



Recognized as two of the most skilled rock climbers in the West, Glen Dawson and Bob Brinton recently attempted to scale the unconquered walls of Monument Peak near Parker, Arizona. They failed to reach their objective, but the story of their adventure is none the less interesting because it gives an insight into an outdoor sport which is gaining in popularity among western Americans. The picture on the left shows Dawson on a typical rope down over a vertical face of rock.

Unclimbed Pinnacle OF THE DESERT

WHEN Engineer Harrington, chief of a party of U. S. Land Office surveyors engaged in running the section lines on the Colorado River Indian reservation at Parker, Arizona, in 1912, sent out a detail one morning to locate and mark the northwest boundary corner of the Indian lands, the men came back a few hours later and reported that it couldn't be done.

"No human being can climb the peak where that corner monument is supposed to be located," they told Harrington. "And so we did the next best thing and drove the iron post horizontally into the base of the pinnacle."

It is still there.

So far as the records show, Monument Peak remains unclimbed, although four men who rank high among Pacific coast rock-and-rope experts have made the attempt.

Monument Peak is a conspicuous needle of disintegrating granite located across the Colorado river and a few miles north of Parker. The Indian reservation includes a triangular slice of California soil, and this peak marks the apex of the triangle. Few people except residents of the immediate area had given much notice to this striking landmark until the U. S. Reclamation Bureau started construction of a dam in the Colorado river for the Metropolitan Water District.

Rock scalers among the dam workers often discussed the possibilities of an ascent and finally in April, last year, John Mendenhall and John Schaffer made the attempt. Although both men rate high as rock climbers, they were not well equipped for a vertical ascent involving so many difficulties, and reached a point only about half way up. They reported, however, that the peak might be scaled by climbers supplied with pitons and other equipment of the climbing fraternity.

Regarding this report as more or less a challenge, a well-organized attempt was made on the peak last October by Glen Dawson and Bob Brinton, ace rock men of the Sierra club of California. They reached the spike which Mendenhall and Schaffer had driven into the wall, and Brinton advanced perhaps 30 or 40 feet above, but at that point the men decided that it was too hazardous to continue.

The story of this last attempt is given in the accompanying report written for Desert Magazine readers by Dawson.

By GLEN DAWSON

It was George Bauens who first told me about a spectacular unclimbed monolith near Parker Dam. Then another Sierra Club member, John Mendenhall, showed me pictures taken during an attempt which he made on the peak.

Bob Brinton and I decided that we would try it. One night last October we followed an old road and camped just below what we thought was the unclimbed pinnacle. The next morning we went up with ease—but it was the wrong peak.

After some inquiry we found the road leading from Parker dam into Copper Basin. And there across the basin was an impressive pinnacle of rock which dominated the whole landscape. There could be no doubt that this was Monument Peak. Its sheer walls were a challenge to any climber.

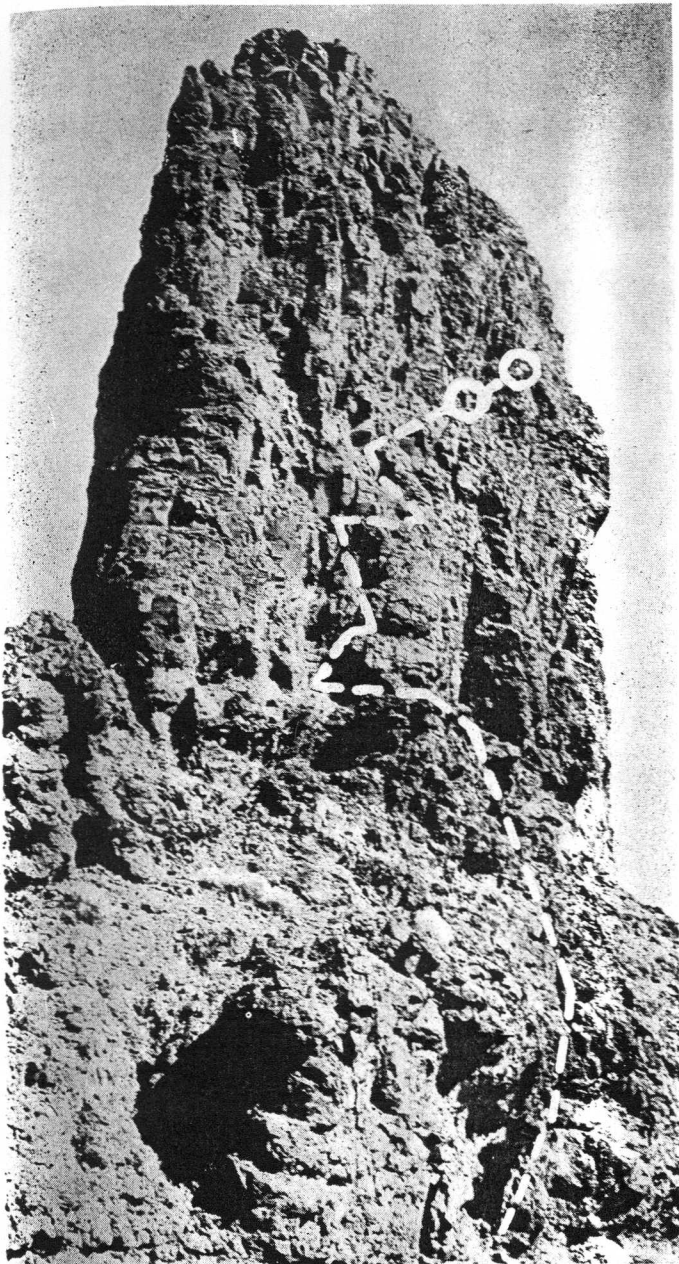
A warm steep scramble brought us around to the west side of the peak where it adjoins a more massive mountain. Here we found a bench mark, the highest point reached by the surveyors.

