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BECAUSE IT IS THERE

by

Brendan P. Leonard

B.A. University of Northern Iowa, 2001

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

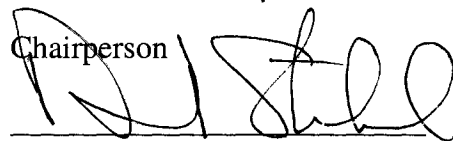
Master of Arts

The University of Montana

May 2004

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Introduction

I started this project in July 2003, although I didn't know it at the time. I was working as a copy desk intern at the Post Register in Idaho Falls, Idaho, and I had two days off work. A friend and I had contemplated an outdoors adventure to fill up my two days off, and we decided that Yellowstone National Park, only two hours away, would be too "touristy" for our tastes, so we set our sights on Borah Peak—Idaho's highest mountain at 12,662 feet.

Although I had spent 48 hours a week at the Post Register news desk, zero hours per week exercising, and probably had no business climbing Borah, we made it to the summit. The views in every direction were worth the 5 a.m. alarm clock, the blisters and the 3 1/2 miles of hiking what felt like a never-ending flight of stairs. Two weeks later, I was on my way back to my home state of Iowa for a friend's wedding, and I decided to stop in Denver. I talked a friend into attempting Mt. Elbert, Colorado's highest peak at 14,433 feet. I added Peak No. 2 to my list, and once again took in a view that can only be seen via airplane or hiking boots—360 degrees of mountains, disappearing only when the edge of the earth dropped off, miles from where we sat.

When I came back to Missoula to begin my second year of graduate school, I busied myself looking up Web pages devoted to mountain climbing. I climbed Lolo Peak, a 9,096-foot mountain about 20 miles from Missoula, with a friend. A few weeks later, I hiked up 10,157-foot Trapper Peak, 10 miles from Darby, Mont., by myself.

A hiking buddy of mine began to argue with me whenever I suggested a new hike. He said it wasn't all about getting to the top of a mountain every time—there were plenty

of beautiful canyons and valleys and hikes along creeks and rivers. I disagreed. I was hooked. My friend began to taunt me, calling me a “peak bagger,” or someone who is obsessed with his personal list of summits, as opposed to someone who is, more honorably, in love with the outdoors and doesn’t put a lot of emphasis on whether they reach the top of anything when they hike.

My friend was right. With no prior care for anything outdoorsy—I’m from Iowa, where most of the hiking involves stepping around manure and admiring this year’s corn and beans—I was obsessed, and I didn’t know why. My girlfriend and I have made plans to move in together after I graduate in May. Sometimes I wonder if I’m going to like Arizona or whether I’ll be able to get a decent job, but most of the time I just think about what month the snow will melt on Humphreys Peak so I can stand on top of it.

I decided on this project hoping it would give me some insight; talking to other people who were obsessed with altitude might help me understand my own new “peak bagging” obsession.

The sport of peak bagging began in Scotland in 1891, when Sir Hugh T. Munro made a list of the 284 Scottish peaks above 3,000 feet. Scotland’s peaks had been there forever, as far as humans were concerned, but the idea of climbing all of them didn’t become a fad until the list was published. The sport crossed the Atlantic in 1918, when the first American peak baggers, brothers Robert and George Marshall and their friend and guide, Herb Clark, set out to climb New York’s 46 Adirondack Peaks higher than 4,000 feet. They completed their mission in 1925.

In 1937, a church school class formed the Forty-Sixers of Troy, which became the Adirondack Forty-Sixers in 1948. Although later surveys found only 42 of the

Adirondack Mountains to be higher than 4,000 feet, summits of the original list of 46 peaks are required for membership in the Forty-Sixers. Peak bagging in New Hampshire's White Mountains followed the lead of the Forty-Sixers, when it was believed that 46 of the White Mountains rose above 4,000 feet. Subsequent research proved that the White Mountains 4,000-footer list included 67 mountains. Currently, nearly 5,000 people have completed the Adirondack 46ers and more than 7,100 have completed the White Mountain 4,000-footers.

Today, there are lists of peaks for every taste: Colorado's 54 peaks higher than 14,000 feet, Idaho's nine peaks higher than 12,000 feet, the Catskill 3,500-footers, et cetera.

The mutations of this obsession go beyond the lists of x number of peaks above x number of feet, however. In this project, I have explored two stories that are not explicitly about peak bagging, but rely on altitude and lists, as well as one story about a conservation group that has taken on the task of rectifying and preventing damage resulting from the peak bagging craze.

The first article is a profile of Bob Packard, a 67-year-old retired Northern Arizona University professor whose obsession is to climb the highest geographic point in as many U.S. counties as he can. Packard has ascended 1,157 of 3,142 U.S. county high points as of April 2004. He is the reigning king of "county highpointing," a little-known hobby that has attracted just over 200 participants in its fledgling 10-year history.

The county highpointers might be seen as an offshoot of a club that is the focus of the second article: The Highpointers Club, a group whose members try to ascend the geographic high points in each of the fifty U.S. states. The founder of the Highpointers

Club, Jack Longacre, died of cancer in October 2002. His final wish was to have his ashes scattered on the summits of the 50 states. More than 600 people have been involved in the project to date, which has covered 49 states and the District of Columbia, with only Wyoming's Gannett Peak remaining for August 2004.

The third article profiles a non-profit group organized to battle the side effects of the peak bagging craze. The mission of the Colorado Fourteeners Initiative is to protect and preserve the natural beauty of the state's 54 14,000-foot peaks. The CFI is based in Golden, Colo., and works with the U.S. Forest Service, the Colorado Mountain Club, Outward Bound West, Leave No Trace Inc., the Rocky Mountain Field Institute and Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado to repair and prevent damage caused by the 500,000 hikers who climb the peaks every year.

Through this project, I tried to find answers to my questions. During my first interview with Bob Packard, in his living room in Flagstaff, Ariz., Packard said, "It's the lists that get me out there," meaning that he wasn't obsessed with having a longer or better list than anyone, but he needed a reason to leave his couch—and a new peak or a new goal was just the trick.

Later in the project, I was interviewing Dennis Whitehead, a climber who lives in Iron Mountain, Mich., and he was trying to tell me about what he'd learned from other mountain climbers. He said that climbers often had trouble with their marriages. For example, he and his friend Jack Longacre had both been married and divorced several times. He said that the feeling of standing on top of a mountain was too euphoric for a mountain climber to give up, for any person. He stopped himself, saying, "I don't know if I'm doing a very good job of putting this into words—"

“Nobody can,” I interrupted him.

“Yeah,” he said. “It’s ineffable.”

One: Bob Packard

There are no hero shots in Bob Packard's living room in Flagstaff, Ariz., no photos of him on the summits of the many mountains he's climbed. There isn't a framed photo of him on top of Maine's Mt. Katahdin, his first real mountain climb in 1958. Nor are there any photos on display from his most recent ascent, Venezuela's Pico Bolivar, in January 2004. Ditto for Mt. Kilimanjaro, Mont Blanc, Aconcagua, Denali, Mt. Rainier, Mt. Whitney, Mt. Hood, or any of the highest 100 summits in Colorado or any of the 262 Arizona summits higher than 8,000 feet.

Packard doesn't keep any photos of himself in his living room. He's got about 100 filed away in scrapbooks, he says, and if he wanted to put one of them up to show just one of his 3,000-plus summits, he'd have no problem choosing. He's a 67-year-old retired math professor who taught at Northern Arizona University until 1996, and during his summer breaks, Thanksgiving breaks, winter breaks, spring breaks, and now retirement break, he's been hiking and climbing. So a man who's made a life's work of climbing high points must have some record of where he's been, right?

So I ask him about his latest hobby, county highpointing, and he produces two stacks of paper, each as thick as a phone book, one file indexed by place, the other indexed by hike, all typed into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet using as few words as possible to make sure each entry fits on one line.

But fittingly, he has to go upstairs to get them.

