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CLIMBING

No 140 October/November 1993

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Tales from the Gripped

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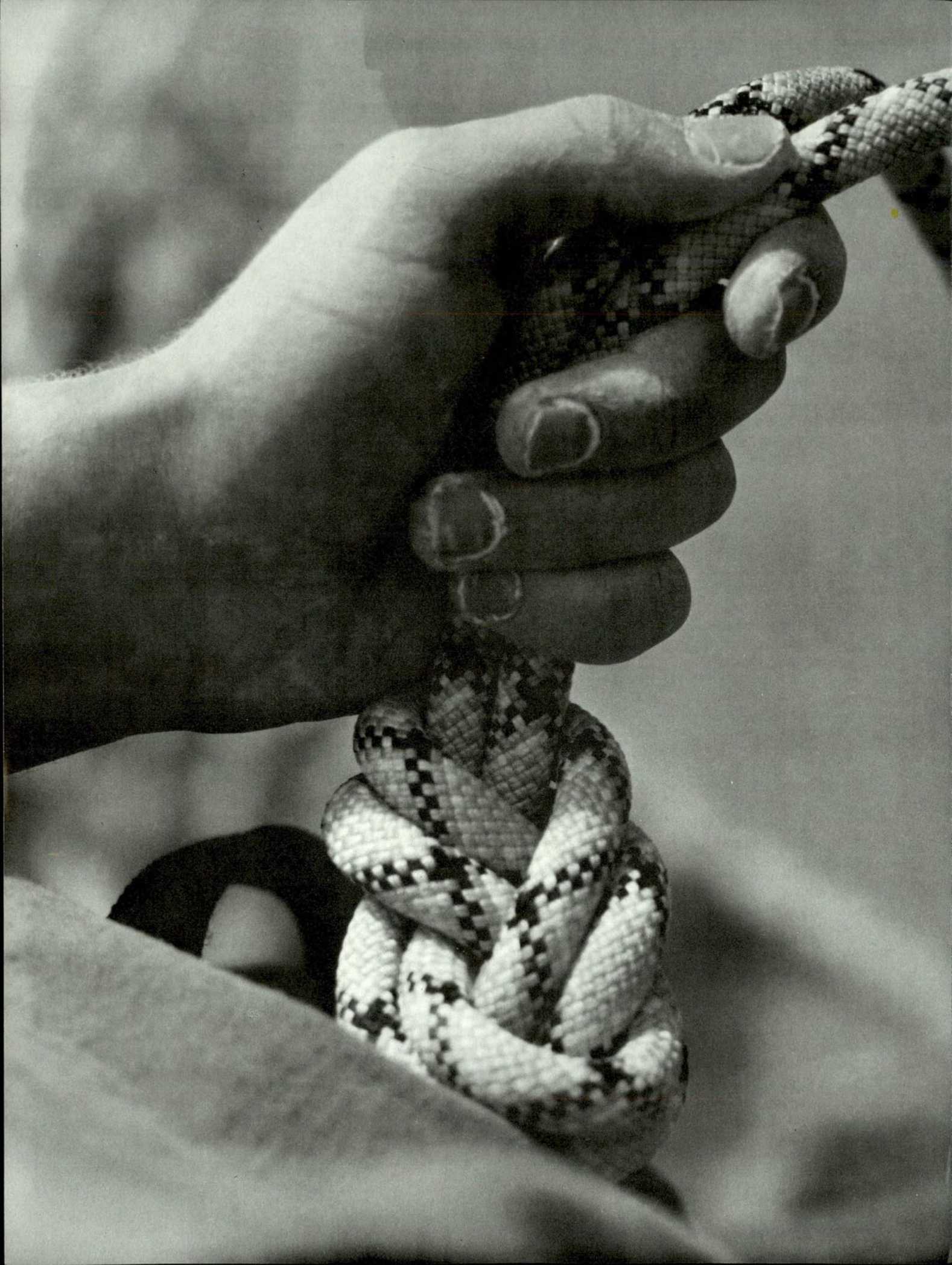


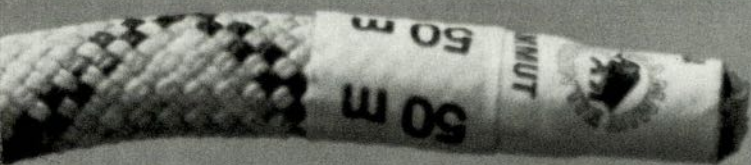
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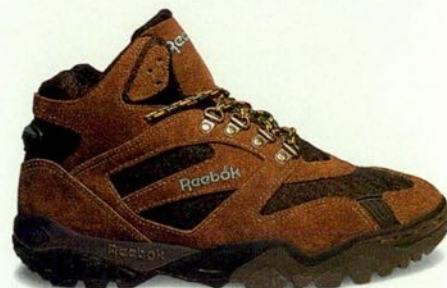
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CONTENTS



62 Trading Places

When Joe Simpson came crawling out of that crevasse after almost four days, he just wanted to live, or at least not die alone. He could never have dreamed of how his life would change.

by Alison Osius

70 Tales from the Gripped

The Mystery Towers of Utah, where the author suffers at the hands of his partners, the rock, and Utah's 3.2 beer laws.

by John Sherman

78 Excalibur: Freeing the Sword

A few good Valley boys head up to see what they can free on an El Cap wide-crack bonanza.

by Steve Schneider

86 Seneca

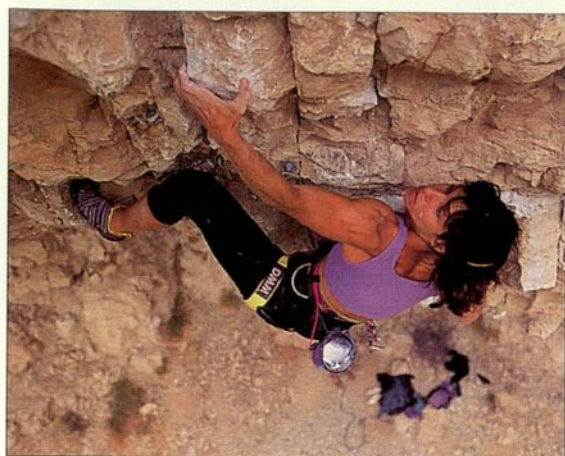
What's beautiful, hard as Gunks rock, and shaped like a big fin? You may not hear much about it, but the longtime Eastern favorite Seneca Rocks is still going strong.

by Tony Barnes

97 The Climbing Gallery

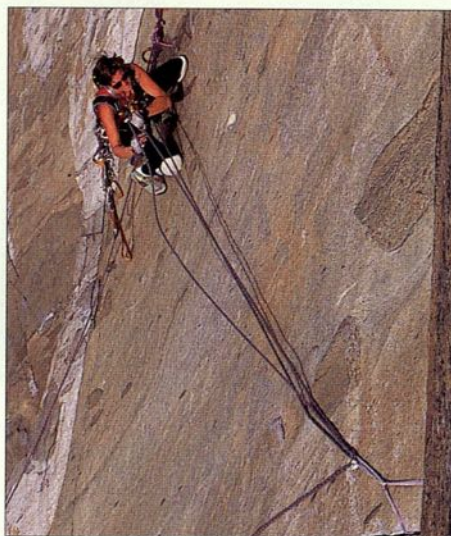
Drool on — the U.K., Devils Tower, Smith Rock, and more.

DEPARTMENTS



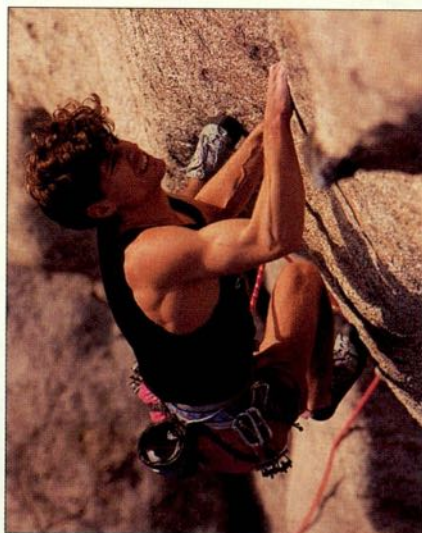
47 Hot Flashes

Slice of Life repeated by 16-year-old; Matt Samet on a roll; Hans Florine blitzes *The Nose*; Todd Skinner on the *Direct Northwest Face* of Half Dome; Bobbi Bensman (left, at Rifle, Colorado) still pulling hard.



125 Technique

Aid Climbing 101. Like setting the valves on a VW Bug, aid climbing has its quirks. This final installment on aid technique gives you the how-tos.
by Duane Raleigh



138 Training

The weakest link. Address your flaws to become a better climber, and learn about engrams, the mind-body connections. This is the first in a series of excerpts from a new book, *Performance Rock Climbing*.
by Dale Goddard

20 Basecamp

Austin limestone; what's up with the AMGA; El Chorro, Spain; possibilities in the Masherbrum area.

58 Postcards from the Edge

A new column on happenings and issues in our sport, by one of its most prolific participants and writers, Greg Child.

106 Equipment

Working for the clampdown. Rambo might climb a rope barehanded, but real climbers need ascenders. *Climbing's* picks and pans. Plus: Just Out, a new section that highlights new gear.
by Duane Raleigh

118 Expeditions

Trango Tango. How to travel to this ultimate alpine rock area.
by John Middendorf

168 Perspective

Godzilla goes climbing. What to expect when you're expecting.
by Alison Osius

Editorial	8
Letters	10
Off the Wall	14
Passages	44
Competitions	51
Events	56
Access	56
Quick Clips	104
Catalog Guide	112
Guides & Travel	148
Reviews	152
Suppliers	155
Marketplace	163

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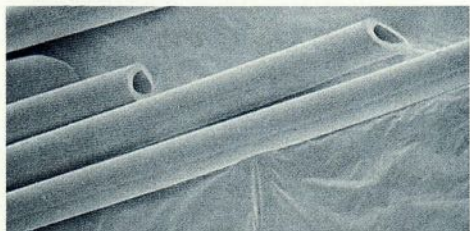
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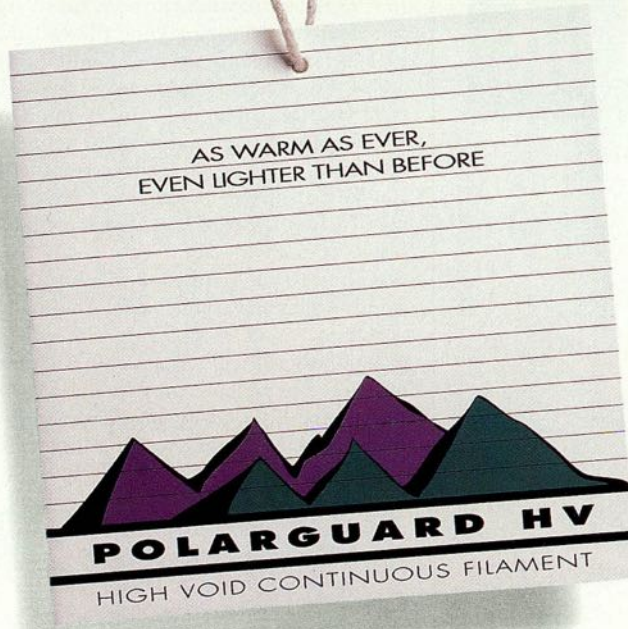
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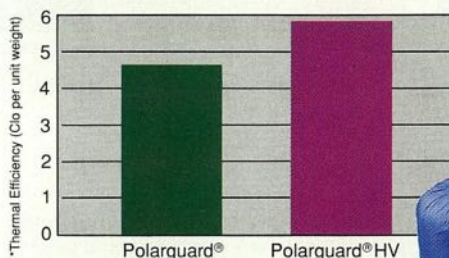
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BIG AL MURPHY IN PROVO CANYON, UTAH. PHOTO: JOHN LAPTAD

Familiar faces, familiar places

Most American climbers are at least vaguely acquainted with Joe Simpson, the British climber who shattered his knee and ankle high on the remote Siula Grande in Peru after making the first ascent of the west face in 1985. His partner, Simon Yates, was forced to cut the rope joining the two after he had inadvertently lowered Simpson over an ice cliff, at night, in a storm. Simpson fell over 100 feet, plunging into an immense crevasse, and the next morning Yates, finding no sign of his partner, left Simpson for dead. But he had survived, and several days later crawled into the pair's basecamp just hours before Yates was to leave.

