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U P R O P E

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NEWS OF THE WASHINGTON ROCKCLIMBERS

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FOUNDERS

Herb & Jan Conn

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THE BLACK HILLS NEEDLES

Herb & Jan Conn

Ever since we were in the Tetons in 1944 we have remembered Paul's remark as he labored up a seemingly endless scree slope: "Let's let the peaks go hang and go rock climbing." At last we have found a place where we can do this with a clear conscience. The Black Hills of South Dakota are rolling hills bristling with rock pinnacles. We estimate there are at least a thousand within one-half mile of a paved road. Beyond that we didn't investigate, feeling happy to climb a mere 15 of them.

The majority of the needles range between 50 and 200 feet in height, while a few are as much as 500 feet high. The climbing alternates between narrow wriggle chimneys and airy high-angle faces. The rock is a firm coarse granite; and if there is an amateur mineralogist in the party, climbing may be delayed while this individual stops to pound on a tourmaline crystal or other interesting specimen with his piton hammer. (In fact, if his eyesight is good, he may spot his specimens at a distance with the result that new and terrifying routes are pioneered.)

Our longest climb was the 500 foot Cathedral Spire Number 4. It took us two days to scout out the route, and a third to decide the route we had scouted wouldn't go. So we compromised by climbing another summit of No. 4 which looked easier. Much to our surprise, when we reached the top we found the easier summit was actually the higher of the two. But the first and unclimbed summit still intrigues us as an attractive bit of unfinished business.

There is too much "business" for it ever to be finished in the Black Hills. There are some pinnacles which we think are impossible, altho future generations may not agree. There are others which, by the sheer weight of their numbers, will undoubtedly avoid the attack of climbers for many, many years.

R.L.M. Underhill (Appalachia, Dec. 1934) says the Needles area should someday become a mecca for rock climbers rivalling the Dolomites. In the Dec. 1936 Appalachia is an article by Lawrence Coveney describing climbing which he, Fritz Wiessner, and others did there. But apparently there has been very little activity yet to bear out Underhill's prediction. There are no rock climbing groups nearby, and climbers coming from greater distances are lured on by the Tetons and Wind Rivers only a few hundred miles away, or Devils Tower which is just next door.

DEVIL'S TOWER

Thru the years Devil's Tower has acquired a reputation among rock climbers. Fritz Wiessner, one of the best known climbers in the country, was at first refused permission to attempt the climb. He is still the only person to have climbed the crack on Devil's Tower bearing his name without actual assistance from the rope. Jack Durrance, however, who led the second ascent, found an easier route up the columns, and each of the parties to follow have made the climb with less difficulty--as is the way with all good climbs from Arthur's Traverse to the Matterhorn.

The Park Service, however, ignores this decline in difficulty. Before granting permission for the climb they require: (a) a written recommendation from at least one recognized climbing organization, (b) preferably a similar recommendation from someone who has actually made the ascent, (c) approval of the equipment to be used from Ranger Field of Rock Mountain Park (who has climbed the Tower), (d) names, addresses, and telephone numbers of a rescue party who will get you down at your own expense, and finally (e) Name, address and telephone number of person to notify in case there is nothing left to rescue. When all this has been complied with, the Custodian in charge crosses his fingers, gets out his binoculars, and resigns himself to a harrowing day.

After five months of negotiations we settled down to wait for final permission in the Black Hills, close enough to dash over to Devil's Tower in half a day--before the officials could change their mind.

Once permission is received, the worst is over. But, as the descriptive folder says, "The columns present quite a problem." Altho the problem referred to seems to be one of geological history, we found that the words applied equally well to the climb. There are write-ups with illustrations in numerous climbing periodicals which describe the route far better than we could. When we were actually at grips with the rock, the climbing resolved itself into finding handholds and footholds; the rock lost the smooth crystalline texture it appears to have from a distance. The 800-foot ascent (of which only 200 really warrants use of the rope) took us five hours. The top is a flat two acres of desert. It is so much like the bottom that we wondered why we had come.

On the way down our rope jammed twice, so we had to climb all the difficult pitches over again. In our irritation we blamed our plight on the Custodian, who had insisted that we use an unmanagable 120 feet of rope instead of our usual 60.

Seriously, however, Custodian Raymond W. McIntyre has a real interest in his rock and in the humoring of those who wish to climb it. He pleads, let him know as early as you can if you want to make the climb, and he will start pegging away at the red tape as fast as he can.

THERE'S STUFF IN COLORADO, TOO

In the San Miguel Range of southwestern Colorado is Lizard Head, a 350 foot volcanic spire topping a 13,000 foot peak. Its name caught our fancy, the pictures of it intrigued us, and Albert Ellingwood's description of the climb in the Nov. 1921 "Outing" sounded definitely interesting. To get there required a long drive over back roads and a night spent at 10,000 feet amid the vocalizing of countless sheep. In the morning a two hour hike brought us

above the sheep pastures to a pleasant timberline meadow where we interrupted the grazing of a herd of at least 80 elk. Now in the shadow of our objective, we continued up tundra and talus slope to the very base of the summit spire.

