

The Sierra



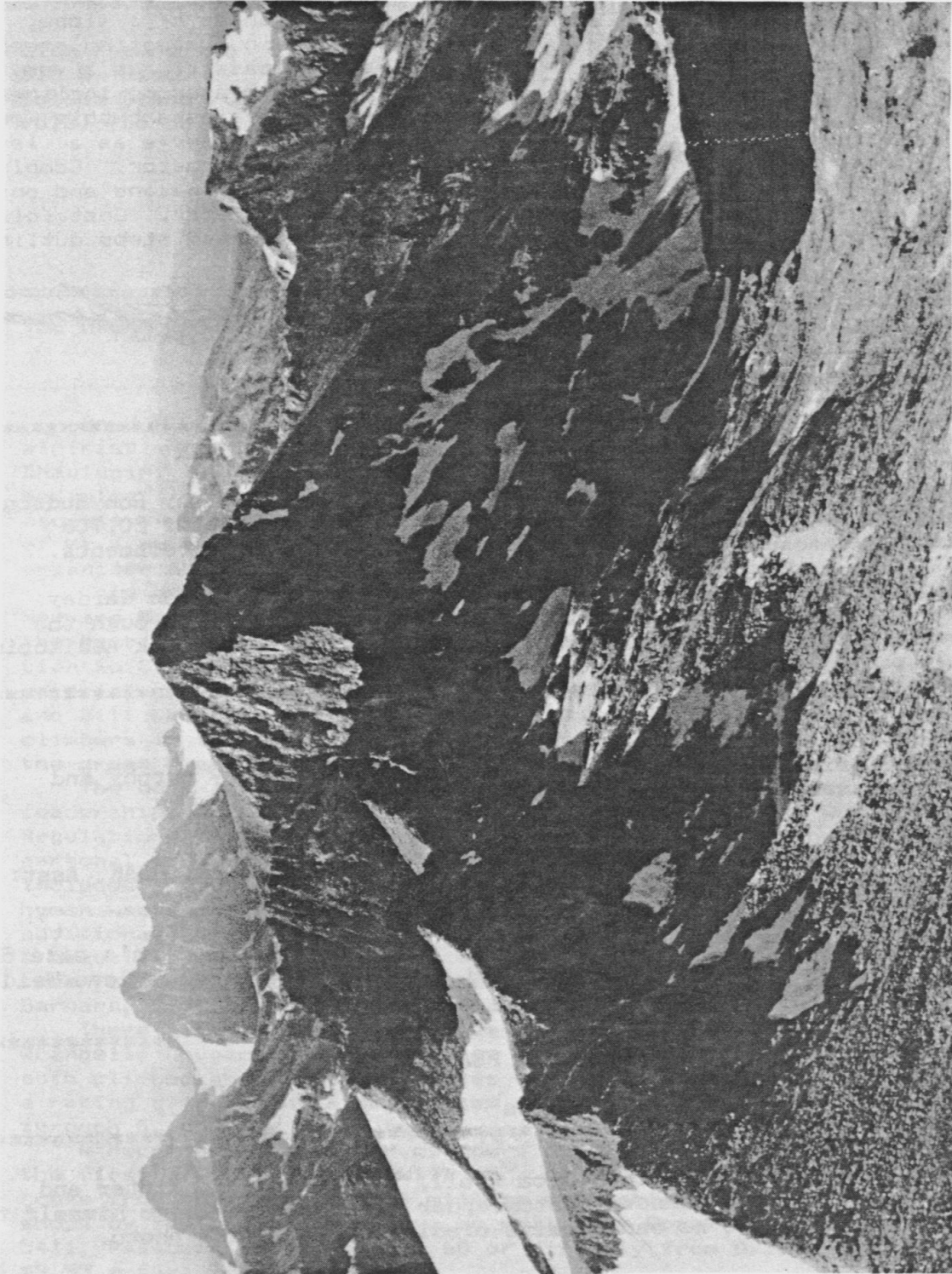
ECHO

VOLUME 29

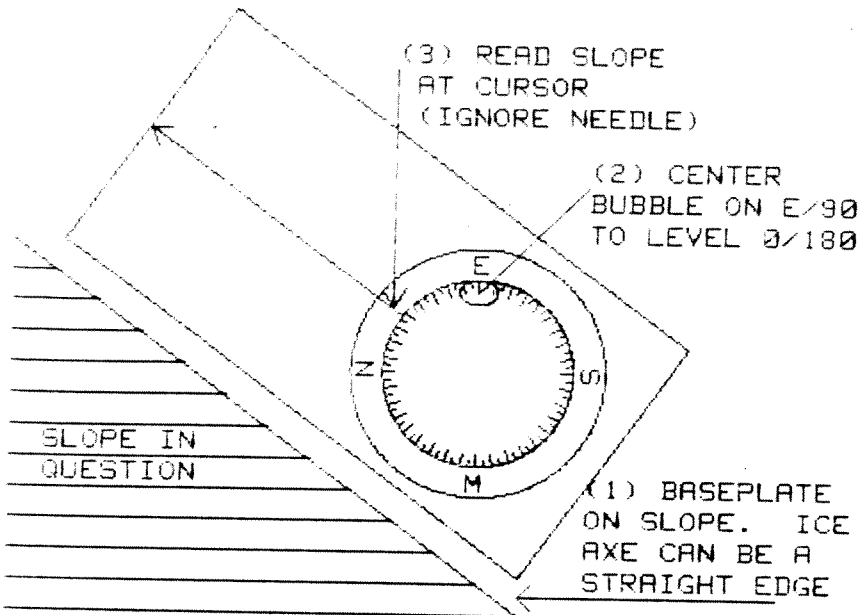
AUGUST

1985

NO. 5



This has turned into a year of low snow. Many of the snow-climb routes are nearly free of snow. One way, that's good news: we don't need to carry the extra weight of ice axes and crampons. The bad news is that many routes still have some snow. It's been there for years. It's hard! It's slippery! It's nearly pure ice! Take care! When in doubt, carry ice axe and crampons. Pay the weight penalty. It is low-cost insurance.



It is often desirable to know the steepness of a slope. This is true in evaluating steep snow. Your compass can be a very useful tool for measuring inclines. If it contains a bubble (most do), it can serve as a level. It is a protractor. Combine these functions and obtain an inclinometer. Just follow the three easy steps outlined in the sketch.

Dave Dykeman
Dave Dykeman

SPS PROGRAMS FOR SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER

September 11 Meeting: "Above 5000 Meters in Ecuador" by Ron Hudson. Join Ron as he climbs in Ecuador including the ascent of 20,708' Chimborazo. Griffith Park Auditorium. 7:30 p.m. Refreshments.

October 9 Meeting: "A New Way to Climb Mountains" by Jon Gardey. Extend yourself beyond techniques and experience self through the mountain travel and world knowledge of Jon. Griffith Park Auditorium. 7:30 p.m. Refreshments.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The SPS trip to Dunderberg and Excelsior to be led by Murphy and Gordon has been moved from Sept. 21-22 to Sept. 28-29.

SEPT 28-29 SAT-SUN SPS
M: Mt. Irvine(13,770'): From Meysan Lake. Leader: LARRY HOAK. Asst: MIKE WILKINSON. Contact LARRY at (213) 931-2614.

BOOTS FOR SALE: Slightly used all-leather PMS boots. Men's size 8N or women's size 9. \$40.00. Please call Vieve Weldon, 213-943-8508 if you are interested.

VOLUME 29-5 PEAK INDEX (1985)

Alta Lone Pine Silliman
Bradley Mexican Volcanoes

