



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

Vol 45 no.1

March 1991

### FILM FESTIVAL APPROACHES...

by Jeffrey Levy

Coming March 24, 1991... from GWU's Lisner Auditorium... it's the Fourth Annual Washington, DC Mountain Film Festival, brought to you by the Mountaineering Section of the PATC!

Yes, folks, it's that time of year again. As the cold, harsh winter winds blow (okay, so it's been 60 degrees lately), the festival crew is hard at work.

For those of you who haven't heard, the festival has doubled in length.

This year's show will be the biggest and best yet (do I sound like a used car salesman?) So far, we have lined up over six hours of film from across the globe, depicting everything from rock dance to a Pakistani porter's life on Gasherbrum II.

In addition, this year heralds the return of...The Reception (much cheering and general pandemonium). Between shows, all ticketholders are welcome to stand around and talk to each other while eating and drinking. Soft drinks are gratis, but a cash bar is available for those who wish to view the films slightly out of focus.

Last fall, PATC/MS members

voted to donate 50 percent of our profits to the Access Fund. In addition, we will again hold an auction of donated equipment on the Fund's behalf. The Fund promotes climbing in general and works to protect access to climbing areas in particular. Ask Dusty Wissmath, our esteemed Chairman, or Stuart Pregnall, our esteemed baby-belay, for details.

Ah, you say, but how much will this cost me? Well, costs have risen, although ticket prices have not for the past three years. So, a modest increase is necessary to \$45 for one show. No, no, just kidding! For only \$11 for one show, or \$15 for both, you get the films, the reception, the auction, and the prize behind door number 3! But wait, there's more! You will also have the opportunity to purchase a Film Festival T-shirt (a John Yanson/Michael Mergi original)!

Seriously, folks, this is your film festival. We've moved the show to a Sunday to accommodate all those poor souls who can't find parking at 6:30 on a Thursday night. We're stretching to two shows for a total of six hours of film (yes, the shows will be completely different), so there's more to see. We've even dug up a couple of cartoons. The

afternoon program will be from 1:30 pm - 5:00 pm, the reception from 5:00 pm - 6:30 pm, and the evening program from 6:30 pm - 10:00 pm. The auction is scheduled to start at 5:45 pm. So come on down and enjoy the biggest Mountain Film Festival on the East Coast! We'll keep the light on for ya!

Tickets can be purchased at PATC headquarters, all EMS stores and both REI locations. For further information on the Festival, call (703) 218-2560.

### THE FILM FESTIVAL NEEDS YOU!

The Film Festival committee needs a few good men and women to volunteer their skills and energy to the cause. About 25 people are needed to take tickets, sell T-shirts, hand out programs, set up the buffet, and perform other miscellaneous skill-intensive tasks. You can volunteer to work one or both shows. If you can help out, please call Barbara Kern as soon as possible at - 301-459-0312 (H) or 301-249-7077 (O).

## THE 14 GREATEST MYTHS IN CLIMBING

by Tom Isaacson

The number 14 holds a special place in our sport. The top standard in rock climbing is now 5.14; the zenith of mountaineering is the ascent of the 14 peaks above 8,000 meters; and hikers attach particular significance to ascents of all the 14 thousand-footers.

After scouring the lore of the climbing world, I have found exactly 14 myths in need of debunking. Just as conquering the "fourteens" will win you admiration in the world of rock-climbers, mountaineers and hikers, mastering these 14 myths and eradicating them forever from your thoughts and words will gain you praise and respect among the climbing literati.

**Myth #14:** "A carabiner should be retired if it drops to the ground from more than five feet up." My first real climbing partner was adamant about this. I occasionally hear other people repeat this myth, in various forms. Of course, you're always well advised to play it safe when you're not sure about the integrity of your gear. But, as a metallurgist explained to me, the aluminum alloys used in carabiners do not suffer from hidden stress fractures, as do other metals. In other words, if it looks O.K., it probably is O.K. By contrast, ropes have been shown to deteriorate very quickly, without significant visible signs of damage. There is no excuse (not even monetary) for climbing on some of the decade-old thread heaps that some club members try to pass off as a rope.

