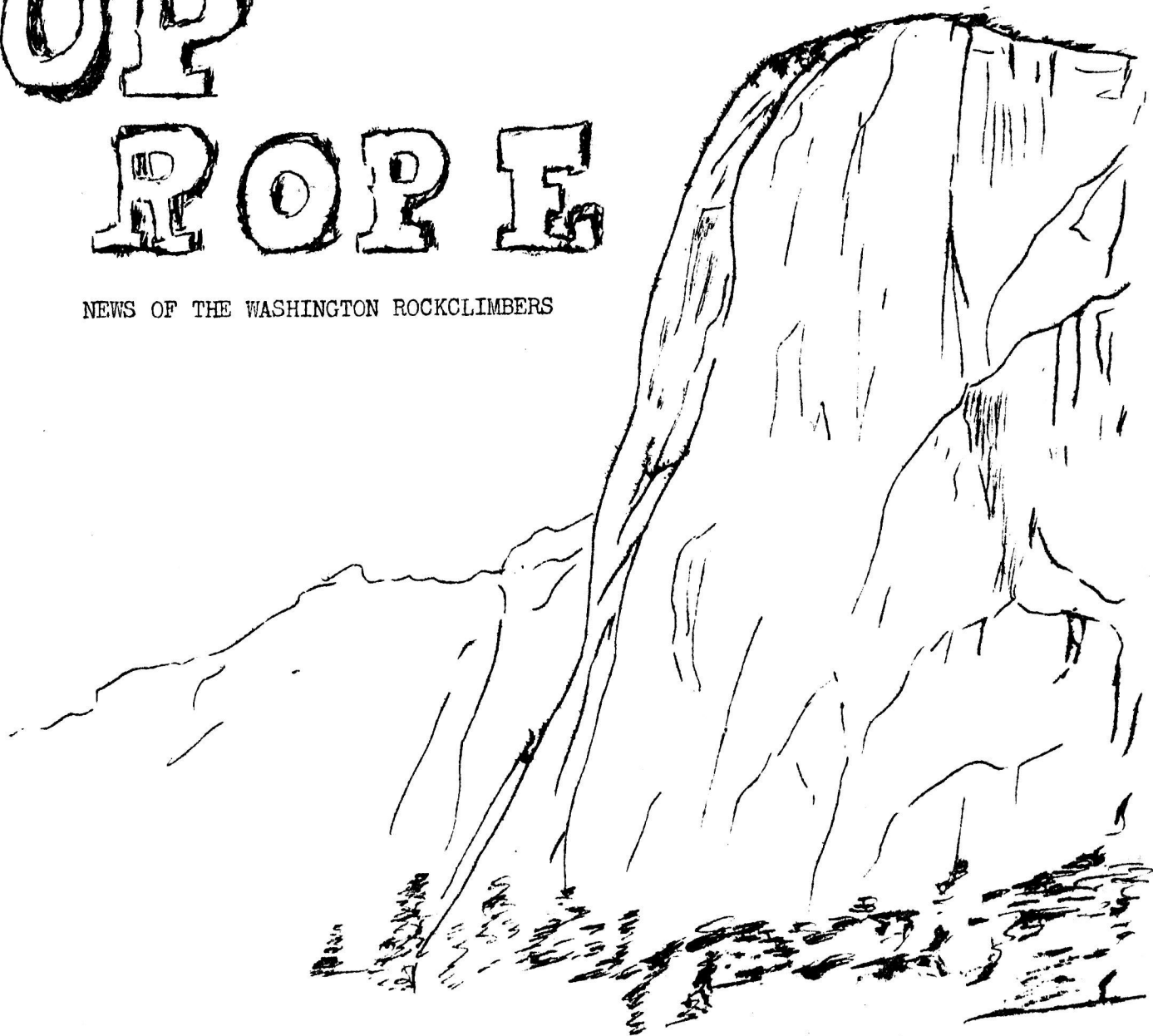


UP ROPE

NEWS OF THE WASHINGTON ROCKCLIMBERS



Editors

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MOUNTAINEERING -- WHAT NEXT?

By Herb Conn

In a recent Up Rope Chris Scoredos told us how "Mountaineering Was Simpler Then," referring to his boyhood climbing in the Colorado Rockies. For contrast, let us look just a few years into the future. The following account might well be gleaned from the pages of a well-known climbing periodical dated 1951:

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The famed 2900 foot monolith known as El Capitan in Yosemite National Park had long been considered unclimbable. But the word "unclimbable," as we all know, is a challenge to any true climber, and so it was that on June 26, 1950, our group of eight assembled at the base of the mighty cliff contemplating a climb straight up the face. The members of our party (whose names appear in full elsewhere in this issue). I shall refer to simply as Jack, Henry, Frank, Louie, Bob, Bill, Rutherford, and myself. We are all members of the newly formed Atomic Climbing Club.