COVER PHOTO: Looking south from Lyell, we see Rogers, Ritter and Banner. Would the unknown photographer please acknowledge himself to the Echo Editor so he can receive credit for this fine photo.

MEMBERSHIP REPORT

NEW MEMBERS

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THE ORGANIZATION OF AN ALASKAN EXPEDITION by Boyd N Everett, Jr
Gorak Books, Pasadena

(Gorak is the SPS's own R. J. Secor)

A book review by Ron Jones

Boyd N. Everett, Jr, is a highly regarded climber and alpinist who died in an avalanche while on a reconnaissance of Dhaulagiri I in 1969. His ascents include several climbs of Mt McKinley (including a new route), a new route on Mt St Elias, 2 ascents of Mt Logan, a new route on King Pk and the first ascent of Mt King George. He was recognized as an expert expedition organizer as well.

This book was presented as a paper at a 1966 seminar of the Harvard Mountaineering Club. It is acknowledged to be perhaps the best source of information on preparing a mountain expedition to Alaska and the Yukon. Gorak Books has updated this material and it has been critically reviewed by Robert Somoano and Bill Krause. It can be of great value to experienced climbers in the preparation of a mountaineering expedition to the great American Cordillera in Alaska and the Yukon.

The book includes valuable sections on the Party and its leadership, Organization on the Mountain, Planning the Route, Regulations within various Parks in the area, Expedition and personal equipment, Food, Finances and other subjects which includes an entirely new section on mountain ethics-litter, human waste and fixed ropes. There is a bibliography and additional references listed in the text. The book is graced by a beautiful cover photo in color of the Mt Logan summit ridge taken by Barbara Lilley and numerous black and whites by Barbara, Bill Krause and Bob Somano.

There is a listing with 112 entries of peaks in the Alaska, Wrangell, Chugach and Mt St Elias Ranges with routes of ascent, both climbed and unclimbed, dates of 1st ascents or descents and a rating of peaks by a new system of Alaskan climbing grades, 1 through 6, done by Gorak books.