**Myth #13:** "Traditional climbing ethics help preserve the

rock." This is true only if you consider friends and nuts as traditional gear, which they are not. The loudest adherents to tradition climbed with pitons. The hammer and blade are the only climbing protection that have been in use long enough to become traditional. If you want to see the lovely effects of repeated piton use, take a look at Lost Arrow next time you visit Great Falls, or check out Serenity Crack at Yosemite.

**Myth #12:** "Rock climbing is a good way to get away from the pressures of daily life and spend some quiet, contemplative moments relaxing with friends, enjoying the outdoors and engaging in significant personal growth and discovery." Climbing is actually an intensely competitive, dangerous activity that attracts people with too much spare time and a fairly serious set of emotional and social adjustment problems including kleptomania, homophobia, suicidalism, and lycra envy. Just kidding, really. The rest of the world would find it quite normal that one climber would chop another climber's bolts because those bolts were placed in a manner that would ensure that they are safe and properly located (that is, placed on rappel). Most sports have rules to make the sport safer. Climbing rules make the sport more dangerous. Only a climber would consider it unethical to climb safely.

**Myth #11:** "Climbing was more fun in the good old days." I'm not exactly an old-timer, but I've climbed in E.B.s, I've camped on Roy Gap Road, I've held a leader fall with a hip belay on goldline rope, I've driven to the New River Gorge

on Route 60, and I've gone lead climbing using only pitons. Anyone who refers to the "good old days" has been spending too much time at high altitude.

**Myth #10:** "Opposing pieces make for good protection." This is a fairly technical myth based upon some misinformation spread by old "how-to-climb" books. While two pieces placed in opposition are better than nothing, this is still protection of last resort. If the pieces are tightly opposed, the system is extremely weak and subject to maximum force loads in otherwise minor falls. If the pieces are loosely opposed, either one may fall out (since it is designed to hold only a sideways pull), rendering the other piece virtually useless. If you fall directly onto pieces that are horizontally opposed, you may suffer an interesting injury. If you don't understand any of this, don't worry, just clip the bolts and go.

**Myth #9:** "Credit for a first ascent goes only to climbers who actually climbed the route." Way false. I admit this is a personal, petty complaint and I should know better. Nonetheless, at a certain climbing area (which I like), a certain climber (whom I respect) will give first ascent credit to anyone who helped take a saw or a wire brush to the flora near the route (even without doing the climb) while denying credit to someone who flashed the route before the first ascent party even completed its attempts. I told you it was petty. I feel terrible about this.

**Myth #8:** "Climbing is good exercise." If climbing is so healthful, why are we always nursing injuries?

**Myth #7:** "Western ratings, especially those in Yosemite, are inflated compared to Eastern ratings." You will hear this from people who haven't been there. There is a hint of truth in it, but believing it will get you into a great deal of trouble. After you've lead a dozen 5.9s at the New, go to Yosemite and try Reed's Direct (5.9). If your success on Terminus (5.10a) or Muckraker (5.10c) at the New has left you feeling pretty cool, check out Outer Limits (5.10a), Wheat Thin (5.10b) or Lunatic Fringe (5.10c) at the Valley and you'll sing a different tune.

**Myth #6:** "The New River Gorge is five hours from Washington, D.C." None of Newton's laws will prevent you from getting there that quickly, but the laws of Virginia and West Virginia certainly will. Anyone who claims to reach the New in five hours from D.C. probably also has a serious problem with his car insurance premiums.

**Myth #5:** "Climbing attire is not important." Wrong. Billy Crystal's adage that "it's more important to look than to feel good" is especially appropriate here since it's almost impossible to feel good while climbing.

**Myth #4:** "Short climbers are at a disadvantage." Those of us who are of normal height have patiently and good-naturedly listened to this refrain for far too long with too little protest. For every tall climber's complaint, I've heard at least a dozen from short climbers. Well, I hate to take away your crutch, but the simple reality is that climbing probably favors short people and certainly does not handicap them. We all know there are a few reach problems out there.

