

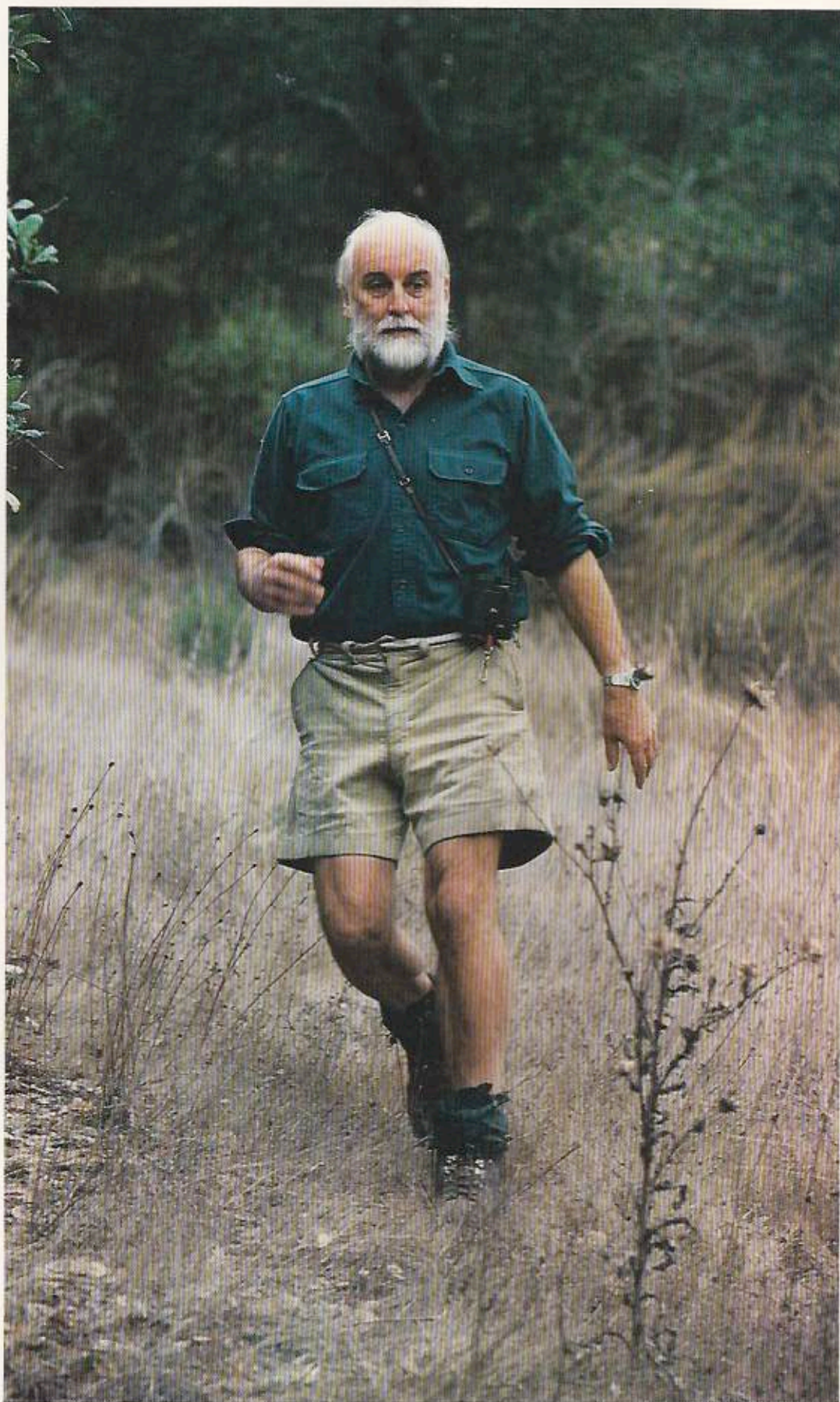
By Donald G. Schueler

## The strange quest of the man who walked through time

*Colin Fletcher, author of the classic backpacker's bible, spent a decade tracking down a mysterious 'cave' man*

Colin Fletcher, the high priest of American backpackers, has always been a specialist at going it alone. The tales of his epic peregrinations from one end of California to the other (*The Thousand-Mile Summer*) and through the Grand Canyon (*The Man Who Walked Through Time*), as well as his how-to-do-it *The Complete Walker*, have made him the most famous solitary walker in the world.