So how do you get beyond what the reader already knows and assumes about someone as notorious as Simpson? Writing a profile is particularly difficult, requiring as it does meticulous research, lengthy interviews with the subject, his acquaintances and partners, and painstaking editing and fact checking. No stranger to this sort of work, senior editor Alison Osius (five months pregnant at the time) traveled to England last spring to visit with Simpson and his cronies, read and re-read his three books, then spent countless hours at the word processor crafting an honest portrait of a person that, for all his intensity, she calls "spectacularly unselfconscious" (page 62).

If Simpson's Siula Grande story had been fiction, no one would have believed it — the tale was simply too fantastic. But it was true, and the book he wrote on the experience, *Touching the Void*, has been translated into 13 languages and sold hundreds of thousands of copies. Many of you have probably read it, or Simpson's subsequent work of fiction, *The Water People*. His third book, *This Game of Ghosts*, is just out, and as contributing editor John Sherman points out in his review (page 152), it's a must-read, as is Sherman's own tale of his adventures on Utah's tottering Mystery Towers (page 70).

"Too wide to handjam and too narrow to chimney inside, offwidths can grind even the best crack climbers into mulch," Yosemite local Steve Schneider succinctly notes as he recounts his experiences on *Excalibur*, an El Cap route noted for its wide cracks, including one 5.12d gasper he freed during the ascent (page 78). Across the country, local activist Tony Barnes takes us on a tour of

Seneca Rocks, West Virginia (page 86), a longtime favorite of Eastern climbers and coincidentally the place where I made my first real lead climb — *Soler* (5.7) — over 22 years ago. In this issue you'll also find Part II of equipment editor Duane Raleigh's treatise on aid technique (page 125), an excerpt from Dale Goddard's new training book (page 138), and a primer on Pakistan's Trango Towers by big wall veteran John Middendorf (page 118), plus introductory articles on areas from Austin, Texas, to El Chorro, Spain.

Wall rat, free climber, and Himalayan veteran, Greg Child is a familiar face in these pages, but you'll be able to visit with him on a more regular basis in his new column, Postcards from the Edge (page 58). My own association with Greg goes back to 1982 and his first article for *Climbing*, "The Simple Life" (No. 72), in which he told the story of his initiation to Himalayan climbing on the East Pillar of Shivering. Over the years our paths have crossed in places as diverse as K2 base-

camp in Pakistan and an American Alpine Club annual meeting in Denver, although it wasn't until May of this year that we finally got together on a climb. All those hours on the phone paid off — we managed a quick ascent of the west face of Mount Huntington and an attempt on the *Moonflower Buttress* on Mount Hunter in Alaska, and spent many delightful hours philosophizing and gossiping about mutual friends while



Greg Child on the edge in Alaska.

storm bound on the Kahiltna Glacier.

Joining our staff is Lisa Morgan, who comes to *Climbing* from the *Summit Sentinel*, a twice-a-week newspaper in Breckenridge, Colorado. A graduate of the University of California, Berkeley, Lisa has also worked as a backcountry ranger in Wrangell/St. Elias National Park in Alaska, as a research assistant for The Nature Conservancy, and as a night editor for *The Daily Californian* in Berkeley. She first learned to climb in high school and is most interested in traditional rock climbing and mountaineering.

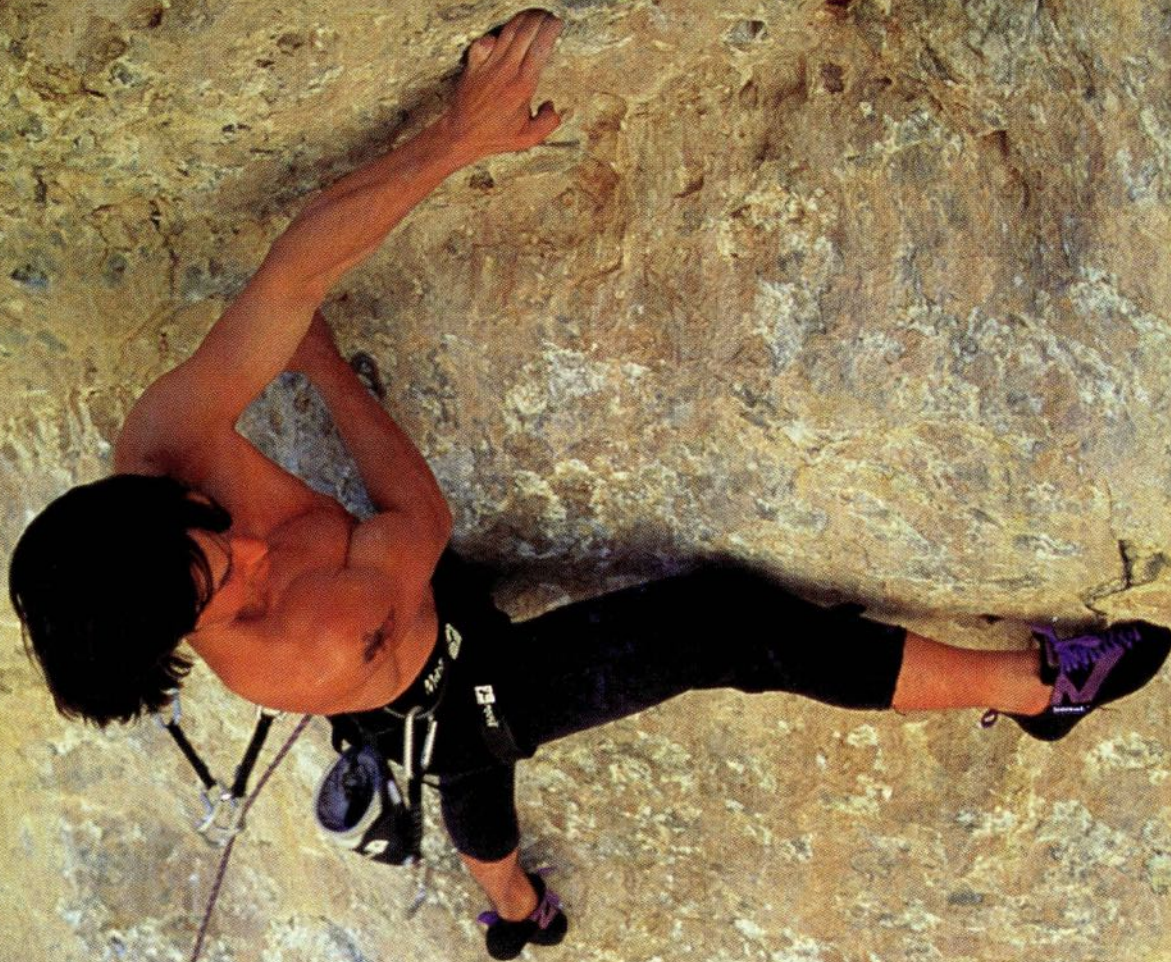
Last, but not least, is the happy ending to Alison's Perspective article on being pregnant and climbing (page 168). As we went to press, she and managing editor Mike Benge had an eight-pound baby boy, Theodore Roy, named after their respective fathers.

— Michael Kennedy

Photo: Michael Kennedy

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boreal

Denali guiding concession secured

After a six-month investigation by the National Park Service, prompted by seemingly political motives, Alpine Ascents International has secured the Denali guiding concession (see "Battle over guiding concession heats up," No. 139). This investigation proved, beyond question, that Alpine Ascents International's initial proposal was not misleading nor did it contain falsified information.

In April of this year the American Mountain Guides Association attempted to have Alpine Ascents International's concession permit revoked by making accusations it was unable to support. They excused themselves from any responsibility by beginning their review with a disclaimer, "The AMGA has not independently verified the information it was provided by third parties." Fortunately the AMGA's unwarranted accusations were easy to disprove. What makes me most upset is that the AMGA did not have the courtesy to send me, an AMGA member, a copy of its report. I had to receive it via the Park Service.

There is no doubt in my mind that the AMGA was misused by a small group of outfitters who are high up in the AMGA. It is inexcusable that this group would use the AMGA to advance its own agenda.

My biggest concern now is for the future. The AMGA is not being managed by guides, but by outfitters who are more interested in using the organization for financial gain than for the needs of guides. In short, it appears that the management is running the union. A better name for the AMGA would be AMOA, American Mountain Outfitters Association.

I hope that this incident does not go unnoticed at the next AMGA meeting. I plan to attend.

— Todd Burleson, President
Alpine Ascents International
Woodinville, Washington

Star witness

As a participant in a 1991 ice and glacier course on Mount Baker, Washington, and as a member of a spring, 1992, Mount Everest South Col Expedition, both organized by Alpine Ascents International, I've never been taught by any more competent, knowledgeable, concerned, and dedicated instructors.

My climbing adventures have taken me to many areas of the globe. I have employed guides in Switzerland and other

countries. Alpine Ascents International is the most outstanding mountaineering outfitter I have met on a mountain.

— Lee B. Burnett
Golden, Colorado

Needled

Regarding the article on the Needles, "Classics in Fairyland" (No. 139), author Bill Gruber missed the clip! For food, the pie shop is great, but rather than mentioning Custer's "tolerable food," why not go the positive route? Orian's Book Cafe in Hill City is one of the finest additions to the area. The Alpine Inn is one of the most popular steak houses in the region. Garbanzo's in Hill City offers good, filling, and reasonably priced Mexican food. All more interesting fare than ordinary Pizza Hut!

As for guidebooks, *Recommended Routes in the Needles* by John Page should not be missed; its directions for visitors are far better than either book mentioned. And while *Needles*' climbs are runout compared to today's clip-and-go crags, this area is an old one, full of fascinating routes and climbing history. Needles ethics still dictate a ground-up style with no forecast for anything but that. There are plenty of well-protected routes!

As for the comment that, "Granted, the face climbing may not test your physical prowess....," *Nantucket Sleighride*, *Two Year Plan*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, *Moonwalker*, *Old Man's Face*, *Modeling in the Nude*, *Walking the Plankton*, *A Policy of Truth*, *Window to the West*, *The Yellow*

Wall, *Just My Baby & Me*, and *Just a Lotta Fun* are all well protected, solid 5.10s to 5.12+s. That range tests the physical abilities of the vast majority of climbers!

Classics better to have mentioned include the *Conn Route on Aquarium* (5.3), *Spire 4* (5.4), *Riddle* (5.6), *Overexposure* (5.8), *God's Own Drunk* (5.8), *Four Little Fishies* (5.9), and *Three Rings for Eleven Kings* (5.9).

Our main argument is the statement that, "The only real climbing shop in the area is P.J.'s Adventure Sport." Sylvan Rocks (195 Main Street, Hill City, SD 57745; (605) 574-2425) is also a real climbing shop, and we give heaps of "abundant and free information" to locals and visitors alike.

— Susan Scheirbeck, Sylvan Rocks
Hill City, South Dakota

Bill Gruber replies: There is one thing writers and editors want and seldom receive: unlimited space. In my original draft I included five of the seven climbs you recommend in the 5.7-5.9 range. Unfortunately, space did not allow a complete listing.

With respect to the physical prowess issue, you are absolutely correct. There are dozens of wonderful climbs in the 5.10-5.12+ range that would test anyone's physical abilities, but this article was focused on climbs in the 5.4-5.9 range. As anyone who knows me can attest, it takes little to test my physical prowess, and, using that as a guide, I felt it was safe to say that most quality moderate Needles climbs do not require superhuman strength.

