



FOUNDED BY
JAN AND HERB CONN

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

1916 Sunderland Place N. W. Washington 6, D. C.

Volume XVIII Number 4

Page 1

April 1963

COMING EVENTS

- April 7 Carderock, Md.
14 Echo Cliffs, Va.
20 Deadline for Up Rope
20, 21 Old Rag Mountain weekend trip. Camping at either shelter. Contact Ed Goodman (Je 4-3853) or Ed Worrell (Ri 4-5114).
24 April Meeting--see notice below.
28 Wolf Rock, Thurmont, Md.
May 5 Carderock, Md.

APRIL MEETING--WEDNESDAY, APRIL 24, 8:00 P.M.

A Meenehan's Eye View of Switzerland and Italy

Pictures by John Meenehan, meeting at Ted and Kay Schad's, 4138 26th Road North, Arlington 7, Va. Phone: 527-5650. Slides will start early--be prompt!

Directions: Key Bridge to Virginia--take right lane. At end of bridge take sharp immediate right onto George Washington Memorial Parkway. Use left lane of parkway. In 1/2 mile--more or less--take left lane at sign reading "To Lee Highway." (This is Spout Run Parkway.) Use right lane. Take Lorcom Lane to Nellie Custis Drive. (Watch for church steeple--Nellie Custis is directly in front of Cheerydale Methodist Church.) Go right on Nellie Custis. Turn right on Military Road. Go several blocks to 26th Road which is on left only. Turn left--4136 is less than one block on left side, has white picket fence on porch. House is exactly 2.5 mi. from Key Bridge.

EDITORIAL

A park is defined as a tract of land set aside by the government for the benefit of the public. To some of us this means maintaining this land in its natural condition. We have learned to use our park land without disturbing this natural condition so the next to come will find it fresh and unspoiled.

There are others who find a different meaning in the words "benefit of the public". Since this land is not developed and is already public property it is "cheap". A "cheap" place to build a highway or parking lot. The highway is called a "parkway", but by either name the result is the same. The serenity of the park is shattered by the agitated rush of high tension city traffic. To honor George Washington we have a memorial parkway on both sides of the Potomac. How long will it be before we need a new reminder of his greatness? Will it take the form of a third memorial parkway right up the center of the river, so the public can benefit by roaring thru the Potomac Gorge at 50 miles an hour?

Our aim is not to start a futile crusade but we do hope to keep our readers informed. To this end the Conservation Committee of the P.A.T.C. has offered to keep UPROPE aware of proposed developments affecting the parks and areas we are interested in. Watch for Conservation Notes in coming editions.

Fall Out Shelters

We have been told that the office of Civil Defense is classing some caves in West Virginia as Fall Out Shelters. Schoolhouse cave and stratosphere Baloon cave are reported to be stocked with food and other supplies for this purpose.

Letters to UPROPE

The clowning and loud and unruly behaviour exhibited by this group in restaurants and other public establishments has ceased to be amusing and now is objectionable and sometimes obnoxious.

The managements of "Ho-Jo's" and other establishments do not need our business enough to allow us to offend their other customers.

We are primarily an adult group and it's time we began to act like adults.

If we don't shape up, we may find ourselves barred from places where we have always been welcome.

Chuck Wettling

BELAYING POLICY AND PRACTICES

Ed Worrell, Chairman

In answer to the questions in last month's editorial I submit the following answers:

1. A near accident is sufficient to get a belaying system started.
2. A check-out system is necessary.
3. The voluntary individual instruction system has not proved adequate to produce sound belayers.
4. A single qualified instructor is enough to pass on the ability of a new belayer, but more are desirable. Means must be provided for disseminating this approval.
5. Obviously I have some opinions.

The previous belaying system that we used was inadequate in several ways. It produced from scratch less than 5 certified belayers. One can also note that some of the "new" certified belayers immediately became qualified instructors (the day of certification)! In its application the system presented an unfriendly face to newcomers and discouraged or repulsed them. Its application had become onerous to the instructors at the time I took office as chairman.