But in his detachment from ordinary human ties, Fletcher can sometimes be a bit extreme. During the last decade, for example, his most absorbing relationship has been with a long-dead man whom he never met, whose identity he still cannot positively certify after an intensive ten-year search. *The Man From the Cave*, to be published this spring by Alfred A. Knopf, is his account of that peculiar quest and is an adventure of a different sort: a journey through dusty files and fading memories in search of the identity of an obscure prospector who also liked to walk alone. It begins in 1968, when Fletcher discovered a hidden cave (p. 122) during one of his long strolls through the more unreachable reaches of the Nevada desert. In and about the cave was the evidence of long-ago occupancy—a folding chair, a “sheepherder’s” stove, animal traps, the fragments of 50-year old magazines and newspapers and an empty trunk (p. 126). Intrigued by his find, Fletcher returned to the site a year later for a longer stay. He reassembled the camp and presently began to enter into the life of the anonymous “Trunkman” (his nickname for the faceless soul who had once



Looking every inch the dauntless outdoorsman, Fletcher strides across

a grassy slope near his secluded home in California (“Please, no address”).

# EAST OF BALI DREAMS COME TRUE

## "Spice Islands of Indonesia"

The magic of Indonesia comes to life as we sail the M.S. Lindblad Explorer\* in tranquil waters east of Bali. We visit Komodo Island, land of the Komodo Dragon, meet primitive tribes of West Irian and enjoy the Trance Dancers in Watubela. These are but a few of the highlights during 4 expeditions between June 12-September 7, 1981. Write for our brochure or call (203) 226-4189.

\*Panamanian registry

### LINDBLAD/SWIRE CRUISES, LTD.

8 Wright Street, Dept. LEX  
Westport, Conn. 06880

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Travel Agent \_\_\_\_\_

S-2

## This book grants a Ph.D. in carpentry.



A tremendous 992-page course in cabinetmaking. An encyclopedia of information, with 1,800 illustrations. Tells you exactly how to make any cabinet, built-in or piece of furniture you can imagine, in any style or period. Covers all materials, hardware, finishes,

adhesives, hand and power tools. Amazingly complete and thorough. Unconditional guarantee.

Brookstone Company, Dept. 317A  
Vose Farm Rd., Peterborough, N.H. 03458

Send me \_\_\_\_\_ copies of Cabinetmaking and Millwork @ \$23.95 postpaid.

Send me Brookstone's catalog "Hard-To-Find Tools and Other Fine Things".

Check enclosed  Visa

American Express  MasterCard

Card No. \_\_\_\_\_ Expires \_\_\_\_\_

Credit card phone (603) 924-9511

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

I-3506-11

# Brookstone



The quintessential backpacker, Fletcher reaches summit of Mt. Shasta in 1964.

lived there), bemused at first, obsessed later on, by the "selective process" that had drawn that other walker and himself to the same remote place, linking them across half a century like a father and son who had never met.

When he returned to civilization, Fletcher wrote an article about his find for the *Las Vegas Sun*, offering a \$100 reward for information concerning Trunkman's identity. Reprinted in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, it produced an important lead in the lively person of one Grace Mazeris, a former singer, stunt rider and companion of many men, then 80 years old and living in reduced circumstances in a Santa Cruz hotel. She informed Fletcher that during the early 1930s she had "taken up" with a part-time prospector named Bill Simmons (p. 124), living with him in the desert near Palm Springs, California. She had liked Simmons, a "gentleman" and a "good lover" but a man who "didn't give himself up easily." She stayed with him for a couple of years before moving on to another place, another man. Still, she remembered enough about her former paramour, including his references to a "camp" in Nevada where he had once left a trunk and other belongings, to more than half convince Fletcher that

her Bill Simmons and his Trunkman were one and the same. The fact that she saw a resemblance in kind between Simmons and Fletcher did not hurt her case.

### Coast-to-coast sleuthing

The conversation with Grace became the first installment in a protracted search for Simmons/Trunkman which, for sheer obsessiveness, makes Fletcher's feats as a walker seem only mildly compulsive by comparison. Beginning with the clues that Grace provided, he painstakingly followed Simmons' documented life from the recorders' and coroners' offices of obscure desert towns to the National Archives in Washington, D.C. Along the way he ransacked the memories of aging prospectors and Simmons' scattered kin, and haunted the places Simmons had known, from the Pennsylvania town where he was born to the whistle stops in the California desert where he spent his last years.

