



Go Home

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

1916 Sunderland Place N. W. Washington 6, D. C.

FOUNDED BY
JAN AND HERB CONN

PRICE
5 CENTS PER COPY

Volume XIII, No. 2

19 November 1956

COMING EVENTS

- 25 Nov. - Harper's Ferry, Md.
- 27 Nov. - MEETING. At Moira and John Rowland's home, 4434 "Q" St., N.W. (FE-3-9558) at 8:00 PM. Arnold Wexler will talk about Peru. Slides, of course!
- 2 Dec. - Carderock, Md. Belay practice with "Oscar". (Special attention given to novices who aren't acquainted with the dummy)
- 9 Dec. - Great Falls, Va. (Juliet's Balcony Area)

* * * * *

FACE CLIMBING ON MT. RUSHMORE

First of all we should explain that climbing on Mt. Rushmore is strictly prohibited. This mountain, as any conscientious tourist should know, has been carved into the giant likenesses of four great statesmen. From left to right, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln proudly gaze out across the South Dakota landscape.

The area is not a National Park but a National Memorial, and there is a subtle difference. National Parks are playgrounds for the enjoyment of the people, even the mountaineer. But a National Memorial is a holy place to be gazed upon with awe and left strictly untouched.

Irreverent climbers usually do reach even the holiest mountains, however, whether they be guarded by native superstition or Park Service policy. The present episode came about under unusual circumstances. Of prime importance was the fact that Bill Hoy, enthusiastic climber and member of the New Mexico Mountain Club, has been working at Mt. Rushmore this fall as a temporary ranger.

We were visiting with Bill in the Mt. Rushmore museum where he was on duty. In discussing recent mountaineering developments, one of us mentioned Gaston Rebuffat's new book describing climbs of the famous North Faces in the Alps. And inevitably our thoughts turned to the four famous Faces directly above us, which obviously had never been done in true mountaineering tradition.

With a flash of pure genius, Bill remembered that someone had mentioned that certain close-up pictures of the carved faces were needed for the official files. After a brief (but apparently glib) talk with someone else in an inner office, he reappeared triumphantly carrying a camera. The expedition had been cleared by the local authorities, and we were off for the hinterland.

A slope of man-made talus leads directly up to the Four Faces. But this seemed uninteresting mountaineering-wise, and Bill took us instead up an impressive chimney on the west side of the mountain. This was good rock climbing on forbidden rock, and we enjoyed it particularly.

Behind the faces the mountain is cut into a maze of gullies and canyons. Some of these are crossed by creaking wooden bridges and flights of steps left by the workmen. We stared into the vast Hall of Records, a rectangular hole in the granite wall where sculptor Borglum intended that the nation's important documents should be kept. But Borglum didn't live to see this phase of the project through, and instead the Hall is full of telephone poles, tar barrels, and sacks of white lead -- somewhat more down-to-earth mementos of our civilization.

Next on our route was a descent by compressed-air pipe east of the faces. So finally we reached the base of the carving, where we were acutely conscious of four huge noses menacing us from above.

The faces have been polished smooth, even upon close inspection. But in the areas between the faces the final polishing was not done, and the method of drilling and blasting has left a series of narrow horizontal ledges which seemed quite climbable.

We scrambled to the shoulder (George Washington's, that is) and studied the climb ahead. Between George's wig and Tom Jefferson's cheek was the likeliest route, high angle for only a short distance, and with two iron spikes already in place for the protection of the leader.

There proved to be a ticklish step above the second spike, and a piton seemed advisable. But to our dismay the only piton crack had been sealed with cement to retard weathering!

The edge of a blast hole finally proved to be the key handhold that solved the pitch. In our moment of triumph we felt a warm kinship with Rebuffat and Herzog and Hillary. But there were no cheers from the crowd watching below. The silence, in fact, seemed quite chilling, and Bill thought he saw the disapproving face of the Superintendent -- his boss -- among the spectators.

We were there, of course, on official business. We were looking for unusual camera angles. It was unfortunate that we could take no pictures, for the difficulties of our roundabout ascent had taken precious time. The sun was now low in the sky, and the light too poor for the film that was in the camera. But we solemnly agreed that our expedition had accomplished valuable reconnaissance work. For we could now tell a photographer a number of places not worth visiting.

Herb and Jan Conn

* * * * *

HAPPY THANKSGIVING!!

INCIDENTAL INFO

There will not be a meeting in December. The next meeting will be in January and officers will be elected (or reelected) for the coming year.

