

Tall peaks draw young at heart

"The mountains become higher as you get older."

Charles Mader, T-14.

Perhaps they do get higher. But that has not stopped Robert D. Cowan, Equation of State and Opacity group (T-4), from climbing the highest mountains Colorado has to offer even though he is 62 years old.

On Sept. 27, Cowan became the 238th person to scale the 53 tallest peaks in Colorado. And this January, he climbed the volcanic Mexican peaks Popocatepetl, Ixtaccihuatl and Citlaltépetl--the 5th, 7th and 3rd highest peaks in North America.

"It's a fantastic accomplishment at his age," commented fellow mountain climber Mader. "There are a few peaks that require spectacular endurance."

The 53 Colorado peaks that Cowan climbed are all 14,000 feet or higher--Snowmass Mountain was No. 53 for Cowan. In 1959 it was also No. 53 for Mader, who accompanied Cowan on a nostalgic trip to the top.

"The higher I go, the better I

feel," Cowan confessed. "Part of it is psychological. I love being above timberline."

This may seem like a strange thing to say, coming from a man who was born and raised in Nebraska and Kansas, where mountains are found only in dreams and climbing means scaling a neighbor's fence. All of that changed for Cowan the first time he went West. He was 18 years old. "The first time I saw mountains, I couldn't stay away from them," he said. "I had an itch to climb mountains from the very beginning."

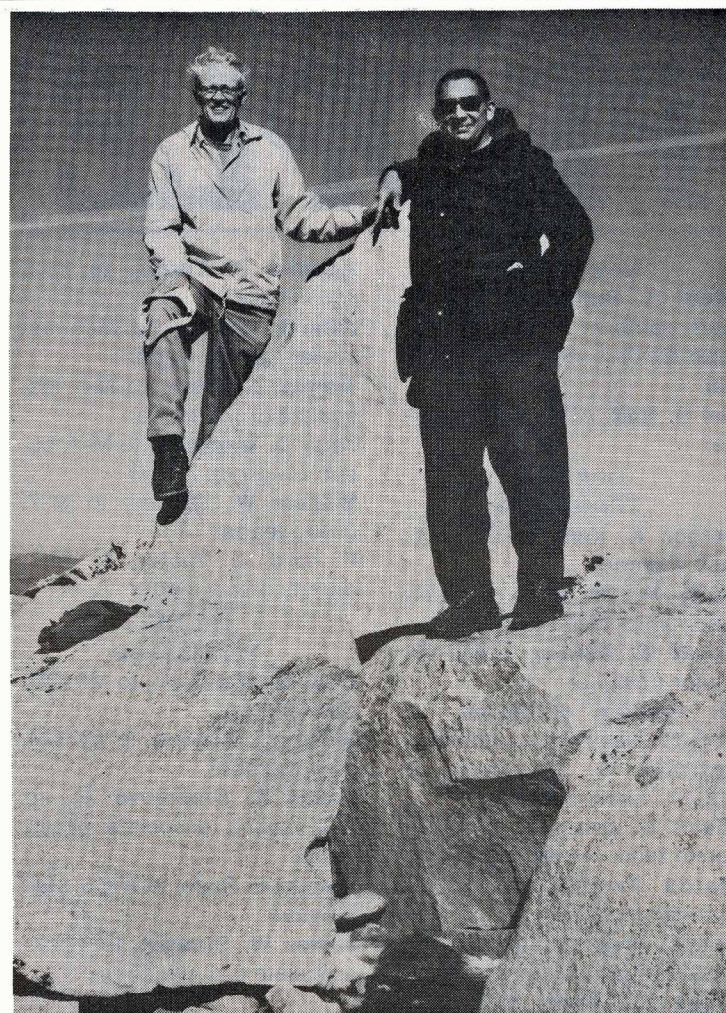
Cowan did not start climbing seriously until 15 years ago. Until that time, he raised a family and satisfied his urge to explore mountains by hiking and camping. Most of his climbs (including the recent ones in Mexico) were done with the Los Alamos Mountaineers, which he joined in 1967. He passed on the concepts of safe mountaineering that he learned from the Mountaineers to the boys in

Explorer Post 122, for which he and Mader have been advisors for the past 12 years.

