

Up Rope



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NEWS OF THE WASHINGTON ROCK CLIMBERS

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Founders

Jan and Herb Conn

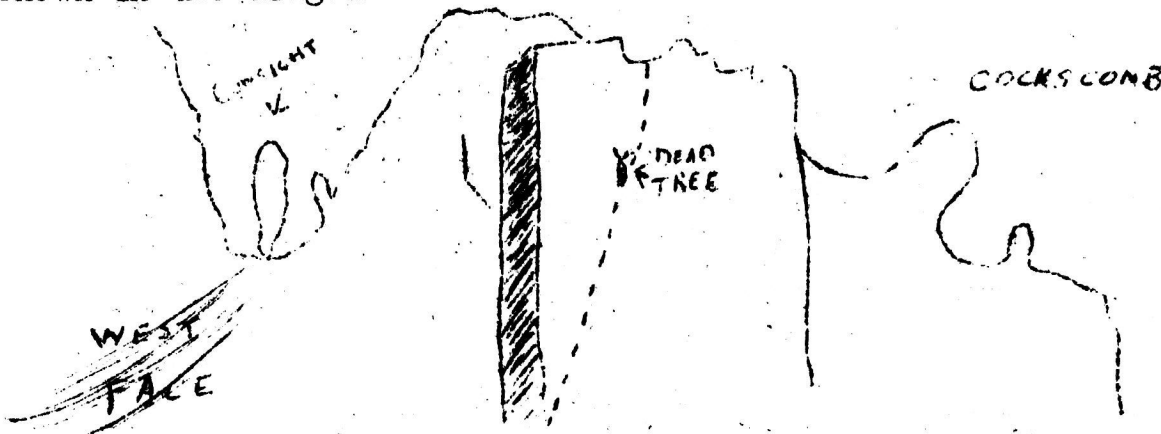
FIVE CENTS PER COPY

THE FACES OF SENECA

Everyone who has climbed Seneca Rock since the mountain troops evacuated it has seen their claims in the register on the South Peak: "First ascent, East Face under summit, April 28, 1944--Private John Stearns, P.F.C. George Kolbuchar, Sgt. Bob Hecker, Sgt. Jim Crooks"--and--"First ascent, West Face under summit, May 11, 1944--Lt. N. C. Hartz, Lt. Henry P. Schluter, Lt. Earl M. Richardson." It had been commonly assumed that both of these faces were unclimbable, and the statements in the register were read with lifted eyebrows and a shrug of the shoulder.

As our supply of pitons was low, Jan and I took a trip to Seneca Rock this spring to pound out a few. At the base of the West Face the pitons are thick, and many of them are easily reached without difficult climbing. When one is concentrating on a job like piton-pulling, one may not realize where the chain of pitons has taken him, and we were suddenly startled to find that we had nonchalantly wandered ropeless 100 feet up the face. Even more surprisingly, the pitons continued on up and the route looked quite possible. Next day, May 2, we tried the climb, but this time we used a rope. In fact, we hooked into three army pitons in the first pitch--which we had previously climbed ropeless--and were thankful that we hadn't been able to pull them out.

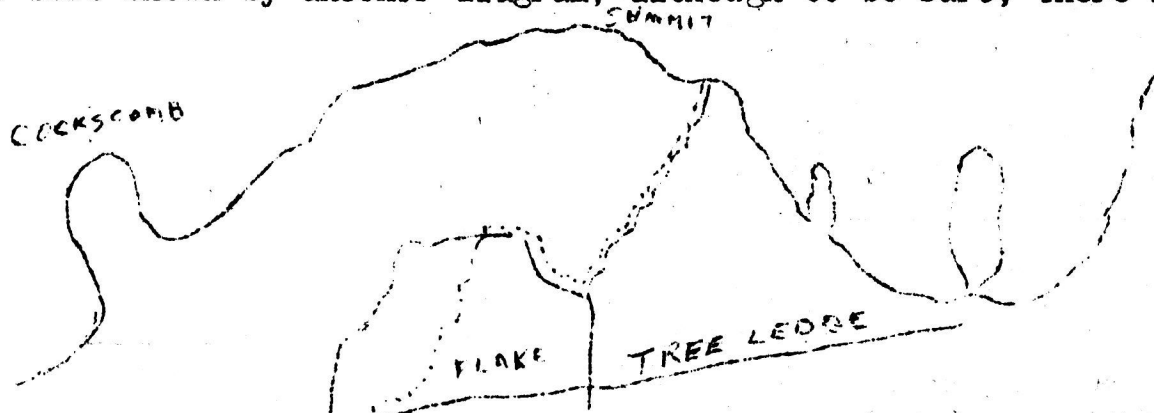
The West Face of the south peak is divided into three sections, the middle section consisting of a broad, out-jutting buttress as shown in the diagram. The route lies entirely on this middle section,



