



FOUNDED BY
JAN AND HERB CONN

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Some Thoughts on the Condition & the Future of the Mountaineering Section

by Donald Schaefer

Part I Introduction

The Mountaineering Section is in a state of transition. There is uncertainty concerning the goals of the section and how these goals might impact upon the hills and mountains with which we all have a love/hate affair. This uncertainty has been evident in the questions of training, the growth of the Section and its relationship to overcrowding of the hills. However there has been little systematic discussion of these problems.

Having only limited reference material my viewpoint is probably quite parochial. However this discussion can be used as a starting point for consideration of the Section's policies on training and membership recruitment.

In simplistic terms the prevailing thinking within the elected and appointed leadership of the Section appears to be:

1. The rapid growth of this and other climbing clubs will continue to cause the mountains to be crowded.
2. Formal training will lead to rapid growth of the Section and the type of climber produced will be undesirable.
3. Therefore, let's not have formal training and let's not try to encourage the growth of the club.

Perhaps a fourth point implicit in the thinking might be:

4. Let the Section continue in its present fashion and it will continue to exist and even prosper.

While there may be truth in some of the above points they are, in my opinion, too negative, ignore the reality of the Section's stagnation, and are generally unhealthy for the Section.

I will discuss four major points. First, I will examine the crowding of the mountains. Next, I will examine how Section policies affect the crowding. Third, an examination of the recent growth (or lack of growth) of the Section will be presented along with some of the determinants of that growth. Last will be presented some constructive ideas for the future directions of the Section.

Part II Crowding of the Mountains

Recently there have been a number of articles dealing with the crowding of the mountains. McCrumm in the June 1970 issue of UpRope points out overcrowding in Yosemite. Christopher Jones in the 1970 American Alpine Journal brings our attention to the crowding in parts of the Alps and the British Isles. From a personal viewpoint many of us have

noted that there is a multitude of climbers at Carderock and at the Trapps in the Shawangunks. From articles and observations like the above it has been inferred that the mountains are generally overcrowded and climbing is facing a population crisis. Such an inference is at best misleading if not actually wrong.

Locally, Carderock is often crowded but even there the climbs downstream from Sterling's twin cracks to the Jambox are rarely climbed. Also, the climbing population at a host of other climbing areas up and down the Potomac Gorge tends to be quite sparse. Except on Section trips I have never encountered another climbing party at Camp Lewis. Similarly, at the Shawangunks there does not appear to be any crowding at Mohonk, Millbrook or Bonticou. Nationally, Yosemite may be crowded but nearby Hetch Hetchy (California), reportedly a mirror image of Yosemite Valley whose valley was flooded to form a reservoir was not climbed in until two years ago. Many more examples could be given. However, the point is in the United States there does not appear to be any general overcrowding of the mountains and rock climbing areas. Only a few specific areas are overcrowded.

It may be argued that while only a few specific areas are overcrowded, they contain unique climbs that are not duplicated elsewhere. As Jones says, "In all the mountains in the world there is only one El Capitan ..." Obviously he has a point that should not be overlooked. However, most rocks and mountains are not quite so unique. Indeed, even in the case of El Capitan, there are big granite walls elsewhere.

Specific crowding is of course worse than no crowding at all. Its causes are myriad. Tom McCrumm attributes the crowding as a natural result of the population growth. Jones points to mountain training centers and publicity generated by climbers themselves. Other causes may be put forth. These include more leisure time, money, greater accessibility and improved equipment. Historically, the work week has diminished. During the present century the standard work week has decreased from six days to five and some companies now have four day work weeks. Increased time off the job means that there is more leisure time to be applied to all forms of recreation. Over time, the affluence of North America and western Europe has increased markedly. Thus more people have more money to spend on leisure time activities, including climbing. The mountains are more accessible than ever before. During the late 1930's and early 1940's it was quite a feat to reach the Shenandoah Mountains from Washington. Now with improved transportation and highways the mountains are easier to approach. Modern equipment in the form of improved clothing, sleeping gear, lightweight food

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Hanging Around

Great Falls, Md.

