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THE CLASSICS ON SENECA

by John C. Reed

More than fifteen years have elapsed since Paul Bradt, Don Hubbard and Sam Moore first reached the South Peak of Seneca Rocks. On the highest part of the peak they found the inscription "D.B. Sept. 16, 1908". Who "D.B." was, or how he reached the peak they never learned, but there were reports of at least five men having reached the peak prior to their ascent. Mr. Harper, (who runs the store at Mouth of Seneca) told Paul that he had climbed what we now call the Old Ladies Route as far as the crest of the ridge, but whether or not he ever reached the top is uncertain. Since 1939 hundreds of names have been entered in the register in the cairn that Paul, Don and Sam left on the peak, and dozens of routes have been pioneered. Many of these routes are so short or so easy that they hardly deserve mention. Most of the more spectacular ones have been previously described in Up Rope, but recently several new ones have been climbed which seem to me to be particularly worthy of mention, and this is as good an opportunity as any to summarize briefly what might be called the classics on Seneca. Some of these routes (e.g., the climb from the Gunsight Notch to the South Peak, the climb of the Gendarme, the Cockscomb) may not be considered outstanding climbs today, but when they were first climbed they truly deserved to be ranked with the classics.

I. The Skyline Traverse (1) (2)

The Chimneys on the south end were first descended by Sam Moore, Don Hubbard, and Paul Bradt in the Spring of 1939.

The climb over the Old Man and the Cockscomb (via the Overhang) to the South Peak was first done by the same party over Easter, 1939. Who pioneered the detour of the Cockscomb Overhang via the Pine Tree route we don't know.

The climb from the Gunsight to the South Peak via the crack on the west face was pioneered by Paul, Sam, and Don in July, 1939.

The Gunsight Gendarme was climbed by the same group in July, 1939. Paul, seconded by Bill Kemper, climbed it on Labor Day, 1939, without throwing a rope over the top.

II. The East Face

The Army-Conn route on the East Face (3) was first climbed by Pvt. John Stearns, PFC George Kolbuchar, Sgt. Bob Hecker, and Sgt. Jim Crooks on April 28, 1944, according to the register on the South Peak. It was "rediscovered" by Herb and Jan Conn in the spring of 1948 and described by them in Up Rope. It was later re climbed by the Conns accompanied by Marion Harvey, by Tony Soler and Ray Moore in 1951, and by Arnold Wexler and John Christian in 1954.

The Soler Route, a variation of the Army-Conn Route was first climbed by Tony Soler and Ray Moore on August 12, 1951 (4). We understand that this route, or some variation of it, was later done by Ivan Jirak of the Explorers' Club of Pittsburgh.

III. The West Face

The Army-Conn Route on the west face (3) was pioneered by an Army team consisting of Lt. N.C. Hartz, Lt. Henry Schluter, and Lt. Earl Richardson on May 11, 1944. Jan and Herb Conn, on May 2, 1948, climbed a route which was probably the one used by the Army. Cliff Alexander and Johnnie Reed climbed a slight variation of this route in the spring of 1954, using a crack which avoided much of the loose rock mentioned by the Conns in their account.

The Thais Route (see description in this issue) was climbed by John Christian and Bob Hinshaw over Memorial Day, 1954. It leads directly up the west face several hundred feet north of the Conn Route.

IV. The West Face of the Cockscomb

An unnamed route leading from the south side of the west face of the Cockscomb near the lunch spot diagonally upward into the notch between the Cockscomb and the main mass of the South Peak was climbed several years ago by Jerry Jankowitz and George Kamm. So far as we know it has never been repeated.

The Breakneck Climb (see description in this issue) leads from the beginning of the Jankowitz-Kamm route straight up to the ledge below the Cockscomb Overhang. It is reported that this route was first climbed by a team from the Explorers' Club of Pittsburgh led by Ivan Jirak. It was climbed by Andy Kauffman, Joan Ascher, and Phil Cardon on May 22, 1954, and was described and named by them.

V. The South End of the Main South Peak Mass

The several Mummery cracks which extend from bottom to top of this two hundred foot face which lies just north of the Cockscomb are at present unclimbed, but probably not unclimbable. Over Labor Day, 1954, weekend, John Christian, Earl Reed, Huntley Ingalls and Bob Hinshaw alternated leads to pioneer a route which traverses this face from the notch between the Cockscomb and the South Peak mass to its outside corner at a level about 15 feet below the notch. From the corner the route connected with the Old Man's Route on the West Face.

VI. The South End

Chris's Lead has never been described, but it lies somewhere near the western corner of the South End. It was climbed by Chris Scoredos, Roy Britton and Don Jacobs on May 31, 1942. It was on this climb that Chris had led high above his nearest piton when a foothold broke, and he was saved from what would probably have been a fatal fall only by a miraculous recovery (1). The route has never been climbed since, so far as I know.