Towering immediately above us was a great pile of rocks, brittle and loose to the slightest touch, yet rising in a vertical wall more than 360 feet overhead and 2446 feet above sea level.

A glance at the wall is enough to discourage anyone, but after coming across the state of California we had to go through with the formality of trying it. Using 90 feet of 7/16 inch yachting rope, Bob and I started the ascent. For difficult climbing, a party of two is the minimum and three the maximum, tied together on one rope.

With a bowline knot at his waist, Brinton went first and I protected him as best I could by belaying the rope around my hips. He moved cautiously, testing each rock,

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Dotted white line shows the route taken by the two climbers. In the small circle at the top is Brinton at the highest point reached in the climb, with Dawson just below. For the protection of the climber above, Dawson has a secure hold on a safety rope which is knotted around Brinton's waist.

Bob Brinton, left, and Glen Dawson studying a possible route up the broken rock face which leads to the summit of Monument Peak. The softness of the rock rather than lack of footing and handholds defeated the climbers.



Unclimbed Pinnacle

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A ONE MAN'S TOWN
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keeping his weight on his feet and using his arms and hands for balance, but not for lifting purposes except when necessary.

He came to a ledge where he could belay me, and he took in the rope, keeping it not quite taut as I moved up the rock face toward him. A belaying point is known in climber's language as a stance, and the distance between two stances is a pitch.

Two pitches up the face we came to a tin can containing the record of John Mendenhall and John Schaffer who made the attempt similar to ours in April, 1937. At their highest point they had driven an iron stake into a crevice. Brinton went up to the stake and drove in a piton, which is an iron peg with a hole in the end. This equipment is made in Germany especially for rock climbing. A snap ring known as a carabiner is clipped into the piton and the rope clipped into the carabiner. On the ascent of the higher Cathedral spire in Yosemite 38 pitons were used.

Route Becomes Hazardous

When Brinton began working his way up the next pitch over loose rock above a massive overhang I began to think about our margin of safety. Brinton is a brilliant leader and I was anchored to the piton, but I felt that our experience in loose rock did not justify our going further.

Geoffery Winthrop Young, leading authority on mountain climbing, considers consistent judgment the most important factor in leadership. Since turning back on Monument Peak I have tried to analyze my own reactions to determine whether for the time being I was unduly frightened or justly cautious. The climbing is not difficult as climbing goes, but very dangerous.

In Yosemite and on Tahquitz Rock near Idyllwild the granite provides fewer handholds but is much more dependable. German mountaineers take their climbing so seriously that they attempt ascents which English and American climbers consider unjustifiable. Drawing the delicate line is one of the major problems of rock climbing and mountaineering.

We had spent two days finding our peak and in a few moments I had made the decision to turn back. The theory that it is better to be too cautious than not cautious enough was about the only consolation for our failure.

For the descent we took out our 200-foot rope of 5/16 inch diameter and attached it to the middle piton with a sling rope. Climbing down is usually more difficult than going up, and roping down properly is one of the most important skills of a rock climber.

We doubled the rope and when we reached a tiny ledge retrieved it by pulling it through the sling. This process was repeated to the base. The last rope down was over an overhang and the rope burned us slightly in spite of extra patches on our pants.

Peak Can Be Climbed

Old timers say that Monument Peak is impossible, but both rock climbing parties who have reached the half way point believe it can be conquered by an experienced party with a less conservative mental attitude.

Our trip was not disappointing because we did not reach the top. Rather, it was dismaying because we did not find good rock on which to work. Exploring has always been a major sport in the desert regions, and with more and better roads the way is being opened for more detailed explorations.

Climbing ability depends on natural aptitude and upon training and experience. In Los Angeles, San Francisco and Berkeley, Sierra club experts regularly give instruction in climbing technique on practice rock walls.

The Southwest is full of peaks which may have climbing possibilities. Shiprock in New Mexico has been given up as impossible by more than one mountaineer. Picacho, near Yuma, is a delightful climb, and for the expert the great flat-topped summits of southern Utah are climbs worthy of the highest traditions of Alpinism.

Development of the sport of rock climbing in the Southwest is a new and entrancing field. Those who enjoy the adventure of a precipitous rock wall may yet discover what Monument Peak failed to provide—a good desert rock climbing center.

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