



FOUNDED BY
JAN AND HERB CONN

NEWS OF THE P.A.T.C. MOUNTAINEERING COMMITTEE

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COMING EVENTS

January 20, Thursday

Annual Meeting

PLACE: Silsbee's
2620 Quebec Street, N.W.

TIME: 8 o'clock

DIRECTIONS:

Turn east off Connecticut Ave on to
Porter Street, then left on to Quebec St.

PROGRAM: Aqualunging in the Bahamas

ADDED ATTRACTIONS:

1. Impounding of new officers
2. Reports from chairmen of committees
we never knew existed before
3. Exhibition of various fossil members
specially stuffed for the occasion.

February 17-22

Ice climbing and skiing on Mt. Washington

There will be a trip for ice-climbing and skiing to Mt. Washington, N. H. over Washington's Birthday. Present plans are to leave Thursday evening (Feb. 17) and return the following Tuesday (Feb. 22). This will mean approximately four and one half days on the mountain for two days away from work. Any shorter time does not seem to be justified in view of the long distance and variability of the weather on the mountain. Older members of the Harvard Mountaineering Club will be on hand for instruction in basic ice techniques. Those interested should contact Erich Heinemann before Feb. 1. Call OPB 4-9047 after 6 PM.

ACCIDENT AT CARDEROCK

By this time most Up Rope readers will have heard of the accident at Carderock on December 26. Bob Mc Intyre, who fell about 25 feet from the Chris-Wex-Don traverse after an expansion bolt failed, suffered a broken heel as well as several other less serious injuries. Ted Schad has appointed an investigating committee composed of Arnold Wexler, Paul Bradt and Amy Kauffman to make a complete study of the accident.

In order to avoid confusion no complete account of this accident will appear in Up Rope until after the committee has made its report.

With this issue your editor regretfully announces his retirement. Much as we have enjoyed gently persuading reluctant authors and scattering commas, semicolons and editorial comments at random across their manuscripts, we hereby pass on to John Christian our sixteen foot Australian bull whip, our Websters unabridged dictionary, and an unused supply of punctuation marks which will be found on any standard typewriter keyboard. Haec olim meminisse juvabit!

THE FIRST ASCENT OF EL CAPITAN

By
Herb Conn

(reprinted from the Journal of the Atomic
Climbing Club*)

The famed 2900 foot monolith known as El Capitan in Yosemite National Park had long been considered unclimbable. But the word "unclimbable," as we all know, is a challenge to any true climber, and so it was that on June 26, 1955, our group of eight assembled at the base of the mighty cliff contemplating a climb straight up the face. The members of our party (whose names appear in full elsewhere in this issue) I shall refer to simply as Jack, Henry, Frank, Louis, Bob, Bill, Rutherford, and myself. We are all members of the newly formed Atomic Climbing Club.

Already we had photographed the cliff from every possible angle and studied these pictures minutely under the magnifying glass. We knew, therefore, that there is not an adequate handhold or foothold along the entire route we proposed. Stronger methods seemed in order. For this reason we arrived with an unusual quantity and type of equipment assembled in an Army ten-ton truck we had procured for the purpose. We spent the first four days relaying a part of this equipment along the three-quarters of a mile of trail leading from the highway to the foot of the rock. Some of the major items forming our loads were six 1000 foot coils of manilla rope, four 120 foot nylon climbing ropes, ten 50 pound crates of expansion bolts, and, of course, tents, sleeping bags, and a food supply sufficient to last a party of eight all summer.

At last the momentous day arrived when we were to set foot upon the rock. Our technique was nothing unusual in itself. The leader (Jack was elected to have the honor of the first lead) pounded a five-eighths inch hole in the granite with ball-peen hammer and star drill as high as he could reach. When the hole was sufficiently deep, an expansion bolt sleeve was inserted and the bolt screwed in, thus expanding the sleeve so that it held tightly in the hole. Two nylon climbing ropes were tied to Jack's waist, and one of these he snapped to the bolt with a carabiner. Next he placed a loop sling rope in the carabiner, stood in the loop, and one of his belayers (I believe it was Rutherford in this case) pulled the climbing rope tight, holding Jack securely against the rock with his waist at the level of the

* and Up Rope, vol. IV, no. 4.

bolt. Now he was enabled to drill a hole for a second bolt two-and-a-half feet higher. The second nylon was snapped to this bolt, another loop of sling rope was attached, and a second belayer provided the necessary tension to raise Jack two-and-a-half feet more.

The technique was simplicity itself, but the magnitude of our undertaking called for the utmost in planning and conservation of strength. After five hours of work Jack was up twenty-five feet. He tied himself securely to the highest bolt, lowered a length of light cord, and pulled up the lunch the ground crew had prepared for him. While he was eating, Rutherford climbed up the ladder of sling ropes and continued the lead.

When darkness fell, Jack and Rutherford descended and crawled into their sleeping bags, while a new crew went up to continue climbing throughout the night. By morning they were so high that both belayers were actually on the cliff themselves, tied to expansion bolts at fixed distances below their leader.

It would be much too tedious to continue to describe the climb in detail. After a few days we settled into a fixed routine, so that three men were always climbing, three were resting, and two were attending to camp duties. As the climb progressed, more and more time and energy were required for the spent crew to descend for rest and the fresh crew to ascend to the point of operations. This was the reason we had brought the thousand foot lengths of manilla. It proved to be but a few minutes' work to raise and lower climbers by means of a pulley fastened to the highest expansion bolt.