Already we had photographed the cliff from every possible angle and studied these pictures minutely under the magnifying glass. We knew, therefore, that there is not an adequate handhold or foothold along the entire route we proposed. Stronger methods seemed in order. For this reason we arrived with an unusual quantity and type of equipment assembled in an Army ten-ton truck we had procured for the purpose. We spent the first four days relaying a part of this equipment along the three-quarters of a mile of trail leading from the highway to the foot of the rock. Some of the major items forming our loads were six 1000 foot coils of manilla rope, four 120 foot nylon climbing ropes, ten 50 pound crates of expansion bolts, and of course tents, sleeping bags, and a food supply sufficient to last a group of eight for the entire summer.

At last the momentous day arrived when we were to set foot upon the rock. Our technique in itself was nothing unusual. The leader (Jack was elected to have the honor of the first lead) pounded a five-eighths inch hole in the granite with ball-peen hammer and star drill as high as he could reach. When the hole was sufficiently deep, an expansion bolt sleeve was inserted and the bolt screwed in, thus expanding the sleeve so that it held tightly in the hole. Two nylon climbing ropes were tied about Jack's waist, and one of these he snapped to the bolt with a carabiner. Next he placed a loop of sling rope in the carabiner, stood in the loop, and one of his belayers (I believe it was Rutherford in this case) pulled the climbing rope tight holding Jack securely against the rock with his waist at the level of the bolt. Now he was enabled to drill a hole for a second bolt two-and-a-half feet higher. The second nylon was snapped to this bolt, another loop of sling rope was attached, and a second belayer provided the necessary tension to raise Jack two-and-a-half more feet.

The technique was simplicity itself, but the magnitude of our undertaking called for the utmost in planning and conservation of strength. After five hours of work Jack was up twenty-five feet. He tied himself securely to the highest bolt, lowered a length of light cord, and pulled up the lunch the ground crew had prepared for him. While he was eating, Rutherford climbed up the ladder of sling ropes and continued the lead.

When darkness fell Jack and Rutherford descended and crawled into their sleeping bags, while a new crew went up to continue climbing throughout the night. By morning they were so high that both belayers were actually on the cliff themselves, tied to expansion bolts at fixed distances below their leader.

It would be much too tedious to continue to describe the climb in detail. After a few days we settled into a fixed routine, so that three men were always climbing, and three were resting, and two were attending to camp duties. As the climb progressed, more and more time and energy were required for the spent crew to descend for rest and the fresh crew to ascend to the point of operations. This was the reason we had brought the thousand foot lengths of manilla. It proved to be but a few minutes work to raise and lower climbers by means of a pulley fastened to the highest expansion bolt.

By the middle of July we were progressing famously. We were up 900 feet, despite a week's delay resulting from the drinking water problem. The summer sun beat unmercifully upon the cliffs all day long, producing unbelievable thirsts in the throats of the climbers. Our original system of hauling canteens up and down on the pulley ropes proved too arduous, and it was Henry who made the suggestion that solved our problem with elegance. Taking a well-earned rest the eight of us drove to Merced where we purchased a 500 gallon tank, a winch, and a thousand yards of firemen's hose. By muleback we packed this equipment to the top of the El Capitan cliff, filling the tank, bucket by bucket, from the nearby waters of Eagle Creek. The hose was lowered over the edge, and Bob, who had sprained his hammering wrist and was therefore useless for the actual climbing, was detailed to remain at the winch, keeping the nozzle of the hose always at the level of the climbing party. (Of course Bob was careful to let only a few gallons at a time into the hose, as a head of 2000 feet would have burst the hose.)

One evening a group of Sierra Club climbers who happened to be in the Valley joined our campfire. We offered to let them pound in a few bolts for us, but they seemed to prefer their own modest little climbs on the Cathedral Spires and the Lost Arrow to our epoch-making ascent. But perhaps they were only being polite, not wanting to deprive us of even a small part of the glory. They did make one suggestion, however, which we gave careful consideration. By using a length of ladder which could be secured to the highest expansion bolt, they explained, we could greatly reduce the number of bolts needing to be placed. We were all strongly tempted to try their idea, but finally rejected it, feeling that it would be undue use of artificial aid.

I will never forget the evening of August 13th. Our small group was jubilant in spite of weariness. Jack was rubbing liniment into his pounding arm preparatory to tomorrow's climbing. Rutherford was putting a new point on his star drill, using the foot-operated grinding wheel we had brought. All of us had come down for a rest, even Bob, who had made the long hike down from the Rim just for the companionship of the group. But we were breathless in anticipation of tomorrow's climb. For a piton crack had been sighted only six hours' climbing ahead, and we could hardly wait to reach it.

The next day we did reach it, so making an extra hundred feet in only three hours. That day was momentous, too, because we reached the upper third of the wall, thus making it practical to lower the climbers to the point of operations from the top of the cliff rather than hoisting them from the bottom. In the next week we moved our entire base camp to the top, where it stayed for the remainder of the climb.

