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News of the  
WASHINGTON ROCK CLIMBERS

Founders  
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### SLIDE MEETING

We don't mean the bannisters. We mean the colored slides by John Meenehan on Caving. Just to remind you--they will be shown at the Bradt's, 6626 First Street N.W., on March 21 (Friday), at 8 P.M. As an added attraction Don Hubbard promises us a rendition of his latest Conn record, a duet by Jan & Jan Conn received last Christmas. We are hoping he'll bring along the rest of his Conn collection. Some of us haven't heard them all, and we'd all like to hear them again.

### HARPERS FERRY

The convenient and scot-covered cliffs of Maryland Heights provide excellent climbing now that the guards have been removed from the Harpers Ferry tunnel. The above sketch shows some of the features noted in Sam Moore's album, wherein: Route o-o (roughly) is that pioneered by Sam Crook and Oakes (shall we call it the Crooked Oak Route?); Route B-B, called B-gully, was traversed without incident by Bradt, Hubbard, and Moore. Route A-A, called A-gully, is attributed to Moore, Smith, and Crook. Route C-C, called Charlie's Lead, is attributed to Chas. Daniels, Moore, and Bradt. Route H-H, called "Hawk's Aerie" from the remnants of a rope found there that had been used by the Harpers Ferry Fire Department to rescue an ornithologist, is credited to Bradt, Moore, and Patterson. Sam's Pin, S, was climbed and sat on by Sam Moore, and despite its 8-foot (+ or -) girth has since been climbed by two other routes. The face F-F promises enough fun to fit the name of Gully Face.

Charlie's Lead, a qualifying climb, B-6, leaves the ground at the bottom of A-gully and traverses to the left just above the greenbriar around a loose nose to a stance below an overhang. Surmounting the overhang one stands at the foot of a slope. This is followed for half the height of the cliff, and, as it peters out, the route turns up the wall. Diagonalling somewhat to the left, one reaches the rain shelter cave and, turning right, walks easily to the top.



## BIG BEND REPORT. Herb Conn

Until Christine Orcutt's excellent article on Big Bend National Park appeared in the current Appalachia, Jan and I were comfortably loafing in the delightful Chisos Mountain campground. From our tent we could see great cliffs and bristling pinnacles, and at times we would speculate idly upon their climbing possibilities. But now that happy idleness is over.

It was the pictures accompanying Mrs. Orcutt's article that forced us to get going. For now the folks back home could see for themselves the possibilities of the Big Bend terrain. "That looks like great country," they wrote us. "What have you climbed?" Hm-m? So, with a sorrowful farewell to the blue jays and the chipmunks we shook the Texas dust from our climbing rope and set out from camp to do our duty.

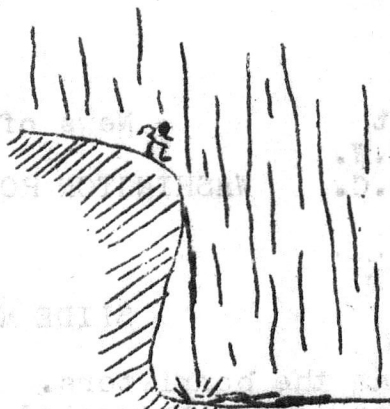
One of our first trips was Cattail Canyon. It typifies well the remote and rugged fastnesses of the Chisos Mountains. For a few miles we walked downstream in a pleasant little valley between gentle cactus-covered slopes, little suspecting what surprises the canyon held up - or rather down - its sleeve. Then rock walls closed in on either side. We turned a corner - and stopped. The stream bed continued to be sure, in full view; but it was 400 feet straight below us!

It was our first experience with the "pour-off," a unique feature of these mountains. From below a pour-off may be recognized as a black stain streaking down the perpendicular rock from a tiny notch high above. There are all sizes and shapes of pour-offs, but in general they have one feature in common. They can't be climbed.

After some backtracking and a long detour we got around this particular one. But now the canyon assumed different proportions. It narrowed to twenty feet in width, and vertical walls soared out of



Canyons like  
Inverted Keyholes



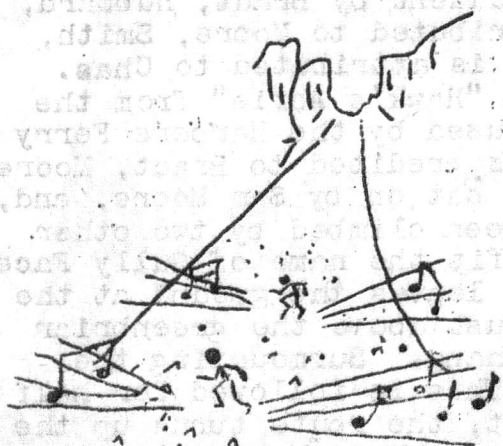
With a PERverted  
sense of humor!

sight on either side. We were following a narrow winding pathway at its bottom, and we were entirely at the mercy of its meanderings and plungings. Nor did we find Cattail Canyon merciful. There were plenty of pour-off problems ahead. We learned our first lesson: You can't get anywhere by following streams.