* * *

Bob Packard is the national champion of a sport the rest of the nation knows nothing about. He will say he hikes for its many benefits: It keeps him in great shape at 67 years old, it allows him to see a lot of different places, it offers terrific views, and it's good for his mind as well as his soul. But the gateway to all of these reasons lies in the pure numbers, the records of his experiences: the lists.

“It is true, I am very goal-oriented—I like lists of mountains, and I like to check 'em off,” Packard says. “Lists give you automatic goals. I'm not happy, as a lot of people are, just to go out and hike. I need a goal to motivate me. ‘Get to this point’ or ‘Hike to the top of this hill,’ or something like that.”

The lists are the solid evidence of Packard's lifetime of hiking: The top 150 summits in the lower 48 states, all the U.S. state high points, the high points of each of Arizona's “official” mountain ranges (according to Packard, there are actually 230 ranges in Arizona), all 54 of Colorado's “Fourteeners” (mountains 14,000 feet or higher) and 440 of its 636 “13ers,” on and on and on, until he gets to the real gem, the list that sets him apart from everyone else: 1,157 county high points, more than one-third of the 3,142 in the United States.

Packard is the king of county highpointing, a small and slowly growing movement that got its initial jolt in 1994 when Andy Martin, a Tucson software developer and mountaineer, published “County High Points,” a book listing each of the high points of 742 counties in 25 Western and Northeastern states, and at that time the most comprehensive list of county high points in America. The group of about 200 nationwide county highpointers, or “COHPers,” is composed mostly of men in their 40s, 50s and 60s, who share the common thread of their hobby and come together at the

county highpointing Web site, www.cohp.org, where their collective thousands of trip reports from all over the country are posted.

County highpointers are the first cousins of the Highpointers Club, a group of about 2,600 individuals whose goal is to summit all 50 state high points, from Alaska's 20,320-foot Denali to Florida's 345-foot Britton Hill, in a roadside rest area near the small town of Paxton. Although state highpointers have to climb some fairly tough mountains to join the Highpointers Club and county highpointers can summit any 100 U.S. counties to gain entry to the club and appear on the "County Century Club List," both will argue as to who has to devote the most work to their respective hobby.

What county highpointing lacks in altitude gain, it more than makes up for in planning, paperwork and horizontal hiking miles. When a county high point isn't as obvious as, say, Mt. Rainier (Jefferson County, Washington), a COHPer must obtain topographic maps of the county in order to find the true high point. But sometimes the contour maps don't even show an undisputed high point.

In flatter counties, like many in the Midwest, a highpointer must visit multiple spots to guarantee he's reached the high point. In the case of Tipton County, Ind., 96 different locations are similar enough in altitude to make a case for the title of county high point. And you'll visit all of them, including one next to a fertilizer factory, one in a bean field, and one between the tree house and the propane tank at Mike and Ginny Glunt's house, if you want to tell the COHPers you've completed Tipton County.

There are many "gimmes," or county high points where the summit can be reached by driving, such as Seneca County, N.Y., where you don't have to do much

hiking, other than sticking your foot out of your car door once you've driven right over the high point in the middle of a dirt road in the Finger Lakes National Forest.

But Bob Packard hasn't built his list of 1,157 county high points on gimmes. He has conquered almost every county in the West, the most rugged half of the United States: All the counties in New Mexico, Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho, Oregon, North Dakota, and all but one county in both Washington and Montana, both of which he plans to complete in the next two years. He's also finished the northeast: New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Maine.

His "completion map," on which he's color-coded the counties he's completed, shows a string of counties stretching from North Dakota to New York, and another string from north Texas to New York, via Georgia. He's connected the west to the east, twice. He's double-stitched the country, just for the hell of it.

After growing up in rural Maine, earning a Ph.D. in math at Bowdoin College, getting married and having two sons, Packard moved his family to Flagstaff, Ariz., in 1968 when he took a teaching job at Northern Arizona University. His now ex-wife, Roberta Packard, who amicably split from Packard in 1979, laughs about Bob's obsession with the outdoors: "Did he tell you he picked Flagstaff because he heard there were great hiking opportunities there? The joke used to be, 'If you had to work in the real world, your life would be a lot different.'" Teaching college-level math afforded Packard three months off every summer, to devote mostly to exploring the backcountry. Even family vacations were planned to accommodate hiking, Roberta says, and although the

two joked about the differing levels of interest in the outdoors, Bob's passion for climbing and hiking had a hand in their divorce, after which they remained close friends but pursued their own interests. Roberta moved to Oregon and lives on a small farm, and Bob stayed in Flagstaff and continues to spend his spare time on the trails. "It's a big part of who he is," Roberta says. "That part of his makeup has been fulfilled."

One day in 1988, Packard's son, Erik, then 23 years old and a climber himself, suggested to Bob the idea of trying to summit all the county high points in Arizona. He had already unintentionally done almost all of the 15 while climbing mountains, so he took Erik's advice and decided to finish them off.

Using only an Arizona state map, he made guesses as to where the county high points were and hiked to them. After Packard had completed the state, a friend pointed out that Packard had misjudged the high point of Pinal County, north of Tucson, so he returned to correct his error. He walked along the Oracle Ridge of the Catalina Mountains towards the Pinal/Pima county line and stopped where he had figured the high point to be.

"I looked down, and by golly, right there was a little cairn," Packard says. "In the cairn was an aspirin bottle, and in the aspirin bottle was a long, thin piece of paper. And the long, thin piece of paper said, 'This is the high point of Pinal County. My name is Doug Kaisan and this is my telephone number.' This was the first time that I realized there was anybody else in the world interested in county highpointing."

Packard phoned Kaisan, a geologist and mountaineer who lived in Tucson, to compare notes on the 15 Arizona county high points. They agreed on all of them. Shortly after, the Highpointers Club began printing lists of county high points in its quarterly

“Apex to Zenith” newsletter. In 1994, Andy Martin, the Tucson software developer, published the first version of his book, “County High Points,” which Packard calls “The Bible.”

In 1996, Packard retired from Northern Arizona University. As an NAU professor, Packard had only three months off work every summer to spend hiking and climbing. When he retired, he had 365 days a year to devote to his hobbies.

By the time he retired, Packard says, his focus had become more oriented towards county high points rather than just hiking, and with no schedule or responsibilities in the real world, everything was in order to make a run at it.

Packard’s “home away from home,” as he calls it, is a 1998 four-wheel drive Chevy Cheyenne truck with an eight-foot camper perched on the back. The camper has no electricity, no water, and no toilet, and a sticker reading “HIGHPOINTER” slapped on the back window.

The four-wheel drive allows him to negotiate the worst of roads, and the camper allows him to sleep wherever he wants to begin his next day’s hike. He drives it everywhere in the United States except Alaska and Hawaii, and estimates that he puts 35,000 miles on it every year while pursuing his hobby. His lack of commitments to a family or a career allows him to stack huge numbers on top of his record—as during his November 2003 trip to Oklahoma and Mississippi, where he completed 40 counties, or his spring 2003 trip through the Midwest, South and Northeast, during which he completed 120 counties.

Although climbing the “peaks” of the plains states aren’t on the normal peakbagger’s to-do list, Packard says some of the flatter counties can provide their own brand of adventure.

In Bennett County, S.D., Packard had to visit eight different places to guarantee himself the high point. Seven of the eight areas were inside a large bison range on Pine Ridge Indian tribal land. Armed with only a GPS, Packard spent nearly 11 hours making friends with the buffalo.

According to Packard’s trip report on cohp.org, he did his best to avoid the herds of 50 to 150 buffalo, but most of the time, they stood in his way. Or he stood in theirs. He walked towards the herd, cautiously. Some of the buffalo would trot off as they noticed him. But the bull would stay behind. Packard watched and waited. So did the bull. After a tense moment or two, the bull trotted off to join the herd. Every time.

“You’re in there, and there’s no way you can go to these places without being surrounded by hundreds and hundreds of buffalo and bison,” Packard says. “It’s a little scary in there, and there’s no escape; it’s such a huge place, and you’re miles and miles from the edge of it—if one of the bulls would decide to attack you, there’s nothing you could do.”

