

Up Rope

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NEWS OF THE WASHINGTON ROCK CLIMBERS.

Editor

Founders

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ROCK CLIMBING IN BELGIUM

by H. F. Stimson

I got an idea about roping down in Amsterdam which is a low country with canals at sea level and some canals below sea level in the polders on the outskirts of the city. In a store window, advertising vacations in Switzerland, was a picture of a guide roping off a cliff with a hitch I had never seen before. He had a carabiner slung close with rope around both legs. The double rappel rope from above came to the carabiner, and made about four turns around the metal of the link, then, bearing only slightly against his left thigh, went to his left hand for snubbing. His right hand held the rope above him to keep erect. If this hitch can work it should save a lot of erosion of pants and dissipate the heat where it will not burn.

In Up Rope I was credited with having a date to climb with Georges Marchal in Belgium. This was a bit premature. I had secretly hoped to, but was not assured of it till I was about to go to my hotel after spending a Friday evening with him, his wife and her visiting Swiss friend.

Georges Marchal is a Belgian Engineer whose work with the electrical standards of his country brought him to America in 1939, where he met Dr. Silsbee, who in turn made him acquainted with Alvin Peterson and later with Paul Bradt, Leo Scott and me. We took him to Bull Run Mountain where he climbed the Overhang with the need of fewer handholds than are actually there. It was he who taught us to crochet the climbing ropes as they do in Belgium when they are carrying them between climbs and do not wish to take the time to coil and uncoil them.

Marchal lives in Ixelles which is one of the suburbs of Brussels and near the University of Brussels. He lives in the same apartment previously occupied by Dr. Marton who is now a section chief in the Atomic Physics Division at the National Bureau of Standards. In this apartment he had had a radio sending station during the war to help the underground, and for this the Germans arrested him and put him in prison in Brussels for about a year and then later took him to the eastern part of Germany where he was finally put to slave labor in concentration camps. When he was released he weighed less than 40 kilos, got T. B., went to Switzerland to be cured but now weighs over 80 kilos.

The four of us left his apartment on Saturday afternoon about 1:15 and drove in his car through Waterloo where there are monuments corresponding to the monuments at Gettysburg, commemorating the battle where Napoleon was defeated over a century ago. Marchal had to stop at Charleroi to attend a funeral and at 5:30, after he was free, he drove east through Dinant on the Meuse River. In Dinant he stopped where the road came near the river at a rock needle nearly 75 feet high. A number of climbers were going up the needle and were rappeling down on the upriver side which was nearly vertical. A bronze tablet at the base of the needle stated that Albert the king of the Belgians had climbed it on a certain date. From here the road led up for a few miles to a place where we stopped, left the car, and walked for a third of a mile to a flat open field with grass and a few trees. This field is owned or controlled by the Belgian Alpine Club and on it were a dozen or more tents where the club climbers and their families were spending the weekend.

The surrounding country was beautiful and resembled some parts of northeastern Pennsylvania that I have seen. The field of tents was on the outside of a bend in the Meuse River, at the top of a steep limestone cliff rising vertically 100 meters to the edge of the field. The river was about 100 meters wide and there was a highway and railroad from France on the opposite side. Across was an old castle, now used as a school, with gardens beside it, including high boxwood mazes, said to be quite intricate.

The night was warm and pleasant with no insects to bother us. For sleeping some had air mattresses which seemed to be between the standards American design and the Appel design with the five long sausages. The European mattress blows up in two sections; one is the mattress itself made of four long tubes with the outer pair larger to keep one from rolling off and the other section a large pillow attached to the head of the mattress. If I had been going back to Paris I certainly would have tried to get one there.

Sunday morning after breakfast the men were off with their ropes to climb the cliffs. Marchal and his friend Jacques de Saegher took me down the slope to the foot of the cliff to make one of the regular routes up. Each of them carried about four carabiners or Mousqueton which is the French word they use for them. The routes are well supplied with pitons at appropriate places and have been used so frequently that new pitons are seldom necessary. They had a 50 meter rope of Italian hemp and put me in the middle of it. The end men used a simple half hitch on the doubled back rope similar to the simple middleman's knot that Gambs taught us. They did not use or bother to use a bowline. Several times the leader used the entire length of rope ahead of me on a lead. The climb was interesting and nearly vertical. On one exposed place it had my knees shaking. I was well protected with a better climber than I (Marchal) behind and a still better climber (Jacques) leading. Even Jacques was not the best at the camp I was told. After the climb we went to the tents for water, my camera, and a chance to realize my craving to perform a tonsorial operation in Europe. I had thought I

had had enough climbing but they took me down again and said they would go up an easy one. On the way up, the leader sometimes chose newer variations that were less easy, but nothing too difficult. The leader commented that it was evident that I had been on rocks before.