The Simple J. Malarky Climb was first climbed by Arnold Wexler and Jim McCarthy, of the New York group over the Labor Day weekend, 1954. The route starts in the cave on its west wall onto a ledge which lies west of the cave and slightly above the level of its roof. From here the route leads straight up over the overhang, requiring tension and stirrups.

Tony's Nightmare has never been described, nor is there any record of when it was first climbed or by whom. It is presumably named after Tony Soler. The route leads straight up the middle of the south face, using the deep chimney west of the one used on the standard route of the Skyline Traverse.

The Ye Gods and Little Fishes Climb (5) was first done by Earl Mosburg, Arnold Wexler and Johnnie Reed on Labor Day, 1953. The route goes directly up the inside corner below the chimney on the standard route on the Skyline Traverse. It connects with the latter at the top of the flake on the southeast corner of the rock about 150 feet above the talus. A double rope technique was used on this lead, and tension was required in placing some of the pitons.

References

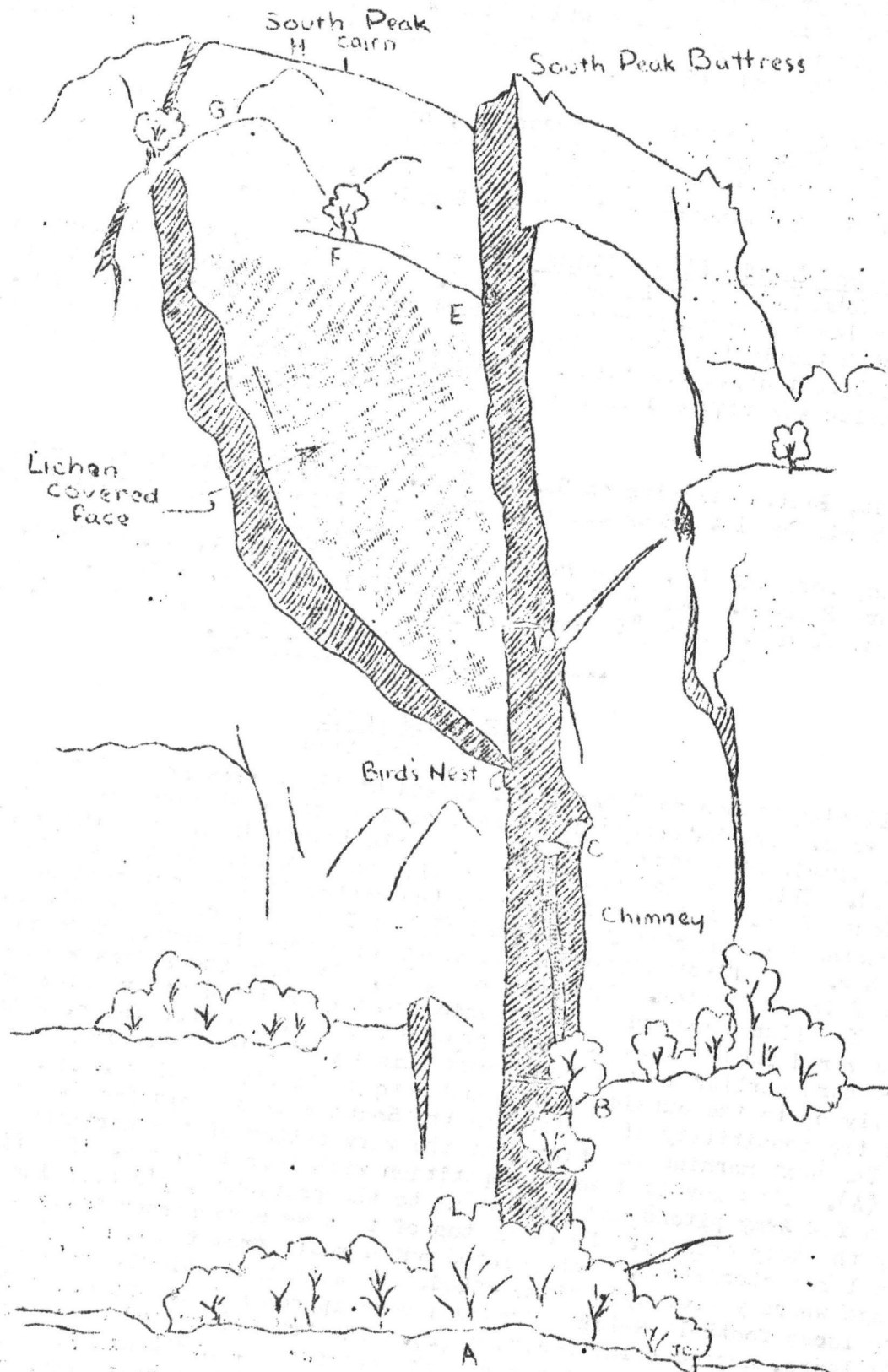
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- (2) Hubbard, Donald. Rock Climbing Along the Potomac. Appalachia X, no. 7, 73-84, June, 1944.
- (3) Conn, Herb and Jan. The Faces of Seneca. Up Rope V, no. 4, Sept. 15, 1948.
- (4) Moore Raymond. Seneca Saga, Up Rope, VIII, no. 6&7, Aug. 20, 1951.
- (5) Reed, John C. The "Ye Gods and Little Fishes" Climb, Up Rope X, no. 10, Oct. 28, 1953.