But rarely is livestock the biggest challenge for COHPers. More often, their toughest negotiations are with landowners. Many high points are on private property, so COHPers do their best to find the owner and ask for permission. In the best cases, COHPers will ask the landowner’s permission and post the owner’s name and phone number in their trip reports so future hikers can call ahead before hiking. In the worst

cases, COHPers have difficulty convincing an owner of the legitimacy of county highpointing before ultimately receiving a confused “Go ahead.”

Other times, COHPers have to “stealth” a high point, as Packard, Mike Schwartz (a New Jersey-based COHPer), and Fred Lobdell (a North Carolina-based COHPer) did in Queens County, N.Y. in May 2002.

The three, who had come to know each other through the COHP Web site, e-mails and phone calls, were able to bag the five New York City boroughs plus Suffolk County and Nassau County in less than nine hours, with Schwartz navigating the city traffic and acting as guide to his two out-of-town guests. Their last high point was Queens County, where the high point lies inside the fence at Towers Country Club in Floral Park, N.Y. Rather than climb the fence, the men decided to ask permission from the guards at the gate.

“Mike had been able to get in several months before, and he went up to the guards,” Lobdell recalls. “Well, they weren’t having any this time. So, we kind of waited until they were distracted by people going in, and then we just walked around the fence and walked along there on the inside. Actually, if we would have worked at it, we probably could have found somebody to go over and escort us in as their guest.”

After sneaking back out of the golf course, Lobdell, Packard and Schwartz learned that the guards’ stinginess stemmed from a terrorist threat on high-rise apartment buildings in New York City, like the North Shore Towers buildings adjacent to the country club. Terrorist threat or not, however, county highpointers are used to the suspicions of landowners and usually explain as best they can. As Lobdell told a

Northwest Florida Daily News reporter in 1999, “When I come up and talk to a landowner, I tell them it’s kind of a strange hobby, but it’s better than Jeffrey Dahmer’s.”

With only 200 or so COHPers scattered across the United States, county highpointing is not exactly catching on as quickly as bungee jumping or snowboarding have in the past 20 years. But Andy Martin, county highpointing guru and author of “County High Points,” says the small community is adding members slowly, as evidenced by the number of people adding their names to the “Century Club” list on cohpc.org after they’ve completed 100 counties.

“You don’t do 100 county high points by accident,” Martin says. “It’s a fringe activity, especially to the 99 percent of the population that likes to golf on the weekends. When you get into the flatter counties, you’re getting into the fringe of the fringe.”

The slow growth of the sport might guarantee that Bob Packard will stay on top for a long time. He’s got the time to do it, Martin says, the know-how, and most importantly, he’s got the drive. Martin recalls the story of Packard’s first attempt at Washington’s 7,965-foot Mt. Olympus: The trip is a two-day hike in, with one day to summit the peak, and two days to hike back out. On the third day of Packard’s hike, he and his two companions decided it was too late in the day to make a safe attempt at the summit without risking exposure to the storms that frequently appear on mountaintops in the early afternoon hours. They hiked out without bagging the high point.

“That’d be a pretty big downer,” Martin says. “I don’t know if I would have gone back. But he did.” Packard summited Olympus on his second attempt.

Martin says Packard has led the way for county highpointing in many of the states in the West, going after tough states like Montana, a challenge because of its size, its 56 counties, and variance in topography: flat in the east, rugged in the west.

“Nobody wants to tackle the tougher western states,” Martin says. “Bob’s the only one. And he’s been going after them basically by himself.”

When he’s not going by himself, Packard often teams up with Bob Martin, an 83-year-old climber who is not related to Andy Martin and who lives in Tucson for most of the year. When he’s not on trips with Packard, Martin is rumored to sneak in a few county high points while on trips with his wife. Martin claims to be way past his prime, although he has bagged over 5,000 summits in Colorado and Arizona, and is Packard’s closest competitor in county highpointing, with 896 counties. But Martin and Packard are friends more than competitors.

“He’s very generous,” Martin says. “He’s very helpful. Sometimes I wonder why someone who’s as good a hiker as he is would want to stay back with someone who’s as slow as I’m getting to be.”

Packard talked Martin into county highpointing six years ago, by doing nothing more than suggesting adding the goal of counties to Martin’s hiking hobby. Martin, who co-authored “Arizona’s Mountains” with his wife Dotty in 1987, became hooked on a sport he says is “mountaineering with a touch of orienteering, which is the fascinating part to me. Finding the places is the adventure of it.” County highpointing, Martin says, takes him many places he’d normally never see, and county highpointing with Packard keeps him from seeing much of one particular place—the inside of his sleeping bag.

“Bobby likes to go from dawn to dusk,” Martin says. “In the summertime, when I go with

him, I don't get much sleep. When we get done hiking at night, we drive right on to the next spot so we'll be ready to go the next morning."

From the looks of his accomplishments, it doesn't appear that Bob Packard has spent much time sleeping in his entire life. It's easy to look at the raw data and see Packard as an obsessed man who wants nothing more in life than to hike up tall things and then run back down, drive to his house and add this or that mountain to his ever-growing list.

But Packard disagrees. As he says, the lists and goals are motivational tools to get him out the front door and back to nature, so he can see the beautiful scenery of as many places as he has time for. Most of the great views only come back when he's looking at his notes and has his memory jogged, he says. But there are a few that stick in his memory. One of his favorites is a place on the White Rim Trail in Canyonlands National Park, where he once stopped to take in a distant view of the confluence of the Colorado and Green rivers. Another time, he was climbing Argentina's 22,840-foot Aconcagua with his sons, Erik and Keith, and Keith was struggling to make it to the top. Since it was getting late, Erik and his wife left the summit to make their way back down to the high camp at 19,400 feet. Packard sat alone on the summit, waiting for Keith. When he finally made it they shared the view, and Bob cried at Keith's success.

But one of the best places is a waterfall he calls Whispering Falls, in a canyon near Kanab Creek, a side canyon of the Grand Canyon.

"When I first went up that canyon and came to the falls," he says, "I saw a vista that blew me away. I had sort of a religious experience where I felt past and present

merge and I felt simultaneously the most insignificant and important person in the world.”

He has seen the tops of 5 continents and 19 countries, the tops of the 50 U.S. states and all the Arizona mountain ranges. And by the way, he’ll mention, he’s also the only living person to have hiked the entire length of the Grand Canyon between the rim and the Colorado River—on both sides.

Ken Walters, a Grand Canyon Field Institute instructor who lives in Flagstaff, has hiked the length of the canyon on one side and spent hundreds of days hiking there with Packard. During Packard’s Thanksgiving break from NAU in 1981, the two decided to take a nine-day trek in the canyon.

They were seven days in and were starting their two-day trip back when they were ambushed by a blizzard, high up on the canyon’s north rim. Unprepared for the early snow, the two camped under a tarp at night after hiking through the snow all day. Their boots and pants became soaked during the days and froze overnight. When they woke, they couldn’t put their feet through their frozen pant legs or into their boots.

“I had a little butane stove,” Walters says. “I’d boil water in a pot, put it in a Nalgene (water bottle) and force it into a boot. Seems like it took about 20 minutes per boot and 20 minutes per pant leg to get this bottle through so you could put them on.”

Packard had bought a pair of boots a half-size too small, but kept them despite their tightness. They worked okay for the most part, he says, but in the Grand Canyon snow, they prevented him from wiggling his toes to circulate blood, and there was no way to completely thaw out the boots. The two-day hike out turned into four days, and on

the last day, Walters and Packard were out of food and out of fuel for Walters' camp stove. They were cold, tired, bloody and bruised.

“We must have fallen a thousand times,” Walters says, laughing. “Even when it was clear in the daytime, we could see, but you just couldn't tell what was underfoot, and you're just falling all the time. You'd step on a buried slab of rock you never even saw, and the next thing you know, you'd be ten feet down the slope, upside-down in the snow.”