A recommended book for climbers interested in the area and the first of what we hope will be a series of fine mountain books from this source. It will be available in the mountain shops by the end of February, by mail from Gorak Books, P.O. Box 5411, Pasadena 91107 for \$10.60 or directly from R.J. Secor, \$9.95 + tax. --RON

ECHOS FROM THE PAST

Ron Jones

Five Years Ago in the SPS

Gene Mauk, Chair, in June 1980 extended the deadline for input into the SPS study on the "peaks list improvement program" to the end of the year. Several wide-ranging and thought provoking responses had been received. New members included Wes Shelberg, Nancy Gordon, Vladimir Lang, Manny Molina, Ross Yates, Nathan Wong, Renee Spargur, Peter Brooks, Cristina Stough and Kathy Bowman. New emblem holders included Mary Omberg (#401), Richard Kutsch, Bob Thompson, Al Hill, Herb Buehler, Pete Yamagata, Virgil Talbott, Dave Vandervoet, Mary McMannes, & Al Benson. Jim Erb became the 61st senior emblem holder and Greg Vernon the 16th list finisher. The climb of Volunteer, Petit and Piute by G Vernon, L Machleder, M & K Lohr, & E Schumacher was celebrated in the ECHO by a 32 stanza poem. On 8/15 7 hikers topped out on a private climb of Independence Pk. The AVERAGE age of the 4 youngest was 8 years, the average age of their parents (Nancy Gordon, Pete Mohn & Al Benson) was ** years. Many noteworthy trips were led including Lutz, McCosker & van Dalsem on a 12 peaks survey of northern California; Murphy, van Dalsem & Campy a 4 day climb of Devils Crag, Wheel and McDuffie.

Ten Years Ago

The development of a SPS program known as the Senior Emblem was taking place and will be listed on the 1975 year-end ballot for member approval. Tom Cardina found steady employment & had to relinquish his duties as SPS Treasurer. Cuno Ranschau, with more free time, took over. Paul Kellow fell to his death on the Swiss Matterhorn during a climb in stormy weather 7/24/75. Dick Ramirez & Mel Johnson led 10 on a 2 day climb of Goddard Pk (21 mi to base camp on day 1, 4 mi for the peak and a total of 25 out on day 2. John Fuhrman, age 10 (& his 13 year old brother) both carrying full backpacks were in the front of the group!! Murphy & Paul Kluth led Clark & Gray, Maynard Brandsma & Don Croley led Darwin, Ted & Anna Lou Pinson led 22 to Mt Langley. New members included Geo Neuner, Mel Lees, Bob Bruley, Ken Marks & Mark Hurst. "Campy" became emblem holder #312 followed by Bob Hicks, Milda Endzins, Jim & Pat Butler, Eivor Nilsson & Mary Bihl.

Twenty Years Ago

New members this period in 1965 included Tom McNicholas, Fred Hoepfner, Nate White and Ben Neffson. Roy Michel earned emblem #100 and Tom Ross became list finisher #2. Arkel Erb led 18 to Baldwin & Red Slate, Ken McNutt led 18 to Lone Pine and Mt LeConte. Six made the summit of L.P. before a severe electrical storm turned back Paul Nelson and the remainder of the group 100 yds from the summit. LeConte was canceled. Jerry Keating and Gordon McLeod led 29 on the 1st scheduled climb of Silver Pk. Dick Jali led 20 on a climb of Mt Baxter. Jess Logan & Neko Colevins led 20 of a group of 36 to Mt Agasiz & 30 to Mt Goode.

Twenty Five Years Ago

Don Anthrop joined the SPS in the summer of 1960, Charles and George Modjeska earned emblems # 46 & 47, followed by Russ Mohn, George Ballard, Marge Gail & Bob Stocking. Keating & Lothar Kolbig led 31 to the summit of Darwin & had a 3 hour hail & lightning storm on the descent. John Robinson & Roger Gaefke led 11 of 34 to Banner & 30 of 34 to Ritter. Graham Stevenson led 4 on a 9 day August backpack totaling 121.2 miles & 34,200 ft gain & climbing Half Dome, Clouds Rest, Clark, Vogelsang, Florence, Electra, Red, Merced, Gray, Starr King, & Cathedral.

--RON

Mt Bradley: SPS trip April 27 & 28, 1985. We heard stories about extremely sloppy snow making bad conditions, and several people dropped out before 10 people started the climb on Saturday. Instead of rotten, the snow conditions were perfect. The trail on the north side of Pinion Creek went well except for a couple of minor spots, & we our base camp was at about 11,000 feet. On daylight savings time's first day, it was before the sun, and climbing with it. We were back at base camp before noon and back at the cars about 3:00 for a liesurely trip back. The outstanding group of participants was: Tom Ferguson, Scott Sullivan, Joe Andrews, Gary Fillmore, Grant Helling, Don Borad, Bill Woods, and Brian Smith. My able co-leader was Roy Magnuson. Dave Dykeman.

ALTA, SILLIMAN

MAY 21-22, 1985

NORM ROHN, RJ SECOR

The tremendous turnout for these fine back-to-back day hikes testifies to the dubious popularity of the leaders--so we went alone. The usual route from Wolverton to Panther Gap and Mehrten Mdw went well over intermittent snow. Proceeded up the broad bare chute just beyond Mehrten Mdw and W of Tharp's Rock. The snow was going fast. Used ice axes for balance and carried crampons unused. No problems and beautiful warm weather. Placed new register and canister on summit. No evidence of old register.