THE THAIS ROUTE by John Christian

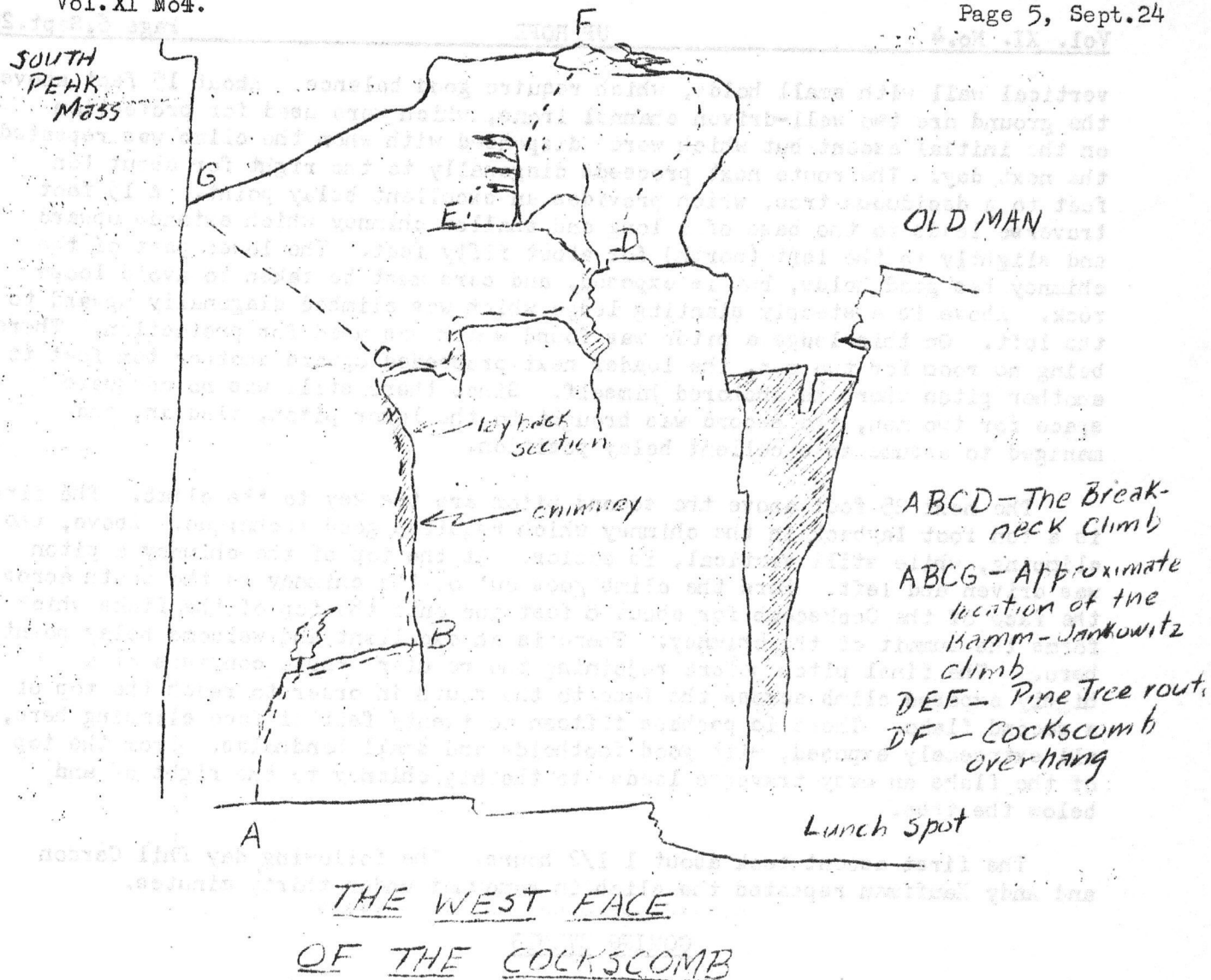
Climbing at Seneca Rocks I had looked at the narrow north face of the South Peak buttress. The buttress' north edge cleaves the west face from top to bottom and casts the prominent shadow so visible from the tavern in the afternoon (see sketch on next page). This face is about 20 feet wide and extends all the way to the ridge line of the South Peak. A deep chimney near the bottom is the most obvious scar on the face.

