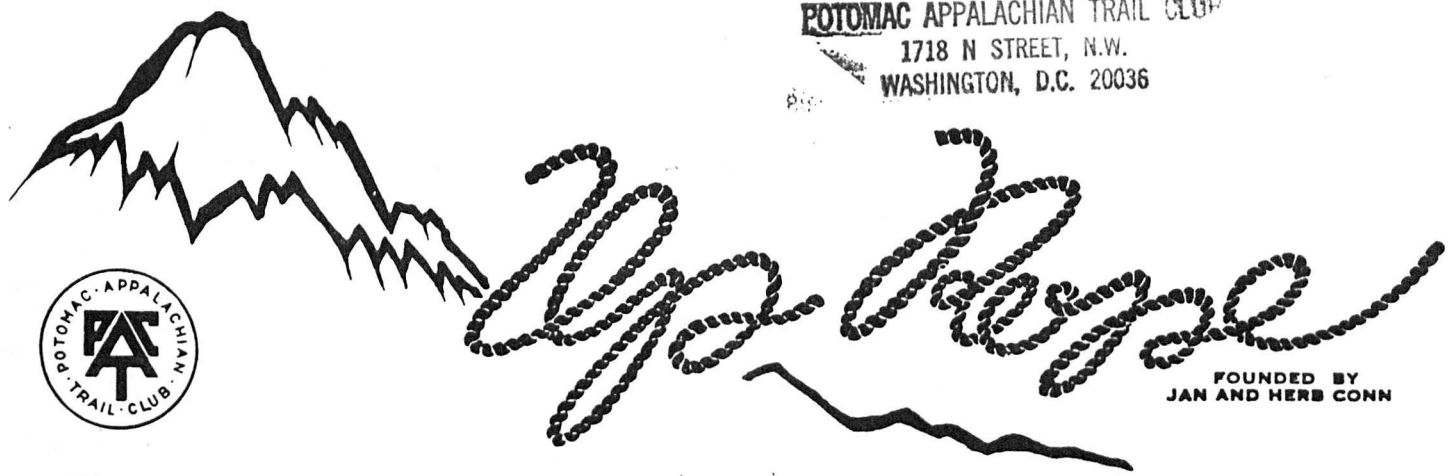


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NEWS OF THE P.A.T.C. MOUNTAINEERING SECTION

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April 1981

ACROSS NORTHERN CHINA

by Arnold Wexler

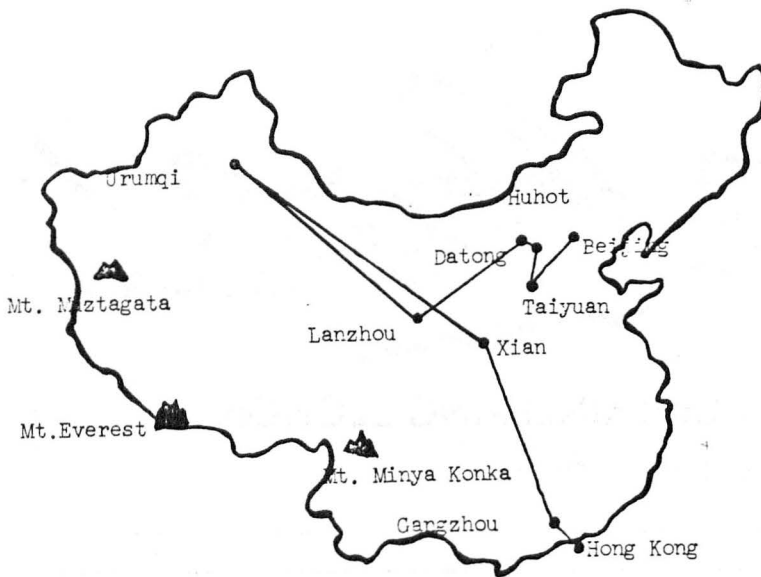
During August and September of 1980, for a period of thirty days, I toured with a Mountain Travel group across China from Guangzhou to Urumqi to Beijing. I entered the country with trepidation engendered by suppressed doubts about the wisdom of visiting a communist country, one that had just emerged from a cultural revolution and only recently had expressed extreme antagonism toward the western world. But I was also irresistably drawn to China, to the land of Marco Polo and Kublai Khan, to the birthplace of Confucius, to the people who had contributed exquisite art, a superb cuisine, an unique written language, a fascinating architecture, and a rich literature to the cultures of the world. I wanted to see, to experience, and to have contact with the Chinese people, even if it was only casual or superficial, in their cities, farms, and workplaces. And I had a compelling desire to look through the embrasures of the battlements of the Great Wall toward the land of the Tartars and to walk through the gardens, chambers, and halls of the Forbidden City.