starting at its extreme northern end. Diagonalizing slightly south on broken ledges and then veering straight up, we headed for a prominent dead tree two-thirds of the way up the face. Just below the dead tree was the most interesting pitch, an inside corner crack containing a large, precariously balanced rock which might have done considerable damage to rope or second man if it had fallen. It was quite a delicate maneuver to climb past it without disturbing it. Above the dead tree we followed up a deep gulley which diagonalized south too much to suit us. So we traversed north to an inside corner which led us directly to the ridge at the first notch on the skyline south of the summit. Although longer, the climb is hardly as difficult as the usual route to the South Peak from the Gunsight, and it is far less exposed. However, the loose block remains a hazard which should probably be removed by the next party.

On top we looked in the register again. The Army had surely climbed our route--pitons all the way proved this. But we still wonder--is there a route on the section of face north of the buttress, directly under the summit?

Encouraged by one success, we looked next at the East Face. It is only a scramble to the broad tree-covered ledge which diagonals north up into the Gunsight. The take-off from this ledge is at a spot best shown by another diagram, although to be sure, there are



not many other spots possible. It is near the south end of a lichen covered flake which is partially detached from the sheer main face and extends up it some 150 feet. Fifteen feet up, we reached a ledge which led a few yards right to an overhanging layback 8 feet high. Above this overhang the same crack continues, angling up and northward, and we managed to follow it to the top of the flake. This is an airy catwalk well over 100 feet sheer above the tree ledge and with a yawning crack behind it which looked as if it dropped all the way into Schoolhouse Cave.

We found a dead owl on top of the flake. From the face above, even the birds fall off! (This seriously disputes the proverbial wisdom of the owl.) The wall above seemed to overhang all the way to the summit, and we wondered what our predecessors whose pitons we had been following had done. Looking about, we discovered; there was a rope sling hanging over the corner of the flake, indicating a long rappel back to the tree ledge. That day we followed suit, but on May 11 we returned to try one slim chance. From the top of the flake we followed down its north edge into a deep notch only fifty feet above our starting ledge. (Pitons indicated the Army team had climbed a crack directly into this notch from below, but this route was too much for us. We even had trouble rappelling down it on our previous retreat.)

Leading out of the notch on its far side was a 25-foot layback crack, and a solitary wafer piton 6 feet up proved that someone had at least tried it. We supplemented the wafer, which was loose, with two channel irons, one of which had to be driven while hanging in layback position with one hand. Easier climbing brought us up to a broad ledge where the belayer had a good anchor behind a pine tree. This felt very secure after the constant exposure we had had with us and would soon again. Now another tough pitch confronted us.

There was no mistaking the route. This, too, seemed to be a layback, and again there was one dubious Army piton near the start. After some maneuvering we got the key to it, narrow finger ledges for hands and feet on the left hand wall. One more pitch brought us to the summit ridge at its northern end, joining the route from the Gunsight just below the final pull-up onto the knife edge. The East Face is much more difficult than the West. In fact, we thought it an awfully good climb--as good as the climb to the Angel's Roost in Schoolhouse Cave, and, what's more, you can see your exposure. Paul will testify to the enthusiasm with which we tried to organize a trip there the next week end. We sincerely hope it becomes a popular route.

-- Herb and Jan Conn

OUR OWN BAEDECKER DEPARTMENT

The Scoredos family is now touring in Mexico. Helen Baker, Clara Lee, and Hope Dawson are now in the West and are hoping to encounter the Conns in Golden, Colorado.

UPS AND DOWNS

September 4, 5, and 6, 1948. Section 1:

Don Hubbard	Sterling Hendricks	Mary Neilan
Earl Mosburg	Andy Kauffman	Paul Bradt
June Mosburg	Betty Kauffman	Jo Bradt
Harold Drewes	Jane Showacre	Allan Bradt
Dolores Alley	Arnold Wexler	Peter Bradt

Saturday morning was spent on Nelson Rock with the two north pinnacles as the major objectives. The ascent was made via the Chimney between the two pinnacles, then over to the first, thence to the second via the East Face. The descent was accomplished by three long rope-offs. Arnold and Andy put in a new route up the second pinnacle by climbing directly up the north face from the upper balcony, using 3 pitons for protection.