But, generally speaking, the ideal height for a climber is to be just tall enough to reach the holds. Anything extra just adds weight and pushes your center of gravity farther from the cliff. Why do you think the best climbers are short? (The explanation of myth #12 will provide additional insight here.)

**Myth #3:** "A route's fixed protection should not be improved without the consent of the first ascent party." This myth was created and spread by guidebook authors who, not coincidentally, also tend to do lots of first ascents which they do not want to see repeated by lesser mortals. I have not violated this admonition but I question its basis. A rock climb is different from a work of art.

Painting eyebrows on the Mona Lisa will earn you the condemnation of artists everywhere. If you think you can do better, buy your own canvas and give it a try. The rock, however, belongs to everyone.

If the first ascenders did a climb in needlessly dangerous style, they have no right to insist that everyone else must follow their example. They don't "own" the rock. First ascenders often can get away with under-bolting a 5.9 either because they can climb 5.11 or because they practiced the route on a top rope. Such dubious considerations shouldn't prevent a future 5.9 climber from trying to flash the route in a safe manner.

**Myth #2:** "Climbing literature in general, and enlightened climbing editors in particular, have significantly added to our appreciation and enjoyment of the sport." Unfortunately, so few people believe this that it does not even qualify as a myth.

Speaking of climbing literature and its editors, the leading U.S. climbing magazine recently refused to publish one of the best climbing satires of the past few years, preferring instead to publish some drivel about Scott Franklin's penchant for hamburgers.

That, too, is a petty personal gripe, about which I am not the least bit ashamed.

**Myth #1:** "Rappelling is the most dangerous part of rock climbing." This is the granddaddy of all climbing myths. Nearly everyone repeats it. I've heard this talisman invoked so often that even I, the skeptic's skeptic, almost believed it. The book *Learning to Rock Climb* seems to be at least one of the proponents that has committed this myth to paper. There are many others who have helped create and spread this gospel. Well, guess what? It is totally untrue, not even close. Leading is the most dangerous part of rock climbing, but you knew that. Any statistical reference, such as *Accidents in North American Mountaineering* or the injury survey reported in *Yosemite Climbs*, will tell you that rappelling is not this sport's greatest danger. To be sure, you can clobber yourself on rappel, but when was the last time you backed off of a hard lead because you were nervous about the rappel from the top?

## GOT ANY PROGRAM IDEAS? PLEASE LET ME KNOW

by Paula Grant

As chairman of the program committee (a committee whose only member is the chairman), I am soliciting program ideas for our monthly meetings. If you have slides or another type of presentation that you would like to share with our members, please let me know. Or, if you would like me to contact someone you think would be an interesting speaker, again, please let me know.

My goal is to publish in the next issue of "Up Rope" a tentative schedule of programs for the next six months. I would like to list for each month who is presenting and a brief description of what they will present.

Some of the speakers we invite to visit us may need to stay overnight. If you have room and would enjoy hosting a "presenter," please let me know. This will help to cut the costs we incur for speakers who charge for their performances.

I welcome your program comments and suggestions. My telephone number is (703) 204-4575. If I'm not there when you call, please leave a message and I'll call you back as soon as I can.

Here are the programs we can look forward to during our March and April meetings:

On March 13, Chris Warner, who runs Earth Treks, a trekking company based in Ellicott City, will present a slide show on two light-weight expeditions to the Himalayas; one is an epic ascent of the Southeast ridge of Shivling; the other, a winter alpine-style ascent of the new route on the West face of Ama Dablam.

On April 11, Eric Horst, who has prepared training programs

for many of our members, will give a presentation entitled "12 Steps to 5.12." Eric is sponsored by the makers of PowerBars, and he said he just might bring some for us to munch on while we listen to his talk.

## ROCKING WACKO

by Paula Grant

ROCK CLIMBING: a year ago, I had never heard of it. Carter Mackley introduced me to the sport last May when he suggested I might find REI's Springstone competition interesting. I went; I was smitten. I bought rock climbing shoes that day; rope that week. But I paid for the shoes and rope not knowing about REAL ROCKS; I thought rock climbing was done on artificial walls. That, I learned fast, was not all I didn't know. This is about how I blundered into top roping.