I found the Chinese people gracious and hospitable, as curious about and fascinated with Americans as we were with them. From officials to the man in the street, each seemed eager to make our visit as pleasant and enjoyable as possible. When I left, it was with a feeling

of regret, for even in so short a time I had become fond of the country and its people. I wanted to see and know more. Yet this brief stay added up to a collection of memorable experiences and left me with a sense of warmth and friendship for China and the Chinese people.

My entry into mainland China from Hong Kong was aboard the air-conditioned train that goes to Guangzhou (Canton). Intensive construction was going on in the New Territories, mostly of apartment buildings and highways. Housing developments with their associated schools, playgrounds and swimming pools, and villages with factories engaged in light industry were urbanizing the countryside of this British colony. An arm of the China Sea came into view. Bathing beaches lined the shore; rowboats, motorboats, sampans, and junks anchored and sailing, bounced on the choppy waves. When the train crossed the border at Lo Wu, I was startled to see a high, barbed wire fence. English disappeared from all signs. Except for an occasional truck, the roads were devoid of motorized travel. The terrain, which in the New Territories had been hilly, was now flat and filled with flooded rice paddies, the young shoots protruding from the water. Farmers worked in the fields or walked along dusty paths balancing long

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It was hot and muggy in Guangzhou. There was no time for sightseeing since early the next morning I had to catch a plane for Xian. There two local guides met our group and escorted us to the People's Hotel, a dull and dreary place. Fortunately the rooms were air-conditioned. Xian is on the River Wei, a tributary of the Yellow River. In ancient times it was known as Chang An (Everlasting Peace) and served on and off from the Zhou Dynasty (1122 B.C. - 770 B.C.) as the capital of China for 2000 years. It was here that caravans began their long and arduous jurnies on the "Silk Road" to the Near East and Europe. My first impression was of a city with wide streets crowded with people and bicycles. In fact the permanent vision I retain of urban life in China is of people and bicycles jamming the streets. In Xian I received my introduction to the architectural, cultural, and archaeological heritage of China. In the center of the city stood the Bell Tower, a pagoda structure of brick and wood, that faced the four cardinal directions. At one time the tower housed a large bronze bell and a drum for marking the time of day; now it exhibited Ming Dynasty (1368-

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poles on their shoulders--poles with suspended loads that bounced at each step. Water buffalo wallowed in water holes. Boys splashed and swam in muddy ponds and streams, and, occasionally, rode on the backs of the buffalo. From time to time I saw fields of sugar cane and clumps of banana trees.



UP ROPE

UP ROPE is the monthly newsletter of the Mountaineering Section (MS) of the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club (PATC) of Washington, D.C. Climbing articles, letters, and comments are welcome and should be addressed to Lin Murphy, 2314 N. Harrison Street, Arlington, VA. 22205. Deadline is the 20th of each month. Subscriptions for MS members are included in the dues. The annual subscription price for nonmembers is \$4. Current PATC members interested in receiving UP ROPE may obtain a subscription at no charge. MS members must belong to PATC. Applicants for membership and PATC members can join the MS by obtaining sponsorship from a current MS member. Send subscription and address changes to Mountaineering Section-Secretary, 1718 N Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

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MOUNTAINEERING SECTION ACTIVITIES

The MS holds meetings at PATC headquarters (1718 N Street, N.W., Washington, D.C.) the second Wednesday of each month except August. There is a brief business session followed by a slide show, film, or other form of entertainment. Sunday trips to nearby climbing areas and/or weekend trips to more distant areas are sponsored every weekend. Check the climber's calendar for scheduled trips.