The reactivation of Oscar has been delayed pending the outcome of a half-hearted search for a new location. The permanent location of Oscar at Carderock is undesirable with the expected nearby picnic area.

I propose to set up Oscar at Carderock on a temporary basis. Temporary rigging can be established which will not involve putting spikes or pitons in a tree, or damaging the tree by the falling Oscar.

I propose to use a block and tackle for hoisting Oscar. This has several advantages. One, we can use the block and tackle at other locations for piton testing. Two, belay practice will be more effective since Oscar can be maintained in the hoisted position until the opportune dropping time rather than being forced to drop because the maximum desired altitude was reached. Three, the objectionable noise, smoke, oil, and backpacking of the motor and capstan would be eliminated. Finally and most important, manual hoisting encourages group spirit, and the trainees are encouraged (if not forced) to pay attention to belaying practice rather than ignoring it before and after turns. The decrease in belaying practice spirit has been notable since the motor hoist arrived. There will be slightly fewer belays with the manual hoist, but they will be more purposeful and of higher quality.

Mike Nicholson is investigating the belaying boom proposed by Ron Bell. This device could be used for belaying practice at several cliffs (which need not be overhanging). This would allow convenient instruction in dynamic belaying from an upper position or an exposed position. This aspect has been neglected for several years as it was inconvenient and dangerous in the tree.

The belaying practice with Oscar has become unrealistic. The large steel "carabiner" has cut rope wear, but it eliminated an important friction component from the system. The voluminous leather patch with padding has glazed the belaying ropes to a ridiculous smoothness and made them difficult to handle, and in addition the belayer does not get enough "feel" of the rope around his body. The glazing has also been accelerated by the tendency to use numerous long drops rather than shorter more instructive ones. I propose to use small steel carabiners to restore proper friction. A light weight canvas belayer's pad and jacket will be procured. (The jacket will prevent rope burns on the arms, which have been relatively frequent.)

I propose to use manilla rope for belaying. Even though it does not have nylon's elasticity the lack of glazing should make rope handling more realistic.

A useful refinement would be to use a light connection between Oscar and the belay rope such as string or Alpine cord to demonstrate that the belay was sufficiently gentle. A dynamometer would be better, but I do not know of one that is satisfactory for this application.

A list of qualified belayers should be made, kept up to date, and disseminated to newcomers.

All newcomers desiring it will be given belaying, rappeling, and climbing instruction. This is necessary to preserve our atmosphere of friendliness and informality and to not discourage potential climbers. Since some of these may climb on their own it is desirable that they get as much training as possible before leaving us. It should be emphasized that they should complete the training program.

Newcomers professing experience may be granted provisional belaying status if desirable. Such persons must be carefully observed to see that they follow safe belaying practices.

Half the climbing day, if necessary, should be reserved for belaying, rappeling, and climbing instruction. During this period the instructors will seek out appropriate beginners' climbs. This does not mean that beginners will not be allowed to climb during the climbing period but only that the climbs will not be matched to their abilities; they must take what is offered.

An information sheet for newcomers with appropriate basic information similar to the present one should be made up. Many of the present sheet's statements dealing with belaying should be removed to a belaying instruction sheet, while the new information sheet would have added climbing signals, qualified belayers list, knot tying instructions, and appropriate phone numbers.

It seems to be appropriate to establish three classes of belayers in accordance with our usual climbing practices.

1. Uprope belayer, provisional. This belayer may belay for any uprope position set up by an Uprope belayer. Oscar practice is desirable to give an appreciation of the consequences of failure to belay properly.
2. Uprope belayer. This belayer is qualified to set up uprope belay positions.
3. Lead belayer. This belayer is qualified to belay a leader. He should have facility to set up safe belay stances even in exposed positions, and have been exposed to (controlled) falls on practice lead climbs. Leaders should be lead belayers since some leaders have been observed to set up unsafe belay positions.

The first two classes are established to facilitate our ordinary Sunday Uprope climbing which can be bogged down for lack of belayers. We often have people who are fine Sunday climbers and who neither aspire to lead climbing nor have piton setting skills.

