with a few oak trees, just above a dried-up farm yard, where goats lay, heat-drowsy.

Next came Harney Peak (7242 ft.), in the Black Hills of South Dakota, unique because of its curious needle-like rock formations, resembling miniature Dolomite peaks. Harney Peak was easily climbed from Sylvan Lake Lodge, 9 miles N. of Custer, by a 4-mile horse trail ascending only 1000 ft. in elevation. A forest ranger's lookout cabin crowns the small rock summit.

From South Dakota we jumped to Oregon's high, Mt. Hood (11,245 ft.), a one-day climb from Cloud Cap Inn, situated at 6000 ft. on its slope. We trudged up the loose stones of Cooper Spur to a snow slope, where, roped, we toiled up to the summit



MAP SHOWING LOCATION OF HIGH POINTS OF THE UNITED STATES

crest. On about the last 1500 ft., part of which slopes over 55° , the Crag Rats of Portland had installed a fixed rope secured by metal spikes driven into the snow. A week previous our guide and four others had conducted 92 Crag Rats up this route. When we climbed the face the snow had become deeply furrowed by wind, rendering the foot-steps which we kicked more slippery and uncertain without crampons than on a smooth slope, thus prolonging the ascent from the usual 5 hours to 7.5 hours. The fixed rope obviated having to cut steps, but hand-pulling proved clumsy and fatiguing because of lost balance. The limitless view to the N. over miles of billowy clouds toward three other solitary "Snow Sentinels of the Northwest," as Joseph T. Hazard well describes them,—Mt. St. Helens, a perfect volcanic, Mt. Adams, larger in outline, and Mt. Rainier's insolent, truncated crest, 110 miles away,—was the second most sublime distant spectacle I have ever seen (Mt. McKinley comes first).

After its surly challenge when on Mt. Hood we could hardly wait to attack Mt. Rainier (14,408 ft.), Washington's highest peak, but old King Weather interfered. A start was made at 2 A.M. on the second day from the stone hut at Camp Muir, 10,000 ft. and by lantern light we had ascended on crampons to a ledge about 11,500 ft., opposite the well-known Gibraltar Rock. A dark cloud cap had settled on the snowy summit dome, indicating high wind.

THE 48 STATE HIGH POINTS OF THE UNITED STATES*
(Arranged alphabetically by States)