Beginning and intermediate training are offered once a month. Anyone is welcome to participate in MS activities, although some restrictions may be placed on participation in club trips. The Sunday trips are usually to areas where there is a complete range of top rope climbs. However, we ask that you have some experience or training prior to the trip. The weekend trips are usually for lead climbers only, and you are expected to find your own climbing partner.

ACROSS NORTHERN CHINA

1644) furniture. One of the main gates, remnants of the old wall, and sections of the moat which surrounded the city during the Tang and Ming Dynasties still remained. Vestiges of Buddhism were to be seen at the Little and Big Goose Pagodas.

The Grand Mosque was secluded in an old section of Xian. Founded in the 8th century, rebuilt in the 14th century, it has served over the years as a religious center for the Muslim minorities. Even now, the elders of the 70,000 Huis continue to use it as a place of worship. I had difficulty first in accepting the presence of a mosque in the heart of an ancient Chinese city, and then in adjusting to the sight of pavilions and a minaret with Chinese architecture, Orientals in caftans, steles with Arabic inscriptions, and a map of Mecca painted on a wall of the sanctuary.

I visited two archaeological sites, each representing a different era in China's history. Banpo contained the diggings and finds of a Neolithic village of 6000 years ago. At the Qin Shi Huang Tomb I saw the unearthed terra cotta warriors, war chariots, and horses that guarded the entrance to the tomb of the second century B.C. emperor who first unified China. The area was enclosed in a mammoth building. About 6000 figures comprise this underground army, none of which are alike. One remarkable feature about this army is that it represented a departure from past custom of entombing living humans with their departed ruler. Over 700,000 people worked 11 years to prepare this tomb.

The next stop on my itinerary was Urumqi in Xinjiang, in northwestern China, a region bordering the Soviet Union in Central Asia. The city was under a pall of smog created by the pollution spewed out of factory smokestacks. Here I met Uighurs and Kazhaks, minority peoples of Islamic faith and Turkic extraction living in the shadow of the Tian Shan. One trip took me to Tian Chi (Heavenly Lake), half-way up snowcapped Mt. Bogda (5445 m). Another was to Turpan, an oasis in the bleak, rocky desert known as the Turpan Depression. At its lowest, the depression is 155 meters below sea level. Here I was served the most delicious grapes and melons I have ever tasted. Turpan is irrigated by

karez, a series of wells and underground channels, each about 3 to 10 km in length, with a few up to 40 km long, through which water flows from the Tian Shan across the desert. It was interesting to visit the homes of several Uighur families; to stroll under arbors laden with ripe grapes; to share the road with two-wheeled carts drawn by donkeys and horses; to explore the sun-baked ruins of the old "Silk Road" city of Gaochang at the edge of Flaming Mountain; to descend into the crypts of the ancient cemetery of Astame where well-preserved mummies rest in vaults decorated with frescoes; to examine the intricate brick work of the Iming Minaret; and to enjoy the traditional Uighur folk dancing and music rendered by a troupe of performers in colorful native costumes.

Rumors floated through our group that our next stop, Lanzhou in Gansu Province, was an uninteresting, polluted industrial city. I was prepared to be disappointed but when I finally departed, it was with a sense of pleasure and a treasury of satisfying experiences. True, Lanzhou was a sprawling petrochemical city on the Huang he (Yellow River) with a population of 2 million. Smog and the smell of organic chemicals pervaded the air. However I quickly became immune to these minor irritations in the excitement of visiting the Goose Beech Peoples Commune, which raised fruits and vegetables; the Wuquan Gonguan, an old Buddhist complex situated on a hill overlooking the city, and its accompanying zoo with pandas and snow leopard; and the free markets with their stalls of goods, produce, tobacco, hot foods, old shoes, and comic books.

The major event was a boat ride in a launch that began on a reservoir of the Yellow River and then proceeded through a narrow gorge of the river lined with barrier cliffs, spires, and pinnacles, and terminated at the Bing Ling Caves in a lateral valley. These man-made caves housed a multitude of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and pagodas carved out of living rock. The work was begun in A.D. 480 and was continued through the Ming Dynasty (14th-17th centuries). The most spectacular attraction was a 30-meter high Buddha sculptured into the face of the cliff. At one time 1300 monks were in residence there. In 1966, the 40 monks who still lived there disappeared, victims of the cultural revolution.

