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LOW LANDS MOUNTAINEERING

If the title raises the expectation that you might combine your next visit to tulips and canals with a stay at a Dutch climbing area, I have to disappoint you. Even the abundant ice that covers the country most winters has not a right angle to be of interest for the mountaineer. For once, myth and reality meet: all indeed is flat in the Netherlands.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the number of climbers in the Netherlands is small. Traditionally, the climbing community consisted of the relatively small group that combined sportiveness with the wealth and leisure time needed for a trip to the Alps. Things are changing, however, not in the least because of the extensive coverage by the media of Dutch expeditions to Annapurna, Nanga Parbat and, next year, Mount Everest.

Climbing has become more accessible too, for the career of a Dutch climber may now start closer to home, in the romantic setting of the Meuse Valley. Overlooking the Versailles-style gardens of the Baron the Freyr, the rock formations near Dinant (Belgium) serve as the breeding ground for more recent generations of Dutch climbers.

Climbing in this region started in the 19th century: early in this century

it was the favorite pasttime of Prince Albert, king-to-be of all Belgians.

After the strain and excitement of your first day of climbing, when you are glowing with joy and the cheap wine that leaves circles of artificial colouring in your mug, do not give in to drowsiness, but make sure that one of your more experienced company pulls you away from the campfire and brings you to the central cafe in nearby Falmignoul. There on a late Saturday evening, the "patron", if you have the luck to find him in a communicative mood, might trust to you the story of young Prince Albert. The Prince was an enthusiastic innovator and surprisingly much more popular with the people than he was with his courtiers. A deadly climbing accident in the Freyr region prevented the realization of his plans; he never succeeded to the throne. Sixty years later, not everybody -- at least not the patron, has been persuaded that the mysterious accident that befell the Prince was not in some way provoked by his enemies.

Fortunately, it is not often anymore that the rocks at Freyr take such a heavy toll; the routes are secured by an officially placed, maintained, and checked system of pitons. The using of nuts (and what is more important, the esthetical considerations that gave rise

[continued on page 6]