After a good eight in the Lodgepole campground we hiked the Silliman Pass trail, again over intermittent snow. It's a little tricky finding and staying on the Silliman Creek trail after the main trail leaves Silliman Creek at about 7600 feet. It cuts across Silliman Mdw and then follows the creek on its SE side all the way to the big slabby valley below Silliman Lake. We went up the ridge on the N side of the valley, passed still-frozen Silliman Lake and the smaller lake above and NE of it and went for the crest. The summit is 200 feet up the crest to the NW. Tremendous views of the Great Western Divide, the Kaweahs, the Kings-Kern Divide, the Sierra Crest from Whitney to the Palisades and even Ritter, Banner and Lyell way off to the N. An ammo box held many register books, nearly all full, and indicates the popularity of this climb. Most of the climbers appear to come from the Ranger Lakes and the popular camping country in the Kings River drainage N of the Silliman Crest. Left the crampons in camp and never unstowed the ice axes.---Norm Rohn.

LONE PINE PK

MAY 18-19, 1985

AVELLA/RAIFORD

We started hiking from the Meysan roadhead with four participants: Joe Wheeler, Jack Knox, Erich Fickle, and Alan Hill at 6:15 Sat. morning. We made quick progress and established camp at a delightful site .5 mi below Big Meysan at 10:45. Jack, Erich, Jim, and I were particularly energetic so we set out for Irvine shortly after noon. We picked the chute just right of the East Buttress, and ascended it halfway when I made the painful decision to turn around---Erich was feeling a bit under the weather.

Sunday at 7:00, we started out for Lone Pine up the standard westside gully. We overtook an AMTC group which started about 40 minutes ahead of us. Good cramponing and a little scrambling put us on top at 10:00.

By 1:00, camp was broken and we were out by 3:00. Snow was deep and gooey Sun afternoon. My thanks to Jim for his assistance, Joe for carrying the new register can, Erich for his scouting help and Jack for his filthy, disgusting humor. -- Frank Avella

In December 1983, George Toby, Dave Dykeman, Ruth Armentrout, and I flew down to Mexico to climb the three big volcanoes. Dave, George, and I climbed Popocatepetl; Dave and I climbed Iztaccíhuatl. That ended the trip. People were sick, so we cut the climbing short. In December 1984, when Ruth, Dave, and I tried again, Dave and I climbed Orizaba to finish the bag. This is the account of those two trips.

On December 18, 1983, the four of us flew to Mexico City on Western's morning flight from LAX. We carried R.J. Secor's book, Duane McRuer's description of a Mazamas climb, Auto Club books and maps, and copious notes assembled by George from other sources. George had worked out a schedule that would have gotten us all three of the peaks in the twelve days that we had, and we followed it faithfully until we decided that we had done as much of it as we could manage.

We landed in Mexico City an hour late, the first of a series of minor snags. Because Western's baggage carousel wasn't working, we had to scramble for our backpacks and duffle bags. In the terminal, George flashed a photostat of his birth certificate instead of a passport. He had to pay a twenty dollar mordita to get past the gate. The green VW Kombi van Avis had reserved for us was waiting, but with a broken window latch. In a manner crude even by the low-tech standards of the latch, the crucial rivet was beaten back into place with a screwdriver and claw hammer. Following this repair, I drove us into Mexico City in gathering darkness, only to find the streets jammed solid with holiday shoppers and their cars, despite its being Sunday. Slowly, very slowly, we made our way to the hotel, Best Western's Majestic, right next to the Plaza de la Constitución. Things got better after we checked in. We strolled over to the Alemeda, mingled with the happy crowd for an hour or so, and came back to the hotel's roof restaurant, where we ate a dinner that included an excellent tortilla soup. In our room, George and I treated the water with iodine, just to be on the safe side. I forgot and brushed my teeth with tap water, but I didn't suffer any consequences from this lapse.

The morning of the 19th, we got up at 6:00 and went out to a nearby coffee shop for breakfast, chowing down on the desayuno campesino, the country boy breakfast: eggs, potatoes, juice, toast, coffee, and a sort of Spam. Then, after retrieving the Kombi from the parking lot, we loaded it, and crossed the city, Dave at the wheel, through early Monday traffic and the beginning of the day's smog. We took the 190D toll road out of the city, got off at the first exit, which comes up right away, and drove to Amecameca. Here we bought beer, bread, eggs, avocados, tangerines, bananas, and other odds and ends. Most of the packaged food I took to Mexico I didn't use. In the COMEX paint store on the square, we found white gas for the stoves, purchasing two liters and a leaky plastic container to keep it in. All that day, we took turns cutting gaskets for the cap from various pieces of cardboard and plastic, but to no avail. The cap leaked for the entire trip, spilling fumes into the van. We also bought a twenty-liter plastic bottle for water. Forty liters of pure water came from the Mercado Oriental, a store which is behind and to the left of the town's open market. Half we kept in its heavy glass jug; the rest we poured into our big new plastic bottle and the canteen bottles we had brought with us.