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ACROSS NORTHERN CHINA

It was a 23-hour train ride to Huhehot in Inner Mongolia, on a route that more or less paralleled the Yellow River. I had read about the loess soil and the caves and grottoes excavated from these yellow deposits. From my train window I could see entrances dotting the cliffs. The journey was leisurely and, in the soft-seat (first class) compartment, quite comfortable. The meals, too, were good in the dining car. Whenever the train stopped long enough for us to disembark and stretch our legs, we were surrounded by crowds and greeted with friendly looks.

From Huhehot I went by bus up the Great Green Mountain escarpment onto the grasslands plateau of Inner Mongolia to Ulan-toke, a compound that serves as the headquarters of a commune of Mongolian herdsmen. I spent several nights sleeping in a yurt. Within the compound there was a monastery that had been destroyed during the cultural revolution, a "living Buddha" had resided there with other monks in su summer residence. Today there were no monks left.

Another train ride took me to Datong in northern Shanxi Province. During the 4th and 5th centuries, this city served as the capital of the Northern Wei Dynasty. Buddhism had been the state religion. There was still striking evidence of the preeminence of Buddhist precepts from that and later eras. Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, gods, and other members of the Buddhist pantheon were impressively represented in the rock sculptures of the man-made Yun Gang Caves and in the frescoes and statues within the Upper and Lower Huayan Monasteries. In an enclosed area of the old section of the city I admired an exquisite Nine Dragon Screen, a wall 147 feet long, 6 feet thick, and 18 feet high, finished in glazed colored tile and showing nine dragons emerging from the ocean waves to fight over several suns. On the morning of departure I wandered up and down some of the streets of the old part of Datong, past stores, stalls, street vendors, noodle shops, and homes. A mass of humanity filled the streets. It seemed everyone was fascinated by the sight of a Westerner. A few Chinese stopped to exchange greetings in halting English. I stumbled into a nursery and kindergarden. The teachers graciously lined up the children for a photograph.

Chong Shan Si (Monastery Where Goodness is worshipped) in the southeastern part of Taiyuan was the only monastery I saw where services were still permitted. There was a collection box for donations from the faithful. During the cultural revolution all monks were arrested. Subsequently they were released. Now only four survive who practice their faith.

Air transportation is never a certainty in China. For reasons that were never made clear, the scheduled flight I was supposed to take from Taiyuan to Beijing did not materialize. Instead I was ushered aboard a non-scheduled 20-passenger de Havilland Twin Otter which flew low and afforded a fine view of the terrain below. The land, in places, was deeply eroded, but densely populated and cluttered with numerous villages. In Beijing I was taken to the Friendship Hotel, a cavernous structure built in the 50s to house the Russians when they were providing assistance to China.

Beijing, with a population of 8.5 million people and occupying an area of 17,800 sq. km. ranks as one of the major metropolises of the world. It has a latitude comparable to that of Philadelphia; its winters are cold and its summers are hot. Prior to the revolution, the city was consumer-oriented. Now it is industrialized, yet about half of the people live in communes. I remember driving down broad avenues lined with new apartment buildings and government buildings. The streets were always filled with buses, trucks, taxis, and bicycles.

For 3000 years a settlement had existed on this same site, yet I did not sense any feeling of antiquity. There were no obvious ruins or relics such as one sees in places like Athens or Rome. Those monuments and structures of a past age, such as the Forbidden City and the Temple of Heaven, that I visited were well maintained and preserved. Other than the Great Wall, which was miles north of the city, there did not seem to be anything pre-dating the Yuan Dynasty (1280-1368).