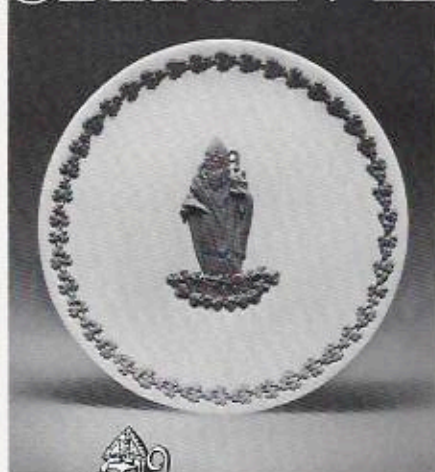
By the time the search was over, Fletcher had collected enough evidence to indicate that Simmons was probably, though by no means certainly, Trunkman and Simmons' life story had become the focus of his interest.

The reader of *The Man From the Cave* will almost certainly wonder why. Born in Pennsylvania mining country in 1875, Simmons spent most of his young manhood in the Army, taking an unexciting part in the Spanish-American War and eventually going over the hill. He drifted West, possibly married a Seattle woman who made a cuckold of him, then turned up in Nevada and perhaps, in 1916, he had lived in that hidden cave, leaving behind the artifacts that Fletcher would find some 50 years later. He spent the remainder of his life in the California desert prospecting, working as a mining-camp cook, gambling and boozing. His last years were a gentle, alcoholic fade-out in the environs of Palo Verde.

All the evidence suggests that he was an unexceptional drifter "who could be a bit of an ass at times, even quite childish, yet of whom most people said, 'You couldn't help liking him.'" In Fletcher's imagination, he also became a man alienated from the technological world and,

*The author's environmental writings include Incident at Eagle Ranch: Man and Predator in the American West.*

# SHREVE



## Brand New St. Patrick Plate from Wedgwood

Shreve introduces this unique Wedgwood plate in sage green on white Jasper. 6½" Diameter. This plate will not receive general distribution throughout the U.S. Order from Shreve's today. Call 800-225-7088. Dept. S

### Wedgwood St. Patrick Plate

Please send \_\_\_\_\_  
St. Patrick plates at \$55 each.

Total order \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Mass. Tax 5% \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Shipping \$2.50 ea. \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Total \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Shreve charge     VISA  
 Master Card     Am. Express

Card # \_\_\_\_\_

Exp. date \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Zip \_\_\_\_\_

### SHREVE, CRUMP & LOW, INC.

Jewellers since 1800  
330 Boylston Street  
Boston, Massachusetts 02116  
Phone (617) 267-9100

perhaps, from his father, as well as a casualty of love (which might have explained his interlude in the cave). More than anything else, he was "a man who chose freedom."

None of this quite explains Fletcher's heroic yet quixotic desire to "rebuild" Simmons' life. In *The Man From the Cave*, Fletcher plays hide-and-seek with his own motivations. Mostly he is content to note parallels between his quarry's life and his own: "We were both wanderers who worked at other jobs until able to devote ourselves to what we really wanted. . . . We both came to the desert late, because of women, and both discovered there that life re-began at forty-one."

Yet, excepting the penchant for desert wandering, these "congruencies" are anchored to the reality of Simmons' life only by the thinnest threads of evidence. Furthermore, Fletcher's fixation about Simmons/Trunkman was off to a running start even before most of the evidence was in. One thing is certain: the most interesting and elusive man from that cave—the one worth searching for—has got to be Colin Fletcher.

If possible, Fletcher is even more obsessive about privacy than about Trunkman. It is not simply a matter of guarding a phone number or an address ("Say I live within a three hours' drive of San Francisco"). If he could manage it, he

would keep half of California to himself. "You mean," I complain, "I can't even mention what wilderness we're hiking—walking—in?"

"Well," he concedes, "you could say it's in the California coastal range. I don't want to sound extreme, but if you mention the name in print it will bring more people up here, won't it?"

Fletcher speaks over his shoulder. For most of the morning, my view of him has consisted of his corduroy shorts, the pack strapped to his shirtless torso, the powerfully calved legs that have helped make him a specialized celebrity, and the boots moving steadily up the narrow trail. It is hard to argue with a man's backside. Still, I am obliged to point out that Fletcher's tendency to hoard whole wildernesses smacks, at the very least, of inconsistency. His books continue to lure hordes of panting Americans into remote places where they are likely to encounter self-awareness, cosmic insights, poison oak and, all too often, one another.

The discrepancy between his alternating roles as guardian of the wilderness and chief proselytizer of its charms is not lost on Fletcher; he assures me that "it is a question I want to grapple with in my writing." Which does not prevent him from grappling with it verbally while ascending a very long 60-degree slope that leads us even higher into the moun-



This cave (entrance is shadowed opening, bottom, center) in a desolate section of

Nevada held intriguing clues that sent Fletcher on lengthy search for occupant.