Living in Los Alamos is an advantage for anybody who wants to climb mountains, Cowan believes. Living at high altitude is good preparation for climbing at high altitude. He stays fit for climbing by walking to work every day from the Western Area to the Administration Building by way of trails through Los Alamos Canyon. "It isn't much--a mile horizontally and 150 feet vertically each way. But it's enough," Cowan said. "To climb most of the mountains we had to backpack into the wilderness a few miles--sometimes 10 or 15."

Modest about his climbs, Cowan emphasizes that none of his climbs was particularly difficult technically. "They were far easier than many made by George Bell, Theoretical division leader; Don Liska, Intense Deuteron Linac group (AT-4); and other members of the Mountaineers," he said. "My only possible claim to fame is my age. I can't keep up with a 20-year old. But I come close."

Of future mountain climb-



On Sept. 27, Robert Cowan (left) scaled Snowmass Mountain and became the 238th person to climb all 53 Colorado Fourteeners. Charles Mader (right) made this climb with Cowan. It was a nostalgic climb for Mader, who scaled Snowmass in 1959, becoming 65th person to climb all the Fourteeners.

ing, Cowan said, "I don't think I have any ambitious plans. For the time being, at least, Citlaltépetl at 18,700 feet has satisfied my desire to climb something higher than the Colorado Fourteeners." However, he is considering Mt. Rainier because it offers a different type of climbing involving glaciers.

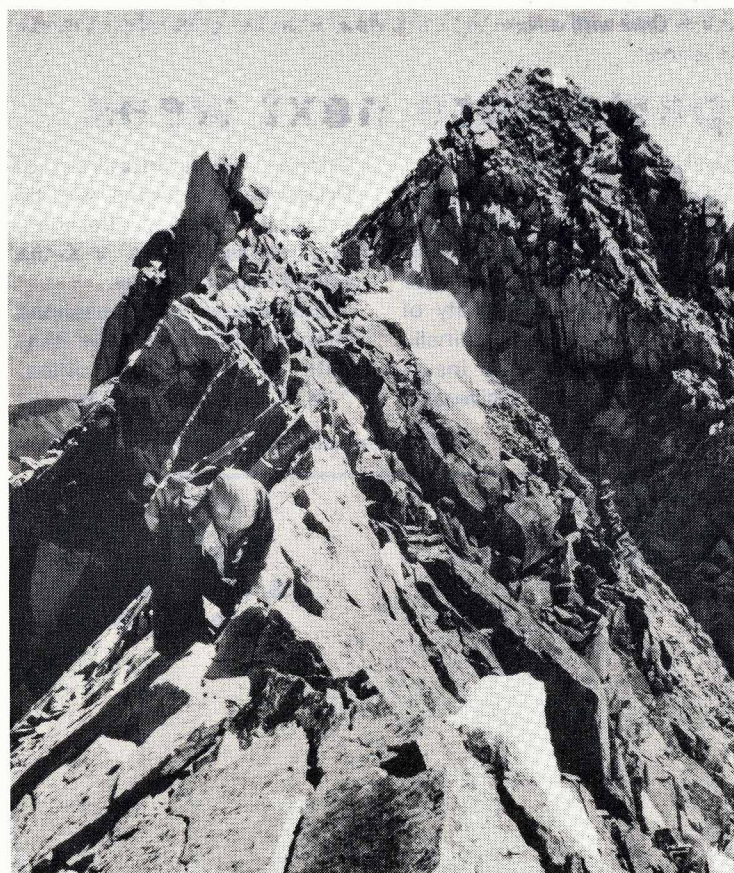
During the past year, Cowan has experienced some other "peak" experiences that do not involve mountains. He recently completed a book entitled "The Theory of Atomic Structure and Spectra," published by the University of California Press as part of the Los

Alamos series in Basic and Applied Sciences. He was also named a Los Alamos Laboratory Fellow last month.

Cowan doesn't expect to top those peaks in the future. "But I hope it's not all downhill from here!"

Note: At our last deadline, word was that Robert Cowan was given an honorary degree from the University of Lund, Sweden. Cowan's "peak" experiences up to now amount to nothing less than a mountain range! That must make him, at this point, a "jolly good Fellow."

—Marc Talbert



Henry Lacquer, a Los Alamos Mountaineer retired from the Laboratory, is perched on the knife edge of Capitol Peak during this climb on July 2, 1978.



Cowan took this photo of Eiichi Fukushima (CNC-4) and Karl Mueller (M-2) on the west ridge of Ellingwood Peak, March 11, 1979.