My first top-roping experience happened about two weeks after the REI competition. I met Carter and Michelle Mecham in the parking lot at Great Falls with shoes I had never worn, a rope I had not yet uncoiled, and no harness at all. I was eager, but ignorant. The walk-in, it seemed to me that day, was an everlasting trek through heavily forested territory, and the 20 pounds I was carrying when we started felt like 200 by the time we unloaded.

Carter set up the ropes, explaining as he did the name of the knot he was using, how to tie it, and other points I should know. All I remember from that "lesson" was the confusion and awe I experienced as I saw him work hocus-pocus on my rope and drop it out of sight.

Down below, I was amazed at

how many ropes were strung over the cliff, and I stepped on each as I approached our setup. Carter lent me a harness and showed me how to put it on. Then, with few words about how to do it, he told me to climb. I did. Unable to discern the "route" he had pointed out to follow, my only plan was to get to the top. And not knowing that rock climbing can be performed with skill, technique, and beautiful movements, I plastered my body to the rock, grabbed the only two bucket handholds I could find, and searched for where to put my feet. This was the "technique" I used to slither (proudly, happily, and finally) to the top.

Looking back on the experience, I should have been less proud. Each foot of rock I scaled required 20 to 30 horrendous looking hand and foot movements. With face and chest pressed against the cliff, I searched for holds with hands that patted and grabbed the entire circumference of rock within the reach of my flailing arms. My legs disassociated themselves from the experience about three feet off the ground: they started jerking up and down with a rhythm and energy that I had never before experienced. Aghast at what they were doing (i.e., spastic and aberrational movements curiously unattractive for legs), I found it hard to use my feet.

If my shortcomings so evident from this experience were only physical, I might deserve to feel proud to have reached the top. But my manners, humanity, and spiritual stability were also called into question. As my body flailed, jerked, and slithered in its ascent, I cursed with a profanity even I found shocking. It was as if my character had

joined my legs in disassociating itself from the experience. So I cursed the mother who bore me and the God that made her do it; I cursed those in my past and those in my (doubtful) future; I cursed myself, the world, the universe; in sum, I cursed whatever I could in four-letter words-all, except Carter. Carter was spared because I needed him to tell me how to get down.

"Let go of the rock, lean back, and use your feet to push yourself away from the cliff as I let you down." I think that's what he said, but I can't be sure since I stopped listening after "let go of the rock." That was the last thing I intended to do, especially from that height. So when he started lowering me, I was using the same "technique" I had used to ascend: face and chest plastered against the rock while looking for handholds and somewhere to place my feet. I arrived back on the ground with skin scraped and clothes torn. The pride I felt when I reached the top was consumed by the overwhelming gratitude I felt when my feet hit dirt.

I learned much that day; unfortunately most of it wasn't properly assimilated. For instance, in discussing the exhilaration of the experience with a colleague at work, he asked me how high I had climbed. "One pitch, probably about 500 feet," I replied.

## NEW OFFICERS

At the Mountaineering Section's monthly meeting in January, members elected a new slate of officers for 1991. They are as follows:

Chairman: Dusty Wissmath  
Vice chairman: Jeff Kramer  
Secretary: Peter Hsi  
Treasurer: Ron Sitrin

The club thanks the outgoing officers for the time and energy they devoted to the club last year.

## SPRINGSTONE

Sad news for sport climbers: there will be no Springstone contest in 1991. Rumor has it that REI, which has sponsored the event for the past two years, does not have the funds this year to uphold the fledgling tradition.