Treat yourself to our famous  
**Corncob Smoked Ham**  
from  
**VERMONT**



... and we'll treat YOU to a  
**FREE package of Bacon!**

We smoke our Hams and Bacon over slow fires of corn-cob and maplewood, the way we've been doing it here in Vermont for over 100 years. Folks everywhere agree the mouthwatering flavor is simply beyond compare — so much better than hickory-smoked!

To convince you, we'll send you a 6 lb. corn-smoked Half Ham (serves 6 to 8) at our one-to-a-customer introductory price of just \$21.95 post-age-paid anywhere in continental U.S.

Order now, and we'll include 12 oz. of our corn-smoked Bacon — FREE! Satisfaction guaranteed or full refund without quibble. Mail coupon or call us today!

-----**HARRINGTON'S**-----

0702-1 Main St., Richmond, VT 05477

- Send 6 lb. Half Ham at Introductory price of \$21.95. PLUS 12 oz. Bacon FREE. (Limit of one order per customer. Offer expires June 30, 1981.) 8575
- Payment enclosed  Charge my ( ) MC ( ) VISA
- ( ) AMEX acct. (include card no. and expiration date).
- Send 32-page FREE CATALOG 6007

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Orders: (802) 434-3411

**Free!**

**Edmund Scientific Catalog**



Astronomy, Microscopy, Biofeedback, Weather, Alternate Energy, Binoculars, Optics, Magnets, Magnifiers, Tools, Unique Lighting, Lab Equipment, and much more. Over 4,000 unique and fascinating products. Send for our **FREE** 112-page, colorful 1981 Edmund Scientific Catalog... Today!

**Rush me your free catalog!**

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_  
State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

**Clip And Mail Coupon Today To:**  
Edmund Scientific Co., Dept. 3016 KS04  
Edscorp Bldg., Barrington, N.J. 08007

tains. "I salve my conscience," he explains in his crisp English voice, "by not writing in terms of specific places anymore. And I do encourage people to behave properly when they're in the wilderness. But still, you know, I'm not sure my self-defense isn't bogus."

I am surprised at Fletcher's volubility. (He never "hikes" and almost never "backpacks" because those words have a phonetically compulsive ring.) But Fletcher seems not to mind my presence or his own voice. Perhaps the setting accounts for this unexpected sociability: the slopes are steep but shadowed by an open, parklike forest; the ravines, though deep, are cushioned by beds of enormous, soft-looking ferns.

I ask Fletcher the name of a dramatic tree along the way. Its branches are as copper-smooth as an Indian baby's skin except where a thin epidermis has peeled back into long curling ruffles. "A madrona," he replies. "A magic thing. When the old ones die, the young ones grow up in a circle around the stump. Sometimes there is a perfect fairy ring. You can almost see, oh, Alice in Wonderland sitting in the middle."

*Curves, yes; "man-crud," no*

Fletcher's response to nature's furnishings is almost always a pantheistic marveling. His god, if he has one, is "a space-age Pan." Indeed, his devotion often takes on emphatically Panlike intonations: "The great beauty of scenery can be, well, rather sexual. . . ."

Yet these anthropomorphic intimations can be misleading. Shoulder to shoulder with the sensualist and the esthete stands Colin Fletcher, Misanthrope. "Look," he exclaims, "there are no straight lines. That's important! I want a place Man hasn't touched. Or at least one that I can kid myself he hasn't touched." He dislikes "man-crud," an epithet that covers the ugly efflorescence of technological civilization. When he looks "at the planet as a whole," he regards "the inevitable collapse of industrial society as a basis for optimism," although he would prefer "a fairly gradual decay of law and order" to a nuclear holocaust, since in the latter case "the fallout would affect things other than human." These sentiments have not quite made a hermit of him, however. There is a "girl friend"—there almost always has been one—who is independent

enough to live 150 miles away, and there are a very few close friends whom Fletcher welcomes "on my own terms."

We have reached the top of a ridge. The trail slips over it and begins a sharp descent. From below, through the golds and browns of the dry October forest, there is a welling up of shadowy blues and greens, and the inviting sound of water on rock. A few minutes later, we have arrived at one of Colin Fletcher's most secret places. A small creek falls into a small pool, lichens and moss blanket fallen logs and boulders, a marginate of ferns and aromatic California laurel crowds the water's edge.