Map No.	State	Name	County	Altitude	Order in Altitude
1	Alabama	Cheaha Mt.	Clay-Talladega	2407	33
2	Arizona	Humphreys Pk.	Coconino	12,611	10
3a	Arkansas	Blue Mt.	Polk-Scott	2800	32
b		Magazine Mt.	Logan	2800	32
4	California	Mt. Whitney	Inyo-Tulare	14,495	1
5	Colorado	Mt. Elbert	Lake	14,431	2
6	Connecticut	Bear Mt.	Litchfield	2355	34
7	Delaware	Centerville	New Castle	440	47
8	Florida	Iron Mt.	Polk	325	48
9	Georgia	Brasstown Bald Mt.	Towns-Union	4784	23
10	Idaho	Borah Pk.	Custer	12,655	9
11	Illinois	Charles Mound	Jo Daviess	1241	42
12	Indiana	Greensfork Top	Randolph	1240	43
13	Iowa	West bound. of Co.	Osceola	1675	40
14	Kansas	West bound. of State	Wallace	4135	26
15	Kentucky	Big Black Mt.	Harlan	4150	25
16	Louisiana	B.M. at Athens (Old)	Claiborne	469	46
17	Maine	Mt. Katahdin	Piscataquis	5268	20
18	Maryland	Backbone Mt.	Garrett	3340	30
19	Massachusetts	Mt. Greylock	Berkshire	3505	28
20	Michigan	Porcupine Mts.	Ontonagon	2023	36
21	Minnesota	Misquah Hills	Cook	2230	35
22	Mississippi	Near Iuka	Tishomingo	806	44
23	Missouri	Taum Sauk Mt.	Iron	1772	39
24	Montana	Granite Peak	Park	12,850	8
25	Nebraska	S.W. part of Co.	Banner	5340	19
26	Nevada	Boundary Pk.	Esmeralda	13,145	7
27	New Hampshire	Mt. Washington	Coos	6288	16
28	New Jersey	High Point	Sussex	1801	38
29	New Mexico	N. Truchas Pk.	Rio Arriba	13,306	6
30	New York	Mt. Marcy	Essex	5344	18
31	North Carolina	Mt. Mitchell	Yancey	6684	14
32	North Dakota	Black Butte	Slope	3468	29
33	Ohio	Campbell Hill	Logan	1550	41
34	Oklahoma	Black Mesa	Cimarron	4978	21
35	Oregon	Mt. Hood	Clackamas-Hood River	11,245	11
36	Pennsylvania	Negro Mt.	Somerset	3213	31
37	Rhode Island	Durfee Hill	Providence	805	45
38	South Carolina	Sassafras Mt.	Pickens	3548	27
39	South Dakota	Harney Peak	Pennington	7242	13
40	Tennessee	Clingmans Dome	Sevier	6642	15
41	Texas	Signal Pk.	Culberson	8751	12
42	Utah	Kings Pk.	Duchesne	13,498	5
43	Vermont	Mt. Mansfield	Lamoille	4393	24
44	Virginia	Mt. Rogers	Grayson-Smyth	5720	17
45	Washington	Mt. Rainier	Pierce	14,408	3
46	West Virginia	Spruce Knob	Pendleton	4860	22
47	Wisconsin	Rib Hill	Marathon	1940	37
48	Wyoming	Gannett Pk.	Fremont	13,785	4

* Based on Bulletin 11892, U. S. Geological Survey, Department of the Interior, Washington, D. C., dated January 3, 1938, and corrected in pencil March 2, 1943, to agree with the file copy of that office.

We waited for two chilly hours, but the cloud cap showed no signs of disappearing, so we descended to Paradise Inn. Indications of continued rain persuaded us to postpone indefinitely further attempts, so we took the North Coast Limited east.

On the way east we stopped at three highest points requiring long motor trips to reach. From Dickinson, N. D., we motored 65 miles S. W. through a bare, drought-stricken area to Black Butte (3468 ft.), North Dakota's high, at the edge of the Badlands in Slope County. I had mentally pictured Black Butte as a button

with unscalable walls. No ascent, however, could be easier. When the road nearing its base petered out we simply continued motoring over the smooth prairie without a trail until close to the base. The ascent was a mere half-hour walk up a gentle open spur to the flat table top of the butte, less than 1000 ft. above the plain. As the temperature was 107° we were entirely satisfied with the shortness of the climb. Our driver brought a rifle to pop at stray coyotes (\$5 bounty) but this was no day for a self-respecting coyote to leave his hole.

Michigan's highest summit, Porcupine Mt. (2023 ft.), in the N. W. part of Ontonagon County, in the Upper Peninsula, was next reached by a 60-mile motor ride from Ironwood, the nearest convenient large town. This is a heavily-wooded region, full of wild life. Of these Middle Western humps, Porcupine Mt. is the wildest and most attractive. The ascent by trail at the end of the road took only 20 minutes. From the summit one overlooks Lake Superior. Here, as in North Dakota, the breeze was too scorching hot for us to eat lunch comfortably on top.

The last summit was Rib Hill (1940 ft.), Wisconsin's highest, a wooded hill in Marathon County 3 miles from Wausau, with a carefully graded and surfaced State road leading up it. In order to register it as a climb we dismounted from our taxi at the base and walked up. Rising about 1000 ft. above its base, it is the only eminence of any size so far as the eye can reach.

That Fall we plucked two more easy high points: one on the main street of Centerville, Del., 440 ft.; the other, Durfee Hill, 805 ft., a nondescript woody upland in Providence County in the N. W. corner of Rhode Island.