I spent four days in Beijing. In one sense it was the culmination of my China experience. This was the seat of political power, both past and present. In the short time at my disposal I tried

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ACROSS NORTHERN CHINA

to see as much as I could. I would liken this to flicking the pages of a book, trying to understand the contents, but at best coming away with a few chapter headings. But what headings! Tiananmen Square, a 100-acre paved open area in the center of the city where up to one million people can and have gathered for rallies and memorials. Mao Zedong Memorial Hall in which Mao's body lies in a crystal sarcophagus. The Monument to the People's Heroes, an obelisk in the middle of the Square dedicated to the heroes of the Chinese revolution. The Imperial Palace, where emperors from the Yuan through the Qing Dynasties have ruled over China. Coal Hill, the park just north of the Palace from which there is a fine vista of the city. Beihai Park with its lotus pond, lake, White Dagoba, and Nine Dragon Screen. The Temple of Heaven where the emperor prayed to the gods for a good harvest. The Beijing Zoo with its pandas. The summer palace, where the Dowager Empress built a marble paddle-wheel boat; the Great Wall, the 3000 mile barrier to protect the Chinese

from the Mongol hordes from the north; and the Ming tombs, where emperors were buried in underground marble palaces with their consorts and jewels. Sandwiched in between were visits to a kindergarden, a neighborhood committee, the homes of families in the hutongs, shopping at the Friendship Department Store, exploratory walks on the city streets, and banquet dinner featuring Peking duck.

From Beijing to Guangzhou, the 747 stayed above the clouds. I could only fantasize on what lay below. It was dark when I checked into my hotel. After a late dinner, I wandered out on the streets. Close by was a railroad station, jammed with people in the waiting rooms as well as outside in an immense square. Vendors were hawking food. Men, women, and children were squatting on the pavement cooking and eating, talking, or sleeping. I wondered where these people were going and why they needed to wait here through the night.

Next morning it was back to Hong Kong and then across the Pacific to San Francisco and home.

EXPANDING ETHICS

by Gianni Battimelli

It was the outstanding free-climbing problem of its time. Uncompromising in its relentlessness, the crack went straight up for four hundred feet in the middle of an overhanging, smooth, holdless wall. To be true, it had been climbed by means of direct aid by the infamous Warren Softing, who scornfully named it "In Wine Lies Truth, but no one considered his exploit as being more than a despicable farce. All the leading climbers of the country had vainly had a try at it. "Bit hard on the fingers," as Don Hawk declared after the first failure of his fulgid career.

It is thus not surprising that, when Dave Bird made the first ascent, a lot of excitement was aroused. "Country of Freedom," as Bird named the route, was hailed as the most aesthetically pure and technically difficult free climb ever done. Then the bombshell came. The word spread that John Short, who had repeatedly attempted the route, was claiming that Bird's climb could not be properly regard-

ed as a true first ascent. In a letter to Handhold, Short made his point clear. "Bird used a one-hundred-twenty foot rope. To climb the four hundred foot crack, he had to take three hanging belays. Using a normal one-hundred-fifty foot rope, would have necessitated only two. It is clear that one of his hanging belays has to be considered an aid point. The first free ascent is still to be accomplished."

The climbing world was shocked. No one, however, could doubt that Short's claims were founded on solid ethical ground. The authoritative British journal, Boulder, published an outraged letter by Harry Bearbar. "By making shorter pitches than necessary, and resting in slings on 'belays,' everyone can do what actually is 'an aid climb and call it a free climb. No such dirty trick should be tolerated."

Galvanized by the consensus surrounding his claims, Short proceeded to a new

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ETHICS (continued)

all-out attempt. He did the climb, but, unbelievably, was forced to take a third belay in slings a few feet below the top. It turned out that someone had cut twenty feet out of his brand new one-hundred-fifty foot rope. Rumor had it that the perpetrator of the crime was Jim Bridbad, Bird's second, who had stood surprisingly silent during the previous controversy. Be that as it may, everyone blamed the incident, but Short was not credited with the first free ascent. He remarked that his runouts had been longer than Bird's, but found no audience. He also declared that he had considered the possibility of moving together with his second in order to avoid the third belay, but estimated this to be too risky and utterly unjustifiable. He should not have said that. Immediately some of the younger hot climbers started to refer to Short as "chicken."

Controversy raged on. In the meantime, the crack was climbed by Pit Dement, solo, at night, and upside down, a remarkable feat indeed. Dement, a sixteen-year old Elvis Presley fan, aptly named the route "Are You Lonesome Tonight," but his feat went completely unnoticed due to the fury of the debate which was sweeping the climbing community.