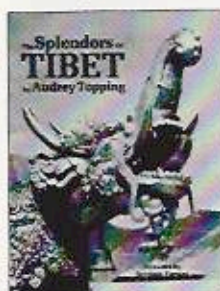
Fletcher fills stainless-steel cups with water at the pool and rummages in his pack for the freeze-dried chicken-salad mix and food sticks that will be our lunch. Now that we are face-to-face again, I am reminded that he is a very striking-looking man. The previous morning, when I first saw him at a distance, coming from his house to meet me, he had brought to mind an unusually fit-looking Santa Claus on his day off—ruddy complexion, white hair and beard and, for contrast, dark vaulting eyebrows. However, a closer look dispels any notions of ho-ho joviality, especially when his astonishingly blue eyes have got one's range. They project a disconcerting combination of intensity and detachment, the look one finds in the eyes of raptors and illuminati.

Fletcher turns his fire-and-ice stare in



Simmons once cooked for mule-drivers' camps. His specialty: Spanish rice.

## Journey To The "Roof Of The World"



**The Splendors Of Tibet**  
text and photographs by  
**Audrey Topping**  
foreword by  
**Seymour Topping**

"... a volume of unusual and fascinating photos... an absorbing account of travel."

—The New York Times

"... No one else has matched this portrait of Tibet today."

—Ross Terrill

Author of: *MAO A Biography*

8-3/8 x 11, 192 pages, 137 full color and 84 b&w photos. \$25.00

**SINO PUBLISHING CO. Dept. A**  
**745 Fifth Ave., NY, NY 10151**

Please send me \_\_\_\_\_ copies of  
The Splendors of Tibet @ \$25.00.  
(Add sales tax where applicable plus  
\$1.50 per order for shipping.)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

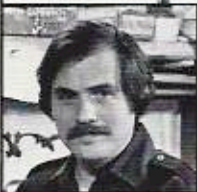
Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

### "This Workbench Is The Greatest!"

MADE  
IN  
VERMONT



Wm. Siegfried  
Port Murray, NJ

Realizing that smaller benches don't offer the flexibility his workshop requires, (and are far too expensive besides), William Siegfried chose the Garden Way Butcher Block Workbench...and these are some of the reasons why:

- Broad Butcher Block Work Surface
- Versatile Vise-and-Dog Clamping System
- Solid Rock Maple Construction
- 3 Models to Choose From: Options Available
- Full One Year Warranty

© 1981 Garden Way, Inc.

CLIP AND SEND TO:

Butcher Block Workbench, Garden Way Research  
Dept. A916W, Charlotte, VT 05445

**YES!** Please rush my **FREE** information on the complete line of Garden Way Butcher Block Workbenches.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_

STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

my direction and then, looking away, remarks, "You know, I've tried to keep myself tabula rasa for this inquisition, but it occurs to me that you haven't asked me anything about Trunkman yet."

Dutifully, I ask the obvious: why the manhunt? Why did it become an obsession? "I felt I understood Trunkman where no one else did," he replies, then backs off. "Why did he fascinate me so much? The answer would interest me. But then, I'd distrust anything I said." Clearly, Fletcher is wary of excessive psychological probing. In another context he had earlier observed, "Plato says that the unexamined life is not worth living. My riposte is that the overexamined life is not lived at all." Now it strikes me that the search for Trunkman may have been his way of living his life and examining it, too.

Fletcher has never been in a great hurry to find out who he is supposed to be. Whether or not Trunkman's life "re-began at forty-one," there is no doubt that Fletcher's did. The official beginning, however, was in Cardiff, Wales, in 1922.

#### A "magic" Welsh heritage

The Welsh, as everyone from Shakespeare to Dylan Thomas has assured us, are a magic-ridden people, given to premonitions, lyrical outbursts and a romantic rapport with the natural world. In Fletcher's case, these traits should theoretically have been tempered by a sober Anglo-Saxon inheritance on the paternal side, but in fact his English father was the real will-o'-the-wisp, deserting his family when Colin was four years old in pursuit of some private destiny in the Canadian hinterlands. The dotting Welsh mother proved the more down-to-earth parent, sending her bright but already "standoffish" son to an English boarding school when he was 12. "She was a great girl," says Fletcher. "I wish I had known her better. She died when I was 21."

A year later, Fletcher, along with hundreds of thousands of other young men, embarked on the Allied invasion of Normandy. He served as a commando, saw his comrades die and had his own share of close calls. But for him "the war was not a terrifically scarring experience," or even a maturing one. "In some ways," he says, "it left one rather juvenile."