By the middle of July we were progressing famously. We were up 900 feet, despite a week's delay resulting from the drinking water problem. The summer sun beat unmercifully upon the cliffs all day long, producing unbelievable thirsts in the throats of the climbers. Our original system of hauling canteens up and down on the pulley ropes proved too arduous, and it was Henry who made the suggestion that solved our problem with elegance. Taking a well-earned rest the eight of us drove to Merced where we purchased a 500 gallon tank, a winch, and a thousand yards of firemen's hose. By muleback we packed this equipment to the top of the El Capitán cliff, filling the tank, bucket by bucket, from the nearby waters of Eagle Creek. The hose was lowered over the edge, and Bob, who had sprained his hammering wrist and was therefore useless for the actual climbing, was detailed to remain at the winch, keeping the nozzle of the hose always at the level of the climbing party. (Of course Bob was careful to let only a few gallons at a time into the hose, as a head of two thousand feet would have burst the hose.)

One evening a group of Sierra Club climbers who happened to be in the Valley joined our campfire. We offered to let them pound in a few bolts for us, but they seemed to prefer their own modest little climbs on the Cathedral Spires and the Lost Arrow to our epoch-making ascent. But perhaps they were only being polite, not wanting to deprive us of even a small part of the glory. They did make one suggestion, however, which we gave careful consideration. By using a length of ladder which could be secured to the highest expansion bolt, they explained, we could greatly reduce the number of bolts needing to be placed. We were all strongly tempted to try their idea, but finally rejected it, feeling that it would be undue use of artificial aid.

I will never forget the evening of August 13th. Our small group was jubilant in spite of weariness. Jack was rubbing liniment into his pounding arm preparatory to tomorrow's climbing. Rutherford was putting a new point on his star drill, using the foot-operated grinding wheel we had brought. All of us had come down for a rest, even Bob, who had made the long hike down from the rim just for the companionship of the group. But we were breathless in anticipation of tomorrow's climb. For a piton crack had been sighted only six hours' climbing ahead, and we could hardly wait to reach it.

UPS AND DOWNS

Nov. 14, 1954 - Great Falls, Virginia

Ted Schad	Felix Peckham	Erich Heinemann	Blondie Neuhaus
June Maienthal	Mike Nicholson	Robb Heinemann	Moir Armstrong
Millard Maienthal	Ike Nicholson	Betty Adams	Corny Ford
Dick Spier	Dave Nicholson	George Magee	Ed Worrell
Huntley Ingalls	Chuck Wettling	Volker de Groot	Lory Forst

We (defined above) on a sunny Nov. 14 up climbed on the shady side to down view the Potomac. Easy, first the Corkscrew was mounted by Dave, Lory, Volker and Felix. Northward then to an unnamed ascent Ted, Millard, George, Lory, and, with original variations, Dick crawled to the summit. Dave, Mike and Erich close by upped trail with lower letter rating. Now were Ted, Felix, Volker and Chuck on a traverse at lower level. The rest, we bushwhacked to Lawrence's Last. Up, Chuck led the climb with a neat two-step sideways. Below, we measured expanse of exposed soles as Felix, Ted, Blondie and Erich went up and over. Meanwhile, Dick played pendulum at the Bird's Nest, and Mike, barefooted, sharpened his toe nails at the Armbreaker. Cliff top unassailed, but Mike managed a few feet more than Blondie, Huntley, or Ed. (To a novice, a great feat, that.) Later, Dave and Huntley mounted Romeo's Ladder, while Chuck, Ike and Lory took gentle ascent to Juliet's Balcony. Good sport, that, and fine sports, we. But - not a yodel was sounded, - a sad waste of a splendid echo.

-L. F. -

Dec. 12, 1954 - Prospect Rock, Virginia

Moir Armstrong	Erich Heinemann	Millard Maienthal	Jane Showacre
John Christian	Robb Heinemann	George Magee	Ted Schad
Don Feder	Don Hubbard	Bob McIntyre	Liz Thomas
Lory Forst	Peg Heister	Peggy McIntyre	Dave Waddington
Volker de Groot	Carter Lawrence	Johnnie Reed	Chuck Wettling
	June Maienthal	Dave Reibel	

Maestro Hubbard, out of "retirement" for the day, led the neophytes on a busy tour replete with-belay practice, Prusik loop climbing, and Bilgiri rescues. John Christian and J. Reed found interesting leads. One, a short pitch near the river, was described as a "little too rich" by second man Erich Heinemann. The other, from the base to the top of the cliffs, had Johnnie admitting that "for a change" he enjoyed a climb. All in all, Prospect Rocks, despite the chilly day, proved interesting (more so than some of us remembered) and enjoyable.

- J. S. -

El Cap. (cont.)

The next day we did reach it, so making an extra hundred feet in only three hours. That day was momentous, too, because we reached the upper third of the wall, thus making it practical to lower the climbers to the point of operations from the top of the cliff rather than hoisting them from the bottom. In the next week we moved our entire base camp to the top, where it stayed for the remainder of the climb.

September 2nd was the glorious day when Henry, closely followed by Jack and then Rutherford, climbed over the top of the cliff to be greeted with much hand-shaking and backslapping by the rest of us. With proper ceremony Henry unfurled the Club flag -- a star drill rampant on a field of granite gray -- while Rutherford blew loudly on the tin bugle he had brought especially for this moment. We all sighed happily, for we knew that this was the birth of a great new era in the climbing of mountains.