The Conns have just the gift for that difficult mountaineer - "Bookends with Mountaineering Motif!" Hand-carved on natural leather and laced in brown for \$7.50/pair. Their address: Herb and Jan Conn, Box 218, Custer, South Dakota.

BOOK REVIEW

British Craggs & Climbers
E.C. Pyatt and Wilfrid Noyce
Publishers - Dennis Dobson Ltd.
London 1952
D.C. Library Soc 796.52 P995

This is an anthology of climbing literature in the British Isles and relates the evolution of technique, from Professor Tyndall's climb on Helvellyn in the 1850's to the first ascent of the Big Slab on Craig Cwm Selin, Wales in 1950.

It will be of compelling interest to local rockclimbers who have been brought up in the precepts of "Belaying the Leader". The British attitude towards safety in climbing is awesome and sometimes unbelievable. The faith shown in static belays and the belayers ability to take up the rope during a leader's fall is touching. Herewith are some excerpts:

"How to Fall Off Safely" -- Pilley

The second man was beginning to expect bad trouble and managed to lever himself across the V shaped chimney until he was lying braced with both feet on one wall and a shoulder on the other. Then he looked again to see how the leader was getting on. Holland was in the same position wrestling with the same problem. Up again came the toe to the sloping nick, wavered on it, then the whole body lifted and the toe slipped off. Out came the carpet knee that should have taken the weight and the jolt plucked his straining finger tips from their hold. Without a word Holland slipped down a little, then fell out backwards and came like a loose sack, head over heels, down the wall. At this instant I.A.R. noticed that the rope had again worked off the belay (a static belay over a nubbin-Ed.).

A body is travelling fast by the time it has fallen fifty feet down cliffs the angle of these. I.A.R. avers that Holland was making a loud whizzing noise by the time he caught him. There was no use worrying about the rope, the thing to do was to catch the climber. Actually he landed head down, face out, between the cliff and I.A.R. who clutched him wildly around the thighs. Then a moment passed during which, rather slowly they realized they had not gone; they were still on the crags and alive; and then Holland began to climb up round the outside of I.A.R.'s bridged body and re-established himself right side up on the little grass ledge:--"

Since our cousins do a lot of sea cliff climbing the following account is reproduced in its entirety:

"Limpets - Shadbolt

As regards the indigenous fauna of Sark, the adhesive limpet takes a prominent place. The more robust specimens may be used as footholds if due warning is given of the coming strain. Lest anyone should be tempted to take out a patent in pocket footholds, let him be warned that it has already been tried. In more youthful and optimistic days I carried out an exhaustive series of experiments with quantities of the largest size of limpets, but, in spite of careful nourishment they refused to stick to unknown rock faces at the word of command, basely dropping into the sea the moment they were released."

As the use of hardware was long scorned, the leader was always on the alert for a chockstone on his climbing route. When one was spotted the leader untied, threaded the rope behind the chockstone or through a loop around the chock and tied himself in again. Thus the following:

"Artificial Chock-Stones - Longland

My longest hesitation, on a little ledge below the rather unpleasant overhang which had to be surmounted to secure a position on the next leaf of slab, was overcome by a triumph of organization that would have gladdened the heart of Callisthenes of the Times. To me protesting, 'But, there's no belay!' there came a wicked smile upon the face of Morley Wood, at the sheet anchor end of the rope; this was the moment he had been hoping for, and he unslung his rucksack, which was hauled up mysteriously heavy. I felt inside and found two chock-stones.

"It was none of your imported chock-stones; no pudding stone from the Dauphine, or millstone grit from the steepes of Laddow, but sound Welsh Rock picked up from the foot of this very buttress; showing in Morley Wood a purism of artificiality enough to satisfy all save those faddists who say that inserted chock stones must not only be picked up on the mountain, but also dropped down the crack in question, from above, to stick where they may."

From the above samples you may judge that this book is a must for any wide eyed American rockclimber, particularly those who enjoy the English tongue in cheek understatements.

John Meenehan

UP ROPE, published by the Mountaineering Committee of the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club, 1916 Sunderland Place, N.W., Washington 6, D. C.
Editor - John F. Christian Typist - Shirley Jackson Production - Betty Johnson
Business Manager - Alan "Hot Rod" Talbert, 4201 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W. Please send new subscriptions, renewals, address changes and cutie-type girls telephone numbers to him. Make checks payable to Alan J. Talbert. Subscription: \$1.00 for 20 frantically typed issues.