



**The
First
Ascent
of**

Mount Trashmore

Paul McHugh



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Mt. Trashmore reverses that ancient poet's line. Here, mice labored to give birth to a mountain.

That was among my last lucid perceptions as I struggled upward through a methane miasma. Up here, at elevations above 100 feet, consciousness itself became mighty Trashmore's chew toy.

Strands of coarse crass coiled like snakes around my ankles. Jagged pebbles slipped into my sandals. Nevertheless, an awe-struck wonder grew in my mind. After all, I was amid throes of an epic quest: the first solo ascent of the highest peak in the continental U. S. (south of Miami).

Before I charged for the peak, I'd been forced to wait out the capricious South Florida monsoon. I'd grown a bit cranky, watching my jalousie of opportunity slowly open, only to slam shut before I could swing out of my lawn hammock.

Now, all those besotted hours of waiting were over. The supreme physical challenge had begun. I should emphasize that the mountain I had challenged was none of the Almighty's handiwork. Men had reared this peak against the heavens! With a foundation laid in the 1980s, by 1992, Trashmore already comprised a heap of some eight million tons of festering garbage. The good people of South Florida charged determinedly into the task of erecting a monument as emblematic of our culture as the Cheops pyramid is of that antique empire of the pharaohs.

The erection of Mount Trashmore is based upon stats that far surpass ordinary American excreta. In the U.S., each person, on average, daily generates about 3.5 pounds of garbage. The folks in Florida, demonstrating a clear sense of mission, more than double this figure. They produce fully 8 pounds of trash, per person, per day. Much of that product gets heaped on Trashmore – or other “vertical landfills” – to bring badly needed relief to the formerly boringly level South Florida horizon line.

Sadly, some of their waste does get, well, wasted, by being burned up in giant incinerators. And so, this refuse merely fumigates the landscape, instead of adding to more lasting monuments to excess, like this fine, pyramidal dump.

Trashmore and her sister peaks did score a literal windfall from Hurricane Andrew's exertions, in late 1992. Doubtless, you've seen the video footage. Thousands of poorly designed, inadequately inspected and shoddily built homes went *whiff!* under the sledgehammer blows of a storm any freshman student of meteorology could have predicted would sooner or later occur.

But Trashmore is much more than a convenient place to stash disassembled trailer parks and substandard housing. It speaks to me of man's lust to re-make the earth in his own image. Culturally, it has even more significance than the gambling chip midden hidden outside the Vatican's rear windows. Aesthetically, once the trash is frosted with dirt and planted with brush, it will be our answer to the hanging gardens that once bloomed on Nebuchadenazzer's ziggurats.

Such musings, fueled by my panting breaths of methane and ammonia (spiked with the odd passing zephyr of oxygen) heaved through my feverish brain as I stumbled up Trashmore. I was just beginning to realize that these slopes could be a prime spot for astronauts to train for manned missions to the moons of Uranus, when my attention was seized by a clumsy rustling in a wilted clump of coarse weeds just before me.

Could it be...? Yes! I thrust myself through the noisome vegetation to see scores of the legendary garuda birds flapping about on an exposed seam of that unique Trashmore formation, ordurite. The foul fowl gaped at me – perhaps the first human to ever invade their sacred domain. They stretched out long, naked necks, clacked their dripping beaks, waddled, then launched themselves into the choking air. Some of the lowlanders misrepresent these grand garudas as a species of buzzard or vulture. But they’ve likely never seen them soar, free and glorious, at the epicenter of their habitat.

Before me now, for an awe-inspiring moment, one blotted out the dim sun. Surrounded by its streaming rays, he was almost heraldic, with a maggot-riddled mullet clenched in his right talon, a crumpled tract of abandoned political promises in his left.

In days of yore, Florida’s skies were clotted with lesser birds, such as roseate spoonbills, egrets, wood storks, and other feathered water lovers winging in and out of the Everglades. However, the wetlands, clean water flows and natural foods needed by them dwindled, while supplies of rotting roadkill and garbage rose spectacularly. And so, the songbirds, waterbirds, woodpeckers and such were forced to move on, and these mighty garudas came to rule the skies.

I spun around, to wave my arms and share my joy at this moment of grand discovery with my support crew, waiting down our Base Winnebago. However, even at the immense distance of at least a quarter-mile, I was able to see that no one stood watch on the other side of the barrier fence, at our tripod-mounted spotting scope. Then it was that I knew that succeeding at this adventure-of-a-lifetime would depend entirely upon my own skills, penetrating vision and bold decision-making.