Everyone felt that a fundamental ethical dilemma was at stake, revolving around the puzzling question: When is a belay to be regarded as a legitimate belay? Answers tended to grow more and more radical, and it became clear that what could have been previously viewed as an obvious solution was no longer obvious at all. At the two-day symposium sponsored by Boulder on the problem (and on related ethical issues) traditionalist climbers remarked that, if belays in sling were regarded as aid, no free climbing would ever be possible. The younger clean climbers answered in all seriousness: No, if your ropes are long enough.

Since no climb of some interest was longer than three or four pitches, it was defined by general consensus the optimum rope length, allowing to re-climb all the routes in the new, no-belay-in-between style. Manufacturers started to produce and to sell at very expensive prices, the new four-hundred-fifty foot ropes which have become customary since, and are the

standard size nowadays. The ensuing rope drag problem, raising no excruciating ethical issues, caused no debate; it was brilliantly solved by the invention of such ingenious items as the self-popping nut (Designed to be automatically ejected from its placement when sufficient protection is placed above while maintaining bombproof safety for the leader.); the self-adhesive, mini-tapisroulant (To be inserted between rope and rock at the points of maximum friction; rope runs softly and is not damaged by abrasion.); the lubricating oil can, together with its complement for the second, the desiccating powder bag (unless the second is jumaring, in which case the oil will dry in a few hours, thus allowing following parties to enjoy the route in its natural condition); and all the other gadgets you are well familiar with.

A new, exciting era for climbing was born. As Tom Freeze said at the Free Climbing Hardware and Software Exhibition, where one hundred and fourteen new pieces of equipment were on display, "Our ethical awareness is expanding. It is our duty to preserve climbing from the threat of technology."

Meeting ReportMarch 11

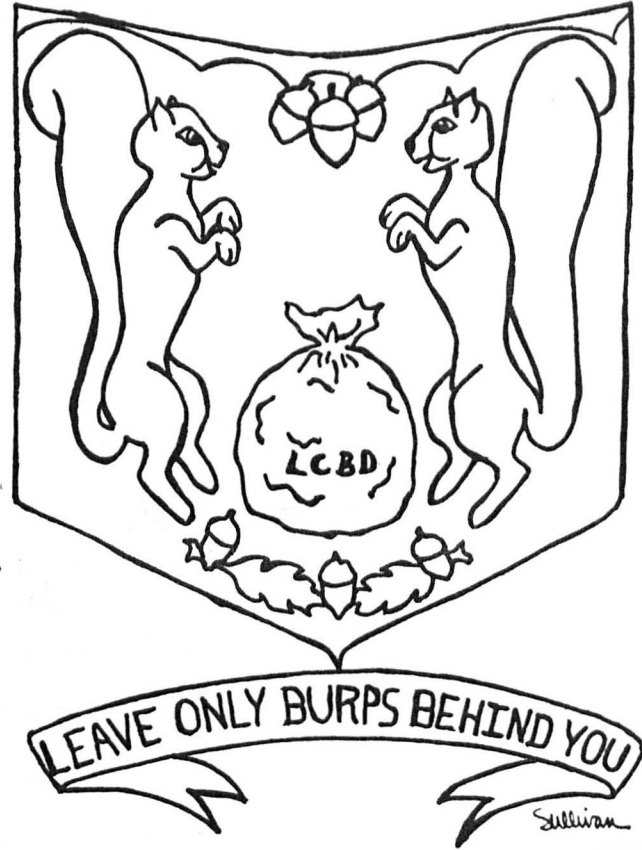
James Eakin conducted the brief business meeting during which Nelson House, the annual picnic, and Bull Run were discussed. Pete Grant volunteered to arrange for beer and a canoe for the MS picnic and climbing on Herzog Island. Jeff Brown reported on his negotiations with Virginia Outdoors Foundation: we will climb at Bull Run April 12. The Vining work trip that was scheduled that weekend is moved to mid-May. Entertainment was the film of Maurice Herzog's climb of Annapurna.

MS PICNIC

Our annual picnic is scheduled for May 10 at the Carderock Pavilion. We plan to climb in the gorge until eating and beer drinking begin, about 4pm. The format is pot luck and a keg of beer. We want everyone to come. If you need a ride call Martha or Lin.