January 4, 1970

Art Wilder - Trip Leader

The 4th was a typical winter climbing Sunday. I got to the Hot Shoppes at 8:20 (the new place for meeting) and met Al Goldberg. Just as we were leaving at 8:45 Bob and Kate Adams came in; so another cup of coffee for Al and me. We got to Great Falls at about 9:45 and met Don Schaefer (He had gone to Howard Johnson's!). When we got to the rocks the water seemed too high (it was 1.5 feet short of flood stage the day before at 1:00 a.m. according to the Ranger), so we went to "Purple Horse." We climbed on the short rocks away from the river until noon under a warming sun. It was a nice winter day. Mike Hill and Nellie showed up and after lunch we visited the Spitzbergen area upstream, which is another warm place on a cold day. We climbed there until the sun went down into the trees, then headed back along the trail. Merv Oleson and Harold Swift came by on their way to Great Falls. The ice on the canal was frozen hard enough to allow an inspection of one of the rocky islands in Widewater. Later, several of us went looking for a new "Touhey's."

Little Devil Stairs, Va.

November 22, 1970

Don Schaefer - Trip Leader

Tom McCrumm

Tink Peters

Sallie Greenwood

Bill Robinson & 3 Ledge Rats

from Baltimore

Bill Thomas & No. 2 son

Charlie Linett & son

Jackie Raine

Bob & Kate Adams

Al & Mark Goldberg

Bob Connor

Ben Ocampo

Dave & Joan Templeton

Rest of Goldberg family

Betsy & Erika Schaefer

or the first time in recent history a large crowd showed up for an excursion to Little Devils Stairs and they soon found the magnitude of their physical, mental, emotional or intellectual shortcomings (if any). For Little Devils Stairs offers a challenge; not only in terms of climbing but also in even arriving at the base of the cliff. Most people found the walk as far as the stream uneventful. The bushwhacking that followed (and the somewhat misleading directions in Up Rope) soon took their toll. A 15-30 minute stroll through briar patches across treacherous boulder fields and down a loose couloir brought us to the base of the cliff.

The cliff a number of moderate lead climbs were attempted with the only casualty being a few pitons and a piton hammer. In the afternoon a number of practice climbs below the main cliff were rigged and climbed. These were notable for their ability to drain what little of the climbers' stamina remained from the walk in.

At 4:30 p.m. we packed up and walked out by a different route, viewing numerous other cliffs along the stream. McCrumm (perhaps reflecting those shortcomings noted above)

kept muttering that it would take a team of wild horses to ever get him back there again. About 6:30, in total darkness, we arrived back at Skyline Drive, 2½ strenuous miles from the cliffs.

Our next stop was the Hampton Inn, a traditional watering place between Sperryville and Washington, Va. Here a most unfortunate incident ensued. We attempted to consolidate some tables, without asking the owner's permission, and thereby incurred his wrath. (The trip leader will be happy to recount the gripping details to interested parties.)

All in all it was an eventful excursion into a wild area full of still unclimbed cliffs -- and one hostile native.

Herzog Island

Jan. 3, 1971

Don Schaefer - Trip Leader

Bob Adams

Terry Robinson

The Wilders

The Templetons

Al Goldberg

Dorothy Anne Agnes Peters

Bill Thomas

Chuck Sproull

Peter Gardiner

Rita O'Connor

Bob Adams, a legend in his own time, did it again. On a cold (26°) morning with 8 inches of snow on the ground, Bob waded across to Herzog Island. Stripping to his longjohns, and turning various shades of blue, Bob waded across and shouted for the rest of us to follow. No one did. So Bob waded back and decided to call it a day. Like I said a legend in his own time.

Much of the remaining time was spent bouldering at the upstream part of Carderock. Feeling much ashamed for our early temerity and also the warmth of the sun, a few brave souls including Dave Templeton, Chuck Sproull, Art Wilder, Peter Gardiner and the excursion leader stripped (leaving on their boots) and proceeded to carefully boulder around. Some unique photos of this event were taken (Lembeck's Without).

The sunbathing completed, we moved back toward Carderock proper and found Terry Robinson with some homemade dill-flavored bread that was quite a favorite with the women. Rejuvenated by our snack, most of the party walked along the canal from Carderock to Widewater, enjoying the beautiful day and the snow.

The day ended at Trav's where we closed the place.

Belay Ledge

Fitz Roy, Chile-Argentina:

Chouinard's film of the ascent of the Southwest Buttress of this 10,958-foot high mountain will be shown at the Department of Commerce Auditorium on 14th St. between E and Constitution Ave. at 8:00 p.m., January 27.

Membership nomination:

Ben Ocampo. Sponsored by Tom McCrumm and June Lehman. The nominee should be present at the next scheduled business meeting so that the application may be voted on.

Married:

Merv Oleson and Fan Ash on December 12 in Potomac, Md.