The belaying instruction systems has two objectives. First, it must impart belaying skills and knowledge. Second, and most important, it must check for and/or establish a sense of responsibility for the climber's life and limb, even though it may be at considerable risk to the belayer's well-being.

In accomplishing the first objective the previous program left much to be desired.

Multiple checkouts do little in determining the attainment of belaying skills and knowledge.

In accomplishing the second objective the program was not adequate. To accomplish this objective a multiple check on an informal basis is necessary. Examples of points considered would be attention paid to belaying, tendency to detrimental distraction or inattention, and maintaining control of the rope with the braking hand. (Under some circumstances such as a heavy climber with low friction there must be complete control with both hands.)

It is proposed that the following requirements will tend to accomplish the second objective. A belayer using an overhead belay through a carabiner must demonstrate maximum rope control with a fall that lifts him off his feet. A sitting belayer should maintain rope control while subjected to a fall or pull sufficient to dislodge him from his position. Both of these tests may be accomplished with live and/or dead loads. These tests accomplish their purpose most effectively if the belayer is surprised, and even more so if he appears to be in some danger.

Reading the BELAYING THE LEADER OMNIBUS and the THEORY OF BELAYING should be requirements rather than recommendations.

In summary, Oscar will be reactivated. Time will be reserved for instruction. Detailed belayer qualification requirements must be worked out.

LETTERS TO UP ROPE

"Informal voluntary" belaying instruction may produce a few expert and reliable belayers; however, I believe that there is a great probability that students will be taught poor technique or that an inherently unsafe belayer may be turned loose and unsuspecting climbers will entrust their lives to him.

Informal unregulated training allows anyone, experienced and reliable or new and untested, to instruct the student in the safeguarding of climbers' lives.

Only continuous good luck can guarantee that none but experienced climbers will volunteer to instruct neophyte belayers. I believe we have used our quota of luck. The next belaying mistake could easily result in a death.

The formal training and check-out system instituted by Harold Kramer guaranteed anyone climbing with our club that their belayer had received a thorough standard basic training and had been judged reliable and competent by more than one experienced teacher.

Admittedly the procedure was time-consuming and students were not qualified as rapidly as one would wish. However, it was the best system used in our club and is much preferable to the present unmonitored activity.

Chuck Wettling

Letters To UPROPE

In the interest of conscientiousness and camaraderie (and speaking as a climber and not the Chairman's wife) I propose the following:

1. That, in general, we reserve Sunday mornings for the serious teaching of belaying and climbing techniques to newcomers so that Sunday afternoons may be free for cloudwatching and less restricted climbing. Reason: to insure both that our newcomers get the best possible instruction and experience and that established members are neither overworked as instructors nor evasive of their responsibility to help as they once were helped.
2. That any belaying difficulties involving old or newer climbers be promptly reported to the Chairman so that he may take appropriate action without delay. (E.g. a friendly talk with the offender, further belaying instruction and practice, or in extreme cases, denying of belaying privileges.)
3. That we return to the Mountaineering Committee's original practice of electing new members after they have been climbing with us long enough for mutually satisfactory acquaintance, in order to solve the puzzle of just who is a member as well as to make membership a matter for a bit more pride.
4. That all matters of current policy are promptly published in UPROPE in order that no climber is suddenly confronted with unfamiliar procedures adopted when he was not personally present.
5. That the Chairman list and UPROPE publish names of those current or recently active climbers who are considered competent to lead such parties (as distinct from ropes) as they wish without first checking with the Chairman and who are considered satisfactory instructors. Lists of Past Chairman John Reed and Harold Kramer would be a good starting point.
6. That the Editor of UPROPE wheedle, cajole, or browbeat the Chairman into writing a periodic "Chairman's Column."
7. That each climber be a good housekeeper, and pick up and carry out a few items of trash from the trails and woods each time he comes out.

Blondie (Louise N. Worrell)

Everest Expedition Donation

I am pleased to announce that the PATC Council has authorized a \$200 donation to the American Mount Everest Expedition to be made through the Mountaineering Committee.

Ed Worrell, Chairman

From Our Foreign Correspondents

We're sorry to hear that Christl broke her leg skiing in Berchtesgarden recently.