

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

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FOUNDED BY
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UP ROPE

May 29, 1955

COMING EVENTS

- 12 June - Hertzog Island
- 19 June - Bull Run Mountain, Virginia
- 26 June - Cowhoof (Echo) Cliffs, Virginia

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THE POTENTIAL MONSTER

Accidents are a growing problem among many clubs. Luckily, we haven't been too plagued with the troubles that lead to accidents. In this light, though, the following excerpts from a letter from Gil Roberts, of the Stanford Alpine Club, to the Chairman of the Safety Committee, Rock Climbing Section, Sierra Club, should be of interest to all of us.

We should take heed NOW of the implications as a little firm handedness is much easier to apply now than a big whip later on.

"A couple of weeks ago there were over 100 feet of lead falls on the Sierra Club trip to the valley, including a broken leg on the Arches. Last weekend there was a talus accident which cost three teeth, a cut tongue and a sprained ankle. You have doubtless heard about the girl on the H. Spire, but I can perhaps elaborate on it a bit.

"The party were all Stanford people. The girls were not real strong climbers but had each climbed two years and could pass any standard safety test. The leader is a very good technical rock climber. He had done 42 Valley climbs including the higher spire four previous times. They started very early. When they were above the rotten chimney it began to snow but all felt very good and wanted to go on since the two hard pitches were done. They made the top and had a very bad time getting down since the ropes were wet, etc. One rappel hung up and had to be cut down. Both girls were cold and tired but got down without help. At the top of the talus, Anne Pottenger showed real exhaustion, cramps, etc. They helped her down for 2 - 1/2 hours and then she couldn't go on and started getting incoherent. Weicker tried to start a fire but couldn't. It was snowing heavily

and very wet. He felt the talus was too treacherous for him to try to carry her. He made good time down but by the time a rescue party was organized and got back, she was dead. The other girl was cold but perfectly O.K. The general feeling is that she must have had some physical difficulty but the autopsy showed nothing but shock from exhaustion and exposure. They were pretty well clothed but, of course, got soaking wet.

"The mistakes are pretty obvious. Not turning back when it began to snow, (of course, we've all made that one, and in Canada at that). One good leader hauling a weak party up a hard climb, which seems to be a growing practice. A couple of people not going back at once with sleeping bags instead of waiting for a full rescue party.

"(Bob Brooke (S.A.C. President) arranged a meeting of about 25 local leaders to discuss these growing accidents.) We all agreed, after some argument, that the basic problem is one of attitude. There are an awful lot of good climbers around, especially young ones, and all the Yosemite Climbs have down-graded tremendously. I don't care how many times a climb is done, the holds don't get bigger AND this idea of being a better climber by talking down climbs, and using less pitons, is dangerous. As I say, everyone agreed that the attitude is poor. Obviously, a lack of real mountaineering experience is one fault. As someone said, 'a guy may not be a better Yosemite rock climber if he's bivouacked in the Sierra, crossed some glaciers, camped on snow, etc., but he'll be a smarter one.' Another is letting the leader take all the responsibility and the second men just go along to be pulled up. Another is competition which leads to lack of respect for any but the most difficult climbs.

"We do have trouble with new athletic types who can't be told anything because they can do things at the practice climbs that some of the more experienced leaders can't, and I am sure you have the same trouble. Ours is worse as a college club because the age difference between leaders and beginners isn't large and it makes it hard to jump on second men. The competition between the second men is bad. I feel fairly sure that Weicker would have turned back if the girls hadn't been so anxious to get up the climb.

"Perhaps accidents and safety-mindedness aren't stressed enough in the early training. A lot of these lead falls seem to be young climbers who feel that they can break into the 'elite' by doing harder climbs. They do them, but push themselves very close to the margin of their ability. They do the lead but are on the well-known 'ragged edge' most of the way. Maybe education can do something about this particular fault, I don't know."

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FOREIGN BOOK REVIEWS

A cursory review at the Library of Congress of some of the foreign books on Mountaineering published during the past decade disclosed a few of more than passing interest. Any translations are quite free.