Saturday afternoon Paul and family went on to the smoke hole to join the M.C.M. while the others went through Gandy Sinks with two flashlights. In the evening Sterling, Andy, Betty, Jane and Arnold climbed Spruce Knob before rejoining the crowd at Armentrout's camp site.

On Sunday, Seneca Rock was climbed. One party went up via the Old Woman's Route, while another climbed the South Face and traversed the skyline arête. The latter party, led by Arnold, worked on an interesting variation at the east end of the South Face, a high angle 50-foot lead up a corner to the top of the narrow chimney on the East Face. The Chimney was formed by a high detached slab called the Rocking Slab because of its bad habit of rocking when sat upon. A high light of the day was the rappel off the Gryphon's Beak. Jane and Earl climbed the Gendarme in the Gunsight.

Monday morning the climbing was on Baker Rocks. Don took one party up the simple portion of the rocks while Arnold, Mary and Jane pioneered a route up a 125 foot chimney. Five pitons were used. Only two thirds of the ascent was made, the party descending by roping off. The upper one-third of the route is climbable, two variations being possible. Each of these leads to one of the pinnacles of the summit ridge.

--Arnold Wexler

September 5 and 6. Section 2:

John Meenehan	Ted Schad	Jack Wilson
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This was a trip of exploration down the new Blue Ridge Parkway from Waynesboro to Route 60 and some of the back country roads of the section. The area is too far from Washington for a one-day trip, too near for a two-day trip, and we felt we should become more familiar with it. It is of surpassing beauty and quite different from the Skyline Drive. We found and climbed one small spur on the road and saw cliffs on the sides of some of the mountains. Since this would have entailed walking uphill we refrained from bothering them.

Evening found us at Sherando Lake at a forest service camp. We came across one of Tom Culverwell's drawings in the Ranger's headquarters and then made camp in darkness and a heavy rain. The camp was thoughtfully provided with Irish wood from which the sap ran and we had quite a time making a cook fire. Ted's axe handle broke off while we were trying to split open a log for dry wood and this proved to be our salvation. Have you ever tried to cook over a fire of newspaper strips and an axe handle? The situation amused us so much that we never minded the rain that ran down under our ponchos. In fact it was quite cozy lying in the tarp leanto with the storm rushing down the ravine, particularly since we maneuvered Ted to the center spot with a perched water table over his head. The next day we went to Brock's Gap northwest of Harrisonburg where the rocks tower up like a model Seneca. We scrambled around a bit and then headed for home. The Conns and Eleanor Tatge have climbed there and it provides some spectacular traverses. J.M.

September 12, 1948.

Don Hubbard
Earl Mosburg
Win Lembeck
Arthur Lembeck
Ken Karcher
Pim Karcher
Peter Bradt

Sterling Hendricks
June Mosburg
Andy Kauffman
Betty Kauffman
John Reed
Paul Bradt
Jo Bradt
Allan Bradt

Harold Drewes
Ted Schad
Eleanor Tatge
Nancy Rogers
Alec Faberje
Tom Melville
Arnold Wexler
John Meenehan

We welcomed the Lembecks, Eleanor, and John Reed back to the Potomac with one of the largest crowds of the summer. The high temperature and humidity caused Don to lead a party of heliophobes to various spots on the upper part of the Virginia Great Falls while Arnold led a party of hardy adventurers on the lower section north of Echo Cliffs, where they worked on the climbs upstream to and including the Bird's Nest.

Upstream, a team made up of Eleanor, Pim, Nancy, and Meenehan made a daring traverse of Juliet's Balcony, while Don and Tom roped up and went across the same climb like lizards on a hot rock.

After lunch Don led the group to the nice cool Straddle Climb just below the Reverse Chimney, climbed by June and John Reed. Immediately below this climb is an overhang that seems to have been unclimbed until this day. John Reed made the first ascent as a straddle below the overhang followed by John Meenehan. Ken made a straightaway attack up the overhang but peeled off most of the way up. We need either cooler weather or Chris to make the climb in this fashion. The day was ended at the Lemonade Springs at Great Falls Park. J.M.