When they finally got out of the canyon to Packard's truck and drove out, Packard's numb feet thawed. The accompanying pain told him his feet were frostbitten. He dropped Walters off at home and drove directly to the hospital where he stayed for the next three weeks with an antibiotic IV to ward off infection in his toes. Packard, a national-class master's division runner at that time, was uncertain if he'd be able to keep any or all of his toes, and uncertain about his future as a runner and hiker as well. A surgeon was able to save all ten of his toes.

“One of those last mornings after the storm was over, we were on the rim, and the canyon was just full of clouds, but there were some buttes sticking through, and with the sunlight on them, it was just an incredible scene,” Walters recalls. A mutual friend had gone into visit Packard in the hospital, and as he tried to console Packard about the uncertainty of his running career, Packard said, “You should have seen that next-to-last morning. It was so beautiful, it was worth it.”

Two: The Jack Ash Project

Jean Trousdale is a clinical psychologist from Norman, Okla., a mountain climber who says she's scared of mountains, and a grandmother. You'd never peg her as the sort of person who would spend her spare time mailing the incinerated remains of a dead man all over the United States.

But when her friend Jack Longacre said his final wish was to have his ashes scattered on the high points of all 50 states and the District of Columbia, she took the responsibility of making sure it happened. After Jack died of cancer in October 2002, Trousdale spent the next year coordinating a nationwide set of memorial ceremonies for him.

Trousdale only knew Jack for the last six years of his life, as did many of the people involved in his memorials. But they all felt close enough to him to carry his ashes up the hills and mountains he chose for his final resting places.

More than 600 people have taken part in scattering Jack, but Trousdale was the only person who had the job of putting Jack's remains into 51 separate film canisters, which Jack had marked with the names of each state. She didn't know if it was going to freak her out or not, she says, but a man's last wish is a man's last wish, so she sat down with the canisters, a roll of bubble wrap, 51 Ziploc bags, 51 boxes, and a box of ashes that used to be her friend.

"I just scooped them out," Trousdale says. "Just took the little canister, dipped the ashes out and wiped the canister off." Before he died, Jack had shown her how he wanted her to seal each canister before mailing it.

“I’ve dealt with ashes before,” Trousdale says. “They’re just calcium.”

Only a man whose life was an adventure could ask those close to him to carry out such an extensive farewell. Many of the U.S. state high points are easily accessible, like Delaware’s 451-foot high point that sits in the middle of a street, or New Hampshire’s 6,288-foot Mt. Washington, which can be summited via a cog railway leading to the top. But some are as difficult as Alaska’s 20,320-foot Denali, a technical rock and ice climb requiring crampons, ice axes, ropes, training, three weeks and thousands of dollars to reach the top.

Born in Sturgis, Mich., on January 8, 1938, Longacre liked to tell people that he was born on the same day as Elvis Presley, only three years later. After graduating from high school, he worked at the Weyerhaeuser Lumber Company in White Pigeon, Mich., for 12 years, and while there, he married and had two daughters and a son.

After he and his wife divorced, he moved to Seattle, affording him views of Mt. Rainier, which taunted him ceaselessly. He wrote in his memoir: “Rainier! Leave me alone! Why do you gnaw at me? Hmmm. Snow covered. Hey, I’m from Michigan, I know all about snow. One of these days I’ll just slap on a pair of galoshes and trundle up there!”

Fortunately, before he and his rain shoes could attempt Rainier, he took a job at Boeing and joined the Boeing Alpine Climbing Society, or Boealps, a group of Boeing employees who got together on weekends to learn climbing skills, and learned the basics of mountaineering. He climbed Oregon’s Mt. Hood with Boealps in 1981, getting his first taste of summit fever, and climbed Rainier a month later.

One day, while browsing through the Boealps book collection, Longacre happened upon a book called “Highpoints of the States,” written in 1970 by Frank Ashley, the first person to visit every high point of the lower 48 states in the same year. Longacre had discovered a hobby that would make him the patriarch of a surrogate family in the last years of his life. From 1981 to 1985, Longacre climbed all 50 summits, crossing the country in Doo-Dah, his orange 1972 Chevy pickup.

On the way to the top of Denali, the 20,320-foot crown of Alaska, Longacre wrote: “The heart beats three billion times in your expected 70-year lifetime. The overwhelming beauty of this place sets one’s heart to coursing speeds. Somewhere along my lifetime I’m going to need some down time or else I’ll be going way over my three billion quota. My heart goes out to anyone who has not experienced it.”

Longacre sought out others who wanted to experience the same things. In 1986, he sent a letter about his “highpointing” hobby to Outside magazine, looking for others with the same interests. Correspondence with other “Highpointers” brought Longacre back to Michigan on April 25, 1987, when the “Original Eight” Highpointers—Longacre; Michiganders Dennis Whitehead, George Johnson and Greg Lehman; and New Yorkers Clark Hall, Jack and Joyce Parsell, and Don Berens—met on the 1,979-foot Mt. Arvon and founded the Highpointers Club.

After retiring from Boeing, Jack moved to Mountain Home, Ark., where he set up the Highpointers Club headquarters and started publishing the club newsletter. After his second divorce, he began looking for a new home for the club headquarters and found some land near Arcadia, Mo., and more importantly, near Taum Sauk Mountain, Missouri’s 1,772-foot high point. He had sought a location that would make him

accessible to his new family, the Highpointers Club. He built a house on County Road CC, hoping that club members would stop by on their way to summit Taum Sauk.

Many would stop and get to know Jack. Talk to most Highpointers and you'll hear them speak reverently about the man they call "Guru Jakk" ("Jakk," spelled to accommodate his signature of "Keep Klimbin'," also the title of his memoir). Everyone has a favorite Jack story: He hauled an 18-pound watermelon in his pack to surprise the members of his singles hiking club when they stopped for lunch during a trek in the ice caves on the south face of Mt. Rainier. He pulled a 5-inch television out of his sleeping bag at 9,500 feet on the way up Mt. Hood. During a Highpointers convention hike in Texas, Jack started to fall behind the rest of the pack and pulled out of sight about 100 feet from the summit, only to pop around the corner in a pressed white shirt, tie and jacket, asking, "Didn't I tell y'all? This is formal!" as they snapped pictures of him.

Jack was the seventh person to complete all 50 state high points, and by the time of his death, the Original Eight had grown to a Highpointers Club membership of nearly 2,600 men and women, including many couples, families with children, and 125 members who had completed all 50 states.

Jack's memoir is, not surprisingly, organized by state high points, starting with Mt. Hood, the first big mountain his Boealps group climbed together in June 1981, and ending at Gannett Peak, which he climbed by himself in August 1985. Every entry includes the names of the plants and animals Jack saw on his way to the high point. He collects rocks, celebrates insects, and devotes almost an entire page to reviewing all the different shapes and colors of clouds he'd seen on his travels.

“He could be standing, looking over the Grand Canyon, and admire a little insect on a blade of grass right in front of him, and he would admire that as much as looking at that entire view of the Grand Canyon,” says Dennis Whitehead, one of the Original Eight. “It would all be the same to him. He didn’t miss any opportunities to see beauty in life, and that is a real gift.”

Jack’s love for the fauna, flora and vistas of the great outdoors made him a guru, but his love for sharing those things made him the nucleus of a group of people spread across the country who didn’t know they were a “group” until he told them so.

“He brought all these people from these diverse backgrounds together into a club that really, if you think about it, just seems like such an improbable club,” Dennis Whitehead says. “That’s the way he was. He was always looking to share those experiences with people. And I don’t think that his death would have been an experience that he would have wanted to have kept from anybody else. He would have wanted to share that, too.”

FRIDAY, SEPT. 19, 2002—BLACK MESA—NEAR KENTON,
OKLA.—ELEVATION: 4,973 FEET

Jack, then 64, had been battling non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma since his diagnosis in spring 2002, but had been more worried about getting his memoir published and organizing the specifics of his final wish. Jean Trousdale had picked up Jack’s manuscript from him in June and had spent the better part of her summer on the phone with him, reworking his writing to prepare it to go to a publisher in Vancouver, Wash.

Jack had collected 51 film canisters and labeled them according to state, to make sure they were ready for his ashes.