During the Memorial Day weekend (1954) I found a ready and willing second in Bob Hinshaw. The first afternoon was spent in reconnaissance. We came onto the face at point B in the sketch. The rock was good, although the ledges were covered with debris. We climbed upward and left into the corner immediately below an overhanging lichen covered face. A small niche provided a belay point. Soler, Moore and Morgan, who were here earlier in the day, named this the Bird's Nest. From here we climbed diagonally up to the outside corner and onto a steeply sloping ledge. With a good idea of the possibility of a climb to the South Peak by this face we returned to camp.

The next morning we started at the very bottom of the north face at the inside corner (A). This involved some competition with laurel bushes. The first pitch contained a few Army pitons and brought us to the previous day's starting point at the base of the deep chimney. Near the top of this we were forced to traverse outward to avoid a large chockstone. Bob pointed out a route from the top of the chimney (C) to the ledge where yesterday's climb ended. We were thus able to bypass the Bird's Nest and the loose foothold which had caused some apprehension. To the left and above was another ledge, a good belay position (D). The traverse to this second ledge gave some trouble. A fixed rope was placed for the right hand. A few cracks at the inside corner led up to E where a small but deep cave provided a secure belay. Above the north face sloped away at a less steep angle to the notch between the South Peak and the buttress. From the cave we traversed north on a wide ledge across the sheer lichen-



THAIS' ROUTE ON WEST FACE - SOUTH
PEAK, SENECA ROCKS, W. VIRGINIA



-covered west face. From below the ledge is not obvious except for a small birch tree growing half way out on the face (F). This easy traverse offered some of the best exposure. Behind the tree was another cave. From here we took the easiest way and scrambled up over flakes (F to G to H) to the top of the South Peak, about 10 feet north of the cairn. The climb took 5 1/2 hours.

THE BREAKNECK CLIMB

BY Andy Kauffman

On May 22 (1954) an ascent was made of the Cockscomb by a route up the west face. Since two pitons were found on the climb and since subsequent investigation indicates that the climb has been done in whole or in part on two previous occasions, this ascent cannot be described as a new route. The participants, Joan Ascher, Andy Kauffman and Phil Cardon were by no means aware when they started the climb that it had been done before, or that it could be done. For then, therefore, it had all the aspects of a first ascent.

The climb begins at the base of the west face of the Cockscomb about 150 feet below the tree which marks the belay point for the final pitch on the normal (Pine Tree) route. The first part of the climb is a

vertical wall with small holds, which require good balance. About 15 feet above the ground are two well-driven chappel irons, which were used for protection on the initial ascent but which were dispensed with when the climb was repeated the next day. The route next proceeds diagonally to the right for about ten feet to a deciduous tree, which provides an excellent belay point. A 15 foot traverse leads to the base of a long and shallow chimney which extends upward and slightly to the left (north) for about fifty feet. The lower part of the chimney has good holds, but is exposed, and care must be taken to avoid loose rock. Above is a steeply slanting ledge which was climbed diagonally upward to the left. On this ledge a piton was found which was used for protection. There being no room for two men, the leader next proceeded upward another ten feet to another piton where he anchored himself. Since there still was no adequate space for two men, the second was brought to the lower piton, tied in, and managed to assume an excellent belay position.

The next 25 feet above the second piton are the key to the climb. The first is a ten foot layback in the chimney which requires good technique. Above, the climbing, while still vertical, is easier. At the top of the chimney a piton was driven and left. Here the climb goes out of the chimney to the south across the face of the Cockscomb for about 8 feet and onto the top of the flake which forms the summit of the chimney. There is an excellent and welcome belay point here. The final pitch before rejoining the regular route consists of a highly exposed climb across the face to the south in order to reach the top of a second flake. There is perhaps fifteen to twenty feet of face climbing here, all extremely exposed, with good footholds and small handholds. From the top of the flake an easy traverse leads to the big chimney to the right of and below the tree.

The first ascent took about 1 1/2 hours. The following day Phil Cardon and Andy Kauffman repeated the climb in somewhat under thirty minutes.

COMING EVENTS

October 3, Sunday-----Bull Run Mountain

October 9 and 10, Saturday and Sunday----Old Rag; Leader, Chuck Wettling

October 17, Sunday--- Carderock. Belay practice

October 21, Thursday---Evening meeting at Joan and Phil Cardon's. Speaker, Johnnie Reed.

October 24, Sunday----Spitzbergen area (Bear Island opposite Echo Cliffs)

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

Ted Schad called just before we went to press on this issue to say that he expects the Pittsburgh Climbers to join us on the weekend of October 16 and 17. They will probably camp either at Carderock or Cupid's Bower on Saturday night.

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