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# THE LONESOME ROAD

A 1200-MILE WALK THE LENGTH OF WILDEST CALIFORNIA

## COLIN FLETCHER

The story of how an ex-captain of the  
British Royal Marine Commandos, now living in San Francisco,  
walked alone from Mexico to Oregon  
through California's deserts and mountains

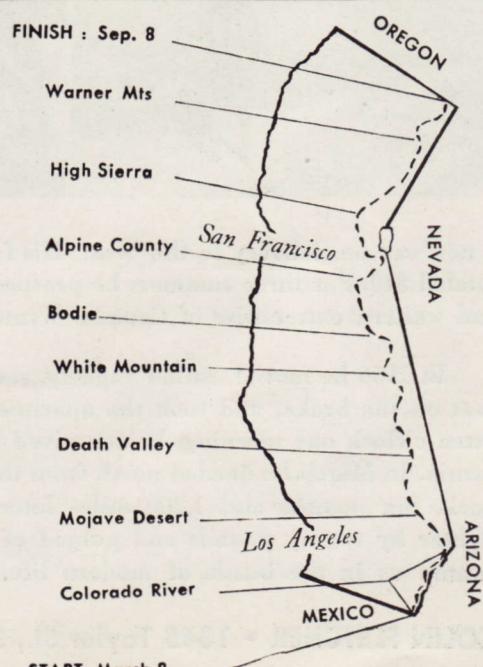
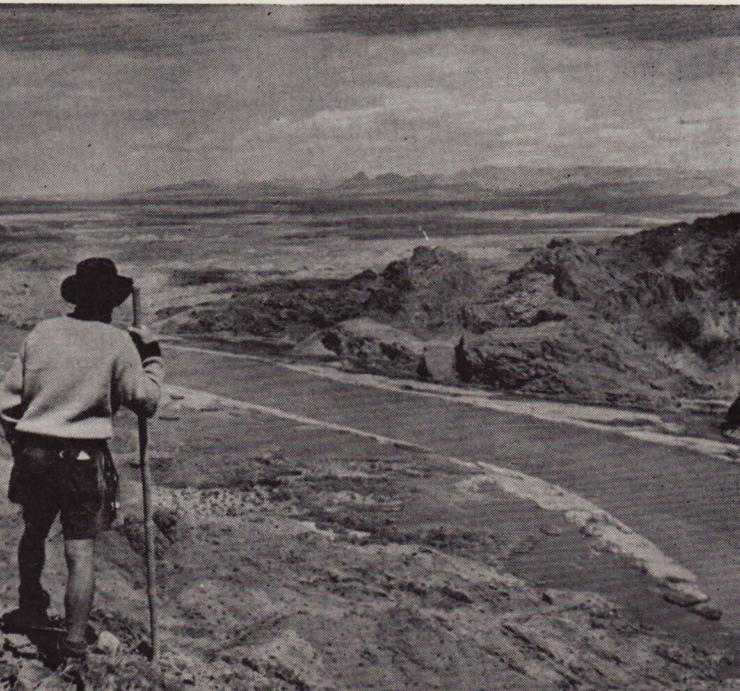
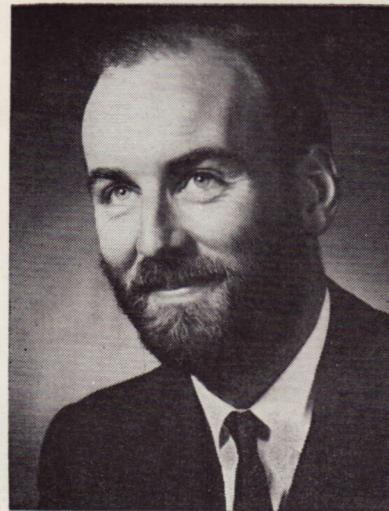
If the average person hits on a plan of escape from the stress and strain of modern living, he rarely does more than dream about it. But when Colin Fletcher thought of his own individualistic answer—an answer that also solved many other problems—he promptly put it into practice.

His outdoor background in many countries enabled him to take in his stride the tremendous physical obstacles of a 1200-mile trek over deserts and mountains, and he was able to concentrate on the amazing variety that is wildest California. Just as important, he understood the psychological release of grappling with a concrete problem instead of the abstract ones that continually assail us in the twentieth century.

Mr. Fletcher described the physical highlights of his trip in a widely-read series of articles in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. During his trek across 600 miles of arid desert, he plodded out over the salt flats of Death Valley to the genuinely lowest point in the Western Hemisphere—probably visited previously by only three or four men. Later he climbed to the summit of 14,246-foot White Mountain—a mere 250 feet short of the highest peak in the United States—and then zigzagged up a long stretch of the High Sierra. All along the trail, in desert and mountains, he crossed great tracts of California that remain unknown to the majority of Californians.

The cumulative effects of six months' outdoor living brought back to him the perspective and zest for life that he had lost in the city; and by the time he reached the Oregon boundary he was once more longing—as would most of us—for the amenities of normal life.

His lively account of the trip, illustrated with a small selection from his 1,500 magnificent color slides, carries lecture audiences along the trail with him—and gives them food for thought as well.



START: March 8

# COLIN FLETCHER



... believes that if a man wants something badly

enough he can achieve it. At the age of 36 he has already proved that his belief—so often dismissed as naive—forms a practical basis on which to run his life. By "practical" he means stimulating and satisfying rather than safe and comfortable.

Born in Wales and educated in England, he served during World War II as a captain in the Royal Marine Commandos. In the course of 6½ years service he took part in the D-Day landings and fought with his unit through to the surrender beyond the Elbe.

In 1947 he emigrated to Africa. After a brief spell as hotel manager ("Not my line," he says), he farmed for four years in the Kenya Highlands and found the life interesting and satisfying. But stimulation was lacking. He determined to see more of the world—and to write.

He drove south to Southern Rhodesia where, rather to his surprise, he built a road over a virgin mountain. He reconnoitered the terrain on horseback, laid out the alignment with instruments, drove the only bulldozer on the job, and supervised the ditching gang.

After six months in Britain he set out for the New World. He crossed the Atlantic by tending a plane load of cattle from Ireland to New York, hitch-hiked to Toronto, then drove



**THE MOUNTAINS . . . AND THE DESERT**



a new car on delivery to the West. His fare from London to Vancouver, B. C., totaled \$10. For three summers he prospected and laid out roads in the northern and western extremities of Canada. Winters, he hibernated and wrote.

In 1956 he moved, rather vaguely, south. He reached San Francisco, put his foot on the brake, and took the apartment he still lives in. Last February, at three o'clock one morning, he conceived the idea of walking the length of California. In March he headed north from the Mexican border carrying a 50-pound pack. Six months and 1,200 miles later he reached the Oregon boundary—lighter by twenty pounds and purged of the cares that sometimes threaten to swamp us in the bustle of modern life.