The 2002 Highpointers convention was held near Oklahoma's Black Mesa. Jack was for the most part bedridden, but still determined to attend. Trousdale made arrangements for Jack to stay in a bunkhouse "as close to the action as you could get." On Friday night, club members piled into the bunkhouse to serenade Jack with his favorite song, "Today," by Randy Sparks. "I guarantee you, there wasn't a dry eye in the house that night," Trousdale says. The next day, while the other Highpointers climbed up the front of Black Mesa, Trousdale arranged to drive Jack and friend Paul Zumwalt to the top by car, up a rough back road. When the Highpointers reached the top, they found Jack and Zumwalt comfortably seated in lawn chairs at the summit. By the next morning, Jack couldn't sit up, so he rode in a makeshift bed in the back of Trousdale's Ford Explorer to her home in Norman, where he stayed an extra day to rest before being taken home.

SUNDAY, OCT. 13, 2002—MINERAL AREA REGIONAL MEDICAL
CENTER—FARMINGTON, MO.— ELEVATION: 938 FEET

Trousdale left her home in Norman, Okla., at 11:30 p.m. Oct. 12, driving all night and arriving in Farmington at 7 o'clock the next morning.

When she arrived at the hospital, Jack was in bad shape. He had seen a multitude of doctors throughout eastern Missouri and undergone massive chemotherapy. On Monday afternoon, he received some plasma and platelets, Trousdale says, bringing about "a three-hour window of real clarity." They spent the time having the last good talk

they'd ever share. That night, Jack told Trousdale to go get some sleep, so she left the hospital to stay at Jack's house with visiting relatives.

The next morning, Trousdale received word that Jack was having trouble breathing, so she went back to the hospital with Jack's brother, Dave. At 1:20 that afternoon, Jack died.

Jack's daughter, Lorrie Krontz, arrived the following day and signed the papers allowing Jack's body to be cremated. Later that week, she picked up the ashes and left them at Jack's house.

On Nov. 16, 40 Highpointers met at the Fort Davidson Motel & Restaurant in Ironton, Mo., for a memorial service titled "A Celebration of Jack's Life." Club chairman Roger Rowlett read a proclamation from Missouri Gov. Bob Holden, declaring Nov. 16, 2002 "Jack Longacre Day." At the end of the ceremony, members listened to a recording of Jack's eulogy, which he had recorded himself on Aug. 29, 1997.

After the ceremony, the Highpointers hiked to the summit of Taum Sauk, where Jack's neighbors, Faith and Paul Light, scattered the first of many film canisters full of Jack's ashes.

Trousdale took the remaining film cans and the remaining ashes back to Norman. By Dec. 6, she was ready to have a memorial back at Black Mesa with three others, albeit in a blizzard. Then she was ready to organize the rest of Jack's last wish. She later wrote in a club newsletter: "I knew I had the easy part—I mean, how hard can it be to transfer ashes into 51 little already-prepared film canisters and get them ready to be mailed? But who would I mail them to?"

SATURDAY, MARCH 22, 2003—BRITTON HILL—NEAR PAXTON,
FLA.—ELEVATION: 345 FEET

Jon Mann and his roommate left their home in Nashville, Tenn., and drove eight hours to Britton Hill, the lowest of the 50 state high points. There's a 3 1/2-foot high granite marker on top of the "summit" now, but when Jack was there in 1984, there was nothing, so he just walked in a criss-cross pattern until he was satisfied he had stepped on the high point. "Exactly at what precise moment I don't know, but I have done it," he wrote in his memoir.

Mann, a bird-watcher as well as a highpointer, played a screech owl cassette to entice birds to sing, placed a picture of Jack on top of the granite marker, sprinkled Jack on top and thanked him for starting the Highpointers Club.

Since Jack had adopted a section of the highway leading to Taum Sauk and volunteered his time to pick up trash along the road, Mann decided it would be appropriate for him and his roommate to pick up the garbage that had accumulated around Britton Hill, which is located in a roadside rest area. Then they left.

SATURDAY, APRIL 12, 2003—CAMPBELL HILL—NEAR
BELLEFONTAINE, OHIO—ELEVATION: 1,550 FEET

Campbell Hill, Ohio's high point, is a two-hour drive from Hoosier Hill, Indiana's high point. On July 10, 1984, Jack summited both within 2 1/2 hours, racing against daylight to squeeze in Campbell Hill shortly before 9 p.m. After Jack's death, the Highpointers decided to have both the Hoosier Hill memorial and the Campbell Hill memorial on the same day.

After leaving Hoosier Hill, 21 friends of Jack gathered atop windy Campbell Hill, including the head of grounds for the Ohio Hi-Point Career Center, located on Campbell Hill. Mark and Wendy Comstock, of Ann Arbor, Mich., set up an easel with four 8-by-12 photos of Jack, taken at the 2002 Oklahoma convention. They played a tape of “Today,” and everyone sang. Near the end of the song, the tape cut out, but the group finished the lyrics a capella.

“It seemed as if Jack was putting us to the test to see if we could come through, and we did,” Mark Comstock says. “That might sound a little melodramatic, but that’s exactly how it happened.”

The Comstocks handed everyone in the group a red carnation, the Ohio state flower, and Mark spread the ashes onto the U.S. Geological Survey marker at the summit. In silence, everyone placed their flowers on top of the ashes. They opened champagne and toasted Jack, and sliced a watermelon, another nod to Jack. Then they shared their favorite Jack stories.

“It was nice (for Jack) to talk to those of us that were shooting for 50 and climbing other places, but it was also people like my wife, who is probably going to get about 40 high points, and not any of the real serious ones,” Comstock says. “He treated them with every bit as much respect and enjoyment, and had a way of making everybody feel that the club was really a good thing for them.”

The group gathered for a photo near the U.S. Geological Survey marker designating the exact spot of Ohio’s high point, and Mark insisted that the head of grounds at the career center and his assistant be included. Also appearing in the photo were Candus Thomson, outdoor writer for the Baltimore Sun, and her husband, Robert.

In her May 6 article in the Sun, Thomson wrote: “Atop Campbell Hill, Longacre’s ashes rest briefly on the bronze summit marker. But restless still, Longacre is gone in a gust of wind.”

FRIDAY, APRIL 25, 2003—MT. ARVON—NEAR L’ANSE,
MICH.—ELEVATION: 1,979 FEET

In 1987, Dennis Whitehead considered it a privilege to stand here with the rest of the Original Eight Highpointers. No one else knew where it was, so Whitehead guided them up.

Sixteen years later, Whitehead and four of the other Original Eight returned, slogging through mud and two feet of snow on Michigan’s heavily wooded Upper Peninsula. Jack was missing, and so was Clark Hall, who died in 2002 of malignant thrombocytosis, a rare form of blood cancer. Jack’s ashes were brought to Arvon in the film canister marked “Michigan” and Hall’s ashes were brought in a plastic bag. Also missing were Don Berens, who couldn’t make the trip from Albany, N.Y., and Eric Krantz, who isn’t considered one of the Original Eight but can be seen, at nine years old, in the 1987 group photo—he’s the only one not smiling into the camera; he’s looking over at his grandpa Jack.

Jack and Joyce Parsell, now in their 80s, were determined to make the trek to Arvon even when the group’s van got stuck in the muddy road six miles from the summit. They hiked on with fellow founding members George Johnson and Greg Lehman. After a four-hour hike through knee-deep snow, the five posed for a re-creation of the 1987 photo—Whitehead holding Jack’s ashes in the spot he had stood 16 years

prior, and Jack Parsell holding Hall's ashes in the appropriate spot, where he had kneeled in front of Jack in 1987.

"I held Jack's ashes in my hand for that picture," Whitehead says, "and I could feel him there."

The five took turns spreading Jack's ashes, each saying a few words, Whitehead says, but mostly about how it was typical of Jack to want them to get all muddy for him.

SATURDAY, JULY 5, 2003—DENALI—NEAR NOWHERE
ELSE—ELEVATION: 20,320 FEET

John Mitchler knows the disappointment of getting close to the top of North America and failing. He was there in 2001, staring his 50th and final state high point in its snow-covered face before he was beaten off the mountain by bad weather. But he knew this time would be better.

