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AGATHLA - PLACE OF MUCH WOOL

By Herb Conn

One hundred miles west of Shiprock, New Mexico, in the wild Navajo country of northeastern Arizona, rises Shiprock's twin, known to the Indian sheep herders as Mt. Agathla, the "Place of Much Wool." The two peaks are so similar in appearance that we have had in our collection a post-card picture labeled Shiprock for two years before discovering that it was actually a picture of the Arizona neighbor.

Agathla figures as a landmark in accounts of Kit Carson and other early explorers, and the early Spaniards had the presumptuous lack of imagination to give it the overworked name "El Capitan." Its climbing history, however, does not begin until 1937 when Ray Garner (author of "First Ascent of Mt. Brussels" in the current American Alpine Club Journal; he learned his climbing from Fritz Wiessner on Breakneck and the Hudson Highlands) climbed up 50 feet, put in a piton, and rappelled back down. Being alone he then contented himself with a thorough reconnaissance from the ground, but an ambition was born which has been simmering for twelve long years. Two years later the Sierra Club quartet who climbed Shiprock drove by it on their way back to Berkeley. They were quite naturally unenthusiastic - Ye gods, not another! - but did take the time, we understand, to convince themselves it was not a walk-up from any side.

On May 27, 1949, climbers began gathering in earnest. There were Ray and his wife Virginia, Ben and Lee Pedrick of Phoenix, and Jan and I. Ray and Ginny arrived too late for a reconnaissance that day, but the rest of us walked completely around the peak and decided that the proposed route, which involved at least 500 feet of 80 to 100 degree climbing up a forbidding basalt dike on the west side, was out of the question. Ray, however, had had twelve years to forget exactly what that dike looked like, and his enthusiasm was enough to herd the six