After lunching on good but chewy mixed grill in a cantina, we drove through forested slopes over Cortés Pass to the climbing lodge at Tlamacas, where beds and blankets were rented by the day for a dollar a day. Hot showers were available in the mornings, the toilets flushed most of the time, and a snack bar operated as long as food and cooks were available. The menu was short: a few sandwiches, bright red hot dogs, and something not very good called the Ixta-Popo burger. Everyone's favorite was hotcakes. Climbers from all over the world crowded the benches in the cozy room, trading climbing stories and carbohydrate loading on hotcakes.

The lodge is at nearly 13,000' and we slept fitfully that night. In the

fully occupied dormitories, the air seemed oxygenless and foul. Cows and dogs wandered in the luminous moonlight on the cold stone patio outside, knocking over garbage cans and looking into our windows. Horned monsters and sharply toothed, grinning beasts with lolling tongues peopled my uneasy sleep, a sort of medieval nightmare. In the morning, we woke up with headaches.

The view of Popo from Tlamacas is exhilarating. The mountain soars up over the lodge, metamorphosing as the light that plays on it is changed by time and weather. Sometimes it sparkles whitely in the bright, thin air, almost floating on its base of dark volcanic ash. At other times, it lurks ominously and grayly in the clouds above, deep crevasses visible on the hard, gleaming ice of the Grietas route. Standing on the wide pink patio, the nocturnal playground of the dogs and cows, we could see the main trail traverse along the flank of the mountain, then climb to a ridge, the site of the Las Cruces hut.

Our plan for the day, the 20th, was to hike up to the 14,698' hut at Las Cruces, which we did, carrying frame packs filled with everything we expected to take up Popo the next day, mostly bulky clothing. As we sweated along, our headaches gradually receded, and the hike became an enjoyable one. Looking back out over the Tlamacas lodge, the sparse, dark forests and open brown fields, we could see Ixta, several miles away, swathed in thick layers of clouds. We ate lunch next to the Las Cruces refugio, a tiny quonset mashed flat as though a giant had stepped on it, looked up at Popo awhile, huge and near, then walked back down to Tlamacas. Some members of the Mexican Olympic team, wearing red shorts but shirtless, passed us, running up the black pumice trail.

On climbing day, we rose at 3:00 a.m. Ten climbers, clients of the American Alpine Institute, were finishing the breakfast they had been served by the lodge. Because we had not known arrangements could be made for eating so early, we ate what we had brought with us. I usually eat a big butter-and-egg breakfast when it's available, but I climb better on granola bars. It's probably a good thing I didn't know I could have had hotcakes. We left the lodge, crossed the stone patio, and started up the cold, gritty trail under the stars. The day before, Ruth had begun to cough. She had coughed throughout the night, and was still coughing. Twenty minutes later, she turned back, clearly unwell. Dave, George, and I hiked steadily on up toward Las Cruces. At the hut, as dawn was breaking, we caught up with the well-fed AAI group. Two Dutch hikers, having slept at the hut the night before, had started up Popo that morning without ice axes or crampons, turned around, and were now heading for a late breakfast at Tlamacas. My stomach grumbled.

After a short break at the hut, we trudged up steepening pumice ahead of the AAI climbers until, at about 16,000', we reached the snow, where we stopped to put on crampons and pat on sun screen. Once the crampons were buckled, we climbed slowly up the steep slope toward the crater's rim. The day was beautifully clear, nearly windless, and not perceptibly cold, though ice formed in the water bottles in my Kelty. The last pitch was icy and seemed even steeper, making me a little apprehensive. I was feeling pretty tired by this time, and the anxiety was, I'm sure, at least partially induced by fatigue. Dave got to the rim first, about thirty minutes before me. When I reached it, I curled up and slept for thirty minutes, until George came up with the first of the AAI group. After he took a short break, the three of us traversed around the rim to the high point on the opposite side. At 17,887', this was the highest any of us had ever climbed, and we were elated. We took pictures of ourselves next to the flaking orange summit hut (I clamped my little Olympus to my ice axe for the group shots), congratulated each other, and started down, passing the AAI climbers, who were just leaving their rest stop on the rim for the hike to the summit.

We were back at Tlamacas by about 4:00 p.m. Ruth had slept most of the day, and thought she was feeling better. We were sorry that Ruth hadn't made Popo, but our biggest concern just then was that Ixta had been in clouds for most of the two days we'd been watching it. We didn't want to climb it in a white-out. Snug in the lodge, we talked to some climbers from the Sacramento area led by

Harry Erl, who is trying to get a BMT established there, and congratulated the AAI people, who got back at 7:00. We cooked dinner, then crawled into our bunks, pleased with our accomplishment.

Next day, Ruth slept or wandered about the lodge, I worked on some papers I'd brought, while Dave and George drove off to scout the Ixta roadhead at La Joya. I didn't work very long, and enjoyed the lazy day, especially the lengthy shower I took to wash the black dust out of my hair and ears. I read a little, but when I saw someone in the lounge with Sartre's No Exit, I was embarrassed by the level of literature I had with me. Dave and George came back to announce that the scouting had gone well. They had gone up a thousand feet or more and determined that what had seemed like a confusing maze of trails at the beginning of the climb was really just a bunch of ways to get to the same place. We went to bed early, looking forward to Ixta. One of the Sacramento climbers had given Ruth some antibiotics, and we were hopeful that she could go, too.