"I was so confident all the way up," says Mitchler, club newsletter co-editor. "I knew I had Jack Longacre with me, so it felt really special."

After 14 days of trudging up the mountain, hauling gear up to the high camp near 17,000 feet, and two days waiting for good weather, Mitchler's expedition group summited, and he claimed his last high point on a day with a summit temperature of 10 degrees Fahrenheit. There was no singing, no champagne, and no 21-person group photo. Not on Denali, a climb where, Mitchler says, "you cut your toothbrush in half to cut down on weight."

“Jack was always known for taking watermelons up peaks,” Mitchler says. “Well, I’ll be damned if I was going to take a frozen watermelon up there. I took watermelon seeds.”

Mitchler dug a small hole in the snow, took the Ziploc bag holding the film canister marked “Alaska,” and poured the ashes in the hole, said, “Goodbye, Jack, Goodbye, my friend,” sprinkled the watermelon seeds around the ashes and snapped a quick photo.

“I was allowed a good ten minutes of just sitting, looking at the hole with the ashes in it, contemplating that he’d been there before,” Mitchler says. “And this would be the last time.”

Mitchler was the only Highpointers Club member on Denali that day, but when he returned, he paid membership dues for the other six expedition members and their three guides, making them all honorary Highpointers for a year.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2003—GUADALUPE PEAK—NEAR PINE SPRINGS, TEXAS—ELEVATION: 8,749 FEET

Dr. Buddy Gilchrest had never met Jack Longacre in person.

But he knew adventure. In fact, he taught adventure. Gilchrest was a professor of adventure activities and sports psychology at Baylor University until 2001, when he retired. He once bicycled from Alaska to Florida. He has summited all the peaks in the United States higher than 14,000 feet. And he did 37 state high points—in one summer.

So when he read in the Highpointers Club newsletter that someone was needed to lead a memorial on Guadalupe Peak, he volunteered to come up with something. And he came up big.

Gilchrest brought 25 others to the summit of Guadalupe, including Boy Scout Troop 27 from El Paso. A Boy Scout bugler began the ceremony with “The Star-Spangled Banner,” and then Gilchrest’s wife, Tresa, led the group in singing “Today.”

Gilchrest read a tribute to Jack, acknowledging: “I never got to climb with Jack—until today,” and ending with “Bon voyage, my friend that I never met, but whom I understand and know well.”

Gilchrest opened the film canister on the summit, and as he says, “There was a good wind up there, so he’s well spread out now.”

Almost 21 years earlier, Jack, reflecting while on top of Guadalupe, wrote: “There is a lot of land in Texas. Why, it stretches from one side clear across to the other side. Ever’ thang in Texas is big, BIG!”

SPRING 2004—HIGHPOINTERS CLUB MERCANTILE—NORMAN,
OKLA.—ELEVATION: 1,172 FEET

After spending most of 2003 acting as the curator for Jack’s remains, Jean Trousdale is almost finished with Jack’s last wish. The District of Columbia and forty-nine of the 50 states have been completed.

“It was very healing for me, and it was for a lot of the people that did it,” Trousdale says. “I had letters and cards and notes from all these people, a lot of them saying how I had helped them kind of come to terms with his death. Although it was

tough to lose him, I know he hated living like that. He wasn't a guy who stayed inside much—much less in bed—and he couldn't even get out of the hospital.”

Wyoming's Gannett Peak, an isolated 13,804-foot mountain in the Wind River Range and by most accounts the most difficult climb of the 48 contiguous state high points, is all that remains in the way of the completion of what some Highpointers call “The Jack Ash Project.” Don Holmes attempted to take Jack's ashes to the top of Gannett in August 2003, but was turned back by a stomach illness. He'll go again this August, possibly with fate on his side—Gannett Peak was also Jack's last high point, and the only one he had to attempt twice before succeeding.

Trousdale will accompany Holmes in August, although, she says, “Mountains scare the hell out of me,” adding, “I'd have done it for old Jack. I told him he was more trouble dead than he was alive.”

Another trouble with Jack is that he turned into so many ashes. Trousdale still has about half of Jack, sitting in a box at her house. Are they going to just dump the rest of the box off Gannett in August?

No, Trousdale says, Jack's going international. The next goal is to take Jack to the the high points of the world's continents, also known as the Seven Summits, six of which he never saw in his lifetime.

“Wherever he's been,” Trousdale says. “And several places he hasn't been.”

One of those places is Triple Divide Peak in Glacier National Park. Jack never climbed Triple Divide, says Dave Covill, club newsletter co-editor, but it did give him a great idea.

“He wanted to paddle his kayak to the ocean,” Covill says. “He wanted to start at Triple Divide Peak because he saw it on a map, and he researched it and he found out that the waters from there flow to the Pacific, the Arctic and the Atlantic.”

In 2000, Jack did the first of the three legs of the journey, paddling his kayak, “Motomo,” the length of the Columbia River to the Pacific Ocean. In the spring of 2001, he started the journey to the Arctic Ocean, but bad weather, high winds and the discouraging fact that he just wasn’t in shape for it convinced him to abort the mission shortly after crossing the U.S.-Canada border. In spring 2002, he was diagnosed with cancer, and he died that October

That was it for the adventure, until Covill got an idea.

“We’re going to take him to the top of Triple Divide Peak,” Covill says. “We’re going to scatter him in a circle around the top of the peak, so he’ll float out to those oceans eventually. It might take a few million years, but that’s cool. We’ve got time.”

Three: The Colorado Fourteeners Initiative

The first Saturday in August 2003, a friend and I climbed Colorado's Mt. Elbert, two hours southwest of Denver. We left the apartment in Lakewood, Colo., at 4 a.m., and drove to the Elbert trailhead outside of Leadville, the highest incorporated city in the United States at 10,430 feet.

We hit the trail at 6 a.m., briskly pouncing our way through the trees. By 10:30, we were just below the summit, having put one hiking boot in front of the other for over four miles, and both nursing mild altitude headaches brought on by the 4,650-foot elevation gain. In a few steps, we'd be at the crest of the 14,433-foot roof of Colorado, the second-highest peak in the lower 48 next to California's Mt. Whitney. We'd be sitting higher than all of America, except for a few people who might have been atop Whitney at that exact moment. We could look over the view of the small communities of Stringtown and Leadville, 4,000 feet below us, and yell, "I am the King of the Rocky Mountains!"

But when we made the summit, we found we weren't the only kings that day. We had to share Elbert's view with nearly 30 co-kings and queens and a few equally royal canines. We sat on a rock, and a woman to our left lit a cigarette, at that time most probably the highest cigarette being smoked in the lower 48. As if on cue, a man just behind us lit a small bowl of marijuana, staking his own claim as the highest man in the United States.

On the upside, there were quite a few people available at the top to take our triumphant summit photo. But if we were looking for solitude, we had come to the wrong place.

There are 54 peaks in Colorado boasting heights of at least 14,000 feet. If you should decide to climb any of them this year, you'll be one of roughly half a million people with the same idea. In the past decade, the number of hikers attempting to bag a "Fourteener" has increased 300 percent. So if you choose Mt. Elbert, Mt. Massive, Capitol Peak, Pikes Peak, or any of their Colorado Rocky relatives for a weekend getaway, prepare to share your solitude with the multitudes.

Jim Gehres, dubbed "Mr. Fourteener" by the Colorado Mountain Club in 2002, remembers when mountain climbing was less popular in Colorado, before "Fourteener-bagging" (the idea of climbing as many Fourteeners as possible) had been invented. Gehres, a retired IRS attorney who lives in Denver, has been climbing the Fourteeners since 1960. He's done each one at least 12 times, some of them as many as 15 times, and counts more than 700 summits of the Fourteeners in the past 44 years. He can remember the days before the Fourteener trails were marked with signs and cairns to point hikers in the right direction. He even remembers the days before there were such things as trails, or even other hikers.

