



Grandma Whitney: Queen of the Mountain

William Andrees

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Hilda Crooks was born in Western Canada in May of 1896. She grew up in the old-fashioned way on a farm where vigorous physical work was daily routine, but book learning was of little confer. Impressed that she needed an education, she left the farm and began the long climb from fifth grade to a bachelor of science degree in dietetics, eventually obtained at the expense of her health. For the next 25 years, she says, "I wasn't worth much. I was nervous, anemic, and perpetually tired." So she evaluated her lifestyle, made sure her vegetarian diet was adequate and set herself a regular exercise program. With the encouragement of ther husband, she began climbing mountains near their home. At age 66 she made her first Mt. Whitney climb (elevation 14,495 ft.). This became a yearly challenge. At 70 she began jogging and found that it made mountain climbing easier. At 75 she started long backpack trips of a week or more. The next year she crossed the Sierra Nevada Range from Sequoia to Whitney Portal, an 80-mile trip. Two years later, at 78, she completed the 212-mile John Muir Trail (accomplished in five summers). Not ready for the rocking chair at 81, she started working on the Sierra Club's registered list of 268 peaks in Southern California ranging in altitudes of 5,000 to 11,500 feet. She climbed 90 of them after she reached age 81. At 91, Hulda gained international acclaim by becoming the oldest woman to climb Mt. Fuji, Japan's tallest mountain. Six weeks later she broke her own record as the oldest person to climb Mt. Whitney.

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