The rock here is igneous, mostly hard intrusive deposits perpendicularly jointed and breaking up into rectangular blocks that clink musically. The breaking occurs rather readily, as for example under

the pressure of the fingers or from a sharp gust of wind. As we climbed the ridge toward Pulliam Peak we ran into this phenomenon. We had come to a gap in the ridge with steep rocky sides, and a 40 mile per hour Texas zephyr was whipping through it. Jan started down. "I don't mind," she called up a few minutes later, "when the wind drops rocks on my head. But when it blows away the foothold I was just going to use, I'm ready to go back to Carderock!" Lesson number two: Ridges are not suitable avenues of travel.

We were left to try mountain faces. Casa Grande was a typical climb. Its sheer 400 to 600 feet



Land of the Musical Scree



front wall was out of the question except in one spot, where shadows and occasional greenery suggested from a distance the presence of a series of ledges and cracks. The ledges and cracks, we found, were there all right. So was the greenery. Texas greenery goes by such names as maguey, lechugilla, and prickly pear (not to mention the cute little pincushion cactus which hides coyly on every handhold). When a ledge is completely occupied by this type of vegetation, as it usually is, the problems of rock climbing are as nothing compared to the weird maneuvers of a climber squeezing between the cliff and the bloodthirsty spears of the maguey. We left a gory trail three-quarters of the way up the cliff. Then abruptly the vegetation ceased. We were at the head of a chimney between a gendarme and the main face. Above us loomed another hundred feet of rock which, although it may be climbable, didn't appeal to us. If the prickly pears can't even get a foothold, we decided, it must be meager going. Lesson number three? It's obvious!



There are some things  
worse to have below  
you than thin air!

Thus having learned there was no way to get anywhere, we decided to look over the pinnacles close at hand. The Chisos rock has a habit of weathering into fantastic pillars which resemble, both in appearance and cohesive properties, a carrot that has been diced, put back together, and balanced on its tip. There is the "Boot", a hundred-foot spire shaped like an inverted leg. Another unnamed pinnacle shoots upward 150 feet, lean and straight as a pencil. But these things are strictly scenery, nothing more. Imagine our surprise then, when we found a feasible route leading up the "Lighthouse," the next pinnacle on our inspection list. The Lighthouse may not be as big as some of the others, but the cairn we built on top has done its part to boost its size.

There are caves here, too. Although there is limestone underlying the igneous rock, we have discovered no limestone caves. There are other caves, however, formed by the parting of huge blocks of rock, leaving deep fissures and clefts which can be followed hundreds of feet into the mountainside. It's not like Schoolhouse, but the bats are apparently just as happy. In a cave on Emory Peak we found a series of logs used for ladders, laid out by CCC boys thirteen years ago when they were here building the road. They were probably hunting for buried smugglers' treasure, which rumor says is hidden in these mountains.

Not strictly a part of the Chisos Mountain group are the Mule Ear Peaks. We can forgive Christine Orcutt all else, but not our two trips to the Mule Ears! These twin volcanic spires stick up out of the barren desolation of a lava-strewn landscape. We hiked fifteen miles to make camp at a spring within striking distance of the peaks. Next day we became better acquainted with them.

The Chisos rock may be loose - this was rotten. Things crumbled at the touch. The south Mule Ear, however, proved vulnerable on its north side. We reached its top fairly easily, with only two pitches of rock climbing up its sharp summit tower. The north peak had no such weakness. Starting from the saddle between the peaks we climbed 80 or 90 feet up a disintegrating wall of agglomerate. But there was still 200 feet to go and no means of securing a belay. Reluctantly we headed for home.

Yet before we were back we

"Are you sure we can  
get down if the  
wind stops?"



realized the Mule Ear bug had bitten us. By combing the hardware stores of Alpine and Marathon we obtained expansion bolts and a star drill. Thus armed we tackled the north peak again. Two expansion bolts and five pitons did the job. This time we were able to leave our names in a fruit juice can on the summit.

There is rock climbing here in the Park, but it is not a climber's paradise. For those with instincts for hiking and exploring, however, it is matchless country, for they can be sure of poking into country few people have seen. It is country full of surprises, and while any old hiker can poke his way into magnificent scenery and rugged going, it may be that only the rock climber, properly equipped with his rope and hardware, can be sure of poking his way back out!

"Dear Paul and Jo,

Feb 24, 1947.

The enclosed manuscript summarizes our adventures in Big Bend Park. It's sort of long, but if you have room some time you might stick it in.

We expect to be leaving here in another week or two. From then on our address will be indefinite for a while.