"I used to go out climbing mountains like Mt. Elbert on weekends in the summertime and go from early in the morning until late in the evening and never see another person," Gehres says. "Occasionally, I'd run into a Basque sheepherder who didn't speak English, or something like that."

But as hiking became more fashionable and mainstream, many people left the health clubs to get their exercise in the mountains. The popularity of hiking increased,

and widely available four-wheel drive vehicles and better hiking equipment made the peaks more and more accessible.

“Back in the 60s, very few people had four-wheel drives,” Gehres says. “So we used to backpack for miles up a jeep road (to get to the trail).”

Gehres has made the Fourteeners his back yard for the past 44 years. But now the Fourteeners are everyone else’s back yard, too. The 500,000 people hiking them every year often use the traditional climbing routes, or “social trails.” Social trails, or user-created trails, are not constructed with much foresight—they’re just routes people have walked and worn into the mountain over many years. Social trails become highly susceptible to erosion, a danger in the fragile alpine ecosystems of the Fourteeners, as the soil can gradually wash down the mountainside and smother lower-altitude plants, or seep into creeks and interfere with aquatic life.

Like city streets that develop potholes, mountain trails also are susceptible to wear and tear. Alpine vegetation gets trampled when hikers step off the trail to let others pass. Trails are widened when hikers step around a puddle instead of walking through it. Many routes cause water to run off and erode soil or destroy native plant life. Switchbacked trails, designed in zigzag patterns to make mountain climbs less steep, also present problems when hikers shortcut them. Avoiding the switchbacks and going straight up or straight down the mountain can cause accelerated and severe erosion.

When too many potholes appear on city streets, the street department eventually shows up to fix them. And when the trails on the Fourteeners start to deteriorate, the Colorado Fourteeners Initiative shows up to fix them.

Although protecting the Fourteeners isn't a hot-news environmental issue like global warming or as urgent as an oil spill, the use the Fourteeners receive is growing by 10 percent every year, and the wear and tear on the mountains is altering nature up high. CFI stepped in to make hiking more sustainable, so land managers won't have to limit the use by instituting a permit system or fees.

CFI was founded in 1994 by five organizations: The Colorado Mountain Club, Outward Bound, Leave No Trace Inc., the Rocky Mountain Field Institute, and Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado, to "protect and preserve the natural integrity of Colorado's 54 14,000-foot peaks and the quality of recreational experiences they provide." CFI has partnered with the U.S. Forest Service to tackle the damage on 37 of the 54 peaks—those that appeared to be in the most critical condition during the Forest Service's initial Fourteener impact study in 1994—through maintenance and repair of routes, constructing more sustainable trails, replanting and transplanting alpine tundra vegetation, and educating Fourteener hikers to enjoy the peaks more responsibly.

"A lot of people don't really understand how fragile tundra is," says T.J. Rapoport, CFI's executive director. "They don't understand that five footfalls in one day in one spot is enough to kill (plant life)—and that's nothing. You do that just walking around in your back yard."

CFI's "Peak Stewards" program is its primary tool to educate Fourteener fans. Each summer, 25 to 30 volunteers for the program are certified in Leave No Trace practices and trained in alpine ecology and mountain safety. The trained Stewards are then asked to spend a minimum of four days on the mountain (or mountains) of their choice throughout the summer, talking to other hikers about the principles of Fourteener-

friendly mountain climbing. But they act more as friends of the mountain rather than mountaintop cops.

“Instead of talking to them about the rules that exist, the laws, or the authority of laws that says, ‘You can’t do this, you have to do that, your dog has to be on a leash, et cetera, et cetera,’ we try to talk to them about the authority of the resource,” Rapoport says. “There are certain laws of nature that determine whether or not the ecosystem up there is going to remain healthy. People are usually really responsive.”

But not all CFI volunteers get to spend four days of their summer tooling around their favorite Fourteeners and fraternizing with fellow peak baggers. In 2003, 379 volunteers spent 5,944 hours sweating out the grunt work of creating more durable trails and repairing the damage caused by hikers.

CFI trail crew volunteers labor in the thin air of the high altitudes, improving existing trails, creating new, more sustainable trails, and hiding harmful social trails. They plant new seeds for alpine bluegrass, Rocky Mountain sedge, willows and cinquefoil, and transplant healthy plants into areas where existing vegetation is dying from erosion or hiker traffic. They build retaining walls, rock dams and switchbacks.

But not one shovelful of dirt is moved without considering the long-term effects on the mountain. Crews go “rock shopping” to find building materials on-site—but they avoid pulling out a rock anywhere it might leave a hole in the mountainside, which could fill with water and then erode. If they need to provide cover for newly planted seeds, they use shredded aspen, which breaks down back into the soil under sunlight. If they cut out turf to build a new trail, they re-plant the turf to cover a social trail they’re trying to erase. Rather than building rock staircases, CFI crews favor “shark’s teeth,” the erosion-slowing

practice of burying large rocks so that only the tips of the rocks stick out through the trail to provide footholds. And when they plant rocks, they plant them lichen-side up, to disguise their work and help it blend into the surroundings.

Blending in is important to CFI, especially in wilderness, where 32 of the Fourteeners are located, and according to the Federal Wilderness Act of 1964, areas should be “affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man’s work substantially unnoticeable.”

“We go to great lengths to disguise our work, so that unless you know what to look for, you wouldn’t really spot that there was a lot of work done; just that there was a clear route,” Rapoport says.

Even the crews’ bathroom habits are eco-friendly. Work crews pack out all solid human waste, and the liquid waste, well, as Rapoport says, “When you pee, you don’t pee on plants, because the soil and everything up there is so deprived of salt. An animal will go, ‘Oh, cool, salt,’ because urine’s full of salt, and they’ll go and eat whatever you peed on. If it’s a rock, they’ll just lick the rock, and they’re not hurting anything.”

The greening of CFI’s trail crews stepped even further forward last summer, when all the CFI base camps were converted to solar energy. Each base camp is now powered by a 70-watt solar panel, providing enough energy to run an electric fence to keep bears out, a light for the camp’s kitchen, and two battery and cell phone chargers.

In many U.S. states, you can easily adopt a highway or a park, but only in Colorado can you adopt a 14,000-foot mountain. Through CFI’s “Adopt-A-Peak” program, groups that choose to adopt a Fourteener agree to do summer preservation work

such as repairing trails, transplanting vegetation and making the land more defensible to erosion. The groups bring eight to 10 volunteers to their chosen peak and get dirty for the cause, led by crew leaders from CFI and the U.S. Forest Service. In 2003, six different groups, including the High Mountain Institute and the Gay and Lesbian Section of the Sierra Club's Rocky Mountain Chapter, adopted nine Fourteeners, and spent 1,888 hours working on their respective mountains.

Outward Bound West, an adventure education school based in Golden, Colo., and the most experienced Adopt-A-Peak group, has been working on Huron Peak since 1998, and adopted La Plata Peak in 2003. As part of an Outward Bound education course, students typically complete one day of service, and sometimes that day is on one of Outward Bound West's adopted peaks, Huron Peak and La Plata Peak. Unlike many Adopt-A-Peak groups, Outward Bound West students are already used to the high altitude and close proximity to dirt that the Adopt project provides.

"Usually, by the time our students are on the trail projects, they've been out there quite a while," says Jake Jones, environmental resource manager for Outward Bound West. "Generally, it'll be day 15 or 16 of their course. They've been up above 11,000 feet, they've been climbing Fourteeners—potentially; they've been well acclimated. They're filthy dirty when they start those projects, and they're even dirtier when they end, and they're not going to shower for another week."

Outward Bound West at times has as many as 40 students on a peak during its project days, but since the crew is already camping on the mountain and self-contained, CFI just has to show up with the tools and directions. And most of the already dirty students don't usually mind a day's work to save a Fourteener, Jones says.

“They’re not asking, ‘How come I paid all this money to come work on a trail?’” Jones says. “They can see the value added to their course.”