As for the dining recommendations, I didn't have room to list all of the establishments in the area. Besides, as a beans-and-weenies-by-the-campfire kind of guy, I'd say Pizza Hut and a pie shop represent for me the utmost in late-night haute cuisine.

I did not set out to write a negative article on the Needles. It is one of my favorite places to climb and I anticipate numerous trips there in the future — albeit under an alias.

If the portaledge fits...

Many thanks for the review of A5 portaledges and big-wall equipment (No. 139). However, I would like to offer a comment regarding the size of the A5 Doublewide portaledge. The review states that only shorter folks can lie in the A5 Double without curling up in a fetal position. I designed the A5 Double portaledge with considerations of an optimal blend of



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The A5 Double portaledge is mainly an expeditionary tool where weight is critical; never before has a 13-pound shelter enabled climbers to spend extended lengths of time on the vertical in extreme conditions, such as Xaver Bongard and I found on the Great Trango Tower in Pakistan last summer, where we spent over two continuous weeks in an A5 Double portaledge.

— John Middendorf
President, A5 Adventures
Flagstaff, Arizona

Karma chameleon

Derek Hersey is dead and Ken Nichols is still chopping bolts. Anti-karma? Did God lose his address book?

— Kevin Schehrer
Calabasas Hills, California

Neither a leader nor a follower be

In *Climbing* No. 138 I found myself mentioned in the editorial section as the "leader" of an adventure funded in part by W.L. Gore and Associates through their Shipton/Tilman grant program. I am thoroughly flattered to be mentioned in the same breath as the other grant recipients, but I can scarcely presume to be anything more than equal to my extremely capable companions: Shane Ruoss, Bill Gaines, and Rick Rozelle. In their eyes I suspect that my quality of being the most vocal team member qualifies me not for leadership but rather, when the weather deteriorates, a separate tent.

— Greg Knott
Winthrop, Washington

Corrections

Climbing No. 139. An item in *Off the Wall* misidentified Wade Boggs, the baseball player. In our coverage of *The Needles in South Dakota*, *Mountain Mania* was overlooked as a supplier of goods and information. The company is located at 4242 B Canyon Lake Drive, Rapid City, SD 57702; (605) 343-6596.

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Off the Wall

Compiled by Allison Ostus

Media Watchdog

■ **Smells like team spirit.** "Hello sweetheart, get me Reebok," read a recent headline for a *Newsweek* article about the decathlete/poster boy Dan O'Brien.

Today some climbers are on the same wagon: Nancy Feagin, of Salt Lake City, Utah; Todd Skinner, of Lander, Wyoming; and Adrian Burgess, originally from Yorkshire, England, but now living in the States. As representatives and consultants, they will be used in a TV and print campaign to include ads featuring Feagin in *Shape*, *Self*, and *Glamour*, and are signed on as Team Reebok members through 1994. Reebok is making them prototype climbing shoes.

Feagin may be the least-known to other climbers, but has an interesting and varied background. She is an Exum guide, has climbed *The Nose* in a day in Yosemite, soloed two big walls in Zion, Utah, climbs ice, and, thanks to Reebok, has just finished a fun-sounding "20 classics in 20 days" project (see *Hot Flashes*). She has consistently made the finals in national sport-climbing contests.

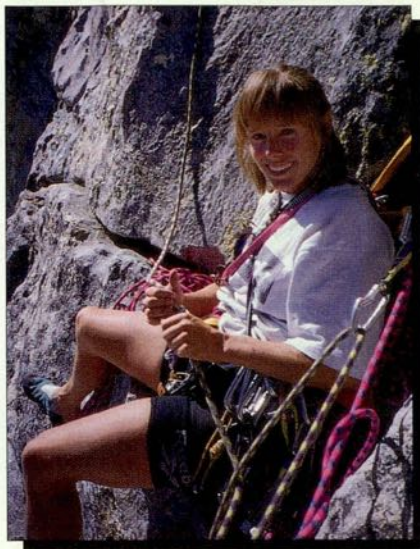
Burgess is an alpinist who has been on nearly 40 expeditions and summited on Dhaulagiri, Annapurna II, and Everest. Skinner has climbed and done new routes worldwide, developing such areas as Wild Iris, Wyoming, on the home front, and going afield to places as varied as the Sinai Peninsula, Thailand, Russia, and Brazil.

■ **Accidents will happen.** The *Daily Camera* of Boulder reported that Mike Downing dislocated his right knee climbing on July 24 in the Flatirons when he "got his foot caught in a protrusion of rock and twisted his knee, causing him to fall about 10 feet."

Actually, the protrusion was a dime-sized smear, on which Downing was attempting a heinous Egyptian backstep. Jeez,

how'd the paper get that wrong?

But the best, and unreported, part of the story is the record-setting rescue by Hank Caylor, Fred Knapp, and Pat Adams, other locals. When Downing was hurt on the unreported *Fiend* (5.13c) in Bear Canyon, Knapp blazed off running to the National Center for Atmospheric Research to call res-



Nancy Feagin, new teamster, at home on the rocks.

cue teams. Meanwhile, Adams carried Downing, who was choking Adams and screaming in pain, piggyback, while Caylor alternately held on to Downing's harness to stabilize him and scoped out places in the scree for Adams to plant his feet. Carrying Downing down saved four to five hours, according to one medic, because Rocky Mountain Rescue would have set up a Tyrolean rescue. Just over an hour elapsed between the injury and Downing's touchdown in the emergency room.

Downing is off crutches, and by the time you read this, should be climbing again.

■ **Kids' stuff.** A writer, Karen Romano Young, tried to reach Jessica Haines of Seattle, a particularly promising 15-year-old who'd just placed third at the recent Snowbird competition, for an interview in the pilot issue of *Girl* magazine. *Girl* is to be published by Scholastic, Inc., in October with an anti-

pated circulation of 50,000 to 100,000 (it will be sent to all Girl Scout troops). But Jessica had stopped off at City of Rocks, Idaho, on the way home, and couldn't be found. Instead, Young interviewed a friend of Jessica's, Ursula Holder, a beginner climber from Bellevue, Washington.

Still, by this time, Young was intrigued enough by Jessica to arrange to interview her for another publication, the national magazine *3-2-1 Contact*, published by Children's Television Workshop (who brought you *Sesame Street*). The four-page piece should come out in March or April.

■ **On-the-cover agents.**

— Mike Corbett was on the cover of the *San Francisco Examiner* Sunday magazine (August 1) for a story describing his 50th and, he says, last ascent of El Capitan, Yosemite. Corbett had invited John Flinn, a climber, *Examiner* reporter, and co-author of *Climbing Back*, a biography of Yosemite's Mark Wellman, along. Chris Falkenstein took all photos.

Corbett, 40, aka "Mr. El Cap," has climbed the monolith via 25 routes with 44 partners, and in the story spends his 187th and last night up there.

Apparently, he is just getting tired of climbing El Cap, of being thirsty and bashing his knuckles.

"I've wrung every bit of joy and fear and elation there is out of it," he is quoted as saying. "Now I'm ready to move on to something else." He intends to settle down, spend more time with his 20-month old daughter, and work for the Yosemite Park and Curry Company leading tourists on "climbing walks" of the valley.

— Bobbi Bensman of Salt Lake City appears on the cover of the *Physician and Sportsmedicine* (July 1993) magazine, bouldering in Calico Hills near Las Vegas in 1990 in a shot taken by Anne Marie Weber/TKO Images.

The article within is about acute carpal tunnel syndrome. "Injuries in rock climbing tend to be chronic," it reads, because of the great forces involved. "In addition, many climbers exhibit unwilling-

Overheard

"It's not
that I don't
enjoy
crack climbing,
but being
seen
on cracks
is bad
for my image."

Boulder's Fred Knapp,

to Bret Ruckman

at City of Rocks,

Idaho

OF AVALANCHES AND WEDDINGS

THALAY SAGAR is an ice-plastered, granite spire in India. There was an obvious line that begged to be climbed; yet no team had ever attempted it. It was steep and the area was known for unstable weather so the only way to climb was fast. Pretending to be bold, Andy and I waved good-bye to our pajama-clad cook and liaison officer, who was to be married in a couple of weeks. They were seriously playing cards.

After four days, 3,000 feet of mixed rock and ice lay between us and the ground. At noon on the fifth day, we were following an intricate path of ice runnels and crack systems up this immense face when I felt a flake of snow hit my cheek. Within an hour, the rock holds and cracks were choked with fresh snow and a thick fog obscured the route. We were not in the ideal location to wait out a storm — the wall averaged 70 degrees and there were no flat places — but we had no choice. Andy prepared our anchors while I untangled the webbing used to suspend our port-a-ledge, a stretcher that hung from four straps off the anchors, with a tent-like tarp for overhead shelter. There we were, perched at 21,000 feet, nonchalantly setting aside food rations which should hold us until the storm quit — four days, we thought, at the most. Outside, the snow fell harder.

Each day saw the same routine.

Hot drink at 10 AM, rest, half a cup of gorp at noon, rest, hot drink at 5, then sleep. At first the rest was welcome but after two days, we were bored and spent most of our time entertaining each other with stories of epic climbs. On day four, the first avalanche began.

A wall of snow pounded against the fly and as I grabbed the webbing, I prayed that our shelter would withstand the force. Images of the poles collapsing and anchors pulling out of the rock fleeted through my mind. Then it was still. In 15 minutes by my watch, another avalanche fell against the ledge. One after another, every 15 minutes like clockwork.

"Man, I hope this doesn't last long," Andy sighed. We had an unspoken agreement never to express doubt, but desperation showed in his face, now gaunt and wrinkled. My stomach knotted tighter. Under the constant barrage of avalanches, retreat was impossible. We cowered in our bags as the storm swatted our ledge like a cat playing with a mouse. The avalanches went on for eight days.

At last the storm was spent. Humbled and starving, we began the retreat. In our weakened state, we only managed 10 rappels on the first day. Then darkness caught us on an icy slope with insufficient anchors for the port-a-ledge. We hacked out a ledge in the snow-covered ice to sit on, and I pulled my sleeping bag up around my waist and held the stove in my lap as Andy tried to hold the tarp over us. Still snow managed to accumulate in my bag until it was so full I couldn't hold it up any longer. To calm myself, I thought of the feast our cook would prepare for us at basecamp.

At first light, we started down again, and 10 more rappels brought us finally to the base of the peak. My tension and fear were replaced by uncontrollable hunger. When we arrived at the camp, however, it was deserted. The wedding day had arrived and all that remained of our cook and liaison officer was a note and a deck of cards.

—Kitty Calboun

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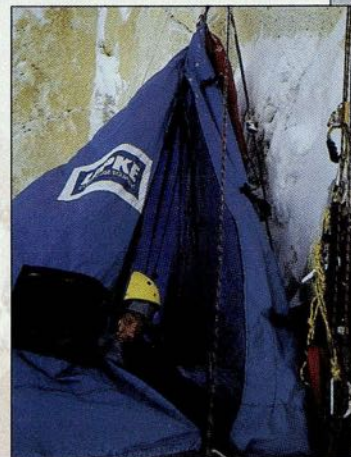
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Overheard

"You have
no chance
of sharing
a basketball court
with
Magic Johnson
or Michael Jordan.
But here,
you can be a
beginning climber
and have a
world-famous
climber
next to you"

Doug Crispin,
manager of Smith Rock
State Park, Oregon,
in The Columbian newspaper,
Vancouver, Washington

ness to adequately rest once injured." Surely not!
— Last issue, *Climbing* ran a shot by T.R. Youngstrom of Charlie Fowler on his route *Charlie's Angel* (5.12a). The same month, *Rocky Mountain Sports*, a Colorado regional magazine, came out with a cover of the same route, shot by same. Shown though not identified is Sue Hill, 26, a climber and telemark skier who, like Fowler, is from the Telluride area, Colorado. Hill belayed Fowler on the route, then he pulled the rope and belayed her as she, an intermediate who has been climbing for several years, attempted it.

The climb is at Sew 'Em Up Mesa in the Dolores River area of Colorado. Rustlers used to take cattle to the site in order to cut off their brands, and then sew 'em up.