Then a happy thought came. Perhaps my support crew had simply strolled away for a moment to bob baits in the torpid stream we called Miasma Creek – which the locals know as “The River of the Three-Eyed Fish.” This dank rivulet meanders around – not the foothills, since there are none – but the ingrown toenails of Trashmore.

An unsung attribute of Trashmore is that this manmade mountain concocts springs and freshets of a type never before seen on the face of the earth. Juices deep within this gargantuan heap, by methods arcane, slowly ooze together, blending into a noxious stew. This cocktail of ammonia-laden leachate is collected in a system of interior drains cleverly linked by the mountain’s builders, then mixed with sewage donated by generous local communities.

The resulting witch's brew is then deep-well injected into salt caverns 3,200 feet below Florida's limestone layer. It is unknown at present if these caves have any outlets that leak out to the sea, or upward, into the state's freshwater aquifer. Even if it lies dormant for a long while, the potent broth obviously provides a rich legacy, an awesomely abundant offering for the delectation of future generations.

Smiling at the thought that my loyal support crew was even now likely trying to harpoon my victory dinner in the bubbling waters of Miasma Creek, I plodded onward, ever upward. Distant though it might be, I could say in no uncertain terms that I had begun to smell the summit.

I must allow, I did experience some difficulty at the headwall, where Mallomar and Irving had last been glimpsed by their basecamp observers shortly before they vanished forever into the Trashmore fastness, leaving behind nary a trace of their ultimate fate. Lurching up over this obstacle, I stubbed my toe against some rusty oxygen tanks, and needed to sweep them and broken camera out of my way with the Batso Mallet. Then I got this crucial tool all tangled up in a rotten Aloha shirt wrapped around a heap of bones. But eventually, I was free to resume the ascent.

One step. Two steps. Skip once, hop on both feet, skip and stop. I repeated this mind-numbing rhythm over and over. Over and over. Over and over. Over and over. The ultimate mountaineer must respond to each new challenge with some creative movement. It is only because of our superior mental and physical gifts that we are able to tread upon such lofty and sacred sites, places in which the great, coagulated mass of humanity remains utterly uninterested.

Finally, at last, in far more time than it takes to tell it, I was there! *Mirabile dictu*. I had no more steps to take. I teetered upon the very pinnacle of Trashmore! Tears of ersatz ecstasy spurted from my eyes. Oh, how my mates had all sneered when I had announced this project, calling me only a sport-climbing gym rat. Well, they'd be laughing out of the other side of their snouts now, with a climb like this to my credit!

A solo first ascent of Trashmore, by its feared *diretissima*, would 'scribe my name in glory, far above peak baggers with mere bagatelles to their credit – such as taking K-2, Makalu and Desilu in a single weekend, the Himalaya's Triple Crown. Let others brag about their skill on verglass-sheathed rock, jumbled glacial seracs and overhanging ice. My abilities on crushed plastic, crumpled cans and wet newspaper had been proven supreme.

Through a beige, murky smaze to the north, I could now make out the fabled Miami skyline, now slightly eroded by impact from small arms fire and rocket grenades after the death of Mayor Sonny Crockett. Off to the south, Turkey Point Nuclear Power Plant reared up the mighty phalli of its cooling towers.

I contemplated the magnificent landscape we are bequeathing to following generations.

“Someday,” I murmured, “all of this will be yours. Whether you want it, or not!”

I whipped out a notebook to record the moment, and jot down a panegyric to the mountain of refuse that bulked beneath my feet.

“O Mighty Trashmore – thou art the art of man above nature. It is magnificent that a peak should be so speedily erected where none stood before. In more benighted locales, people may purblindly seek to minimize trash, to remove and conceal it. Here, it’s potential is unleashed!

“In areas like Everest, misguided mountaineers sometimes organize expeditions to police litter. Fools! Can’t they see how the Himalaya’s paltry tectonic upthrust of a few annual centimeters could be wondrously enhanced? All they need do to seize the

opportunity is pack all that trash on up to the summit, then stack it there!

“Today’s waste can form the building blocks of Tomorrowland. Some Florida eco-freaks insist on seeing Trashmore shackled to a height of no more than 250 feet. But I say, ‘Set Trashmore free!’ Bring in truckloads of refuse from neighboring states! Import it by garbage barge from around the world get Trashmore up above 12,500 feet – and then install ski lifts! In southern Florida! Can’t you just see it?”

“And we need not stop there. The Appalachians for instance – now poor, worn-down, stunted hills, could serve as the foundation for a new crest of peaks far mightier than any that stood here in geologic history.

“Coming generations would simply reel at this achievement. Indeed, we can feel certain that, with epic monuments to our way of life like Mount Trashmore to our credit, they will never, ever forget us. Forgiveness, of course, might be another matter.