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A
SENECA SWAN SONG from Bob Robinson (across the seas)

(This is the text of a most interesting letter from Bob to Sally Greenwood.)

Dear Sally,

This is a voice from the not so distant past and as it is going to echo sentiments expressed in a recent Up Rope on the U.K. attitude on the philosophy of climbing and will, inevitably call attention to the opening pages of the Seneca Guide, perhaps you would, or will, be kind enough to publish a paraphrase of this letter in a forthcoming UpRope. Maybe you could entitle it "Seneca Swan Song."

The fact is that I cannot but recall that my last climb at Seneca was to lead Soler Route, and that I neither carried or used pitons, except those already in place. I used a couple of slings over horns (at the diamond block 15 feet from the base of the direct start and near the end of the traverse) but otherwise, in my very humble opinion, none are necessary. Need I add that I do not consider myself a "hard" man and here in the U.K. I would feel extremely self-conscious to even be seen carrying pegs and a hammer. All this means that in my opinion the ethics of climbing in the U.S. will have to change so as to preserve the rock and a sense of proportion as to what it is all about.

May I quote from the 1971 Alpine Journal, part of the valedictory address by the president of the A.C., Sir Charles Evans of Everest 1953 expedition: "Please do not think that I presume to belittle the satisfaction of making the first ascent of an extreme route: it is a creative achievement which, for lack of experience, I must be content to suppose must satisfy enormously. But, in sport, to accomplish is not all, and there are plenty of signs that at least in Britain and France, and perhaps in Austria and America, these very exceptional men capable of such achievements are thinking that simply to achieve may be less important than to perform the act within some conventional self-imposed rules, to observe 'the spirit of the law'. Robert Paragot (a noted French "hard" man) says (translated freely): 'although artificial means brought to perfection will enable man to solve any climbing problem whatever, can one then say that the particular accomplishment is nobler than any other or that it has enabled man to realize

himself more fully?' He and the climbers of this country who regard it as bad form to peg a climb which has been led 'free' are reminding us that the way a game is played may be more important than the bare result, a characteristically English attitude which is far too easy to mock. In the approach to a sport or game that English attitude, which traditionally has been the attitude of this Club, is the sign that we are rational beings with a sense of proportion." (End of quote)

Sally, the quote above expresses what I attempted to say in the mildest terms in the "Introduction" to the guide, which is to my mind the most important part of the guide. I hoped my introduction might suit the U.S. climber. For the sake of the future, I sincerely hope it does.

I also ask you to publish this letter in full, and you might also like to add that in my 5 years in the U.S. when I enjoyed my climbing as much as I have ever done, I drove less than 5 pitons (in anger) in the entire time and can in fact recall quite specifically those I drove; also that for all the climbs I could lead (and 5.7 was probably my limit) I found either enough old pins to buoy me up psychologically, or was able to use nuts or slings. I make no apologies for this (I am getting old remember -- 50 soon) but I would remind all the readers that climbing is not a mere physical exercise -- it is in fact a mental exercise in which one learns one's own limits in the company of a few chosen friends -- the paradise one finds after the purgatory of perhaps years of climbing with the (forgive me) hoi-polloi membership of a large club, to which, of course, one owes allegiance to defend the sport together and which enables one to meet other climbers before and after the chosen ascent, but to which one should not otherwise be continuously obligated, except morally and ethically, with respect to "the sport" not "the club."

This is all rather hasty, but, having had another quick read of the guide (which pleases me, though I am fully aware of the imperfections of my contributions) I feel impelled to write.

Best wishes to all.

Love, Bob