LA TECHNIQUE DE L'ALPINISME by Marcel Pourcheir and E. Tendo is a climber's manual well illustrated with extremely good photographs instead of the usual sketches. Most of the techniques illustrated are those familiar to us. The novice would find this little book very practical because of the descriptive photos.

GEFAHRENBUCH DES BERGSTEIGERS UND SKILAUFERS, KATECHISMUS FÜR BERGFREUNDE IN SOMMER UND WINTER (Danger Book for Mountain Climbers and Skiers, A Catechism

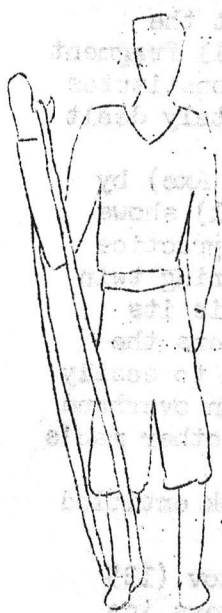


FIG 1
SLING LENGTH

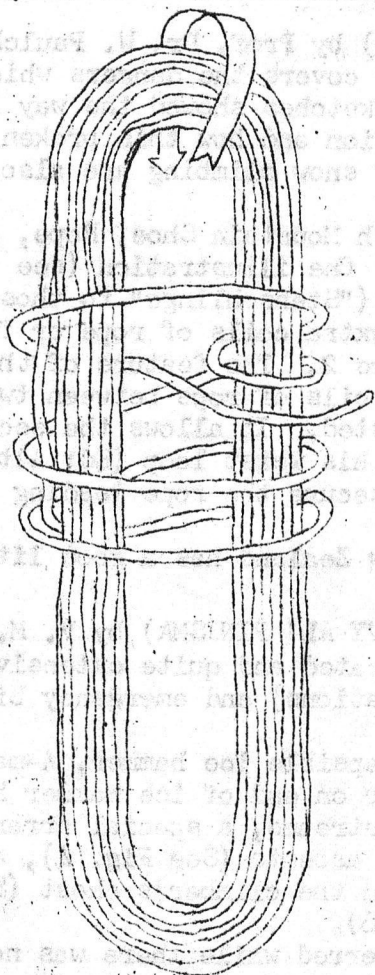


FIG 2
QUICK RELEASE TIE

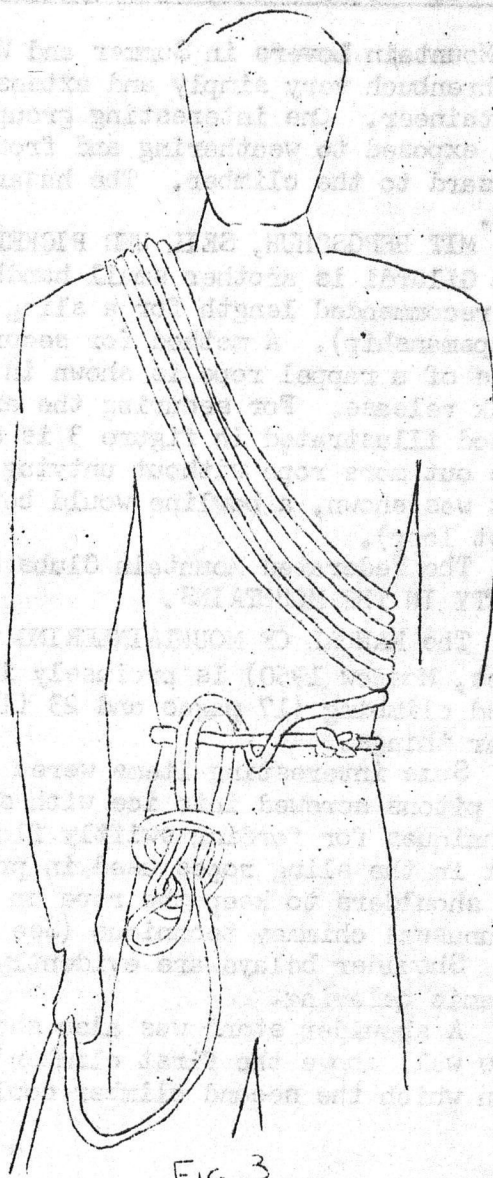


FIG 3

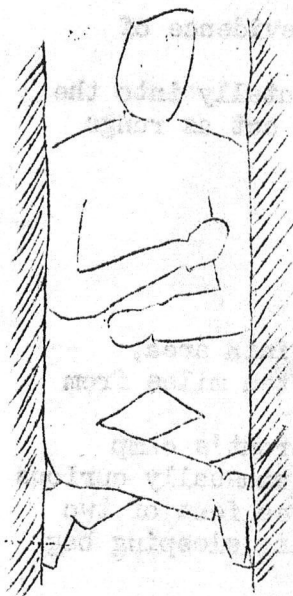


FIG 6
NARROW CHIMNEY
TECHNIQUE

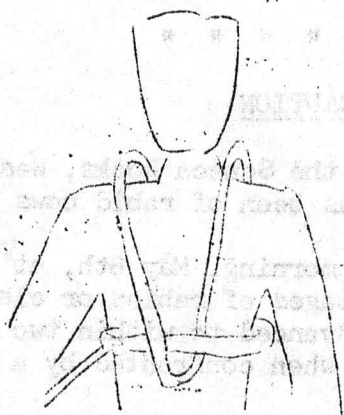


FIG 5
CHEST SLING

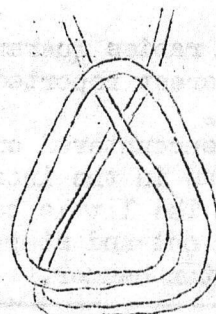


FIG 4
STIRRUP FOR
PRUSSIC LOOP

for Mountain Lovers in Summer and Winter) by Prof. Dr. W. Paulcke. The Gefahrenbuch very simply and extensively covers the dangers which beset the mountaineer. One interesting group of sketches showed the way rock will fragment when exposed to weathering and frost action and how this broken rock constitutes a hazard to the climber. The hazards of snow climbing are also adequately dealt with.

MIT BERGSCHUH, SEIL UND PICKEL (With Mountain Shoe, Rope, and Ice Axe) by Sepp Gilardi is another small handbook. One illustration (see figure 1) shows the recommended length for a sling rope ("Stehschlinge" to those that practice Oneupmanship). A method for securing extra coils of rope or for securing twin coils of a rappel rope is shown in figure 2. The feature of this tie is its quick release. For securing the extra coils of rope between two climbers the method illustrated in figure 3 is suggested. It allows the second man to easily give out more rope without untying from his waist loop (Ed: Although an overhand knot was shown, a bowline would better secure the rope leading to the other man's waist loop).

