

DISCOVERING DAD

A dusty trail leads to Clinton Clarke's handmade journal...

By Barney "Scout" Mann

Only pencils and blank paper allowed. No pens, no cell phones, no cameras. At the University of California in Berkeley, I produce photo identification to enter the Bancroft Library's cavernous, high-ceilinged Archive Collections Reading Room.

I'm chasing a long shot.

Library norms are upside down. Here they bring books to you. I open an acid-free, archive-quality cardboard enclosure. The "book" inside is huge. Gutenberg Bible huge. Using both hands, I open the cover. On the lower inside corner, bracketed by a stained, burgundy cloth binding, I find a handwritten inscription. "Data obtained and Atlas constructed by Clinton C. Clarke, Pasadena, California January 1941."

It is his signature. Clarke wrote this himself. I stare; push away, and without looking at the Atlas for the next 40 minutes I write.

How did I come to be here? What do I hope to find?

In my case, my guide was an obscure online reference found seven months before. I'd augged down into the web on a faint side trail. I was following a **Sierra Club** reference to the Clair Tapaan Lodge while researching an article on **Eric Ryback**. That teased out a reference to old Sierra Club papers at the Bancroft Library, and so I diverted, scoring a hit on Clinton C. Clarke. It was something called an "Atlas of the Pacific coast [i.e., crest] trail"

"Bancroft Library, Holdings Off-site, 10 days advance notice required: Atlas of the Pacific coast [i.e., crest] trail: scrapbook, 1941. Relates to Clinton C. Clarke's involvement in the Sierra Club."

A PCT "Atlas?" I knew Clarke wrote two books in the 1930s and 1940s. The Bancroft's holding is probably one of them. It's a bastardized reference to Clarke's *The Pacific Crest Trailway*. That eyes-glazed-over cataloger had certainly botched "Coast" for "Crest." It went on my research list. Priority: low.

Fast-forward seven months, to January 2010; I have a PCTA board meeting scheduled for downtown San Francisco. The Bancroft Library is a 27-minute hop on Bay Area Rapid Transit. I gave the Bancroft their due notice.

Now here I sit.

What do we know of Clarke? He's often called the "Father of the PCT" and he's often mentioned - *National Geographic*, *Smithsonian Magazine*, *The PCT Guidebooks*, and *The Communicator*. But so little is known. There is only one extant photo. It's a head shot (pictured, above right), with Clarke posed as if in a 25-cent photo-booth, bow-tied, spectacled, wooden and stunned.

"It is virtually impossible to find biographical materials on Clarke, who, for all of his activities in public was a very private individual." **Glynn Gary Wolar**, outdoor historian.

"It's virtually impossible...." Well, what scraps are there? He co-founded the Pasadena Playhouse. He was active in the Boy Scouts. His wife was an actress. He was a Republican. One unsupported reference states he was a "successful oilman." Pretty slim pickings to know about your "Dad."

We know his return address during the years he championed the PCT, the posh Vista del Arroyo Hotel, Pasadena, California. One writer claims him for Harvard, another for

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"Clinton C. Clarke, the father of the Pacific Crest Trail" National Geographic June 1971



...and a few surprises

Summit of Glenn Pass

#30

Williams College, and yet a third says both! His age is settled. At 59, Clarke was already old – three years shy of the then-average male’s life expectancy – when in 1932 he first picked up the PCT baton.

One more thing they speak of as certain. As historian Wolar bluntly put it, Clarke was “an arm chair hiker.” Wolar further drove the point home: “Clarke never walked on any segment of the Pacific Crest Trail.” More charitable is author **Dan White** in his recent PCT book, *Cactus Eaters*: “There is no written record of him [Clarke] even taking an overnight camping trip on it [the PCT]. It saddens me to think he fought so fiercely for something that he didn’t get to enjoy.”

Sad. Will we always be left to celebrate Clarke by dragging out that terrible photo? He looks like a man in need of more fiber in his diet. Did Clarke have a sense of humor? Did he ever tell jokes?

I put down the pencil and turn to his Atlas.

What is inside? Here’s what I hope. I hope for more details about the original PCT. I hope for hints about Clarke. And I confess to having secret hopes. Ones I won’t commit to paper.

“The idea of the PCT originated in the early 1930s in the mind of Clinton C. Clarke.”

First Wilderness Press PCT Guidebook 1973

I turn the first page. Maps. Eighty-two pages. The Atlas is thicker than a ream of paper. If you laid a men’s size-20 shoe across its width, the Atlas wins. It’s practically two feet tall. It dwarfs my *Rand McNally Atlas*, which at 11 by 15 inches, is the largest book I own. The Atlas weighs 16 pounds, more than one-and-a-half times my pack base weight.

I turn the pages. Old Auto club maps, U.S. Geological Survey topos. First, state-by-state, and then broken into smaller units. On each map, the trail is meticulously drawn, Clarke using a thick, colored-pencil line. Each map is hand-cut, edges trimmed. Most have multiple, pasted-on labels, some handwritten, but many are hand-typed. This clearly took time. Clarke’s book is like a monk’s work before the printing press. The Atlas must have taken him months, perhaps years. He was not only a PCT zealot and visionary, but he clearly loved this task. Periodically, he writes. “Handle With Care.”

Within the first 30 pages, the Atlas yields up a secret. The PCT’s original planned northern terminus was not Manning Park, it was Mt. Baker. The trail was supposed to begin almost 40 miles further west. Erased lines give mute testimony, and you can still read the words Clarke crossed out: “Just north of Mt. Baker where the PCT begins.”