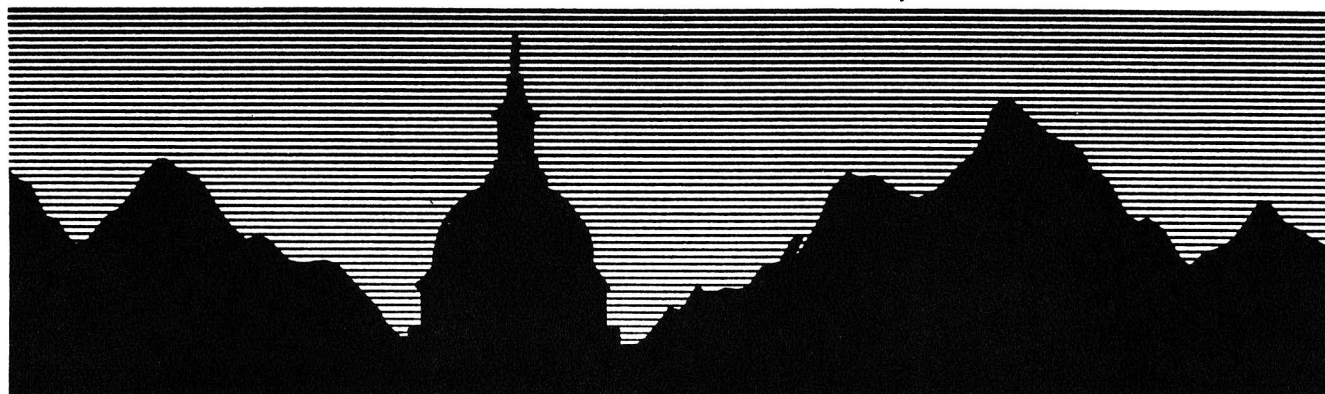
## HARRER

The Official Year of Tibet committee will hold a reception on Monday, April 15, at 7:00 p.m., to honor Heinrich Harrer, author of *Seven Years in Tibet*. Anyone interested in attending or helping to advertise the event should call Anne Baron at 202-223-4001 (W) or 703-680-5561 (H). A \$10 donation is being asked for attendance. This is a unique opportunity to meet Heinrich Harrer, Austrian mountaineer, adventurer and author, who became the first Western tutor and confidant of the Dalai Lama during the 1940s.

Harrer will be giving a lecture at the Smithsonian the following day as part of a series, but tickets for this single event are not available.

The reception will be held at the Sumner School, at 1207 17th Street.

# THE <sup>4<sup>th</sup></sup> ANNUAL <sup>1991</sup> WASHINGTON, DC



## MOUNTAIN FILM FESTIVAL

**Sunday, March 24, 1991**

**Lisner Auditorium The George Washington University**

21st and H Streets, NW, Washington, DC (3 blocks SE of the Foggy Bottom Metro station)

**Expanded to 6 hours of international films in two presentations,  
focusing on mountaineering, rock climbing, expeditions,  
and other mountain sports.**

**Our special guest, Jean-Claude Legros, will present the world premiere of  
"Free K2".**

### Schedule

- Afternoon Presentation 1:30 - 5:00 pm
- Reception\*/Auction 5:00 - 6:30 pm
- Evening Presentation 6:30 - 10:00 pm

Live Auction during the reception to benefit the Access Fund, which maintains access to climbing and outdoor recreation areas. Sponsors have generously donated clothing, climbing equipment and camping equipment.

### Tickets

- Afternoon or Evening Presentation \$11.00
- Both Presentations \$15.00

- Tickets available at:

PATC Headquarters, 1718 N St, NW  
REI, Bailey's Crossroads & College Park  
EMS, Gaithersburg, Alexandria, Towson,  
& Tyson's Corner

At the door, day of the festival

- Discounts for students & senior citizens

\* Reception is open to all ticket-holders and includes refreshments and cash bar. Several restaurants are within walking distance for those attending both presentations.