This may explain his first marriage and the six postwar years he spent in East



Simmons' empty trunk prompted Fletcher to name his elusive prey "Trunkman."

Africa, working by turn as a manufacturer's agent, hotelkeeper and farm manager. None of these occupations, or his marriage, worked out. When he left Kenya in 1952, the greatest legacy he carried with him was the conviction that he would be a writer.

By the close of 1953, Fletcher had bummed and odd-jobbed his way across Canada without any conscious idea of where he was going or what, besides writing, he wanted to do. However, if there were not some Telemachian motive in this odyssey, there ought to have been. One day, as a result of one of those "selective processes" that transcend coincidence, Fletcher and his truant father found themselves, unbeknownst to each other, playing on the same pitch-and-putt course in Vancouver, British Columbia. The reunion that followed had an impossibly British ambience: Fletcher *filis* recognized his father (they had met briefly at the end of World War II) and when the latter knocked a ball in his direction, he took it as a sign that he must introduce himself. "Excuse me, sir," he said, "I don't think you know who I am." "No," his father replied, "but I think I ought to." "Colin," said Colin. "Do you know," said his father, "I believe you're right." Unsurprisingly, this cool encounter was an end, not a beginning. When, a few years later, the senior Fletcher died, his far-away son "felt almost nothing."

By then, Fletcher was in San Francisco. He had met a young woman there and was very much in love. Recollecting this period, he becomes visibly agitated. He arranges and rearranges himself against a lichen-covered boulder. "This was a very big deal for me," he says. "I had to

# Armstrong House

decorative accessories catalog

**Armstrong**

Page after page of decorator selected accents, from fun and practical items to exquisitely hand-crafted artwork can be found in our catalog. Beautify your home . . . or find unforgettable gifts. Send \$2.00 for the next 3 issues.

**Armstrong**

Direct Response, Inc.\*  
Dept. 12SSM, 313 W. Liberty St.  
Lancaster, Pa. 17604

Enclosed is \$2.00 for the next three issues of *Armstrong House*.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

\*A subsidiary of Armstrong World Industries.

## Amazon

Cruising Expedition across a Continent



With naturalist guide/lectures, enjoy the excitement of seeking wild-life on daily boat excursions into the waterways of lush jungle from the headwaters at Iquitos to the delta at Belem, then to Rio. Fine accommodation/ cuisine on our MS WORLD DISCOVERER — the world's most sophisticated expedition cruise ship. October departures, 21 days, from \$3900. Write for details.

**Society Expeditions**  
Cruises Inc.

723 Broadway E.  
Seattle, WA  
98102 USA

Name \_\_\_\_\_ SM-2

Street \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Cruising expeditions also to:  Amazon  
 Antarctica  New Guinea  Indonesia  
 Seychelles  Red Sea  Iceland / Greenland

M/S World Discoverer Registered in Singapore



Reconstruction of Simmons' "dinner table" at cave he occupied in 1916 shows

can labels still unfaded, delicate toggle sticks (foreground) used in animal traps.

decide whether to marry her, you know? I still don't know why, if we were so happily coupled, I felt I had to go far away to think it all out. All I know is that I woke up at three o'clock one morning and decided that if I walked from one end of California to the other, it would solve all my problems. Doesn't make much sense, does it?"

Actually, it did. Until that small hour of the morning, Fletcher's life had been composed mostly of loose ends. To borrow a figure from Lewis Thomas (*SMITHSONIAN*, April 1980), one of the few current writers whom Fletcher admires, his assorted selves had never held a committee meeting to find out how they could work together. Now, however, the writer in search of a subject, the wanderer in search of a destination, the loner in search of a "religion" that would sublimate his self-protecting egoism, were all lining up, at least for the time being, behind a newly evolving self—one for whom the journey would be the destination—to wit, Colin Fletcher, Walker.

Fletcher had always done a lot of walking, but it had never been a compelling enthusiasm much less a vocation. Now it suddenly was.

The description of his majestic journey first appeared in installments in the *San Francisco Chronicle* and later, more elaborately, in *The Thousand-Mile Sum-*

*mer*. As a writer, Fletcher was at long last on the ascendant turn of fortune's wheel. At the same time, however, the would-be husband was riding for a fall: while he was making up his mind to marry the girl, the girl was unmaking hers. There was a marriage, but it lasted scarcely a month.