The *Rocky* turned the shot backwards for its cover.

As of mid-August, by the way, *Rocky Mountain Sports* got itself a new editor, Will Gadd of Boulder, climber, kayaker, and skier, and a former editor at *Rock & Ice* and intern at *Climbing* magazines. Congrats to him.

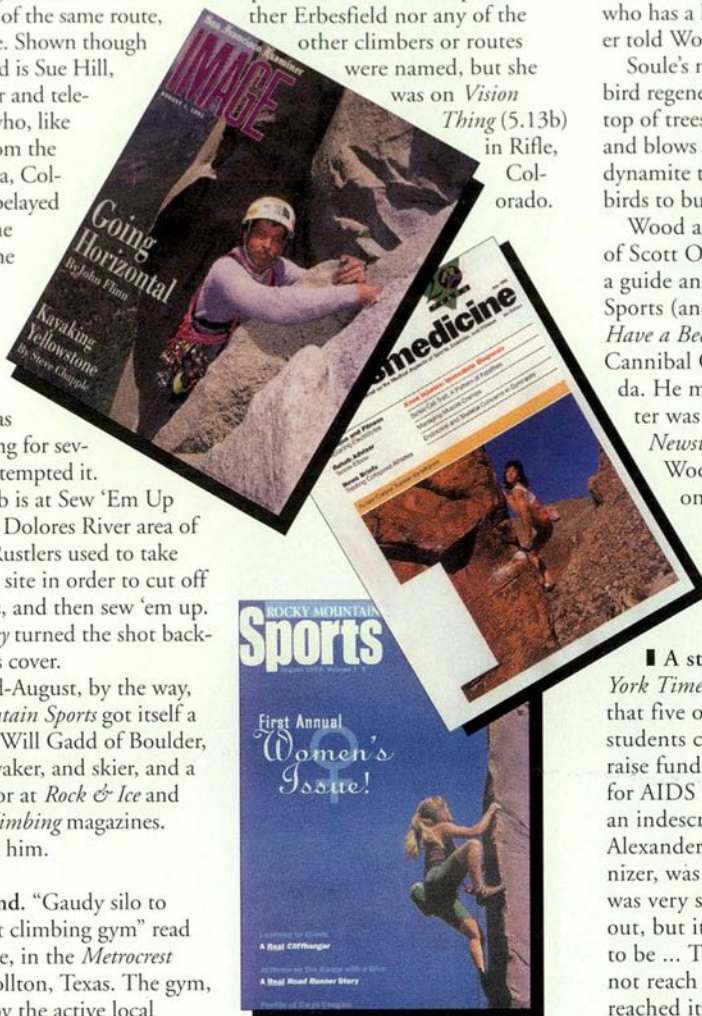
■ **Easy to find.** "Gaudy silo to house tallest climbing gym" read one headline, in the *Metrocrest News*, Carrollton, Texas. The gym, started up by the active local climbers Karen and Russell Rand, is to be housed in a well-known area landmark, a grain tower painted with a multicolored "Jesus is Lord" declaration. The Rands will only be leasing the interior of the building, while the exterior remains under lease to Robert Tilton and the Word of Faith church, centered in another town.

Opening this fall, a complex of towers that includes the painted 110-foot silo is to offer two-pitch leads and 25,000 square feet of climbing walls. The Rands believe theirs is the tallest climbing gym in the world.

■ **Potpourri.** Robyn Erbesfield, Atlanta native and winner of the 1992 World Cup, was featured on CNN July 24. She and her new

husband, Didier Raboutou, were shown climbing while in Atlanta for their wedding.

Erbesfield was also pictured in the recent *Newsweek* cover story (shown in *Climbing* No. 139) on climbing and other adventure sports, in a Beth Wald photo. Neither Erbesfield nor any of the other climbers or routes were named, but she was on *Vision Thing* (5.13b) in Rifle, Colorado.



Making headlines.

It was nice to see real climbers get the work, taking and appearing in the photos. Wald, a longtime climber-photographer, had two pictures in the issue, one being a two-page spread of mountain biking. Also pictured were a flopped photo by Brian Bailey of Charlie Fowler ice climbing on Upper Ames Falls, Colorado, and a mountain-biking shot by Bill Hatcher, another longtime climber-photographer.

The cover shot is by Ted Wood, 37, of Jackson, Wyoming. Wood is modest about his own climbing, but he's been at it, doing "basic mountaineering" for seven years, since moving to Jackson.

The cover showed Bill Soule, a

former part-owner and current part-time guide for Timberline Mountain Guides at Smith Rock, on (what else?) *Chain Reaction* (5.12c) at Smith.

Soule got the gig because he has taught climbing to one of the *Newsweek* editors, Maynard Parker, who has a house near Smith. Parker told Wood to contact Soule.

Soule's main job these days is in bird regeneration: he climbs to the top of trees in old-growth forests, and blows off the treetops with dynamite to create a flat place for birds to build nests.

Wood also took an inside shot, of Scott Olsen, 28, who works as a guide and at Desert Mountain Sports (and has great hair), doing *Have a Beer With Fear* (5.11a) on Cannibal Crag, Red Rock, Nevada. He met Olsen when the latter was hired as a guide for a *Newsweek* writer whom Wood was accompanying on assignment.

The cover was worth \$2500 to Wood, and was his first for *Newsweek*.

■ **A style is born.** *The New York Times* (July 10) reported that five of the nine Princeton students climbing on Denali to raise funds towards finding a cure for AIDS had summited. "It was an indescribable moment," Alexander Friedman, trip organizer, was quoted as saying. "It was very stormy, almost a white-out, but it was the greatest place to be ... Though four people did not reach the summit, everyone reached it spiritually."

Perhaps *Climbing* should begin reporting ascents done in spiritual style?

P.S. They raised \$200,000.

■ **Science project.** To open its 11th season, PBS's Emmy-winning national science series, "Newton's Apple," is doing a show in which the host, David Heil, learns about the physics and biomechanics of rock climbing. Heil, an avid novice climber, traveled to Smith Rock for the segment. There he was shown around by several climbers: Jeff Perrin, Diana Dutton, and Paul Doherty, the last a climbing physicist from the Exploratorium in San Francisco.

The segment includes video footage of various other climbers — Todd Skinner, Bobbi Bensman,

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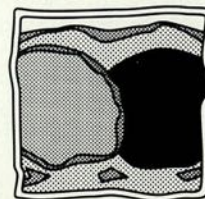
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Overheard

"We could make
very good
use of it.
There are
all sorts
of new climbs."

David Brower,
conservationist-climber,
facetiously calling upon
climbers to blow up
the Hetchy-Hetchy Dam
in the submerged valley
adjacent to Yosemite
(reported in the
American Alpine News)

Tommy Herbert, Mike Tupper, Robyn Erbesfield, Peter Croft, and Paul Piana — and will show a cover of *Climbing* magazine.

The program will be fed to affiliate stations on October 2, but they will use it at different times. Check local listings or call your PBS station.

■ **Treasure island.** Nick Yardley and Marc Chauvin of the International Mountain Climbing School, North Conway, New Hampshire, have gotten caught up in a treasure hunt. The two went to the Turks and Caicos islands in the Bahamas to do rigging for a big-budget French TV program, "The Treasure de Pago Pago."

Each episode features six contestants competing for a \$25,000 first prize. They follow maps and clues and perform physical "tasks" while looking for a trove of pearls buried underwater.

Chauvin and Yardley's job was to set up a huge net in a 70-foot watery sinkhole. They used all manner of pegs and bolts to tack the net into scaly rock, and set up pulley systems for hidden toprops. The contestants were lowered into the hole, and had to climb the net to get out.

The shows were to air in August and September.

■ **Alaskan air and other TV times.** We have an air date for the film *Beyond Denali* (see *Climbing* No. 138): October 25 on ESPN, 9:00 Eastern Time. Check local listings, and in case of change, call American Adventure Productions at (303) 920-3777 for more info.

"National Geographic Explorer" has two films coming out in October: *Mount Everest Anniversary*, including interviews with Barry Bishop, Edmund Hillary, Reinhold Messner, and Christian Bonington; and a somewhat edited version of *Ballade a Devils Tower*, a film of Catherine Destivelle climbing and soloing in the Utah desert and at Devils Tower,

Wyoming. The Everest film is October 10, the Destivelle film October 17. Explorer is on cable station WTBS Sundays at 9 p.m. Eastern Time, and repeats Mondays at 2 a.m. Eastern and Saturdays at 10 a.m. Eastern. For info, call (202) 857-7680.

A rescheduled ESPN "Cross Over Sports" show featuring Ed Viesters climbing Rainier is to air on October 10, 12 p.m. EST. One on Mark Wellman, Yosemite wall climber and paraplegic, is also slated — no date available yet. For info, call (714) 487-5548.



Jim Pringle, climber, is good with rocks. His design was a winner at the nation's biggest diamond-jewelry contest.

Scree

■ **Diamond Jim.** A climber, Jim Pringle of Columbia, Missouri, was a winner in the 1993 "Diamonds Today" contest, considered the top diamond-jewelry competition in the country.

Pringle, 40, a jewelry designer and climber of 15 years, used a mountain motif in creating his "Indian Peaks Sunrise" necklace (made with 4.48 carats of diamonds, yellow gold, white gold, and lapis lazuli). These days he centers his climbing on the various local crags in Boone County, Missouri.

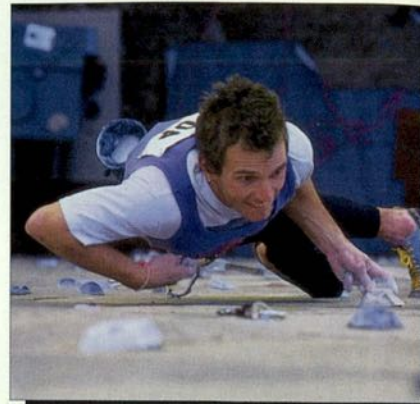
Pringle is one of 25 winners, whose artpieces will be exhibited in major museums in seven U.S. cities, including Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle.

Kudos to:

— Mike Pont, one of the most experienced U.S. course setters and an entrant at July's Snowbird climbing competition. When rain washed out the finals at Snowbird, the action was delayed and switched to the Rockreation Climbing Gym, where no routes had been prepared. Pont, who'd made the finals field, offered to withdraw to help the overextended course setters, Boone Speed, Jonathan Knight, and Mike Call. "I know how hard you've been working and how tired you are," he said.

"No, you're climbing too well!" they told him.

And in fact that evening Pont climbed great, and placed second.



Mike Pont: nice guy, didn't finish last.

— Kevin and Tim Powell, Darrel Hensel, and John Barbee, who have taken it upon themselves to replace 500 or 600 old bolts and pins at Joshua Tree, Tahquitz, and Suicide, California. They are paying for the project out of pocket. — All who participated in the First Annual Smith Rock Climbing Clean-Up and More, held May 1. About 110 volunteers cleaned up trash, cans, and barbed-wire fence remnants, and even bagged human wastes and toilet paper. They also worked on trails and replaced belay stations.

OFF ROUTE



Photo: Steve Lewis

Impeccable belay technique on a mural in Gap, France.