The Federated Mountain Clubs of New Zealand has a good little book entitled SAFETY IN THE MOUNTAINS.

The MANUAL OF MOUNTAINEERING (OSNOVY AL' PINISMA) by V. M. Abalakov (135 pages, Moscow 1950) is profusely illustrated and quite extensively covers ice roped climbing (17 pages and 23 illustrations) and emergency bivouacs among other things.

Some interesting items were: collapsible ice hammer, 4-man sleeping bag, ice pitons screwed into ice with spanner on end of ice hammer handle, various techniques for fording swiftly flowing streams, a special arrangement for the foot in the sling ropes used in prussic ascents (See Fig. 4), a small line over the shoulders to keep the rope up around the climber's chest (See Fig. 5), and an unusual chimney technique (See Fig. 6).

Shoulder belays are evidently preferred while there was no evidence of dynamic belaying.

A shoulder stand was also shown with ice axes driven horizontally into the snow wall above the first climber's head and supported by him to act as rungs upon which the second climber could ascend the snow cliff.

* * * * *

CAUTION

There is a rabies quarantine in the Seneca Rocks, West Virginia area, although the nearest reported case has been of rabid cows about ten miles from Mouth of Seneca.

A fox was encountered on Sunday morning, May 8th, at Armentrout's camp ground, which was in the incipient stages of rabies or else was unusually curious and/or hungry. The little beastie advanced to within two or three feet of two people sleeping out and stopped only when confronted by a flopping sleeping bag and a waving piton hammer.

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