I was especially glad to have made the acquaintance of this man because there is a good chance he will be in Washington for two or three years with his family and, if he is, he will make a valuable addition to our group here. Almost all of them spoke English better than I spoke French so practically all my conversation was in English. French was the common language there altho Mrs. Marchal and her friend usually spoke in their native Swiss dialect which seemed to me to be more different from German than the Dutch language seemed.

That day was the warmest I saw in Europe and after dinner Marchal didn't feel well, possibly because he had had some cold drink right after making the second climb when he was hot and sweaty. He asked me to carry on but I assured him that I had had two wonderful climbs and chose to avoid overdoing that day because I had to leave early the next morning for England.

During the afternoon one of the climbers who had slept with me in the same tent, asked me if we had the six grades of climbing in America that they have there and when I said, "Grade six was where pitons were used as direct aid", he said, "Yes". I asked him if from that he considered the climbs I had been up in the morning as grade five and he said, "Oh no, about grade three, but the pitons had been placed there for safety for the student climbers they have, sometimes as many as sixty on a Sunday." I think that grading was about right for the actual difficulty corresponds, perhaps, to the graduating climb at Cupids Bower except that the cliff was ten times as high. The limestone was not rough like granite and there always seemed to be handholds somewhere if one looked around for them a bit. On one place of one climb there was a rope from a piton above to hold to while swinging around an exposed traverse, but that was the nearest to using a piton directly. That place probably could have been made by some without the rope but it would not have been as simple.

The return was through Namur, along the Meuse river, where boxes of huge strawberries were offered for sale, then across Belgium in the evening with the beautiful colors of the setting sun. This made a fitting climax to the most enjoyable day I had in Europe.

* * *

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENCE

Eleanor Tatge writes that she is having a wonderful time in Sao Paulo, Brazil with special appreciation for the coffee and food. She doesn't have the slightest idea what she is eating but it tastes awfully good. (They must have a second Don Hubbard as cook).

Geraldine Clark makes it official that Fitzhugh, Jr. is now

on the scene as part of the 1965 Rockclimbing team.

Bert and Elizabeth Vos have moved to McLean, Va. and extend a gracious invitation for all climbers to drop in and see them when climbing on the Va. Great Falls Rocks. They are located on El Nido Avenue off Old Dominion Drive, near Brookhaven, one mile S. E. of McLean. It's the white house on the hill with the row of sugar maples in front, just east of the Brookhaven Development.

Gus Gambs wrote to John Meenehan on August 5, 1948 as follows:

"Cultivating tomatoes and greens, fighting weeds, bugs and beetles kept me close to the ground and prevented me from stopping out to watch rope and hardware exploits which in the last decade have become more and more fascinating. They have surpassed anything ever done before in the Cumberland Lake District, England and in the Dolomites near Cortina di Ampazzo, the traditional rendez-vous of rock climbers from all over the world.

About three weeks ago while on a visit to my son's home near Utica, N. Y. it occurred to me that for the last 35 years I had been wanting to roam through the western Adirondacks with all its lakes and peaks. But now I had only one day to spare and I was told that the jewel of that area was Blue Mountain Lake, 2000 ft. elevation, overtowered by Blue Mountain, 3759 ft., same equipped with a fire tower commanding an all around view. The Utica-Old Forge Transportation Company runs a daily and Sunday bus in 2 hours 40 minutes to the 95 mile distant terminus Blue Mountain Lake, following a long string of waterways dotted with countless cottages. Only one bus leaving Utica at 9:15 A.M. returns the same day allowing but four hours at the lake. I figured on a difference of 1759 ft. between lake and summit, two hours up, and, one and a half for the descent with thirty minutes for lunch, but public road work shortened my time by 30 minutes. The beginning of the fire trail starts from the highway one mile above the bus terminus; the track is rugged, well defined and demands some scrambling in a few places. Since I was alone double caution became advisable on such a trail, the stinging midday July sun also conspired against me and by the time I reached a large clearing among fir trees and hemlocks at altitude 3000 ft. I called it a halt. A refreshing mountain breeze and superb views to the west and south greeted me. After a while I remembered that I had a lunch the consumption of which made me soon forget that I still had 759 ft. above me plus a 100 ft. steel tower. Reluctantly I broke away from this spot to retrace my steps to the lake. I never saw so many people rushing up and down a peak on their own power and I recalled that this mountain has for a long time enjoyed the reputation as the most popular one in the Adirondacks."

* * *

Arnold Wexler states that our program for the new year will be concerned with safety. A belaying platform will be constructed at Carderock and the monthly meetings will be

planned to include some outstanding safety experts. The tentative date of the first meeting is October 19, when Sterling Hendricks will tell about the Selkirk trip.