At 3:00 a.m., the 23rd, Ruth, feeling worse, chose not to get out of bed. Dave, George, and I drove to the roadhead in the dark, parked under starry skies, and scrambled up steep, sandy trails through low brush to intersect a ridge. George, who had been troubled by what Americans in Mexico fear the most, declared that he was too weak to complete the climb, and that he would go back. I was surprised at this announcement, for I hadn't thought he was that sick, and disappointed for George. He had worked very hard organizing the trip, doing an outstanding job of planning and scheduling, and it was a shame to see him falter only a few hours short of Ixta. We agreed that Dave and I would continue the climb. George would go back to Tlamacas, rest awhile, then pack the van and meet us at 4:00 p.m. for the drive to Puebla, where we intended to resupply for Orizaba. George slid back down the steep dirt to the Kombi, and Dave and I continued on a textbook climb of the Rodillas route of Ixta. The route was a mixture of trails, a little class 2-3 scrambling, flat snow fields that paraded the bright tents of camped climbing parties, clear skies, and labored breathing. The expected white-out never materialized. I ran out of film. A climber from Argentina took a picture of Dave and me on the 17,342' summit with Dave's camera, but this shot was subsequently spoiled when a bottle of Kalua opened in Dave's luggage on the airplane home, drenching Kodak and Kodacolor.

I was very tired by the time Dave and I got back to the roadhead at La Joya. George wasn't there yet. I felt listless and depressed, but I cheered up after Dave fed me an avocado sandwich and I rested a bit. We had just started to hike out along the road when the Kombi wheeled up in a cloud of dust. Except for George, it was empty. Hurrying us back to Tlamacas, George told how he had gotten back to the lodge that morning to find Ruth very sick and breathing with difficulty, practically unconscious. The AAI assistant leader, who had not been climbing because of burns suffered in a stove explosion early in that group's trip, helped George get Ruth into the Kombi, whereupon they rushed her down the mountain to Amecameca. Neither spoke Spanish, and it was a long, frantic, agonizing time before they finally located a doctor, a woman who spoke no English. Although communication proceeded slowly, at last Ruth's trouble was diagnosed as bronchial influenza. She had been given medication, but to no immediate effect. There being no hotel in Amecameca, George had brought her back up to Tlamacas and gotten her into bed, much to the consternation of the lodge staff, who had rented the bed to somebody else. We decided that the thing to do was to load the van and drive to Puebla as quickly as we could.

For a sick man deprived of his day of rest, George had a lot of energy left, doubtless running on adrenaline. I was exhausted. We got the van loaded and walked Ruth down to it, where she slumped in the back seat against Dave. George driving, we hurtled down the mountain, through Amecameca, and over to 190D, the main road between Mexico City and Puebla. It was almost dark when we got to the intersection. There was no way to get on the highway going in the direction of Puebla; the only on-ramp led to Mexico City. We now know that the accepted way to deal with this is to get on 190D going west to Mexico City, then hang a U-turn down the road a ways into the east-bound traffic. But there, in the gloomy dusk,

isolated by our pitifully little Spanish, sick, hungry, tired, and anxious for Ruth, we opted for the secondary highway that paralleled the toll road.

It wasn't a particularly good choice. George drove as fast as the tortuous mountain road would let him. Frustratingly slow trucks often blocked us on upgrades; magueys fled along beside us in the dappled shadows like Aztec ghosts, glowing silver in the white moon. At times, the bright lights of 190D's oncoming traffic swerved toward us just a few feet away, separated from the bouncing Kombi by only a chain link fence. At other times, we could glimpse dim headlights distantly, deep in a ravine, or high on a hillside. With a flashlight, I tried to read a map to find where we could get off this awful, endless road. There seemed to be no escape. Finally, at Rio Frio, we managed to get back to 190D, and drove comfortably but tiredly past the big VW assembly plant into the city of Puebla, pulling gratefully into the courtyard of El Mesón del Angel, a luxury motel recommended to George by Gene Olsen, and a place that quickly became a favorite. We got Ruth into bed, and, finding that the rest of us weren't too far gone for dinner, hobbled down to the restaurant and ate. We drank a fair amount of Bohemia, too, rehydrating. I couldn't have slept more soundly that night were I a dead hero of the Mexican Revolution.

The next morning, the 24th, the three of us who made it to the dining room were revitalized by a wonderful buffet breakfast. A long table boasted toast, chicken, eggs, ham, papaya, melon, several kinds of juice, coffee, and a succulent dish of chilies and tripe. Our spirits rose accordingly. By now, however, Orizaba was looking iffy. The night before, in our daze of uncertainty, we had chosen to come to Puebla instead of returning to Mexico City on the chance that some of us might be able to attempt the biggest volcano, and coming on to Puebla had at least kept that possibility alive. George, eating heartily but still sick, volunteered to stay with Ruth, who wasn't noticeably improved, while Dave and I took the Kombi and pressed on. As we talked, though, we began to realize that the trip was over, and one by one concluded that the most prudent thing to do under the circumstances was to abort Orizaba and go back to Mexico City. The mountain would have to wait.