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News & Area Reports

Austin city limits

Austin, Texas

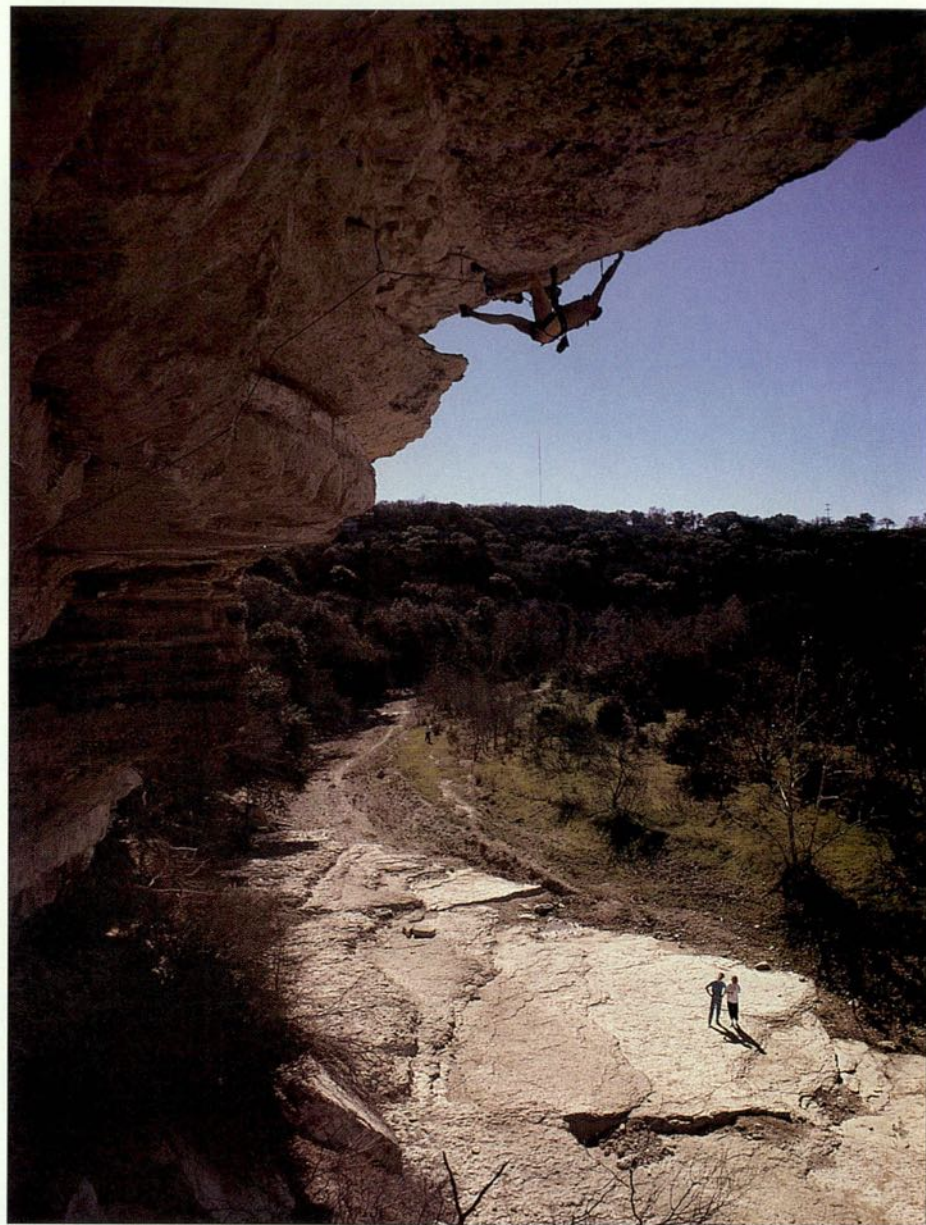
The history of Austin rock climbing is as rich and varied as the city's liberal population. The Tonkawas and Comanche, who in centuries past camped at the back of Bucket Cave, surely eyed the climbs. Lines of pockets and huecos invite bouldering, and the Texas Indians, always game for tests of courage and daring, must certainly have been climbers.

Route development in central Texas really took off when Enchanted Rock was temporarily closed to rock climbing in 1983. Soon, hundreds of bolted limestone climbs went up to replace the lost granite. With typical western reticence, the Texans kept their cliffs to themselves, pretending instead to be engaged in rodeo functions and local politics.

Austin climbing is exemplified by summer bouldering sessions at Bucket Cave. Climbing under fist-thick vines and ferns in a jungle atmosphere of gray pockets, springs, and green moss is an arboreal experience. Add 100-degree heat and a 60-degree overhanging wall and you have the ingredients for an altered state. The *Kervorkian* (V5), a pocket traverse that Kurt Smith called the best natural limestone bouldering line he'd ever seen, is a 100-foot-long problem that couples powerful roof pulling with delicate body positioning. Heel and toe hooking, a knee drop, knee bar, foot stuff, no-hands bat hang, mono- and bi-digits, and a full sack of pouf make this problem a joy in the heat.

The winter hang is the Urban Assault wall. Protected from the elements by a huge roof, this chossy crag overcomes its shortcomings by remaining climbable in any weather. Torrential rains can fall while you deal with *Starfish* (5.12c), a slightly overhanging face that leads to 20 feet of finger jamming, followed by a trick at the lip to finishing jugs.

On the many cool and sunny days, the New Wall is the choice for mileage. *Meet the Flintstones* (5.9) and *Walk the Dog* (5.11b), both offer steep, powerful climbing through slopers and big, flat limestone blocks. *Tunnel Vision* (5.12a), *Power Monkey* (5.12c), and *Space Cowboy*



Jeff Jackson on *Plate Tectonics* (5.13b), Urban Assault, Austin, Texas.

(5.12a), kick back a few more degrees on the proper side of vertical and up the ante. *Iron Man* (5.12b), is a good on-sight challenge. A bucket traverse and edge pulls through a black prow take you to a greasy side-pull under a roof, where the trick is to find a path to the good pockets above. Everyone finds a new way to do it, but it is never easy. A friendly weekend scene complete with dogs, picnic baskets, nude sunbathers, and psycho mountain bikers lends this crag a festive atmosphere.

Many other areas within a few hours of town sport an abundance of great rock and scenery, but the thing that makes

Austin unique is the wealth of climbing within the city limits.

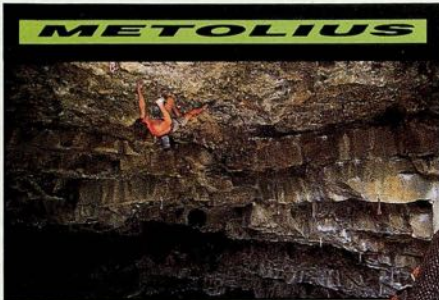
Austin climbers owe a lot to the likes of James Crump, Mike and Dave Head, Scott Harris, Dave Cardosa, Greg Brooks, Hank Caylor, Jean and Scott Hudson, and a hundred other good, dangerous men and women I've left out.

The following areas represent a sampler of Austin rock climbs developed over the last decade by a diverse group of climbers who never had to travel more than 10 minutes to pull hard.

— Jeff Jackson

(continued on page 22)

Photo: Christina Jackson



Whoa! photo: Stevenson

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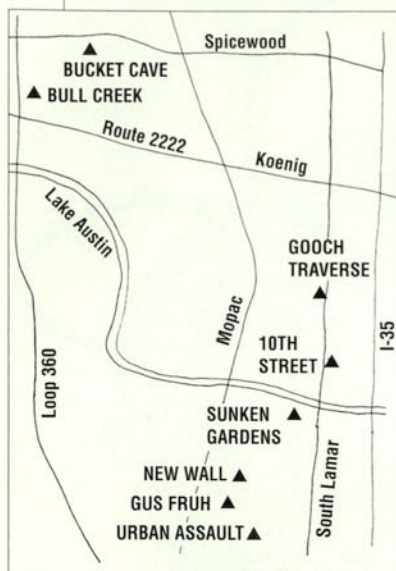


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LOGISTICS

Getting there. Areas are described from north to south, using centrally located Town Lake as the starting point. Once in Austin, buy a city map and locate I-35,



Guadalupe, Lamar Boulevard and Mopac (Loop 1), the main north-south arteries. These caminos will get you where you need to go. Specific directions are provided in the area descriptions.

Camping. You can't camp at the climbing areas in Austin proper, but here are a few options, beginning with Lake Austin Metropolitan Park. To get there take Mopac north from Town Lake to 2222, which you follow to City Park Road. Turn left and wind to the shores of Lake Austin. If you want indoor accommodations, go to the Austin International Hostel (YHA affiliated), 2200 South Lake Boulevard, (512) 444-2294, or find any of a number of cheap hotels along I-35.

Amenities. You can find almost anything in Austin. Here's the beta on a few of the essentials.

Coffee: Quackenbushes at 2120 Guadalupe is a mandatory Espresso/ Cappuccino stop. Located two buildings down from Kerbey Lane Cafe (see Breakfast). Mexican Food: Sunday night is Molé night at Guerrero's (very healthy), 614 East Oltorf. Try El Arroyo's Bar B. Q. chicken enchiladas for a Tex-Mex feed, 1624 West Fifth. Vegetarian: Mother's, at 4215 Duval, or Martin Brother's at 2815 Guadalupe. Carnivore: Sam's Bar B. Q., 2000 East 12th. Ribs, ribs, ribs. Breakfast and late night: pancakes at all hours, Kerbey Lane Cafe, located at 3704 Kerbey Lane.

Last-minute provisions. Bagel Manufactory, 2200 Guadalupe, up the street from Quack's. Groceries: Whole Foods Market, 914 North Lamar.

Gear. Chalk, quicks, and tape are available at either R.E.I., 1112 North Lamar, or Whole Earth Provision Company, 4006 South Lamar and 2410 San Antonio.

Guidebooks. For more information pick up a copy of *Central Texas Limestone, A Climber's Guide*.

Ethics. Traditionally, ethical debates in Central Texas are resolved with cleavers.

BUCKET CAVE

Directions. From Town Lake, take Mopac north to Spicewood Springs Road. Exit and turn left. Turn left at Mesa. Right at Burney. Right at Rim. Park at the guard rail and walk downhill on the paved trail. Veer right onto a well-used trail. The first visible cave is the Grot, the Penal Cave and Bucket Cave are further along the trail (see map).

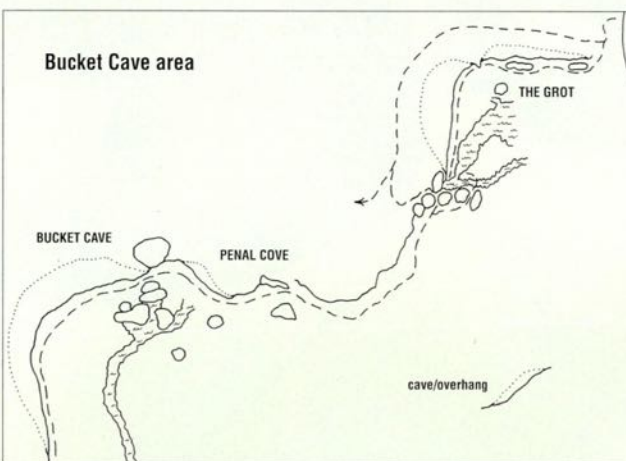
General description. Without a doubt, the best bouldering in Austin. Like Hueco's Bucket Roof, only much bigger. The cave was closed last winter to deter vandals, but hopefully will reopen to bouldering this summer.

The Grot

1. *Butch* (V1). Starts on the right side of big boulder; follow big holds to the top.
2. *Mount the Puppy* (V2). Start off center of the boulder.
3. *Pup Left* (V3+). Move left along the lip of the roof.
4. *Agent Orange* (V4). Hard problem just left of *Pup*.
5. *Santiago's* (V2). Start off left side of next boulder left; cool bulge to pockets.
6. *Rumination* (V0). Traverse from Santiago's to the obvious drop and return.
7. *Daddy Rain* (5.13). Through roof past two bolts into cave.

Penal Cave (right to left)

1. *Grapevine* (V2).
2. *Rabbit-Eared Bandycoot* (V2).
3. *Cane Toad* (V4 *).
4. *Stinkfoot* (V3 *). Sit-down start. Traverse right from the low flake and top out right of the body-sized hueco.

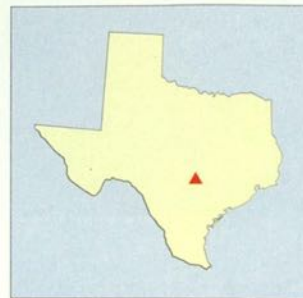


5. *Stroke* (V4 *). Begin at the one-finger pocket just left of *Stinkfoot*, bad undercling in left hand; all holds in the trough are off route.
6. *Shwang* (V4+). All holds used for *Dick* and *Stroke* are off route.
7. *Dick* (V3 *). Start with your feet on the low edges. Pull the pockets right of the "Dick" graffiti.

