



WHERE TO GO AND HOW TO GET THERE

BY JOHN NORTH

A BACKPACKING expedition into the country that only the man afoot can reach affords one of the most adventurous types of camping trip. Especially where marked trails provide the route.

Hiking is healthy exercise, and good fun. The hiker can go his own gait, set his own pace and stop where he wants. He camps where fancy chooses, for he carries with him everything he needs.

With Reader R. T., hiking is a habit. Writing from Glendale, California, he says he's done considerable backpacking in western Oregon. He used to live there, outside of Portland. Now in his new surroundings he wants to stretch his legs on a long backpacking trip in southern California. "Two hundred miles at least," his letter reads. "And into country that's different—like the desert."

R. T., how about a 406-mile backpacking trip from Tehachapi Pass south to the Mexican border? The route's a honey. It crosses 70 miles of desert to the Coast Range Mountains and wends along their ridges for 200 miles or more. Then before the trail reaches Mexico, its southern terminus, it dips into the desert again.

On part of the great 2,000-mile-long Pacific Crest Trail System, water and camping-sites have been established at designated intervals. Even across the desert portions good water can be found about every 15 miles. The route, known as the Desert Crest Trail, is open to hikers from June to December.

Backpacking the Desert Crest Trail is a fascinating way to learn the desert at firsthand and cruise the towering mountain ranges of southern California. Hiking the whole route takes an estimated 32 days. It is not necessary to cover the entire 406 miles in a single trip. Trunk-line highways cross the trail at intervals throughout its length offering access to or exits from the trail where bus or other transportation can be had.

For instance, from the Los Angeles district a start can be made at Tehachapi Pass, the real beginning of the Desert Crest Trail, or the trail can be picked up at Soledad Pass from Highway 6, or even further south at Cajon Pass.

Starting from Tehachapi Pass adventure comes with the hiker's first step into the desert wilderness. For 30 miles there are no trail markers. Compass direction is the only guide

across the open sand. It's true desert wilderness travel. From a point on the roadway 3 miles east of Tehachapi the backpacker turns south by compass and keeps on until he comes to Oak Creek Spring, 10 miles distant. That's the first night's camping spot.

The second jump is another compass hike, south 12 miles to Willow Springs where water and a place to camp can be found. Third jump, or third day on the usual itinerary is a short 6 miles still south to water and a place to camp. Stepping off 17 miles the fourth day is lengthier going. But the trail brings you past Elizabeth Lake, up from the desert floor and into the Angeles National Forest for the evening meal and a good night's rest.

From then on, the rest of the division to Soledad Canyon, in fact most of the rest of the trail clear down to Mexico, can be followed pretty generally by route markers rather than by compass. But it's a good idea to keep the compass handy.

The second division of the Desert Crest Trail is the stretch between Soledad Canyon and Cosy Dell in Cajon Canyon. The route traverses the Angeles National Forest, the Devil's Canyon wild area and part of the Sierra Madre Mountains. Carrying along extra water is advised for the first two days of this portion of the trail; that is, for the 12-mile

hike from Soledad Canyon to the summit of Mt. Gleason, and from the summit to Sulphur Spring, 15 miles. Five days are usually allotted for covering the 87 miles between Soledad Canyon and Cosy Dell.

The next division of the trail runs through the San Bernardino National Forest and the San Bernardino Mountains to Strawberry Valley. Most of the 117 miles covered is high above the desert floor. Some of it offers breath-taking vistas of the country far below. The route skirts the forested rim of such celebrated southern California mountain resorts as Lake Arrowhead and Big Bear Lake and finally brings the hiker, via the high summit slopes of Mt. San Jacinto, to Strawberry Valley.

One more division, part trail-marked, part across open country, and part of it temporarily routed alongside regular roadways, will bring the backpacker the final 129 miles to the Mexican border and journey's end. The hike from Strawberry Valley to Mexico can be comfortably made in eleven days.

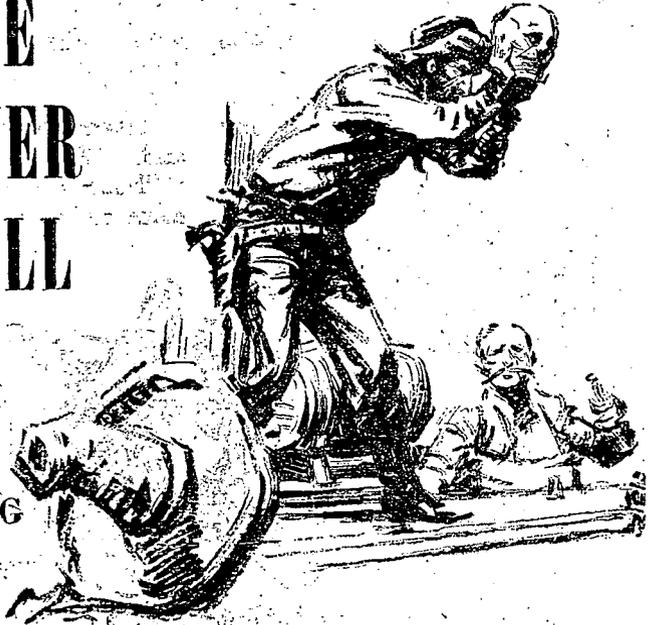
It's a swell trip, camping as you go, carrying your needs with you. But remember as part of the Pacific Crest Trail System, the Desert Crest Trail from Tehachapi Pass to the Mexican border is a true wilderness route. Long distance hikes on it are geared to the backpacker with experience as well as enthusiasm.

Mr. North will be glad to answer specific questions about the West, its ranches, homestead lands, mountains and plains, as well as the facts about any features of Western life. Be sure to inclose a stamped envelope for your reply. Address all communications to John North, care of Street & Smith's Western Story, 122 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y.

It didn't cost Bill Callahan much to redeem that macabre cranium but he'd have to pay a hot-lead toll if he wanted to discover the secret it held

THE SILVER SKULL

by
HAPSBURG
LIEBE



GRIZZLED old Sheriff Bill Dornbush walked out of his office just as Vince Callahan came down the steps of the bank next door. The attention of both men was upon a crowd that had gathered around the little railroad station beyond the dusty town square. No train was due, and Callahan's curiosity was aroused:

"What's up, Bill?" he asked.

"Ole hoss sale," answered Dornbush. "Y'know, that's what they call it when they auction off freight that's not been claimed; only way the rail-

road's got of collectin' their charges. Some o' the stuff is boxes without labels, sort o' mystery stuff. Want to buy yourself some luck?"

The sheriff laughed. Callahan didn't. He said:

"I could use a little luck, Bill. You heard o' me inheritin' five thousand and puttin' it down as first payment on a big cow outfit, which is now the V-in-C. Well, my range creek is dryin' up, with beef prices below zero, and the bank won't lend me a cent. Besides, I've had some rustlin', and my bunkhouse burnt, and my best hoss busted a leg and