Conservation Report

UP ROPE is pleased to report the formation of a new environmental action group, the League of Conservation Beer Drinkers. The League is a quasi-organizational association that promotes the ecological consumption of beer. Its activities range from collecting beer cans left in the woods by insouciant boozers (You can build a real thirst collecting beer cans.) to developing a complex statistical model to monitor ecological behavior among drinkers of various brands. Preliminary data from Bull Run Mountain indicate that Budweiser is the overwhelming favorite among outdoors people who litter. Participation by concerned drinkers is welcome. Call Dr. Charlie (Wire) Dorian, Statistical Consultant, or Lin Murphy, esq., Chairwoman of the Bar.



Hanging Around

SENECA ROCKS - February 21, 22

Trusting the local weather forecasts, the four of us drove through Friday's evening's rain expecting it to clear by midnight. Although the torrents subsided somewhat, the soaking had turned the upper Nelson Gap Road into a quagmire. We were forced to ditch the car and hike the last 100 yards to the house.

After a leisurely breakfast at the house (intended to avoid an even more leisurely breakfast at the Valley View) we dropped in the Visitor Center to wait for the weather to improve. There we were treated to private showings of the films Climb and Solo and a well-arranged slide presentation about the area around Seneca.

By noon Gianni, Charlie and I chose to climb. James went on a reconnaissance hike of Nelson Rocks. We three each led a pitch over new terrain (for us) and enjoyed some sun, showers, and wind.

Sunday's weather worsened. At Charlie's suggestion we headed toward the highest peak in Maryland, Backbone

Mountain (3360ft). Along the way, the weather greatly improved. The moist air from the southeast was blocked by the Spruce Mountain-Cabin Mountain barrier. We detoured to Blackwater Falls State Park.

There we found some worthwhile cliffs on the canyon's north rim. We picked a good route, rappelled down and top roped back up. James noticed an old piton along the way. This route presented different challenges to each of us, but we all agreed the crux was surmounting the lip of the cliff. The area is worth a return visit, especially when the weather repeats this unusual condition.

On the way home we still had time to bag Maryland's uninspiring highpoint. For those who question our motives for such folly, this climb was not without challenge. We had to search for the unmarked trailhead; avoid many false turns; bushwhack through brush and logged-over hillsides; cross patches of knee-deep snow (in sneakers); and correctly orient ourselves to arrive at the correct ridge crest marked by a metal plaque.

(continued)

Hanging Around

Climbers were James Eakin,
Gianni Battimelli, Charlie Dorian and
Jeff Brown

group included climbers of a wide range of ability, allowing most ample inspiration for later-season climbs. In addition to Stan Halpin's training group, the participants were Gianni Battimelli, Vivian Mendenhall, Art Karp, Marcy Logan, Al Rosen, Mike Adams, Bill Heironymus, James Eakin, Don Benson, Ken Hood, Bryan Boyd, Parker Hill, Art Powell, Patricia Arcangeli, Joe Farness, Gary Roan, and Jeff Grove. After beer and chili at Trav's, we retreated to nurse our aches and pains and look forward to next week.

GREAT FALLS, VA. - March 15

After a cold and blustery Saturday, the promise of spring was again evident on Sunday. The local climbers were receptive and turned out in force, filling the cliffs of the Gorge close to capacity. (If this happened more often, perhaps tired old Carderock would be in better shape.) The PATC

Jeff Grove

Climber's Calendar

April 4, 5	Nelson House work trip	James Eakin(598-6047)
8	MS meeting - 8pm PATC Hd	Arnold Wexler's China tour slides
12	Bull Run Mountain	Jeff Brown(232-1548)
18, 19	Shawangunks, NY	Sallie Greenwood(533-8412)
May 5,6, or 7	Arlene Blum: Annapurna and Brigupanth	TBA (Call Andy Kauffman, Sallie, or Lin.)
9	Potomac Gorge	Lin Murphy(533-8412)
10	***MS PICNIC***	Carderock Pavilion
13	MS meeting - 8pm PATC Hd	Art Karp's Minya Konka trek slides
16, 17	Vining work trip & climb	Lin Murphy

For information on trips call the leader or James Eakin(598-6047).

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