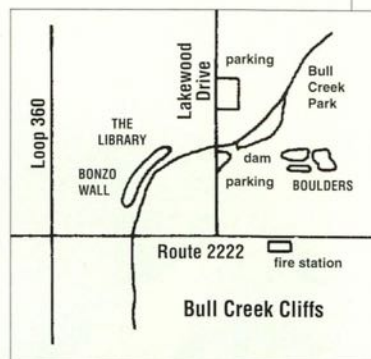
8. *Hard Dick* (V4). Start at the one-finger pocket directly under "Dick" and pull the bulge straight over.
9. *Boner* (V7). Sit down start. All footholds are on. Pull the "Dick" bulge using only the worst holds — the lowest one-finger pocket under the "K," the bad edge/mono combination left of the "D," and the bad edge left of the joined pockets at the lip.
10. *Left of Dick* (V1).
11. *Schlong* (V2). Climb pockets left of *Left of Dick*.
12. *Gelding* (V5 *). Start at "Raw Penis" graffiti, pull right under roof into large holds under *Left of Dick*. Holds above the lip are off route. Finish via *Kevorkian*.
13. *Raw Penis* (V6 **8). Start same as *Gelding*, but then climb through the roof. Finish straight up through the shallow one-finger pockets. Bad landing. Another variation (V4) low traverses the "Dick" wall and pulls into the trough right of *Stroke*. Go for the *Kevorkian* pump by moving directly into *Stinkfoot* — V5.
14. *Gleam* (V4 **). Start left of *Raw Penis* with a foot in the Africa-shaped pocket. Move right through buckets to join *Raw Penis* at the lip. *Mercy Kill* (V6 **) starts with *Raw Penis* to the large pod at the end of *Stinkfoot* and reverses *Gleam*. V6 if you don't rest in the pod.
15. *Bone Fetish* (V6). Start way left of *Gleam* at the pockets beneath the "Celeste" graffiti. Pull buckets under roof into the *Gleam Kevorkian*.

Bucket Cave (right to left)

16. *Slacker* (5.13 **). 5 bolts.
17. *Zappa* (V4 *). Start *Slacker*, move left.
18. *Rethreads* (V2). Move through obvious threads, right under lip.
19. *Threads* (V2). Left under lip. (The following problems start left of the "CH" graffiti, beginning with feet on the rock skirt.)
20. *L. A.* (V9?). Ugly dyno to a sloping mono pocket.
21. *Master Cylinder* (V5). Crank through a flared hueco.



27. *Crusoe* (V3).
28. *Poe* (V3). Dyno up and right to a small brick.
29. *Rash* (V1). Direct finish.
30. *Twang* (V4). Pocketlings left of *Rash*. *DD. Beer Cup* (V4) traverses pockets right



and tops out at *Master Cylinder*.

31. *Crackle* (V2). Sit down start to layback left of *Twang*.
32. *Snap* (V2). Big feet, small holds just left of *Crackle*.
33. *T. O.* (V0). Take a line of pockets to direct finish.
34. *Wiener* (V0). Any one of the many pocket climbs left of the boulder that leans against the downclimb ramp.

BULL CREEK CLIFFS

Directions. From Town Lake, take Mopac north to 2222. Exit and turn left. Follow 2222 for several miles, and turn right on Lakewood. (If you pass under 360 you've gone too far.) Follow Lakewood to Bull Creek Park. Park across from the low-water crossing. Follow the trail downstream along the creek until you reach the Library Wall.

General description. The most highly concentrated, difficult limestone climbing area in Austin proper, the Library Wall offers pocket climbs on an overhanging face. The proximity of the creek and configuration of the cliff, combined with a steady southern breeze make Bull Creek an ideal summer crag. Cliffs and routes are listed from right to left.

The Library

1. *Altered States* (5.12b).
2. *Gulliver's Travels* (5.12d/13a*). Difficulty is height dependent.
3. *Atlas Shrugged* (5.12c*).
4. *Surrender 95* (5.12b*).
5. *Finnegan's Wake* (5.13+).
6. *Kubla Khan* (5.13b/c).
7. *Metaphysics* (5.12d*).



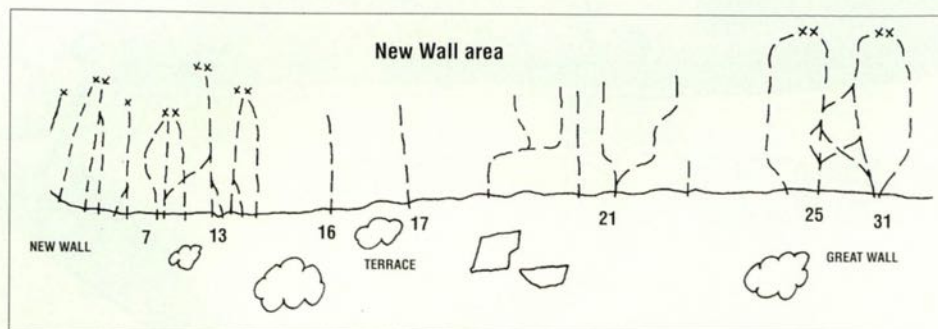
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8. *Lord of the Flies* (5.12b).
9. *Blatant* (aka Head Trip) (5.12a).
10. *Do the Right Thing* (5.12a). The farthest left of the Library routes, followed by a long section of wall without routes.

Bonzo Wall

11. *Chemical Warfare* (5.11a).
12. *Beans and Rice* (5.12a).
13. *Head Thing* (project). Bolts angle right.
14. *Bonzo's Revenge* (5.12b). Move right through the obvious pockets to the green and purple slings.
15. *Bedtime for Bonzo* (5.11b*). Ring bolts; a good landmark for other routes. The *Italian Route* (A2) traverses right on hooks and bolts from *Bonzo*.
16. *Raging Bull* (5.12a*). Climb the arete left of *Bedtime*.
17. *Boss Bull* (5.12a).
18. *The Green Fuse* (5.12a*). Old aid seam with bolts.
19. *Bronco* (5.12c R).
20. *Rick's Traverse* (V hard). Low traverse from left end to the Bonzo boulder.

NEW WALL AREA

Directions. From Town Lake take Mopac south to Barton Skyway. Exit and turn left. Follow Skyway until it dead ends. Park and follow the trail behind the guard rail. At the T in the trail, turn right. Follow a good trail approximately half a mile. The cliff is on the east side of Barton Creek.

General description. Steep, blocky limestone of the pumpy variety. This is an excellent training wall.

New Wall (left to right)

1. *Meet the Flintstones* (5.9).
2. *Mr. Slate* (5.11a).
3. *Yabba Dabba Do* (5.11a).
4. *Schoolboy Indirect* (5.9).
5. *Schoolboy Fantasies* (5.10d). Climb the layback crack.
6. *Cloud Nine* (5.11b).
7. *Hysteria* (5.11a*).
8. *Lots of People* (5.11b).
9. *Eraser Head* (5.12a).
10. *Mandingo* (5.11d).
11. *Mandingo Direct* (5.11d).
12. *Buddha* (5.12a*).
13. *Walk the Dog* (5.11b*).
14. *Rabbit Hut* (5.11c). Starts on *Walk the Dog*, traverses left at the third bolt, and finishes at the chains on *Flintstones*. Bring long slings.
15. *Wowie Zowie* (5.11a).

Terrace

The Terrace refers to the climbs between the New and Great Wall.

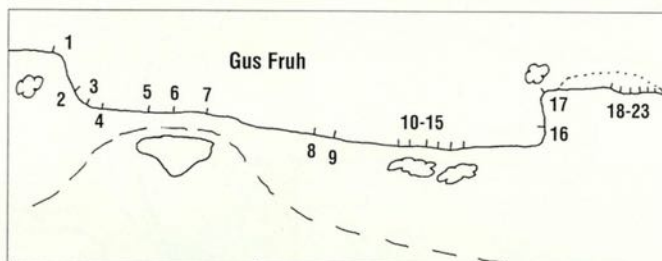
16. *Crystal New Persuasion* (5.10b*).
17. *Cactus Patch* (5.10a).

Great Wall

18. *Heaven Can Wait* (5.11a).
19. *Heaven's Gate* (5.11c).

20. *Hug Thy Mother* (5.12).
21. *Iron Man* (5.12b).
22. *Magical Mystery Tour/Pee Wee's Big Adventure* (5.11c).
23. *Adams Way* (5.12). Toprope. Named for Adam Hurst, an Austin climber killed by lightning on the *Naked Edge* in Eldorado.
24. *Through the Looking Glass* (5.11a*).
25. *Tunnel Vision Direct* (5.12a*).
26. *Girly Vision* (5.11c). Avoid the crux of *Tunnel Vision* by moving left to the large side-cling.
27. *Tunnel Vision* (5.11d*). Move right instead of pulling the left hand bulge at bolt.
28. *Eye of the Storm* (5.11a/b). Move right at second clip of *Tunnel Vision* and finish

- (5.11), climbs straight over bulge just right of *Chicken*; variation 2, *Egg Salad Sandwich* (5.10), takes the right side of the bulge near *Trash-Can Man*.
10. *Trash-Can Man* (5.11a).
11. *Rock Retard* (5.11a*).
12. *Apostrophe* (5.11b). Avoid the big holds to the left.
13. *Thumb Dance* (5.10**). The classic Gus Fruh must-do.
14. *Blind Date* (5.11).
15. *Praying Mantle* (5.10).
- Rent a Pig* (5.10) climbs a line marked by a hangerless bolt right of *Praying*.
16. *Unnamed* (5.5).
17. *Access* (5.4).



Power Monkey.

29. *Shock the Monkey* (5.12c). Move left after the second clip of *Power Monkey* and finish *Tunnel Vision Direct*.
30. *Power Monkey* (5.12c).
31. *Space Cowboy* (5.12a/b*).

GUS FRUH

Directions. From Town Lake, head south on Lamar Boulevard. Turn right on Barton Skyway, turn left on Barton Hills at stop sign. Park at the wooden sign on the right that reads "Gus Fruh". Follow a clear trail downhill, cross Barton Creek, and turn right. The cliff rises just off the trail.

General description. Classic gray stone with big features; a good place to learn limestone technique.

Gus Fruh (left to right)

1. *Running Man* (5.12a).
2. *Reefer Madness* (5.11b/c*).
3. *Cyborg* (5.11b/c*).
4. *Birdland* (5.10d).
5. *Iranian Arms Deal* (5.8).
6. *Fern Bar* (5.9).
7. *Gros Ventre* (Big Stomach) (5.10).
8. *Wyoming Women* (5.8*). Crack. Variation 1, *Heir Apparent* (5.9), topropes 2 feet right of *Wyoming Women*; variation 2, *Wandering Women* (5.9), climbs the first half of *Wyoming Women*, then traverse up and right and finish *Thumb Dance*.
9. *Chicken Supreme* (5.10). Climb to gully left of two bulges. Variation 1, *Betwixt*

buttress on the west side of the creek. If the creek is high, bushwack up the west bank.

General description. Steep face and big roofs, with a premium on all around technique, from dime edges to big slopes.

Left Oven

1. *Ladrone* (Thief) (5.11b).
2. *Masada* (5.12c).
3. *Femme* (5.13a).
4. *Starfish* (5.12c*).
5. *Cell Block* (5.11b*).
6. *Medicine Man* (5.12b). Climb *Cell Block* and move right; finish *Tectonics*.
7. *Mah Jong* (5.12b).
8. *Plate Tectonics* (5.13b*).
9. *Spelloanatics* (project).
10. *Urban Assault* (5.10+ or A1).

Right Oven

11. *Deep Flow* (5.13-).
12. *Mandibles* (5.12c*).
13. *Lydesaid* (A1).
14. *Manchild* (5.12b). Climb is closed when the owl is home.