Lizard Head has the reputation of being rotten rock. It is not rotten in the sense that it crumbles, but it is decidedly loose. Debris which has collected on every ledge makes footing treacherous and is an even greater hazard to climbers below. Moreover, most of the handholds could be pulled off if sufficient force were applied, but fortunately it is usually not necessary to pull so hard. However as we watched the huge rocks spread apart when we drove a piton between them, we were left with no illusions as to the solidity of things about us.

We located Ellingwood's original route without difficulty. Above the first 100 feet (evidently the Colorado supermen don't worry about a mere 100 foot fall) the route was marked by pitons of a 1920 model, home-made affairs bent up out of steel bars and rods. (Equipment chairman please note: they seem quite inferior to the modern channel-iron.)

With the advantage of modern equipment we made the climb with ample protection except from the hail which pelted us at intervals. The top is a precarious pile of loose blocks which cannonade off both sides as you walk across them and slowly gravitate toward the edge even if you stand still. Realization of where we had been made our hair stand on end on the way down--or maybe it was just the electric storm around us.

In Colorado, too, we found a 14,000 foot pinnacle. It's called Longs Pinnacle or Peak, we think because all the routes are so long. Those on the eastern face are particularly offensive in this regard. We spent 17 hours and an unbelievable amount of energy climbing halfway up the face and down a gain. As with all high mountains; the worst part of the climb was getting to the cliff. After the initial 7 mile pull over trail, talus, and snow we reached the base of the first 700 foot pitch, which is reputed to be the most difficult of the climb. This pitch is deceptively known as Stettner's Ledges, the ledges being mainly vertical. As our rope was only 60 feet long, we had to break the pitch up into short sub-pitches. It was slow, laborious work since this type of granite is extremely hard to break up. By mid-afternoon we had just reached the top of the pitch, the ledge called Broadway. As it was obviously too late to go on to the top we descended by means of a waterfall or spring freshet--called Alexander's Chimney by those who have climbed or paddled their Sink Stopper up it. We were very wet, and it was very dark LONG before we were down. But then, it's a LONGs peak.

These big mountains proved too much for us. We've settled down, and Herb is going to business school in Denver. Weekends we spend practicing climbing on a hundred foot cliff near Golden. It's nearer our size.

This weekend we're looking forward to seeing Helen Baker, Clara Lee and Hope Dawson who are touring the country.

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Editorial Query

Doctor Hubbard wants to know if the hands on the last "Up Rope" cover were those of Ken Karcher showing us how to tie a butterfly knot?

Ups & Downs

September 19th, 1948

Eleanor Tatge
Don Hubbard
Jim Maxwell

Jan Conn
Harold Drewes

The day was started with the transportation of the party to Carderock by Jan's sister. A new post-war low in available cars was reached as most of the faithful were beach combing.

Yet the day was enjoyably spent at Herzog Island. Under Don's instruction the morning was spent on a piton lead of a difficult face. The Chairman's Chimney was the highlight of the day. Later at Carderock, Harold climbed the Spidervalk and then Jan, Harold and Jim went up Sterling's Crack with little trouble. Don thoughtfully supplied the group with Paw-paws as a reward. -HD.

September 18-19, 1948

Seagoing Section

John Heenehan
Jack Wilson
Alice Wilson
Lorrie Wilson
Dolores Alley
Betty Alley

Ted Schad
Kay Schad
Ken Karcher
Pim Karcher
Clara Watkins
Dick Gaylord
Tom Schriber

The party camped on the dunes above Ocean City, Md., and enjoyed a happy sunburned week-end. The water temperature was just right and with the exception of a few scattered squalls during the evening the weather was perfect. Putting up tents in a lightning storm and howling wind was quite an experience and the results, viewed by daylight, were astonishing.

September 26, 1948

Don Hubbard
Arnold Wexler
Pim Karcher
Dolores Alley

John Heenehan
Harold Drewes
Andy Kauffman
Betty Kauffman

The day was spent as a work party at Carderock rigging up a new home for Oscar. Harold found time to climb Arnold's Arduous Ascent and Leonard's Lunacy. John and Don spent part of the time collecting a fine group of poisonous mushrooms.

* * *

With this issue my 90 day term as editor comes to an end. I wish to thank all those who have helped me with preparation of the issues, in particular Eleanor Tatge, Jack Wilson, Jo Bradt, June Mossberg and Joan Price. The next editor will be Ted Schad and I can go back to enjoying the reading of UP ROPE.

John Heenehan