First Group to Spot Mt. Whitney

This is a picture of the first group to spot Mount Whitney and decide that it was the highest mountain in the area. They are the California Geological Survey field party of 1864. From left to right, they are: James Gardner, Richard Cotter, William Brewer, and Clarence King.

Some of the members of this group (notably Clarence King) tried to climb the highest peak in the range several times without success. The first time they tried, King and Cotter climbed Mt. Tyndall, then realized that there were higher peaks a bit further south. They ran out of food and had to go back to base camp. Two more times, King tried to climb Whitney, but failed, once thinking he'd succeeded since fog obstructed his view of Whitney. Before he realized his error, three local fishermen, Charley Begole, Johnny Lucas, and Al Johnson climbed Whitney and named it *Fisherman's Peak*.

This started up something of a dispute, as the CGS party of 1864 had already named the peak Mt. Whitney, after the founder of the CGS, Josiah Dwight Whitney. Officially, the first people to climb to the peak of a mountain are supposed to have the right to name it. Since the fishermen spread their name primarily by word of mouth, and the CGS had lots of publications about it, their name eventually stuck.