September 2nd was the glorious day when Henry, closely followed by Jack and then Rutherford, climbed over the top of the cliff to be greeted with much handshaking and backslapping by the rest of us. With proper ceremony Henry unfurled the Club flag--a star drill rampant in field of granite gray--while Rutherford blew loudly on the tin bugle he had brought especially for this moment. We all sighed happily, for we knew that this was the birth of a great new era in the climbing of mountains.

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UPS AND DOWNS

March 21--Loudoun Cliffs Continued

Herb, Jan, Dolores and I spent the morning climbing the "Old Man's Folly". Herb led, Jan was second Dolores was third and I brought up the rear. The ascent started at road level, went up 10 feet of the open inside corner, then swung around the nose and onto the upstream face of the cliff. Thirty feet and two pitons brought the party to the balcony on top of the face. Herb, then tackled the overhanging "Folly". This required three pitons for protection. Above the "Folly", an additional, 50 feet of fair climbing took us above the rocks.

In the afternoon, Herb, Jan and I attempted the 30-foot sheer wall facing in the "Chimney" facing the pinnacle, just off the A. T. It was a straight forward climb with sufficient holds, but very tiring. Only Herb made it. A. W.

Don called from the Hot Shoppe that the gang was going to Loudoun Cliffs so Jo and Paul agreed to go with the understanding that the latter could climb until lunch, then watch the children while Jo hiked after lunch.

Paul found a full rope climbing up the Old Man's Folly,--Herb leading, Jan, Dolores and Arnold following. Herb put a flourish onto the climb by coming back into the crack or chimney above the chief overhang. Arnold impressed by Paul's gray hairs and poor condition suggested that he and John Meenehan could traverse the prominence below them if they took along adequate protection, "say four pitons". The traverse was found and recognized as one of those "look no hands" walks. With his hands set for pitons Paul let his imagination run wild and started up the edge. John thought his imagination was too wild and went on strike four pitons up. Anyway it was 3:30 and lunch time.

In the afternoon Josephine walked to Keys Gap while Paul instructed the $3\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ year olds in climbing.

Jo apologized for taking two hours for walking the five miles. (Don't tell her but it included 800 ft. of climbing.) P.B.

March 27-28

Arnold Wexler
Helen Baker
Clara Lee

Jan Conn
Herb Conn

Following the meeting Saturday at the Bradts, five of us drove to Beverley Mills for the night prior to climbing at Bull Run on Sunday. Sunday dawned cold and windy, so that the climbing was confined to roped and unroped scrambling over the faces and among the chimneys of Zeus' Throne.

Remembering how hot and dry the Bull Run rocks can be, even this time of year, we carried plenty of water up the mountain with us. Ah well---it proved very useful for putting out our campfires.

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L E T T E R S

Editors Up Rope:

There has been so much speculation as to the authorship of "The Return of Jam Crack Joe" that I would appreciate a few lines in your illustrious publication UP ROPE wherein to clear up the case. There has been a continued effort on the part of certain unscrupulous individuals to place the crime on me, so in order to maintain my justly earned reputation as the Dumbest Character (extant or extinct) in rock-climbing circles it is absolutely necessary that my name be divorced from the above musical and literary gem.

The anonymous manuscript, written in the handwriting of Herbie Conn's typewriter, profusely covered with Herbie Conn's fingerprints, was delivered to me by mail post marked from a postal zone near Herbie Conn's place of business. When asked, Herbie Conn's wife confessed that Herbie Conn had written it. All this admittedly is merely circumstantial evidence that Herbie Conn is the author. There was always the possibility that Herbie Conn might have been framed. But, who could have framed him? It would necessarily have to be someone of sufficiently high intellectual and cultural background to be capable of writing such a song. A rapid check up on all of the Potomac Rock-Climbers revealed beyond the slightest shadow of a doubt that not a single one of them was of sufficiently high IQ to have done so--with the exception of HERBIE CONN.

"Elementary Dear Watson! ! But conclusive.

If anyone doubts the validity of this IQ diagnosis, just imagine if you can, any of the following bird-brained crows as the author of the "The Return of Jam Crack Joe;" Paul Bradt, Chris Scoredos, Arnold Wexler, Sterling Hendricks, Fitzhugh Clark, Gus Gambs, Sam Moore, etc.

Donald Hubbard

* * *

We hear from Bob Hackman, 310 Stanford Village, Standford, Calif.: " I have joined the Stanford Alpine Club. The outfit isn't too well organized, and what with all the work everybody has to do we don't get out too much. But they are a swell crowd. Another thing good climbing is quite a way from here two hundred or more miles. There are a few good faces for practice climbing near at hand, but nothing exceptional.

'At our last meeting they showed a rather interesting movie on the climbing of the Lost Arrow Mountain." * * *

'I have an interesting summer to look forward to. Will be leaving for Alaska in about six weeks to do some work (map work) up around the Prince of Whales Island. In fact our first job consists of a pack trip into the interior to shoot the high points. That I will like very much."

* * *

Charlie Daniels writes from 100 Green St., Melrose 76, Mass. that he hopes to see us before long.