Up Rope

UP ROPE is the Newsletter of the PATC Mountaineering Section, founded by Jan and Herb Conn in 1944. Publication is on the last Wednesday of each calendar month at PATC Headquarters. Deadline for submitted material is the next to last Wednesday of the month preceding an issue. Material for inclusion, comments or questions on editorial policy should be directed to EDITOR, UP ROPE, c/o PATC, 1718 N Street, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20036. Subscription rates are \$1.50 per year. New subscriptions and changes of address should be directed to Business Manager, UP ROPE, etc.

Recommended reading:

Manual of Ski Mountaineering. Ed. by David Brower. Ballantine Books, New York. This 95¢ paperback is just about essential as an introduction to winter mountaineering.

New UP ROPE subscribers and address changes:

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Schaefer, cont.

and technical climbing equipment (stronger ropes, pitons, carabiners, and hardhats and climbing shoes) has made climbing less a hardship and safer.

All of the above factors would appear to have a role in increasing the number of climbers. However, they do not explain the distribution of climbers and the specific overcrowding of the mountains. One such explanation might be that in general climbers do not have information about all the possible places to climb. On the whole most tend to go to areas for which guidebooks or other sources of information are available. Only a small number pioneer new areas. Because the number of guidebooks is small the areas described are crowded. In other words, today's climbers tend to avoid the unknown. Locally, this tendency is documented by the attendance on club trips to new areas versus the attendance on trips to established areas.

Other less charitable rationales for the uneven distribution of climbers include lack of initiative and skill on the part of most climbers. For example, in the Tetons there are herds of climbers in Garret Canyon but few in Avalanche Canyon immediately to the south. The absence of a trail as well as the initiative to bushwhack in makes the difference in this case for both approaches are detailed in the guidebook.

To summarize the above points, some of the factors leading to an increase in the overall popularity of climbing are growth of population, the greater ease and safety of climbing, and the increased opportunity to climb. Lack of initiative and lack of information as well as the uniqueness of certain areas are factors in specific crowding.

Part III The Activities of the Section and the Crowding of the Mountains

In this part I will examine the relationship of various club activities to the crowding of the mountains (both general crowding and specific crowding).

As an organization, the Section has two major activities that contribute to the growth of the climbing population. First, the Section publicizes climbing in numerous ways: guidebooks, films, lectures and last and surely not least UpRope, the Section publication. UpRope is available to anyone wishing to purchase it. Lectures and films by noted climbers continue to be sponsored by the Section and are open to the public. All in all the section makes climbing in the Washington D. C. area highly visible.

The second recruiting device employed by the Section is the weekly climbing trip that is open to the public. As more than 60% of the weekly trips are one day trips and generally suitable for beginners it is quite easy for a beginner to take part in rudimentary climbing. On these trips the idea of climbing with the group is stressed.

These two Section activities, prima facie, contribute to the general crowding of the mountains. However, as there does not appear to be any immediate danger that the local or national rock and mountain resources will be exhausted these contributions to crowding should not be considered as completely detrimental. Climbers die, give up climbing, or leave the area. Some replacement is necessary if climbing is to continue to exist.

Perhaps more importantly one should ask "What about the Section's activities and specific crowding?" Here the record is, in my opinion, less equivocal. In sweeping terms, the club introduces many people to climbing and then abandons responsibility for most of them. This abandonment allows if not creates a group of inadequately prepared climbers who are unable or unwilling to do anything but flock to known climbing areas.

There are two methods, in theory, in use within the Section, to upgrade climbers' skills: formal training and informal training. Formal training within the Section is negligible and is declining. In the past two years the only formal training has been dynamic belay practice. The dynamic belay practice is of course very useful. However, it hardly constitutes a complete training program. Prior to this time the Section offered other formal training in static belaying, overhead belaying, knots, rappelling, prussiking, and first aid. Quite obviously even more extensive training is possible than was conducted in the past. Formal training, such as it is, is open to members and non-members, alike.

Informal training within the club has been the prime method for learning climbing skills. This is especially true for mountaineering and snow and ice climbing. While desirable for its coverage, informal training has a couple of potentially serious defects. First, the supply of informal training is sporadic. It depends on the presence and willingness of experienced climbers to pass on their skills. Even when available this informal training, quite naturally, goes to friends rather than persons unknown to the teacher. Often this teaching pattern results in the training of a small closely knit group of climbers while the majority of climbers who could benefit from this training may not receive it. Second, with no built-in safeguards the quality of informal training varies greatly. Informal training can be a potent force in perpetrating incorrect and unsafe practices.