Christmas morning, we ate another big buffet breakfast and hit the 190D. Shortly after noon, the others dropped me at the airport. They went on into Mexico City, Dave and Ruth for another day of rest before returning to Los Angeles, George for a few days' sightseeing. I got a seat on Western's afternoon flight, and was back in Los Angeles shortly after dark.

A year later, the day after Christmas 1984, I flew back to Mexico, again on Western. Ruth and Dave came down on Mexicana. George stayed at home with knee problems. This time, casual old Mexico hands, and lacking George's willingness to do the planning, we didn't really decide on the first objective until we met in front of the Budget Auto Rental counter in the Mexico City airport. I, naturally, wanted to do Orizaba first. Ruth had shown some interest in trying first for Popo as a training climb for the big one, but we decided eventually to start with Orizaba with the others as maybes. We breezed out of the familiar airport in our black Ford sedan, zipped over to the 190D, and drove to El Mesón del Angel on the outskirts of Puebla, arriving in time for dinner. We slept soundly, woke up eagerly for the generous breakfast, and cruised into the city proper to find gas for the stoves.

Based on our experience in Amecameca the year before, we tried at a couple of paint stores with no luck, then were directed by a clerk in a sporting goods store to the Ferretería Bandini, a hardware store at 8 Poniente 512, where we filled our Sigg fuel bottles (no leaky plastic this time around) and bought a length of plastic tubing and a twenty-liter bottle for water. Back at El Mesón, Dave ran the tube from the motel's drinking water faucet to the bottle, and we got our supply free. After lunch, we checked out of the motel and drove over to the little town of Tlachichuca under cloudy skies, stopping in the village of El Seco to buy bread, eggs, and fruit. Our Spanish, better this year, was pretty good during these transactions, and, by the time we got to Tlachichuca and asked at the PEMEX station for Sr. Reyes, the man with the Jeep, we were almost glib.

Actually, there are two taxi services to the climbing hut at Piedra Grande: the one run by Sr. Reyes, and another run by Sr. Limón. For twenty dollars apiece, one of Sr. Reyes's drivers took us up the mountain and retrieved us later, on schedule. Included in this fee was an overnight stay in Sr. Reyes's home the day of our trip out. We didn't try to bargain, and discovered upon talking to other climbers in Piedra Grande that everyone, in fact, had paid the same. We bumped and churned our way up the wet, rutted road in a small Toyota Land Cruiser. At a timber camp, as snow began to fall, we switched into a big Ford 4WD camper, and reached the large stone hut feeling as though we had ridden there in a cement mixer. Inside we found a dozen Texans, five mountaineering store employees from Arizona, and some Mexican climbers. Before nightfall, we were joined by an Englishman and an Arizona-New Mexico team of two. Snow fell throughout the afternoon; cold wind whistled in through the broken windows that had been patched with pieces of corrugated tin torn from the roof of the tall building. We ate a climber's dinner, and fell asleep amid the hot reek of butane, gasoline, and kerosene stoves and the Texans' loud attempts to communicate in Spanish with the Mexican climbers, a process that involved a lot of singing. During the night, one of the Mexican climbers retched violently, twice, which made us all feel queasy.

On the 28th, we rose to a cold and cloudy world, heads throbbing. Almost everyone there had been planning to take two days to climb the mountain, packing the first day to a base camp on the snow, and the second day doing the summit and coming out. I had wanted to do this, especially since I weighed twenty pounds more than I had the year before, and had run and climbed very little in the preceding months. Dave didn't want to sleep any higher than the hut, which is at about 14,000', and his plan to day hike the peak, which we hadn't yet been able to see, gradually prevailed among all the groups. We strolled up the trail under gray, grim clouds for about 1,500' to tone up for the next day, which we hoped would be clear, and ate a little lunch. Then we drifted back down to the hut, light snow swirling around us from time to time. In the late afternoon, the clouds parted, and all the climbers rushed from the hut, clad for the most part in navy polypropylene underwear, to take pictures of the mountain, towering huge and white above us. A few minutes later, the clouds closed in, but we took the sighting as a good omen, and looked forward to climbing the next day.

The night was not quiet. The hut has three tiers of what are essentially deep wooden shelves, far enough apart to let a person stand hunched over. The top tier is the least desirable, owing to the dripping water occasioned by the missing roof tin. Tenants lie next to each other, arranged in rows like merchandise. People coughed, groaned, and shifted, trying to sleep. An Orange County church group of five, only two of whom were climbers, arrived about 10:00 and managed to squeeze in. At 3:00 in the morning, most of the climbers got up and began preparing for the climb. Orange County, Arizona-New Mexico, and two Mexicans raced away; we didn't see them again for hours. The Arizonans, now reduced to four by altitude, eight Texans, and the three of us started up the trail about 3:45. Thirty minutes later, Ruth turned back, herself a victim of altitude. On the trail, the groups mingled, then slowly strung out; above 16,000', after we put on crampons and sun screen, the order of march was established pretty much for the rest of the day. First went Dave, then three Arizonans. I followed; the Texans came last. Another Arizonan had dropped out. Rock climbers, these guys had never climbed very high or even worn crampons.