On a 1935 New Year's holiday trip we gathered the highs of Kentucky and Virginia, under unfavorable weather conditions. From Abingdon, Va., we motored 75 miles W. on a good, but winding road to the coal mining town of Norton, then up a looping road to a notch on Big Black Mt. at 3700 ft., after which a quarter hour grope through dense fog and sleet to the 4150-ft. summit. The following day we motored through driving rain 32 miles E. from Abingdon to a pass between White Top and Mt. Rogers, Virginia's highest (boundary between Grayson and Smyth County). A circuitous 3.5-mile walk in the teeth of a furious windy fog landed us on Mt. Rogers' snow-crested summit of 5720-ft. elevation.

A Fall vacation in 1935 provided opportunity for capturing five more high points in some of the hotter Southwestern States. Missouri's high, Taum Sauk Mt., 1772 ft., in Iron County, was reached by motoring N. from Lesterville about 6 miles over a crazy road through the thickly forested Ozarks, twice fording Taum Sauk Creek. The road became impassable by motor. Here there are several nearby hills; it is impossible for a stranger to judge the highest; furthermore the correct route was too complicated to follow by instructions. So we induced a farm boy to guide us on foot over an easy trail 4 miles to the base of the hill; then a short quarter-hour scramble without trail to the rocks on top.

Our next objective was Magazine Mt., Logan County, Ark. This is one of Arkansas' two highest points, which are of equal height (2800 ft.), the other being Blue Mt., in Polk and Scott Counties.¹ We reached our objective by motoring 15 miles from Booneville, E. to the settlement of Blue Mt. at the base of Magazine Mt., then ascending a 5-mile foot trail to the summit. At the W. end of the summit plateau was situated unpretentious Sky Top Inn. The friendly landlady reported having once worked as a nurse in Mt. Sinai Hospital, New York. City noises, however, became too nerve-wracking,—her only refuges of quiet being the Brick Presbyterian Church and the X-ray room of the hospital.

Oklahoma's high, Black Mesa, Cimarron County (4978 ft.), in the panhandle of that State, required a 90-mile motor trip from Dalhart, Tex., to Kenton, Okla., near the western boundary. This was a lawless no-man's land in pioneer days, vividly depicted by Edna Ferber's *Cimarron*. Many areas had again become no-man's land because of terrific dust storms of the previous April. The ascent of the plateau of Black Mesa took only a half hour steep, rough walk from Kenton.

The Texas high point, Signal Peak (El Capitan), 8751 ft., in the Guadalupe Mts., just S. of the New Mexico-Texas boundary, lies in the rear of a spectacular buttress, visible for many miles, projecting into the desert to the S. We reached the base by motoring 75 miles W. from Carlsbad, N. M., over the desert ground swells of the road to El Paso. The climb, of six hours round trip, consisted of a steep, rocky, ridge walk, where leather puttees were

¹ According to *Appalachia* (Dec. 1936, 178), a new survey for a modern road to the top of Magazine Mt. places its elevation at 2883 ft.

a helpful protection against Spanish Dagger, also a mental comfort as regards possible rattlers. On the way up we watched a herd of mule deer soon outdistance us, as they effortlessly glided in single file up a parallel ridge.

North Truchas Peak (13,306 ft.), the roof of New Mexico, in Sangre de Cristo Mts. was reached by a long but pleasurable horseback ride from Mountain View Ranch at Cowles along a scenic ridge to within 1000 ft. of the top. The Truchas range contains three closely-located peaklets of almost equal height. A conspicuous cairn crowns the southernmost peaklet, which is locally claimed to be the highest; but just to guarantee that the climb would not have to be repeated some day (which was necessary in Arizona and Minnesota) I dashed across high saddles to the other two peaklets and back to the horses in four hours round trip; thence descending after dark to Beatty's Cabin (9500 ft.), S. E. of the peak, for the night.