* * *

UPS AND DOWNS

August 15, 1948

Arnold Wexler
Betty Kauffman
Andy Kauffman
John Meenehan
Betty Alley

Donald Hubbard
Earl Mossburg
June Mossburg
Dolores Alley
Harold Drewes

The climbing was on the Maryland Rocks facing Cupid's Bower. Don's team tried to drive a piton through a hornets nest with the hornets being interested spectators while we lazy ones cheered them on. After lunch the climbing continued on a little Twelve Foot Devil that shook us off quite easily. Only two of us lucked out on a delicate step to make the top. In the afternoon Don led a party to Cupid's Bower while Arnold led another team to Carderock to inspect sites for the belaying platform.

JFM

August 22, 1948

John Meenehan
Arnold Wexler
Ruth Schlecht
Bill Schlecht
Harold Drewes

Karl Henize
Donald Hubbard
June Mossburg
Earl Mossburg
Bill Brown

The climbing was on Cupid's Bower where we enjoyed the hospitality of Stimmy and family. Don took Ruth, Bill and Karl on a warm up climb on the Maryland shore while the rest climbed the Batchelor's Climb with ease; the Master's with some loss of breath and skin, and the Doctor's with varying degrees of success. I know of at least one member left dangling in the air after peeling off the tough section. After sitting out a storm the day ended on the Brown overhang which was climbed with variations.

JFM

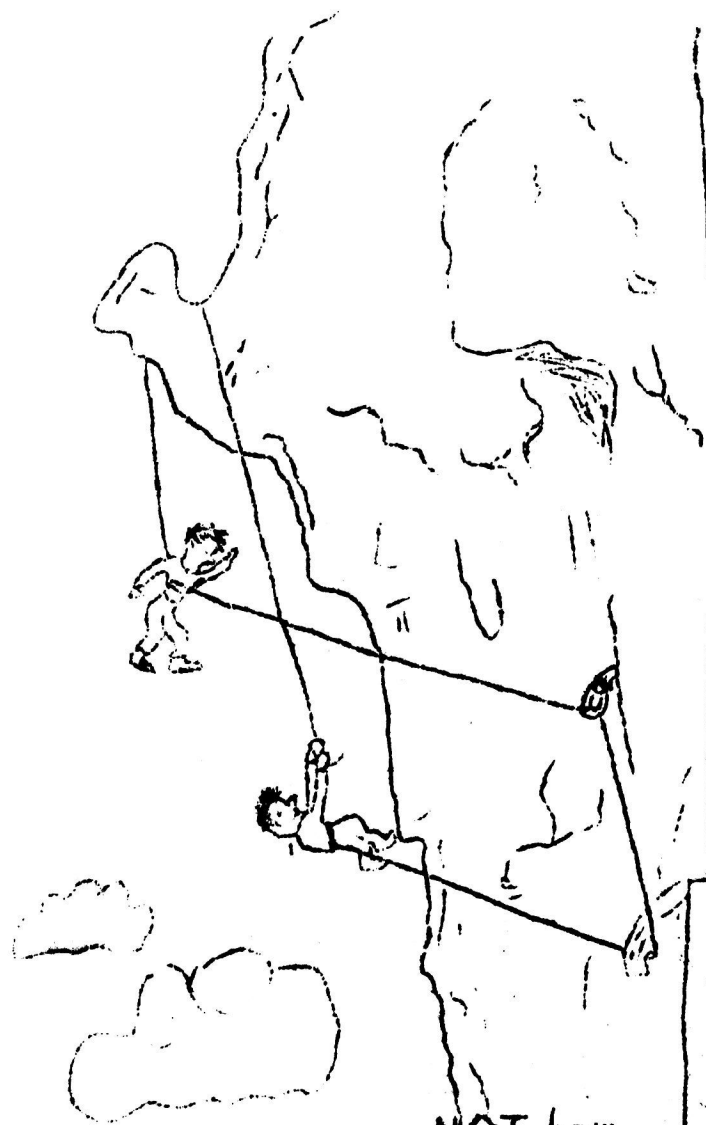
August 29, 1948

Ken Karcher
Pim Karcher
Harold Drewes
Don Hubbard
Arnold Wexler

Earl Mossburg
June Mossburg
Doloris Alley
Betty Alley

The climbing area was on Little Stony Man. The cool, breezy day was enjoyed to the utmost by two teams working on the face cliffs. Most of the efforts were expended on the Chimney Lead and on the Vertical Face. Some of the rest of us were over near Schoolhouse Cave on the trail of long-eared bats.

JFM



The question, Don, is **NOT** how
we got **INTO** this mess!

CONN Reissues



If you're cold, Miss Jones,
I-uh- have a suggestion!