OTHER AREAS

Gooch Traverse bouldering. Located at 29th and Lamar. Park across the street at the parking lot on the southwest corner. Cross the street and walk downstream to the cement crossing, then uphill to the boulders in the trees. Blocky, white limestone boulders. Traverse the big boulder right to left and pull the roof for a V3 problem. Left to right staying low is V3. Several good problems and variations can be found on the overhanging south boulder.

10th Street Bridge bouldering. Located at 10th Street and Lamar Boulevard. Park on 10th behind the 7-11 and walk downhill under the bridge. Fierce, overhanging limestone edges. The right-to-left traverse is V4; lap it for a V5. Another fine Erik Harmes (Austin bouldering guru) problem.

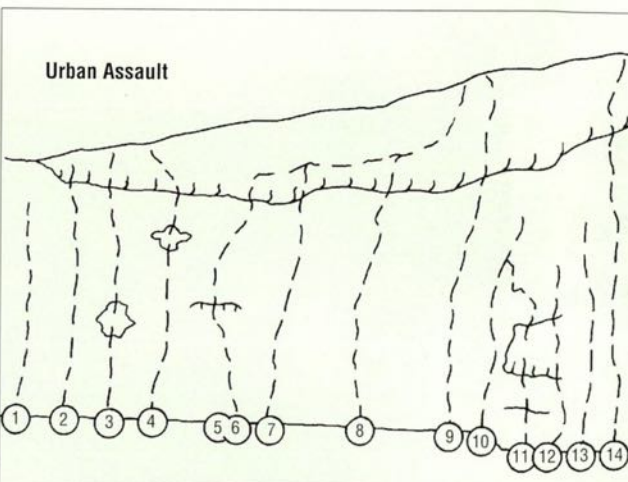
Sunken Gardens bouldering. From Town Lake, head south on Lamar, turn west onto Barton Springs. Turn left at Robert E. Lee and park at one of the baseball diamonds. Walk downhill to the spring-fed pool. An old-school climbing hang. Limestone blocks with edges; long traverses that will build forearm strength and footwork.

Kingdom of Ging (right of main Gus Fruh)

18. *Hank's B8* (V7*).
19. *Charlie Don't Surf* (5.10+).
20. *Jerry's Kids* (5.11*).
21. *Sex Dwarfs* (5.11b).
22. *King of Ging* (5.10a*).
23. *Gray Streak* (5.10a).

URBAN ASSAULT

Directions. From the Gus Fruh access, cross Barton Creek and turn left on the well-marked trail. Urban Assault is the big white



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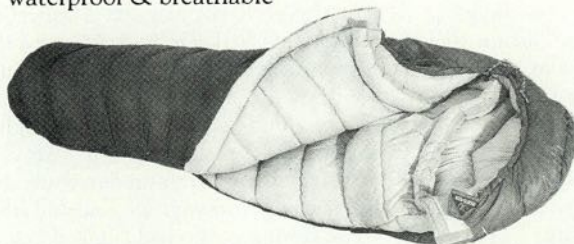
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Good fun with a few good friends

Masherbrum Range, Pakistan

Walking along Ghundugero Glacier towards the high pass of Gondoro La in Pakistan, I came across someone coming in the opposite direction. He was wearing yellow plastic mountaineering boots, a parka, and glasses, and carried a light backpack and ski poles. He did not look like your everyday trekker.

It turned out that he was from Chile and I from Argentina; we began sharing stories about Patagonia and what had brought us to this place so far away from home. He was a member of a Chilean expedition to Broad Peak, and was returning to Skardu via the villages of Hushe and Khapalu. On the way in, his team had followed the classic Baltoro Glacier trail, but this shorter, different route made more sense for the way back.

The Chileans were the first of an exodus coming out of the mountains: a Mexican group was expected any day, returning from K2, and there were others on their way. History was coming full circle: decades ago, before the road to Askole was completed, expeditions to the heart of the Karakoram came this way, reaching the Baltoro Glacier via the nearby Masherbrum La.

My friend Agustin Santamarina and I were different from these expedition people: we were a two-person team looking for a mountain to climb. Nothing fancy or glamorous, just a nice peak that would provide us with some fun and excitement. Our budget was also different: from Rawalpindi, food, porters, and transport included, each of us was planning to spend \$500. Our objective? Any 6000-meter peak. As we progressed along the glacier we looked left and right, judging the peaks around us, gauging difficulty, accessibility, and time needed for a quick ascent, making mental notes and taking pictures for future reference. Our decision was made difficult by the overabundance of good peaks to try.

Originally we had intended to go hiking and climbing in the Snow Lake area, an area recommended to us by Galen Rowell and described by Eric Shipton in his book *A Blank in the Map*. Galen told us the Baltistan-Hunza traverse along the Biafo and Hispar glaciers was a trip worth mak-

ing, one on which we would find plenty of good mountains. Yet in Rawalpindi we had a surprise while talking with the Pakistan Tourism Development man: when we mentioned our plans regarding the glacier trek, he produced a handful of computer-generated charts describing the itinerary, the daily elevation gains, the hours of walking per day, the location of camps, the availability of springs. "We just did that trip with a Dutch group," he

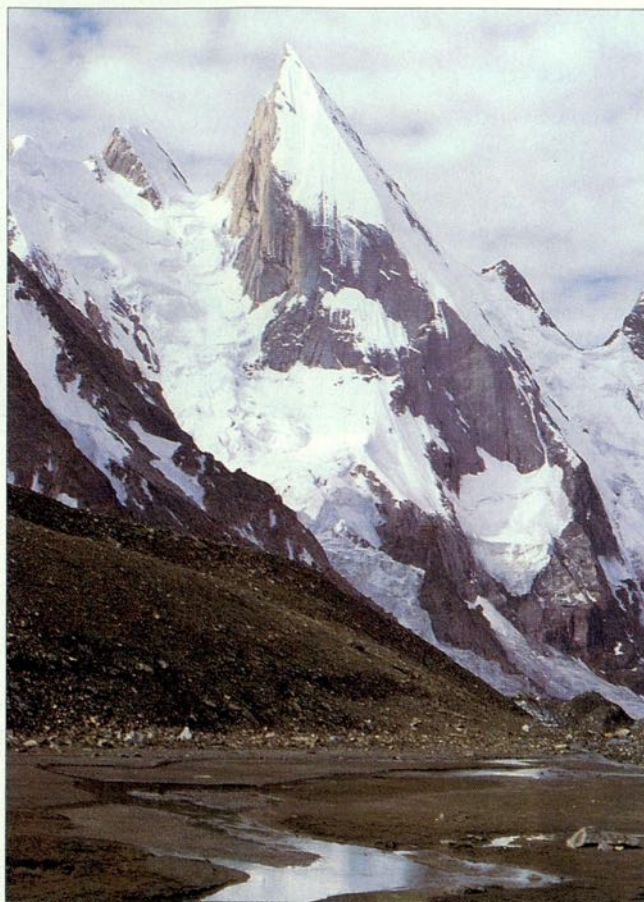
Hushe, was full of unnamed peaks towering above 6000 meters, many of which were unclimbed. It did not take us long to make up our minds.

In Skardu, it was surprisingly easy to find a jeep to take us to Hushe. We hired a driver who, with one of the many ubiquitous Toyotas, would take us for the six-hour ride. The drive followed a wide road for the first hour, and then the route became progressively more narrow and tortuous, crossing villages and fields, never losing sight of men and women working the land, trees full of ripening apricots, and other signs of human habitation. We regularly saw signposts crediting a Dutch development agency for the building of water works. The trip is an urbanist or rural economist's delight, with people, land, water, animals, and environment interacting with each other in front of one's eyes.

Upon arrival in Hushe we were surrounded with people. As usual, the little kids were the most playful, all identically clad with their *shalwar kameez*, while the girls observed from a distance, faces half hidden despite their curious eyes. With a schoolteacher as interpreter, we hired two people to give us a hand carrying our loads into a camp two days into the Ghundugero valley. The "stages" were clearly set all the way to the camp, with the standard 165 rupees per stage, and even though there was some latitude regarding porters' food and equipment fees, the lion's share was set from the beginning.

The approach took us along the Hushe River towards Masherbrum and the Masherbrum La, past an excellent view of the impressive walls of K7 in the south. We could divine Masherbrum La in the clouds, and came within sight of the incredible Lela Peak. Our two young and friendly porters updated us about recent expeditions; we learned about some Germans who had climbed Lela and some Japanese on a mountain close to Trinity Peak.

When we reached camp, the porters took off and we set to work finding a mountain to occupy us for the next sever-



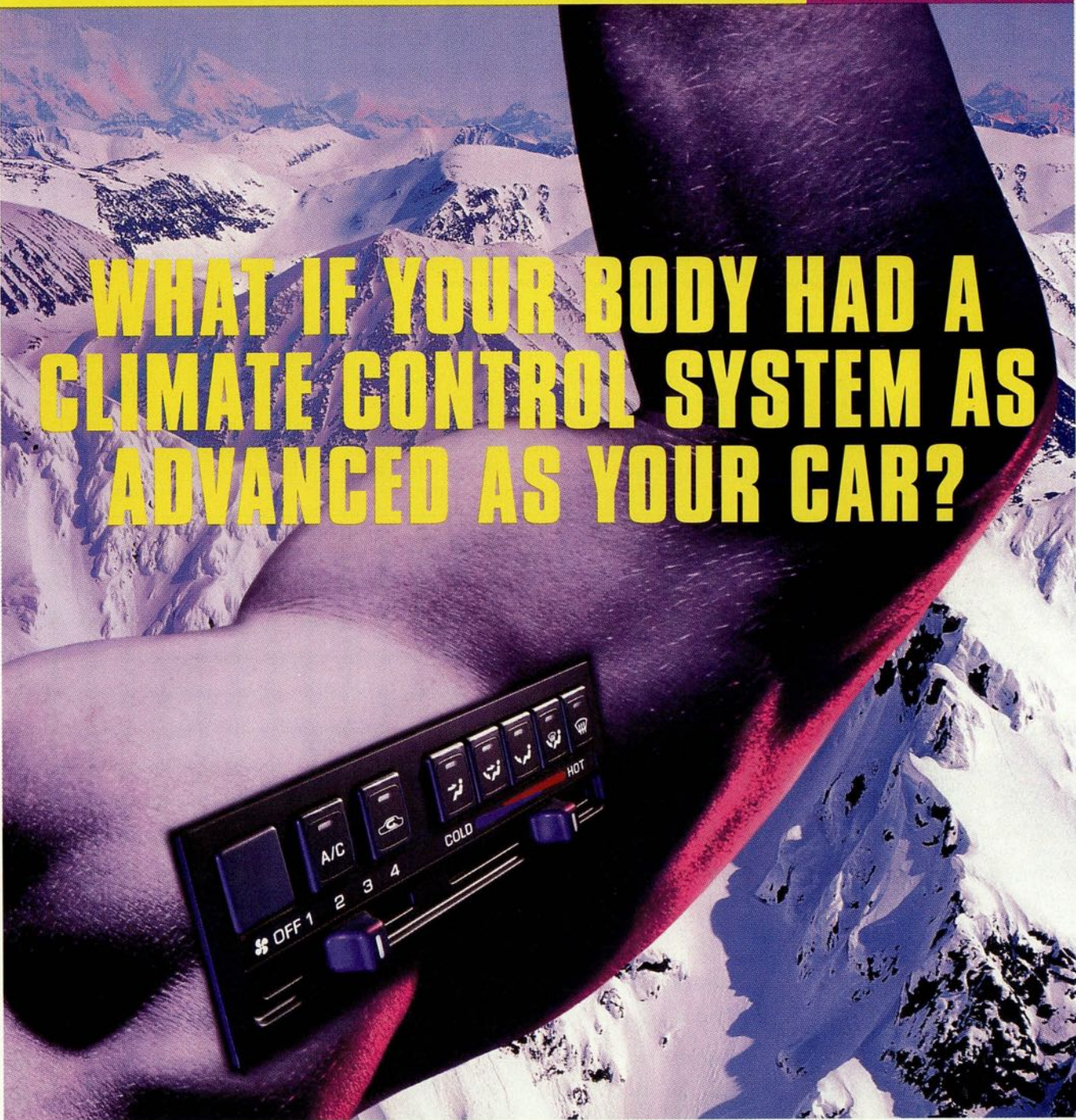
Lela Peak (6294 meters) from basecamp, two days out from the village of Hushe.

proudly mentioned, "this is a complete description of our itinerary." To us, that meant the worse: Snow Lake had been conquered by the adventure-travel hordes. We had to go somewhere else.