### **Sponsors** (partial list)

Black Diamond Equipment  
Cascade Designs  
Climbing Magazine  
Eastern Mountain Sports (EMS)  
George Washington University  
Hudson Trail Outfitters  
Misty Mountain Threadworks

Patagonia, Inc.  
Petzl Equipment  
Recreational Equipment, Inc. (REI)  
Rock & Ice Magazine  
Summit Magazine  
The Trail House  
Vertical Club

## MOUNTAINEERING SECTION

Potomac Appalachian Trail Club,  
1718 N Street N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036

## CLIMBERS' CALENDER

Date	Area or event	Contact	Phone	Place
March 2-3*	Lake Placid (Ice)	Anne Baron	202-223-4001	TBA
March 10	Bulges (Great Falls, MD)	John Yanson	202-667-4334	TBA
March 16	Great Falls, VA	Dusty Wissmath	301-585-7610	GF
March 17	Carderock	Jeff Kramer	703-532-3247	CD
March 23	Crescent Rocks	Matt Morley	703-533-7221	TC
March 24	4th ANNUAL MOUNTAIN FILM FESTIVAL			
		Jeffrey Levy	703-527-8331	
March 30	Great Falls, VA	Ron Sitrin	202-244-3197	GF
April 6	Great Falls, VA	John Yanson	202-667-4334	GF
April 7	Carderock	Jeffrey Levy	703-527-8331	CD
April 13	Great Falls, VA	Anne Baron	202-223-4001	GF
April 14	Annapolis Rocks, MD	Tim Hood	703-830-3919	RR
April 21	Great Falls, VA	Dusty Wissmath	301-585-7610	GF
April 27	Cow Hoof	Don Holtzer	301-656-4076	TBA
April 28	Rock State Park	Eric Wright	301-951-0840	TBA
May 4-5*	Seneca	Jeffrey Levy	703-527-8331	TBA
May 11**	Great Falls, VA	Dusty Wissmath	301-585-7610	GF
May 12**	Bull Run	John Yanson	202-667-4334	AO
May 18**	TBA	Michael Mergi	703-682-2649	TBA
May 19**	Sugarloaf	Jeanette Helfrich	301-585-9119	RR
May 25-27*	Gunks	Doug Craun	703-323-5256	TBA
June 1	Great Falls, VA	Don Holtzer	301-656-4076	GF
June 2	Sugarloaf	Jeff Kramer	703-532-3247	TBA
June 8-9*	Seneca	Matt Morley	703-533-7221	TBA

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\* **These trips are to lead climbing areas.** Please arrange for your own partners. The trip leaders can help with arranging rides and other logistics.

\*\* These trips will double as lead training sessions. For information, call Michael Mergi at 703-682-2649.

Note: Please call trip leaders in mid-week to make arrangements and contingency plans. In the absence of published trip leaders, call John Yanson ( 202-667-4334 ), Jeffrey Levy ( 202-527-8331 ), or Matt Morley ( 703-533-7221 ). If you have questions about scheduled or unscheduled events, call Matt Morley.

**\*\*MEETING PLACES FOR PATC/ MS TRIPS AND ACTIVITIES**

**TBA = To Be Announced**

**RCC= Rockville Community Center**, recreation building. By car, take I-270 north to exit 6A. Take Rt. 28 east ( W. Montgomery Rd.) for 10 lights ( don't miss the left turn off Viers Mill Rd.). Turn right onto Baltimore Edmonston Drive (an old mansion on the hill ). Go up the hill, keeping the mansion on your right, then down the hill to the recreation building on your left. Alternatively, take the Red Line to the Rockville Metro Station, then walk east on Viers Mill Rd. to Edmonston Dr. ( a 25 minute walk ).

**TC= Tysons Corner, Hardee's Restaurant and Central Fidelity BankParking Lot**, 8111 Leesburg Pike, Vienna, VA. **DIR:** Exit I-495 at Rt. 7 W. ( Tysons Corners ) ; L. at second light.

**CD= Carderock Park**, Potomac, MD. **DIR:** Exit I-495 at exit 41 ( Carderock exit ) ; W,. on G-W Parkway about 1/2 mile; exit R. at Carderock exit ; L. across parkway ; R. at stop sign to last ( third ) parking lot..

**HQ= Headquarters of PATC/MS**, 1718 N Street, N.W. , Washington, D.C. **DIR:** 1 block east on Conn. Ave. near DuPont Circle Metro Stop ( Red Line ).



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