



NEWS OF THE WASHINGTON ROCK CLIMBERS

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AGATHLA - PLACE OF MUCH WOOL

By Herb Conn

One hundred miles west of Shiprock, New Mexico, in the wild Navajo country of northeastern Arizona, rises Shiprock's twin, known to the Indian sheep herders as Mt. Agathla, the "Place of Much Wool." The two peaks are so similar in appearance that we have had in our collection a post-card picture labeled Shiprock for two years before discovering that it was actually a picture of the Arizona neighbor.

Agathla figures as a landmark in accounts of Kit Carson and other early explorers, and the early Spaniards had the presumptuous lack of imagination to give it the overworked name "El Capitan." Its climbing history, however, does not begin until 1937 when Ray Garner (author of "First Ascent of Mt. Brussels" in the current American Alpine Club Journal; he learned his climbing from Fritz Wiessner on Breakneck and the Hudson Highlands) climbed up 50 feet, put in a piton, and rappelled back down. Being alone he then contented himself with a thorough reconnaissance from the ground, but an ambition was born which has been simmering for twelve long years. Two years later the Sierra Club quartet who climbed Shiprock drove by it on their way back to Berkeley. They were quite naturally unenthusiastic - Ye gods, not another! - but did take the time, we understand, to convince themselves it was not a walk-up from any side.

On May 27, 1949, climbers began gathering in earnest. There were Ray and his wife Virginia, Ben and Lee Pedrick of Phoenix, and Jan and I. Ray and Ginny arrived too late for a reconnaissance that day, but the rest of us walked completely around the peak and decided that the proposed route, which involved at least 500 feet of 80 to 100 degree climbing up a forbidding basalt dike on the west side, was out of the question. Ray, however, had had twelve years to forget exactly what that dike looked like, and his enthusiasm was enough to herd the six

of us up the talus next morning, loaded with ample supplies of food, water, ropes, and hardware for an extended assault. We dumped our loads at the foot of the cliffs and looked questioningly to Ray for the next move.

He dangled the end of a climbing rope and a few pitons at me, explaining that the start was easy and he wanted to save his energy for the real battle. He was right about the first two pitches, and the two of us established a cramped base of operations on a tiny sloping ledge 150 feet up. Directly above us things started to overhang, and we decided the situation warranted the security of an expansion bolt anchor, even though piton cracks were fairly adequate. This was a mistake, for basalt is a far cry from the usual soft Arizona rock. We spent an hour and ruined the drill in making our hole the necessary depth.

Reinforcements in the form of Lee Pedrick were called up from below. I retired to the more comfortable 100-foot station while Lee and Ray worked away at the overhang. Hoarse urgent shouts, "Up!" "Down!" "Hold!" drifted down from the pair struggling at their impossible task, while I discussed with the three at the bottom possibilities of a climb on the other side of the mountain. Then suddenly, shortly after noon, I woke up to what was going on. The leader of the party I was tied to was two whole rope lengths above me, and he was yelling for me to come up. Hastily I shouted for information. Would it go? Was it far to the ridge? What about the other climbers? What about bringing up more hardware? What about food and water?

The climbers were thirsty, apparently, for my talk of water struck a welcome note, but they were too busy to think of food. I pulled up two canteens and some pitons from below, assuming we were still just scouting a route and the main event, if it were to take place at all would be tomorrow, aided by fixed ropes and the fresh muscles of Ben and Jan.

As I climbed up past Lee and Ray I caught some of their optimism. Things looked better ahead - definitely. One more pitch should bring us to where the dike sloped off, possibly to the ridge itself. And until we got to the ridge we had no idea whether the upper half of the mountain was climbable.

I led not one pitch but two, and Lee led two more before the angle eased noticeably. For Ray we saved this next "easy" pitch, a nightmare of loose blocks poised at the top of the dike. We made the ridge, 550 feet of continuous climbing from the talus without one stopping place secure enough to belay without a piton anchor. We used twenty-five pitons and one bolt, but no direct aid. But it was now after five o'clock and there was barely time to retreat before dark. And we were still not in a position to view the rest of the climb!

STUDIES IN WHITE NO. VII

Moonlight on the Columbia Ice Field

We held a brief conference. Probably best to retreat, Lee and I had just decided when a rope tugged at our waists. We looked up to discover that Ray had crossed a scree gully and disappeared around the corner. "Come on up! he cried, "We're practically up!" From Ray's

new vantage point we looked above. At least 250 feet of a steep knife-edge separated us from the summit. It would go, surely, but we would be benighted without food and with but a few swallows of water. "Men," said Ray, "I never want to climb that dike again. Let's get this summit here and now."