In summary, the Mountaineering Section through its publicity, formal training, and trip activities is widely promoting climbing on the one hand, and only narrowly improving the skills of members and others who climb with the Section. The obvious result of such a combination is to produce a large number of unskilled and semiskilled climbers. The impact of the Section policies is to produce climbers who, on the whole, are not capable of climbing any already crowded areas.

(Editor's Note) Don Schaefer's first introduction to the Section was a 1967 training demonstration put on by the Section for P.A.T.C. (mountain rescue, rappelling, prussiking, etc.) Don has been climbing ever since. This past year he served as vice president of the Mountaineering Section and chairman of the P.A.T.C.'s equipment committee.

This is the first of a two part article. The second article will cover the state of the Section and Don's suggestions affecting training, trips, and facilities.

CLIMBER'S CALENDAR

Date	Place	Leader
Jan. 13	Meeting, PATC Headquarters 8:00 p.m.	ELECTIONS and slides by John Christian of the Canadian Alpine Club's summer camp
Jan. 17	Purple Horse/Spitsbergen	Bob Adams (292-1340)
Jan. 24	Sugarloaf	Maren Stewart (559-5986)
Jan. 27	Dept. of Commerce Auditorium 8:00 p.m.	Yvon Chouinard's film, "FitzRoy: Ascent of the SW Buttress"
Jan. 31	Wildcat and Pinnacle Rocks	Ed Goodman (281-4126)
Feb. 7	Big Devil's Stairs	Don Schaefer (521-5326)
Feb. 10	Meeting, PATC Headquarters 8:00 p.m.	
Feb. 14	Cupid's Bower (dynamic belay practice)	Linnea Stewart (657-3286)
	Mt. Washington	Tom McCrumm (527-6272)
Feb. 20-21	Old Rag	Sallie Greenwood (683-5091)

Trip Leaders are reminded of their responsibility to arrange for a report and, if a leader is unable to make his assigned trip, to appoint a substitute leader. If directions to climbing areas need revision please note the necessary changes and send them to Editor, UP ROPE.

Purple Horse and Spitsbergen, Md.

From the Beltway take the Carderock exit (15). Drive past the Carderock exit to the end of the Parkway. Turn left onto MacArthur Blvd. At the Old Angler's Inn, turn left into the dirt parking lot. Cross the canal and walk right (upstream as far as Widewater). Turn left before crossing a cement foot-bridge. In 30 yards turn right and cross a stream on a cement slab. Follow the trail downstream; pick up the blue-blazed Billy Goat Trail 75 feet past a sizable pond on the left. Follow the trail right for 300 yards to the rocks.

Sugarloaf Mountain, Md.

From the Beltway take I-70 S north to Md. 109. Go west 3 miles to Comus. Turn right on Md. 95 and go 2.5 miles to an intersection and follow signs to the Stronghold. Park at the top and hike up the trail to the rocks which are on the right half way up the summit trail.

Wildcat and Pinnacle Rocks, W. Va.

The rocks are just off Route 55 -- 3 miles before Wardensville, W. Va. Check a road map. The rocks are large slabs to the right and above the road. Parking is off the road on the left.

Big Devil's Stairs, Va.

Go into Washington, Va. At intersection of 211 and Va. 622 turn right onto 622. (in center of town where 211 takes a sharp left)

Big Devil's Stairs, Va.

Go into Washington, Va. on U.S. 211. Where 211 takes a sharp left in the center of town, go right onto a secondary road. 100 yards to Rte. 622; left on 622 for 4.5 miles. Park and follow blue-blazed trail to the rocks.(about .6 miles).

Cupid's Bower, Md.

Follow the directions for Purple Horse/Spitsbergen to just below Widewater. Follow the blue-blazed trail to the left just before Widewater to the river. Cupid's Bower is near the foot of the island nearest D.C.

Old Rag, Va.

Follow U.S. 211 west to Sperryville, Va. Turn left on U.S. 522 and south for 1 mile. Right on Va. 231 south for about 8 miles. Right on State route 670 to Nethers. The long way up is the fire road at the end of the parking area (we'll camp at the shelter at the end of the fire road, possibly) and the short, but steep way, is to follow the blue-blazed trail to the left.

Belay Ledge, continued

John Pinkston

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Christopher Wren

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Hugo Mayer

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Yosemite -- Ladies Days:

Bev Johnson, who climbed in the Washington area a year or so ago, did the Crack of Doom on the Leaning Tower this past fall -- Grade IV, 5.10 -- the 5.10 was an overhanging shallow jamcrack. Elaine Matthews did the West Face of Sentinel and the Nose on El Capitan (Grade VI) with Chuck Oustin this past spring.

Up Rope

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