A series of delicate, translucent, onionskin maps have the feel of rice paper. One map edge is glued to an Atlas page and the rest folds out in an elongated sheet, tucking back in again like an accordion bellows. Do many even know what onionskin paper is today? Would it help to explain that onionskin paper was once commonly used to make a lightweight copy under carbon paper in a typewriter? Carbon paper? Typewriter? Oh, never mind....

Then, beginning on page 29, there is a marked change. The first photos appear like the first large drops presaging a Sierra shower. All are hand numbered. Most attest to their source. Some photos are cut from Sierra Club Bulletins. Some are postcards, hand-tinted, the pastel colors so patently fake, an art form belonging to a bygone era. I look up at the nearest University scholar, her head buried in an old text. What I wouldn’t give to share this with someone sitting next to me.

One photo pulls me up short. I feel a foreshadowing like in an old movie; picture a Texas desert scene, at an oil driller’s site, the roustabout derrick crew hard at work, random clanks issue from a turning drill, and then there’s a deep, low rumble. Hard-hat heads turn as if in slow motion, a visible rush of air flings skyward anything not bolted to the tower, spanners fly, drill pipes flip out of

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Previous page: Clinton C. Clarke at 11,978 foot Glen Pass in the high Sierra with Painted Lady Peak in the background. Note the compass in his hand and the spoon in his cap. Above, left: Page 78 of Clarke’s atlas, which includes the first known photos of three YMCA boys starting the 1935 to 1938 PCT Relay. Above, right: Atlas page 51 includes a photo of Clarke on the PCT. Photos courtesy of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. The head shot of Clarke on page 12 is from PCTA archives.

stacked racks, and then a black inkwell erupts. A fountainhead, a gusher! They dance under sticky showers of flying crude.

That's the low rumble I feel when I see photo 77. Written on the photo's bottom-right is "C.C.Clarke." There is one more and then more still. Clarke took these photos. They are deep in the Sierra Nevada. The country pictured is much more than a day's hike from a trailhead. I recognize them – places on the PCT.

Clarke was there! He hiked on the PCT. Is it bad form to dance on the table?

Then how can I tell you what happened next? I'm awash in a roustabout's simple joy, practically feeling black gold flying about the staid library, when I look at photo 94, page 51. I see a 3-inch high hiker standing at the top of Glen Pass. He carries an old-fashioned rolled bedroll tied vertically to his back, a spoon is tucked into his hatband and he has a compass in his flat, open hand. He's looking out in the distance toward 12,126' Painted Lady Peak. I know this because I've stood in the same spot three times – 1996, 2003 and 2007. PCT Mile 792.5. What I didn't know was that Clinton C. Clarke stood there too. Centered under the photo is the label "Clinton C. Clarke."

At last. A photo with which to celebrate "Dad."

Of the 236 photos in the Atlas, this is the only photo where a person dominates the scenery. The only one. And there are no more photos of Clarke.

As the sun assumes a low angle, I move to put the Atlas back into its box. I ask the librarian: "When was the last time the Atlas was checked out?"

"To the best of my knowledge no one else has seen it."

Back home, months later, the trail takes a sudden twist. I turn back to the beginning, to a digital scan of the page with Clarke's original inscription. On a lark, I focus a digital jeweler's loupe on his handwriting.

A magnification of the year, 1941, shows that the "41" is in different ink. Underneath it, the year "35" was erased. Clarke originally made the Atlas in 1935, three, not nine years after 1932, the year he first put forth the PCT idea. Having made his precious book in 1935, I can only suspect, Clarke couldn't bear to part with it for six more years. It all seems to make him a bit more human. 🍷

POSTSCRIPT: What were my secret hopes? I had two: to confirm what my gut told me must be true – that Clarke himself had walked on the PCT; and to deliver to the trail community a new photo of Clarke. In addition to the Atlas, The Bancroft Library staff found four normal-sized photo albums of Clarke's not in the digital index. These albums confirm that Clarke took two, multi-week, Sierra Club trips deep into the Sierra Nevada. July 3 to Aug. 3, 1910, and July 3 to Aug. 6, 1911. The photo of Clarke appears twice in the four other albums. In a caption in one album, Clarke wrote about himself: "Note in the knapsacker's hat a spoon, which with a tin cup at belt and an empty lard pail makes a complete kitchen and dining room outfit."



MANN WINS PRESTIGIOUS LOWELL THOMAS AWARD

PCTA Board Member **Barney "Scout" Mann**, a regular contributor to *Communicator*, received a third-place award in the **Lowell Thomas Travel Journalism Competition** for a freelance story he wrote last year for *The Oregonian* newspaper in Portland, Ore.

"Across the Snowy Crest" published on Sept. 27, 2009, detailed **Don** and **June Mulford's** 1959 thru-ride on the PCT. Mann's story revealed that the Mulfords were the first horseback riders to complete the Trail, ending the notion that equestrians first completed the Trail in 1988.

The results of the Lowell Thomas award, one of travel journalism's top honors, were announced Oct. 11 in Leipzig, Germany, during the annual convention of the **Society of American Travel Writers**. The contest drew 1,161 entries in 27 categories and was judged by the faculty at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill School of Journalism and Mass Communication.

Mann's story – a similar version was published in the December 2009 issue of *Communicator* – was a winner in the category "Newspaper Article on U.S./Canada Travel." He is in good company. *The New York Times* won first place and the *Miami Herald* took second in that category.

Congratulations Barney.