An hour later we were on top, busily building a cairn while Ray cranked his movie camera. We felt a strange mixture of rapture and foreboding as we watched Agathla's lengthening shadow reach for the horizon. We had "conquered" the mountain, as some folks are fond of saying, but at that point it seemed equally apt to say that the mountain had conquered us. Warily we backed off down the knife-edge and set up our bivouac on the scree slope above the dike.

Early next morning the trio below heard the thunderous roar of rocks again falling from the dike and knew that we were on our way. It took us three hours to fumble our way down five 120 foot rappels, two of them free, to the talus and food.

We hear that the Indians have a new name for Agathla. It is now known as the "Place of Much Fool."

Ups and Downs.

Arnold Wexler	Ken Karcher
Chris Scoredos	Pim Karcher
Bob Reasoner	Air Force Staff
John Meenehan	Sgt. Helen Owens
Eleanor Tatge	James D. Kennedy
Dick Gaylord	Andy Kauffman
Don Hubbard	Betty Kauffman
Peg Keister	Irene Posner
Al Chastain	Roger Foster

"I've always wanted to try it this way."

Barbara Wilson
Leonard Wilson

Chris, Bob, Don, Peg, and Roger stopped at Prospect Rock; the remainder of the group went up to Great Falls, Virginia. On a cliff face opposite the Fish Ladder the more vigorous members made a tension traverse while their hot companions hunted up rocks with shadows to sit in. Later a swimming party gathered in the Juliet's Balcony area where a splashing time was had by all. (June 12, 1949.)

Don Hubbard	Andy Kauffman	Dick Goldman	Ken Karcher
Irene Posner	Betty Kauffman	Sally Lindsley	Pim Karcher
Joe Walsh	Chris Scoredos	Eva Russell	Gabby Rosenberger

On Sunday, June 19, 1949 the group went to Sugar Loaf Mountain (except Chris, who went to Garderock, climbed alone--after taking the door of his car apart & fixing it--on his way back met a young man who wanted to learn about climbing, so took him out and taught him). It was a very hot, muggy day in the best Washington tradition, and according to accounts, not much was accomplished in the way of climbing, although Joe and Dick did the Cave Climb, and the Karchers managed a few strenuous moments in the vicinity. In the afternoon a quarry said to be nearby was sought for a bit of refreshment, but the Catoctin River was the best that could be found in the way of water.

INVITATION TO A SWIM

Apparently June 26 will be "Extra-Curricular Sunday" for the Washington Rock Climbers. John Meenehan and Ted Schad are leading a Swim Trip and Beach Party to the dunes above Ocean City, Maryland, where a sea-going trip met with much success last fall. They plan to leave Washington on Saturday, June 25, and camp overnight. For further details call Ted Schad DUpont 600, Ext. 607, or John Meenehan, ADams 3297, or office phone EXecutive 8120.

As noted in the last issue of UP ROPE, the big MCM Marathon Hike is scheduled for this same week end, from PenMar, Pa. to Harpers Ferry, W. Va., a distance of 38 miles. Call Art Lembeck, OLiver 2500, Ext. 455 in the daytime or SHepherd 0421 in the evening.

Inside Corner

"Mr. and Mrs. Harold Frederic Stimson announce the marriage of their daughter Julia Anne to Mr. David Woodhull Appel on Wednesday, the eighth of June Nineteen hundred and forty-nine, Grinnell, Iowa."

Johnny Reed set off for Alaska in a truck Wednesday, June 1, to work for the U. S. Geological Survey on Surveying the Mt. McKinley Area.

Harold Drewes just dropped in on his way to Alaska, Mrs. Alice Holubar write us from Colorado. Harold is bound for the Aleutian Islands on a boat. He also is working for the U.S. Geological Survey this summer.

Two parties are exploring the Cariboo Mountains, west of Jasper, British Columbia, this summer, leaving from Tête Jaune. The first, Sterling Hendricks, Alec Fabergé, Don Hubbard, Art Lembeck, Chris Scoredos, and Arnold Wexler, plan to leave Washington by train July 2. The second party is driving, and comprises Betty and Andy Kauffman, Pim and Ken Karcher, and Jane Showacre.

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