

PEAK BAGGING RECOLLECTIONS

I joined the hiking club in 1987. My first few hikes were with Harry von Bergen, and shortly thereafter I heard about peak bagging and met Dave Shope. Dave invited me to go along on some of his peak bagging trips. I'd like to tell a few stories about some of the peak experiences!

John Irwin is the one who came up with the original idea of making a list of 315 major peaks that were within 75 miles of Tucson as the crow flies. Many of the hikes I went on were guided by Dave Shope, some were guided by Richard Joseph, Mark Nichols, and Mike Coltrin guided many of the rock climbs like Baboquivari, Finger Rock, and Holy Joe.

When I started peak bagging with them in 1987, most of the peaks that were bushwhacks didn't have any trails or even routes to them. There were no GPSs, you had to bring your map and try to figure out your way to the peak. That was the start of many adventures for me, and peak bagging was good, as I need to have a goal to work toward -- and once I got really interested I ended up doing the entire 315. I hiked most of the later peaks with Charlie Whitmore -- we spent many hours on the side of various mountains.

As many of you know who have hiked with Dave Shope a lot, sometimes he would look around with a bewildered look on his face, like where are we? One time, on Dave's second hike to Grassy Peak and my first time there, we were bushwhacking southeast of YLE Tank, 2 or 3 miles away from the trucks, and Dave sat down to study his map and drink some water. After a while he whispered to me, "Richard, do you have any idea where we are?"

He would pull that on me, Mark Nichols and Richard Joseph quite a bit. Although Dave had been to many of those peaks before, there are so many different peaks that sometimes it got confusing. The same thing happened on the way to Keilberg and Kielberg peaks in the Galiuros. At that time, there was no route of any kind. We were still exploring the best way to go there. We had more trouble returning to the vehicles than we did initially climbing the mountains, as it was all thick brush and rugged country. Sometimes we would get caught out in the dark, so everyone carried two flashlights.

One time five of us went from the starting point for the so-called access route to Keilberg Peak on the west side of the Galiuro Mtns. We wanted to bushwhack into Cedar Flats with the goal of seeing if we could find a better access route for some of the peaks in that area. By noon, Charlie Whitmore and a guest had dropped out and said they were going back to camp because it was already late and we weren't anywhere near our destination. Scott Casterlin, my wife Beth and I proceeded to Knothe Springs. We were in Gold Canyon on the way back to camp when it got dark. We had our flashlights and kept hiking through that extremely rugged country, arriving at camp at 10:30 p.m.; we didn't find any shortcuts, either.

On Dec. 8, 1991, Dave was the guide and a large group of us headed for North Butte along the Gila River. To get where we wanted to start climbing, we had to cross the Gila River on the Railroad Bridge and walk through a dark tunnel on the tracks. Before the hike I asked Dave, what do we do if a train comes? Dave said "Oh, don't worry, I checked the schedule -- there's no trains through here till 1:30 this afternoon and we'll be long gone before that."

We got through the tunnel and had gone maybe 50 yards on our ascent of North Butte when around the corner here comes this train; and it was making pretty good time. I said Dave, I thought you said there was no trains due till 1:30? And he said "I'll be damned, they must have changed their schedule." We were all really glad that we didn't meet that train in the tunnel or on the bridge.

On the way back to do South Butte, we had to cross the tracks, the bridge and the tunnel again, and everyone was apprehensive. Someone had their ear on the rails listening just like in the old cowboy movies.

On April 9, 1988, another Shope hike, 12 of us went into the Tumacacoris. Our objective was to climb at least three peaks that were on the list in that area, and one or two "bonus peaks." After we completed the first peak, the group began to break up. By the time we finished the last peak we wanted and were heading back to the trucks, our group of 12 was split into 5 different groups. Luckily, we all made it back to the vehicles before dark. It was on this hike that I came upon Dave and Madeleine Rodack, and she was really chewing Dave out. When she got through, she stomped off toward the cars. Dave was standing there -- I went over to Dave to rib him and said: "How long have you two been married?" Dave turned about three shades of white and said "Oh my god, that's not my wife!"

In February of 1988, a group of us talked Mike Coltrin into leading us to Finger Rock in the Catalinas. I remember John and Rita Montgomery being there, and Gilbert Jimenez, who went along to help Mike with some of us who were novice rock-climbers. Linda Miller and Dean Westmoreland were also along, and I believe it was Dean Staley who was on Prominent Point taking pictures of us on Finger Rock. Mike did an excellent job of leading it, tying the ropes etc., and getting everyone up and down

safely. Finger Rock is a hard hike. On the way up, there's a chute. Someone above us dislodged a head-sized rock that almost hit Rita Montgomery. We all got off the mountain without any injuries. As far as I'm concerned, Finger Rock and Helen's Dome were the scariest peaks on the original 315 list.

One time I ask Eber Glendening about a route from Romero Pass to Cathedral. He said he'd been in there and spent a lot of time exploring for a route, and couldn't find one that did not drop way down below the rock cliffs. Linda Miller and I were hiking together a lot, and I told Linda there must be a route through there, so we went looking for one. We got lucky and found a natural underground tunnel through one of the cliffs. On the other side of the tunnel we went around a tree, and we were on top of the rock cliffs and could make our way to the north side of Cathedral.

The next time we went up there, we placed a register in a bottle in the underground portion of the route. The last time we went there, the only people who had signed it were people who had been in our group. Near the exit of the tunnel, we found where someone had built a rock shelter, and there was a jacket there of the type worn by pilots during World War II. I haven't heard of anyone else using that route since.

There are many other stories of peak bagging in the 80's and early 90's but not enough time or room to print them all.

Richard Kane

Originally printed in The Bulletin, Volume 51, Number 3