"Breach of trust can be a terrible thing," says Fletcher, broodingly sipping from his stainless-steel cup. "I had never been rejected before" (he discounts publishers and his father) "and it killed me."

In this murdered state he returned to England. He prescribed himself a trek from Land's End to Hadrian's Wall, but it didn't help. He buried himself in an ancient Sussex house, "a funny little funk hole called Starve-Crow, which seemed appropriate." There he worked on *The Thousand-Mile Summer*. There also he was gripped one evening by the stunning, late-blooming realization that "By God, I was expendable! It was an incredible discovery for an egotist like myself. It was a huge new freedom!"

Nevertheless, when he returned to the United States in 1962, Fletcher was still among the walking wounded. Fortunately, the necessary therapy was at hand: where a stroll through the scepter'd isle had failed, an unprecedented ambulation through the Grand Canyon would do the trick. Fletcher had his first look at the

# A Museum Piece for Your Home



## MANOLETE by Miguel Berrocal

This impressive sculpture, paying tribute to the greatest of all bullfighters, Manolete, is a powerful and dramatic work of art for your home or office. Ingeniously constructed of 26 interlocking elements, some cast in stainless steel and the rest in bronze, Manolete is also a fascinating and challenging puzzle. Cast and polished by hand, it displays the kind of skilled craftsmanship admired by all art lovers.

Created by Spain's foremost living sculptor, Miguel Berrocal, Manolete is an asset to any art collection. Published in signed and numbered limited editions, the value of Berrocal sculptures has historically risen as the editions are exhausted. For example, a Berrocal that sold for \$75 in 1969 is now worth \$1000.

Send \$1 for our beautiful 20 page full color catalog of challenging Berrocal puzzle sculptures, priced from \$250.

### Centicore Arts, International Ann Arbor, Michigan

Centicore Arts  
2122 Melrose Avenue, Dept. 50  
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48104

I have enclosed \$1. Please send me your color brochure and complete ordering information.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Canyon on the way back to the West Coast and promptly dreamed of walking it. "Other people have dreams like that," he explains, "but I carry them out."

The eloquent account of that carried-out dream would become the best-selling *The Man Who Walked Through Time*. In the same year, 1968, the even more successful first edition of *The Complete Walker* was published. Fletcher suddenly discovered himself to be the reigning guru of all backpackers and, for the first time in his life, a very solvent man. *The Man Who Walked Through Time* records his self-surrender to the annihilating disinterestedness of one of the world's most formidable landscapes. It does not record the fact that the self that Fletcher surrendered was the rejected, downcast fellow who, four years earlier, had taken a very human gamble and lost. "Afterwards," he remarks, "I was not the same man I was before." As far as the "man-world" was concerned, he had come to terms with his most singular gift: the capacity to be willingly alone.

#### *Trunkman, meet Vergil and Merlin*

Three hundred feet above us, the hills are still shining, but our glade has settled into a premature twilight. Fletcher gets up, begins collecting cups and spoons and paper wrappers, stowing them in his pack. We are temporarily out of words, and for the first time the silence of the wilderness is something we can hear.

In that silence, my thoughts return to Trunkman. Why, after all, had Fletcher been so "fascinated" with him? Obviously he sensed in him a kindred spirit. Yet I am certain that if Fletcher had encountered the flesh-and-blood Trunkman/Simmons in that cave, rather than his vague ghost, he would have been annoyed to find him there, intruding on his own isolation. No, his search for that innocuous nomad had to serve a powerful, imaginative need: Trunkman/Simmons was meant to be Vergil to Fletcher's Dante, Merlin to his Arthur—the dependable, paternalistic guide who knows the way, whom all exiles, orphans, explorers and other loners sometimes wish for when they traverse life's more forbidding terraces and steep slopes. If Simmons had not existed, Fletcher might have decided to create him. He very nearly has. *The Man From the Cave* is halfway between biography and novel.



On 1958 1,000-mile California trek, Fletcher camped in White Mountains.

Most of the time, Fletcher prefers silences to human voices. He prefers trails to roads. He prefers walking to all other means of locomotion. He prefers the solitary craft of writing to any other creative occupation. He prefers the wilderness to any aggressively human space. All of these preferences have a common denominator: they are the personal declarations of independence of someone who either "chooses freedom" or has it forced upon him. For Colin Fletcher, the pursuit of freedom—the existential, not the political, variety—is the only valid quest of a meaningful life, examined or otherwise. He walks in wilderness "that Man hasn't touched" because he can "kid" himself that his response to it is as free and original as on the first created day.