Last week we met Ansel Adams, a director of the Sierra Club. He spent a few days here in the Park. He about persuaded us that our next stop should be Yosemite. At any rate unless the boss, our truck, objects we hope to mosey along into California working north as Spring comes.

Remember us to the gang."

Herb Conn.

#### UPS AND DOWNS

March 2, 1947. Paul Bratt, Donald Hubbard, Andy and Betty Kaufman, and Eleanor Tatge left early in the snowy, blowy morning for White Oak Canyon via Skyline Drive in the Blue Ridge. After giving a Major a helpful push now and again on the way to California, they arrived at the Drive to find it unplowed, surfaced with enough snow to dampen our enthusiasm for driving down it. Because the snow was still coming down so fast, they turned back a little before noon and headed for Syria at the foot of the Canyon. A three-mile hike up the Canyon brought the long-awaited ice-covered falls into view. When Betty and Eleanor arrived the men were already half-way up the frozen Upper falls following Andy's expertly cut ice steps. Crampons and ice axes came into play as the men struggled across their "glacier" providing a picturesque tableau for the women awaiting them across the stream. Andy and Paul were the first to the top of the ice cliff. As Don started to climb Betty anxiously remarked, "But he has no ice axe." And sure enough, Don once again must out-expert the experts by making his climb without artificial aid, which he did with his usual skill. The time having been mostly spent in driving around and tramping up the snowy trail, there was only enough left for a taste of the sport.

The return trip to the car through the snow was considerably more rapid than the upward climb had been. Although our climbing day was very short, it was extremely beautiful. The snow-laden pines and the icicle-bedecked cliffs near subsidiary falls along the route were breath-taking in their splendor. Now and again the clear, cold air was misty with blowing snow or rising cloud vapor. We were tired enough to more than enjoy the ride home under a brilliant almost-full moon.

The following report comes from Section II of the White Oak Canyon Trip. Unfortunately the Sections failed to get together, and were entirely ignorant of each other's trips. John Meenehan reports:

Howard Watkins, Clara Sholtz of the Speleological Society, and I made the trip in Howard's jeep and never was a jeep more appreciated, because a blizzard struck us at Centerville and stayed with us until 3 P.M. Snowplows kept the road clear and we got up to Thornton Gap without trouble. The plows had left 24-inch banks of snow across the entrances to the Drive but we managed to buck through them and get up to the tunnel. We had lunch there and spent some time admiring the



huge icicles formed by water seeping from the roof. Some of them must have weighed several hundred pounds. It was quite like a cave.

After lunch we climbed Mary's Rock a little way and then continued the drive. We got up to a point about one mile this side of Skyland before we turned back. We could have gone on but the clouds had come down below us and the snow was drifting rapidly. Our tracks were wiped out as fast as we made them. A freezing fog had hung on the mountain and every needle and twig was covered with ice. It looked like a glittering fairyland and we took a number of pictures, which was our real object in coming on the trip. From the appearance of things I would judge that snow drifts would be very deep in the Canyon.

P.S. Sunday traffic didn't bother us on the Drive.

It is regrettable that the two Sections were thus separated. A cooperative venture might well have accomplished more.

On the same day Chris Scoredos reports a one-man trip to Carde-rock. The ice was too soft for good skating.

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March 9, 1947. Although possibly all reports are not in yet, so far as is known the entire turn-out was a select group of two, Fitz Clark and John Reed, who climbed at Sugarloaf Mt., Maryland. Fitz reports that the weather was perfect, the climbing of first-class caliber, and the rocks as interesting as ever.

\* \* \*

NEWS NOTES. Two women, Mrs. Finn Ronne, wife of the Antarctic explorer, who will accompany her husband, and Mrs. Harry Darlington, wife of the expedition's chief pilot, will accompany their husbands to the South Pole. They will be the first women known to have landed on the South Polar continent. The Ronne expedition plans to freeze in for the entire Antarctic winter. Evidently they are heading for down under just as the Byrd expedition is coming home. Mrs. Finn Ronne, formerly Jackie Maslin, used to climb with us.

At New Haven, Connecticut, three cliff-climbing Yale students were arrested for climbing on the 300-foot face of East Rock, causing a traffic jam and bringing out police and fire departments. The judge said, "We don't do that sort of thing here."

REVIEW. The December 1946 Sierra Club Bulletin, recently out, will often be referred to as a textbook on the factors entering into the safety of a belay. When a fall is caught, great stresses are applied to the belayer, the climber, the rope, the carabiner, the piton, and the belay point. These separate factors have been examined experimentally and are quantitatively reported in "Belaying the Leader," by Richard M. Leonard and Arnold Wexler. This issue of the Bulletin is also valuable for the wonderful mountain photography of Vittorio Sella. Sixteen plates of some of the "World's Greatest Mountains" accompany an article on Sella by Ansel Adams of the Sierra Club.