During the Christmas holiday of 1935 we planned to avoid vigorous northern weather and collect a few southeastern high points. In South Carolina a 5-mile road leads from the Pickens-Rosman highway to a ranger's tower on the highest summit, Sassafras Mt., 3548 ft., but we took a 3-mile foot-trail short-cut. We had hoped to do the Georgia high-point the following day, but that project was balked overnight by a 12-inch snowfall, followed by an almost unprecedented ice storm which destroyed many trees in the region; so for consolation a train trip was taken to the Bok Tower in Polk County, Fla., the site of which is only 325 ft., the lowest highest of all the States.

In 1936 serious competition arose for the high-point championship. A. H. Marshall, of Vancouver, Wash, had already climbed all State high points over 7000 ft. A barrage of postals was exchanged between us, taunting the other each time a new hump was tallied. We had to step fast. In the early Summer we flew to Memphis and on return methodically visited southern high points, starting with Louisiana. En route to the high spot near Athens, in Claiborne County, the altitude of the high point, 469 ft., sufficiently impressed our lowland driver to remark, "It must be a nice place to live, up in these cool hills." After some uncertainty as to the exact place, we found the bench-mark, right in the middle of a cornfield. We then retraced to Mississippi, where the high point (806 ft.), was easily found on one of two wooded knolls

reachable by motor about 3 miles S. E. of Iuka, Tishomingo County, in the N. of the State.

Next came Mt. Cheaha (2407 ft.), in a lovely State Park between Clay and Talladega Counties, S. of Anniston, Ala., another road ascent. The next day another motor trip took us from Gainesville, Ga., almost to the top of Brasstown Bald Mt., Georgia's high. At the road end a half-hour foot trail leads to the summit tower, 4784 ft. Subsequent objective, Clingmans Dome, 6642 ft., in the Great Smokies of Tennessee was also a motor ride to within half-hour's walk of the spruce-covered summit, which lacked a view, but where a tower was reported to be planned. Our southern trip ended with a motor ride from Virginia westward over several Allegheny ridges to Spruce Knob, 4860 ft., the high point of West Virginia, Pendleton County in the N. E. of the State. Straddling the Virginia-West Virginia border is a beer house. West Virginia decided not to permit sale of beer; Virginia did; so the proprietor thereafter sold beer only on the Virginia side of the house. West Virginia state troopers raided him, but he won his case and continued business. At Circleville a brand new C. C. C. road led to within half a mile of the open, rocky, blueberry-patched top.

The crest of Maryland, Backbone Mt. (3340 ft.), Garrett County, was well named: we had difficulty in finding the highest vertebra in the backbone of a wooded ridge. This condition applied also to Pennsylvania's high point, Negro Mt. (3213 ft.), Somerset County, in the S. W. corner of the State.

In case a lack of enthusiasm is betrayed in the Southern trip narrative, let it be known that several of these visits were made during 100° temperatures. Then, to make us feel better, we received a postal from Marshall announcing the completion of all the 48 State summits.² Nevertheless we decided to continue completing as many as possible, especially as several interesting Western climbs were waiting to be enjoyed. The same Summer we joined an Appalachian Mountain Club party in Wyoming, visiting en route another cornfield representing Iowa's high point, 1675 ft., on the W. boundary of Osceola County; also Nebraska's high, 5340 ft., in a treeless chicken yard in Banner County at the western State border. Gannett Peak (13,785 ft.), Wyoming's

² A. H. Marshall, "Forty-eight State Summits," *Appalachia*, December, 1936, pp. 167-181.

highest peak, in the Wind River Range, is fairly remote, so we were glad to profit by the pack-train and camping facilities provided by the A. M. C., as well as the leadership of those who were familiar with the region. A high camp was based at the head of the Titcomb Valley, and two days after the exhilaration of a first ascent of G-15, a party of us gained the base of Gannett via a glacier edge reeking with dead locusts, whose migration was apparently blocked by the Continental Divide, then up a 1000-ft. ridge in a snow and furious wind storm to the more gradual rocky crown.