In the 10 years since the founding of the Colorado Fourteeners Initiative, the nonprofit has grown from one staff member to an operation with a \$500,000 annual budget, six full-time employees, 11 seasonal staff members and four interns. CFI has completed work on 16 peaks out of the 37 in its agreement with the U.S. Forest Service. In 2003, CFI restored 16,890 square feet of trails, reconstructed and performed maintenance on 24,690 feet of trails, and constructed 15,735 feet of sustainable trails.

CFI acts as a taskmaster, says Loretta McElhiney, peak manager for the Forest Service in Leadville, Colo., and keeps the Forest Service on a timeline to address the damage caused by heavy use of the peaks. The Forest Service writes the plan and CFI implements the plan. An important part of each plan is fund-raising. CFI uses funds from the Forest Service to leverage other grants, and it obtains a large part of its operating cash from donors, both individual and corporate.

“Through their fund-raising efforts, we get a lot more money onto the mountains,” McElhiney says. “The Forest Service, on their own, probably couldn’t afford to do the extent of activities that are occurring on the mountains, for sure.”

The Forest Service is beginning work on a strategic management plan for the Fourteeners, to deal with the ever-increasing hiking-boot traffic. CFI’s efforts are wonderful, McElhiney says. But no trail can be constructed well enough to withstand an annual climbing population that rivals the size of the city of Denver.

“I think that they are very skilled at what they do,” McElhiney says. “But sustainability is also a factor of mountain use. When you’re working on steep slopes or erosive soils and very easily impacted vegetation types, there’s a limit to how many people they can withstand. And we already see it. We have problems with the fact that we just have too many darn people up there. There’s no way to build a trail, with the funding levels that we have, that could actually accommodate uncontrolled use.”

Most Fourteener fans don’t want to see fees or permits, like those used on Mt. Whitney and Washington’s Mt. St. Helens, come to Colorado to remedy the high use of the state’s mountains. But as long as the yearly traffic on the Colorado’s highest peaks keeps up, the Fourteeners Initiative will have to work hard to prevent the Fourteeners from being “loved to death,” as a CFI brochure says.

As long as hiking the Fourteeners is free, it will be popular, and hikers can expect to see as many as 200 other climbers on weekends at Mt. Elbert, Pikes Peak and the other more popular Fourteeners.

“If you live in Denver, it’s still kind of getting away,” McElhiney says from her office at the Leadville Ranger District. “For us, it’s not, really. If I want to get away, I’ll go anyplace but a Fourteener.”

Afterword

There's a story in Jack Longacre's memoir about Al, his old Boealps climbing friend. Al, Jack says in the story, was quiet, and when he did speak, you had to lean in to hear what he was saying.

One summer, Jack, Al, and a few other Boealps members were climbing Mt. Olympus in Washington, and during one of the quiet moments in the group's camp, Al began to talk.

"When I go climbing," Al said, "My wife gets so mad at me she won't speak to me for two weeks." After a long silence, he grinned and added, "I try to get in two climbs a month."

Al's philosophy represents nearly all of what I discovered in my attempts to find out from peak baggers why they obsessively climbed mountains: Mountain climbers are bad at marriage.

Do mountain climbers love peaks more than wives or husbands? Are they unable to sacrifice one for the other? Or are they just blindly addicted to peak bagging?

Jean Trousdale, who is a clinical psychologist as well as the head of the Jack Ash Project, stands by Aristotle's words, "All things in moderation."

"Professionally, it would be my opinion that climbing and hiking don't usually fall in the category of addiction," Trousdale says. "They do when they interfere with other aspects of one's life, such as work, marriage, et cetera. Then they become an addiction, an escape, a non-productive effort to deal with other life problems."

Jack Longacre was twice divorced. Bob Packard was once divorced, and in his ex-wife's opinion, his mountain climbing was a big reason why. Packard's hiking partner, Ken Walters, may have put it best when he explains how long he had known Packard.

"We went on our first hike in Thanksgiving of '73 and we've been hiking together ever since," Walters says. "Outlasted three or four of my relationships and outlasted two or three of his."

Dennis Whitehead, who says he and Jack Longacre "used to joke about how we got screwed in our divorces," is also twice divorced from wives, but never divorced from mountains.

"All I know is that if I go a long time without climbing, I don't feel quite right, and I have the strong sense that something is missing in my life," Whitehead says. "I made the mistake of marrying two women who were sort of opposites to me. I saw myself as needing an anchor, and things never worked out with that attitude."

As I neared the end of my interviews, I began to understand that I would only get part of the reason for the problem by asking the people who had the problem. Pressed hard for an answer, most peak baggers will say a. They love the outdoors, b. They like the physical and/or mental challenges, and/or c. They enjoy meeting others who love the outdoors.

In the 1995 book "Collecting: An Unruly Passion," psychoanalyst Werner L. Muensterberger asserts that "Collectors themselves—dedicated, serious, infatuated, beset—cannot explain or understand this often all-consuming drive, nor can they call a

halt to their habit. Many are aware of a chronic restiveness that can be curbed only by more finds or yet another acquisition.”

Whether collecting involves stamps, coins, spoons or art, psychologists are studying it. A search for “collecting” on the PsycINFO database brings up nearly 70 pertinent studies. To my disappointment, peak collecting isn’t being studied much at all. The search for answers to my big question led me back to Scotland, where peak bagging began in 1891 with Sir Hugh T. Munro. I found a study by Rose N. Campbell of the University of Stirling, titled “Trends and motives affecting participation in active outdoor pursuits: the case of climbing.”

In her study, Campbell says that collecting of any type can become a ruinous addiction, but for many it is not. Collecting, when not obsessive, is not an abnormality, she writes, citing a 1981 study that estimates 1 in 3 Americans are collectors of something. As far as outdoor experience collecting, Campbell states: “The impulse to collect in general and to collect experiences in particular is a powerful factor organizing and driving much outdoor recreation.” Campbell cites Don Juan as the “archetypal experience-collector,” and compares modern-day Don Juans’ sexual conquests to peak bagging (or hill-collecting, as they call it in Scotland): “Collection is the goal, rather than the experience collected. There may be an element of this in outdoor experience collecting: Certainly hill-collectors proceed in all weathers, even in conditions when the experience is bound to be unpleasant...”

Unpleasant is Bob Packard nearly losing his toes to frostbite in the Grand Canyon, and Jack Longacre complaining for 17 straight days in his journal during his climb of Denali. But the unpleasantness fades when Packard sees his Grand Canyon sunrise and

Longacre rejoices on the Denali summit. As Campbell states and the lives of Packard, Longacre, and many of their climbing brethren attest to, “Hill-collecting can dominate a life.”

Campbell provides a prime example of the “because we love the outdoors” mantra I repeatedly heard in my interviews: “Colin Dodgson, who died in 1991, collected all the 2,000 ft. hills in Britain, some 2,443 in total, and also bathed in each of the 463 Lakeland tarns. Dodgson’s obituarist Henry Griffin reports him as stating that, ‘We didn’t collect mountains and tarns as stunts but simply because of our great love of mountain country’—a dubious sentiment echoed by every collector.”

I read most of Campbell’s study thinking of the Bob Packards and Jack Longacres of the world, until a later section, when I felt Campbell was delivering the bad news of my own peak bagging compulsion:

“Might it fade away, as jogging has done? It seems unlikely. Once the first fateful steps have been taken on the road to completion, it is hard to imagine that the process will stop in many individuals.”

As I write this article, I am planning a post-graduation road trip with my best friend. Our idea is to drive south through the Pacific coast states—Washington, Oregon, and California—and bag at least three peaks in each state, or as many as possible in three weeks. It is now obvious and sadly ironic that I cannot control a compulsion that I have studied in other people for the past six months.

However, whenever someone asks me why I want to climb this mountain or that mountain, I vow that I will not tell them I do it because I love nature, or that I like the physical and mental challenges, or that I enjoy meeting others who love the outdoors. I

might respond with the words George Mallory said when asked why he was so obsessed with climbing Mt. Everest: "Because it is there." And because I have an uncontrollable impulse to collect experiences, like Bob Packard, Jack Longacre, and Don Juan.