Orizaba is steep. The snow was really good, its crystals glistening brightly under achingly clear blue skies and brilliant sunshine. Sweat washed PABA into my burning eyes. We crunched upward, stabbing our crampon points into the glittering crust, climbing up, and up, and up, lungs straining in the thin air. There was no place to sit. Taking a picture, I lost half of my camera case when I dropped it and it whizzed away down the slope with amazing speed. The Arizona-New Mexico team glissaded down to us (five hours round trip!), and offered to take our rope from Dave, saying we wouldn't need it. In the ensuing transfer, Dave knocked his emblem-laden hat off, and it followed my camera case

down five hundred feet or so. New Mexico retrieved it, and brought it back up to him. Presently, the Orange County pastor and his single sheep came down, followed by the Mexicans. His camera batteries had frozen, the minister said, and he had not been able to take a summit shot. I checked the new batteries I had shrewdly installed in my Pentax. No sign of life was visible.

By now, however, I had other things on my mind, chiefly breathing and getting one foot in front of the other. I had tried to reduce my load as much as possible--a heavier camera was the exception--by carrying a Lowe daypack instead of a big green Kelty, foisting the rope off on Dave, using an ice axe borrowed from Mary McMannes that was two inches shorter than mine, and other such tricks of the game, but I was not having an easy time. I finally dragged to the 18,885' summit an hour behind the Arizona boys and two hours behind Dave. We took some summit shots, estimating the f-stops, ate a bite, and started back down. We did bumpy glissades of at least 3,000'--I picked up a bruise that hurt for a week on one chunk of ice--and straggled back down to the hut, enjoying maybe fifteen minutes of white-out at 16,000'. The Texans were two hours behind, having done elaborate roped climbing exercises that required lots of stops on the last, steep sections of the climb. On one stop, a Texan lost half of his camera case. I found his; mine was lost. I got to the hut thirty minutes after Dave and the Arizonans, and about thirty minutes before the Ford camper arrived.

The Arizonans rode back to the village of Tlachichuca with us to stay the night with Sr. Reyes. We dined together in a tiny, friendly cantina on sausage, eggs, beans, tortillas, and Corona. I stuck my fingers into a little bowl of chilies, remembering too late that the skin on my thumb was cracked open from the cold. It ached for two days afterward. Sr. Reyes's home was full. Besides our two groups, there was a party of Austrian climbers, who had us thoroughly confused as to their nationality since they were speaking Spanish almost exclusively. I forgot and brushed my teeth with tap water, but again had no problems. Although the ancient beds left a lot to be desired, we slept fairly well and got up early the next morning, the 30th, for a foggy drive to Puebla.

At El Mesón del Angel, we checked in, showered, breakfasted, and sorted gear. The Arizona group came in by bus and we agreed to meet for dinner that night. I spent the afternoon strolling among the flowers and lawns of the grounds, and sat by the pool for an hour to write postcards that never made it back to the states. Dave and Ruth toured Puebla in the Ford. At dinner, we got to know the Arizonans a little better: Steve Elm, proprietor of Bob's Bargain Barn in Tucson (it began as a surplus store) and some of his employees. All of their gear was brand new: the latest in plastic boots, shiny hardware, handsome packs, fashionable tweed knickers, and stylish Gore-Tex parkas. Steve topped off his costume with a fedora in the mode of Indiana Jones.

Next day, we drove into Mexico City. What had begun in Puebla as a brisk, sunny day degenerated into heat, choking smog, and gridlock as we made our way to the airport. Dave had done most of the driving on this trip; I was glad he was driving now. We turned the car in (rentals are expensive--a whopping fifteen per cent tax got slapped onto the quoted rates at the end of the ride) and I got a seat on Western's afternoon flight. Dave and Ruth taxied on into the city for a few days of sightseeing. I flew back alone, to land at LAX on New Year's Eve.

Approaching the city after dark, the endless carpet of lights spread below, intensely bright after a cleansing rain, I was reminded of the clear, black morning the year before when Dave and I had looked down on the lights of Mexico City as we began the ascent of Ixta. The world had been silent then, save for the scuff of our boots on rock and sand, our breathing, the beat of blood in our ears, and the faint, distant whine of an airplane somewhere high above. Now I sat strapped in the rush and hum of a DC-10, surrounded by noisy passengers bustling happily in the lighted cabin to get ready for the landing. Claustrophobia began to close in on me, so I reached up, turned on the vent, leaned back in the seat with my eyes closed, and let the cold, narrow blade of air peel back the stuffy cocoon of encroaching civilization to preserve a little longer the sense of joy and solitude that climbers know in the high mountains.

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