Even death, the one unrecordable experience, can serve the purposes of the quest. Not long ago, Fletcher fell into a deep faint which seemed to be, but wasn't, a heart attack. In the ambulance, as his consciousness began to stir, his reaction echoed the moment at Starve-Crow when he realized the unimportance of self-importance: "I wanted terribly much to live, of course. But if I didn't, that was all right, too, I wasn't afraid to die. Knowing that was a very freeing thing."

Fletcher speaks of this experience when we are settled in his living room that night, facing a fireplace and, next to it, an expanse of glass through which the starless void looks in. In daylight there is a view of canyon oaks and beige hills, with nary a straight line in sight. This is hardly the wilderness (Fletcher lives in one of those spread-out California communities that he aptly calls "shrubburbias"), but the houses are tactfully ar-

# Iceland Greenland

Cruising expeditions to  
Iceland/Greenland



Polar bears, walrus, exceptional birdlife, Eskimo villages, Norwegian fjords, Spitsbergen. Informative lectures by expert naturalists. Fine accommodation/cuisine on our MS WORLD DISCOVERER — the world's most sophisticated expedition ship. Rates from \$4400. Departs July and August. Write for details.

**Society Expeditions**  
Cruises Inc.

723 Broadway E.  
Seattle, WA  
98102 USA

Name SM-2

Street

City/State/Zip

Cruising expeditions also to:  Amazon  
 Antarctica  New Guinea  Indonesia  
 Seychelles  Red Sea  Iceland/Greenland  
M/S World Discoverer Registered in Singapore



## 14 Ways Better Than A Wheelbarrow Easier And More Enjoyable To Use.

Mail us the coupon below to receive all the exciting news about our famous Vermont-Ware carts, our special free premium offer, our two styles, five models and special build-it-yourself kit.

Learn why more than 50,000 satisfied customers all over the world say they don't know how they ever got along without it.

### VERMONT-WARE

Dept. 0802-1, Hinesburg, Vermont 05461  
Write for our FREE catalog today.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

ranged so that they do not intrude on each other's views. Since Fletcher also exacts respectful silence from neighboring children and dogs, he "kicks" himself that he lives in almost perfect isolation.

Above his living room fireplace is a large reproduction of Renoir's famous *The Luncheon of the Boating Party*, surely one of the most smiling celebrations of human conviviality ever painted. Fletcher "likes" the people gathered at that long-ago picnic. However, he has not chosen the painting for its sociable theme. Earlier he had asked me to notice "how the railing in the painting echoes the lines of the hills outside, and how the greenery matches my oaks perfectly." So much for the imagery of human intercourse. Fletcher the Esthete and Fletcher the Misanthrope are as one.

He smokes a forbidden cigarette. He stares out at the viewless view. It is 11 o'clock, past his bedtime. In many ways he is a creature of regular habits, indulged neuroses, small rituals (the time-honored means of keeping large freedoms, like genies, bottled, as they must be when one chooses to live with them). He declares himself "a hypochondriac," an ashtray emptier, a diet watcher. There are burglar and smoke alarms attached to everything; there is a taped, crooning voice that occasionally tells how to relax; there is a sign on the walk warning Jehovah's Witnesses and almost everyone else to go away.

Is he happy? "I am not happy with the word 'happy,'" comes the non-answer.

It is safe to say that Fletcher the Writer is not entirely satisfied with his professional life. There is a problem with the Walker image. Fletcher is only too aware that the Walker pays the bills. Now that he has exhausted the Trunkman obsession, he will come back to the role for awhile; a third revised edition of *The Complete Walker* is in the works, as well as a collection of essays on the natural world. He even toys with the notion of walking the entire length of the Colorado River "sometime in the next 150 years." (How many miles? "Miles? Oh, I have no idea. Miles are irrelevant. It's the hours that count.")

Yet, at close to 60, this perennially expectant, self-creating man has a lot more selves to try out, and the hours count. He may soon have to call another meeting to elect a different chairman. "To tell the truth," he says, "it riles me that I'm better known as a walker than a writer. Hell, I'm not a better backpacker than anyone else, I just write about it better." The wild, blue glance swings in my direction. "Of course, I would like to be a *great* writer," he explains with a pretend-modest smile. "You know, Colin Shakespeare." He pauses, then adds, "I do think I have one novel in me. . . ."

He has answered the question, after all. In the largest, freest sense of the word, he is a very happy man.

Packing out of Nevada desert with some of Simmons' belongings, Fletcher (left)

carries the trunk while a park ranger follows him with the shepherd's stove.