Our project continued in 1937 with a southwestern trip, stopping in the west of Kansas to locate the highest elevation of that State, 4135 ft., in Wallace County on the Kansas-Colorado boundary, in a barren, muddy, barbed-wire fence landscape.

A second high-point attempt had to be made in Arizona, in the San Francisco Mts. near Flagstaff, in correction of an error, two years previous, in having climbed the wrong summit, Agassiz Peak, on the S. side of the group; whereas we later learned that the highest elevation was Humphreys Peak (12,611 ft.), on the N. side. A motor took us up a narrow, exposed and poorly-maintained toll road to Fremont Saddle (10,800 ft.). Further motor progress was blocked by washouts. From the saddle was an easy 6.5-hour sky-line walk around a long semi-circular lip of an extinct crater. From the summit the N. rim of the Grand Canyon, 50 miles to the N. was clearly defined. The San Francisco Range is well-known for the usually interesting species of flora and fauna found at different altitude zones.

Our third high point that Summer was Mt. Elbert in Colorado (14,431 ft.), reached by motor from Leadville, to the E. of it. The most precarious part of this expedition was a 5 A.M. breakfast at Dago Mike's cafeteria in Leadville, where the prostrate forms of miners distributed in polymorphous stupors betrayed a gay Saturday night before. Climbing started from Half-moon Gulch up a steep, toilsome N. spur of the peak, rendered doubly fatiguing because of loose stones, which caused back-slipping. But labors were well rewarded by the magnificent summit view and the friendliness of rosy finches, which feed on the snowy tops of so many of the Rockies.

In 1938 the skylights of Nevada and California were added to my list. Boundary Peak (13,145 ft.), in the White Mts. of Nevada, Esmeralda County, was reached by motoring from Bishop, Calif.,

to 11 miles N. E. of Benton, then right-turning well up a mountain valley, where the road ended at a gold and silver mine. As I started to back-pack up to a shoulder of the mountain, the manager of the mine dashed after me excitedly and wanted to know my mission. I did not learn until my return the next day that the manager had been trying to sell his mining stock, and suspected this prospective purchaser of secretly trying to inspect the mines. Bivouac was shared with mosquitoes on a 10,000-ft. pass. Next morning at six I plugged along a steep, bare ridge up the peak; the climb resembling that of Mt. Elbert in Colorado, but longer, being twelve hours from bivouac-to-summit-to-road end.

A few days later I climbed Mt. Whitney (14,495 ft.) in California, the highest peak in the U. S., in orthodox manner via horse trail from the Outpost Camp above Lone Pine. Although as late as July 21, the trail above 11,500 ft., on the ascent to Whitney Pass, was obliterated by snow, and still impassable for horses. Snow-fed streams were cascading furiously everywhere: this combination of roaring torrents and Whitney's imposing E. face made one of the most scenic trips I've ever taken.

And now for the 44th and last high point trip undertaken to date: the highest of the Misquah Hills (2230 ft.) in Cook County, Minn., a lake region N. of Lake Superior, reached from Grand Marais. To reach the highest elevation required a long one-day canoe trip from Rockwood Camp and back involving ten carries. From the most distal lake, a lovely forested region, the high point was only 1 mile away, but screened by dense underbrush. We attempted to hold an E. S. E. compass direction as closely as thick raspberry bushes would permit. To facilitate direct return through tangled underbrush the advertising pages of our *Atlantic Monthly* were removed and fragments distributed at intervals, paper-chase fashion, which aid was later much appreciated.

To date we have travelled over 38,000 miles on this project. We still lack four interesting high points in the West: Mt. Rainier (14,408 ft.) in Washington; Borah Peak (12,655 ft.) in Custer County, Idaho; Kings Peak (13,498 ft.) remotely situated in Duchesne County, Utah; and Granite Peak (12,850 ft.), a difficult rock climb in Park County, Mont. Perhaps we shall never finish the project; no matter, because we're now pursuing another equally pleasant hobby: color filming North American birds.