We mentioned Hushe, a village close to Masherbrum, located in a seldom-traveled valley that only recently saw the completion of a road from Skardu. "That's a beautiful area, and you don't need a permit," he said. In the tourism office, we checked a book that lists most ranges and peaks in Pakistan's Karakoram, and saw that the Masherbrum range, north of

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K2, Broad Peak, the Gasherbrum group, and Cho Oyu from Gondoro La (5400 meters).

al days. For acclimatization, we went up Gondoro La, the pass currently used to connect the Baltoro with Hushe — Masherbrum La is no longer travelled because of its myriad icefalls and crevasses. Gondoro La is a straightforward hike to 5000 meters, with an impressive view of the upper Baltoro Glacier. On a clear day you can see Chogolisa, the Gasherbrum group, Broad Peak, and K2.

And we found an objective, an unnamed 6810-meter peak very close to camp, with a clear ridge which apparently had no major technical difficulties. With a Swiss climber we met in camp, who had been on Cerro Torre and Aconcagua, we shared opinions on our proposed route. It was a beautiful line, and one that looked feasible for a small team. I was elated: this was a climb planned, literally, on the back of an envelope. We were going to attempt a mountain we knew nothing about, not even the name, along an unknown route. We were not even sure which mountain it was on the map.

Our equipment consisted of four ice screws, a few carabiners and slings, and a rope. We felt great about all of this; it was the ultimate light expedition. Pure, uncluttered fun.

With food for five days, good weather, and plenty of enthusiasm we started. We made good progress on day one, yet the glacier quickly got complicated, with massive crevasses and seracs. We lost valuable time and energy. At the end of two days we reached the bergschrund, only to be confronted by a 200-meter rock headwall we had not seen from basecamp. With no rock equipment, we decided to quit without even having started on the mountain. A real pity, given that we still had time and the weather was holding; we were letting clear, windless skies go unused! Yet we digested it quickly: we had gambled in our exploratory approach towards this colossus, and we had been stopped short. Next time it would be better. The rewards, had

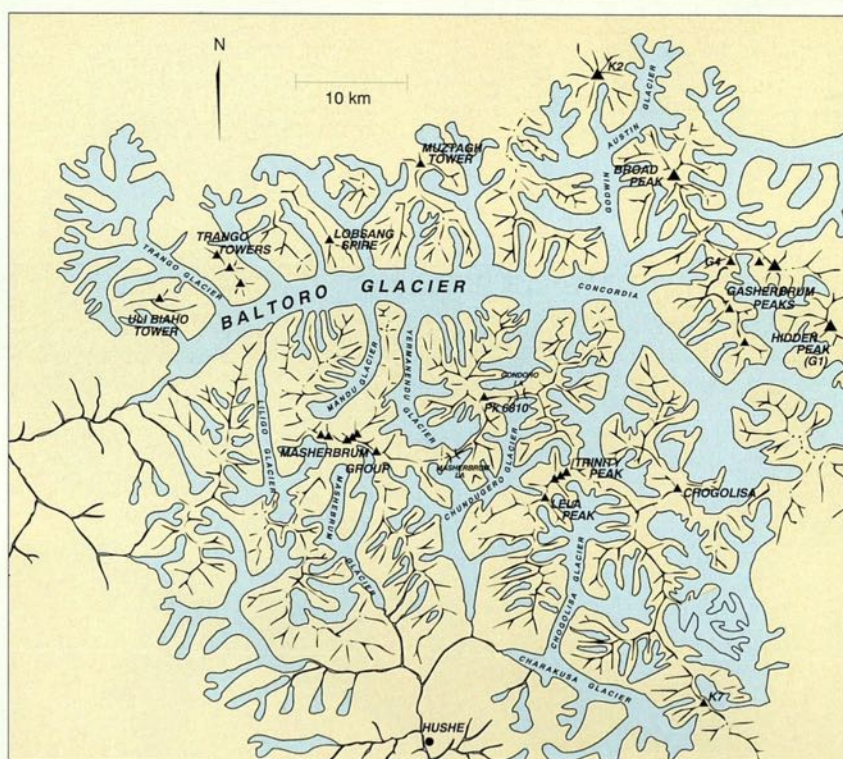
we succeeded, would have been immense.

The return to Hushe was uneventful. In camp, Ibrahim, our new 50-year-old porter, prepared us Balti soup while we offered him Knorr cream of chicken. We came across goat and sheep herders and a group of adventurous Britons on an organized trek. How long will it be before even more commercial trips visit the area?

The Masherbrum valleys, lying in the shadow of the Karakoram 8000-meter peaks, have so far been ignored by Western travelers and remain full of discoveries to be made. It is an ideal region for small expeditions looking less for glory than for good climbing and good fun with a few good friends.

— Sebastian Letemendia

Photo: Sebastian Letemendia



LOGISTICS

Access. Reach the village of Hushe by jeep from Skardu. There is no regular service, but it is easy to find a driver. Price fluctuates around 2200 rupees (about \$100), but it can be negotiated down if the jeep is carrying cargo. One alternative, although not recommended, is to ride a public bus to Khapalu and wait for someone to come by.

Permits. Trekking permits are not needed for this area, making life easier for low-budget expeditions. Climbing permits are needed for major peaks (over 6000 meters).

Guidebooks/maps. Information on the area is scarce. Maps

are best obtained in the United States; Chessler Books has sketch maps, but topos are more difficult to find. Probably the best information can be found in accounts of earlier expeditions, when the approach route to the Baltoro went over Masherbrum La.

General. People in Hushe are incredibly friendly. The schoolmaster, Mr. Murat, speaks good English and can be helpful in organizing porters. There is no porter service in Hushe, yet there are plenty of strong hands looking for work, and Hushe people have a reputation for honesty and goodwill.

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and the same thickness of fleece without the Gore membrane is barely measurable!

The result: products made from WindStopper Fleece are very comfortable and *much* warmer in the wind than similar pieces made with regular fleece.

ALPINE HAT

This hat features a simple shape with circular ear band and truncated-triangle-shaped top; the bottom edge is somewhat curved to provide excellent coverage for the ears.



EAR BAND

This one velcros together in the back so it will fit virtually any head. Its lower edge is curved so that the ears remain covered at all times without having the front of the band crawling down over the eyes.



PERUVIAN HAT

Our Peruvian hat has the same top shape as the Alpine, but adds generous pointy ear flaps.

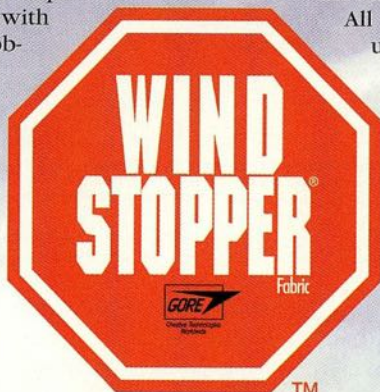
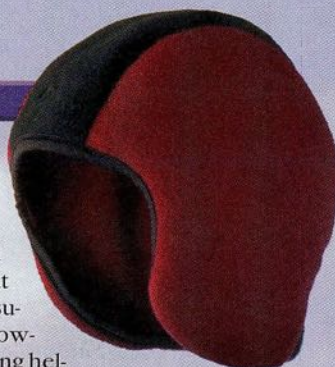
The chin cord adjusts with a cordlock to avoid the obnoxious effort of tying strings in a cold wind with gloves on. The cord allows the ear flaps to be held in place on top of the hat in a very stylish fashion when not needed for ear warmth.



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This has virtually the same "helmet-liner" shape as our Moonlite Pile Liner for the Hat For All Seasons, and it can be

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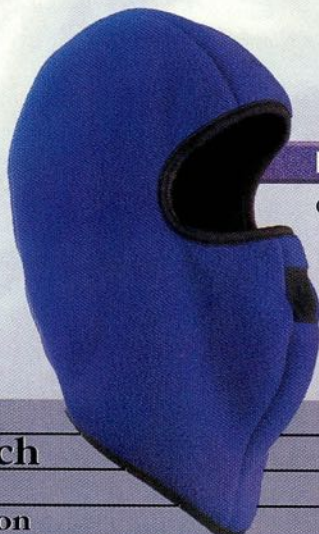
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Women's Rock Day outstripping itself

North Conway, New Hampshire

"There was long ones, tall ones, short ones, brown ones, black ones, round ones, big ones...craa-zy ones." Remember that line from the old Eric Burden and War song, "Spill the Wine," whose narrator looks down from a mountaintop and sees "every kind of girl"?

The scene, upstairs at the host International Mountain Equipment (IME) shop in North Conway, was dizzying. Hundreds of women: walking, talking, having coffee and muffins, in line, registering, fingering gear, laughing, gesturing.

At the North End of Cathedral Ledge, one of several sites of the Women's Rock Day on June 26, looking down from the top of the cliff almost made you sick, with all its surging color and motion.

There was noise, too. As Miranda Branagan, 10, fought every inch to get to the top of Child's Play, the hordes cheered every half inch. A young woman on the adjacent route stopped to talk Miranda through moves. Loud applause issued when the girl reached the tree anchor, and one of the women at that cliff turned to another and said, "Well, that was worth waiting for." With 150 women on the spot, some waited two hours to get on a route.

Lowered to terra firma, Miranda slumped over from her stalky legs to the ground, only half in jest. She raised a sweaty face up from under a big white helmet. "Awesome, Mom," she said.

That night at the packed, humid, and unruly raffle and slide shows held at the Mount Cranmore Recreation Center, Jed Williamson, AAC president, one of the few men (who were generally sheepish-looking) to drop in, said, "This is like Jurassic Park... Like, what if they all turn on me?"

The numbers alone were insistent. Last year's first Women's Rock Day in North Conway expected 40 participants and got 140. This year, counting volunteers, the event got a cool 374. Chief among the huge volunteer corps to make it happen were the locals Wanda Allen, who thinks she put in 200 hours, and Julie Voyles. They called on myriad sponsors, of which

a hefty 83 contributed, chief among them PolarTec, *Climbing*, and Blue Water.

The women came from as far away as New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Canada; with a quarter of them over 36, they were



"There were long ones, tall ones, short ones, brown ones, black ones, round ones, big ones...craa-zy ones," at Women's Rock Day.

aged 8 to 58, although we should probably count one 15-month-old gamine in an elegant full-body harness. "Does she climb in that?" her mother, Leslie Brown of Connecticut, was asked. "Of course she does!" said Brown.

Brown's husband, Claude, was one of the handful of men — including Randy Zuckerman, Gary Williams, Bruce Theiland, and Hank Gross — to join the volunteer corps, moving loads of prizes and food, transporting people, and helping to set up a huge buffet at the Mount Cranmore climbing wall.

The women were from all walks. There was an obstetrician, a dozen L.L. Bean employees, and a pickup-truck-driving bartender. She had three tattoos, one a feather in a mischievous place, which she explained with, "I went crazy when I got my divorce... Now I just do stuff like rock climb." Actually, there were a lot of tattoos around.

There was a landscaper, an upholsterer, a psychologist, an entrepreneur, a physical therapist, a Cancer Society program director, a lot of ex-NOLS and OB instructors, and a whole lot of students, from high school to graduate. One woman brought the special-education team she teaches, eight teenage girls.

Among the others attending were women who've found it hasn't worked out to climb with their husbands or boyfriends, and were looking for partners. One participant, Paula Ferguson, was

there testing the waters in hopes of organizing some sort of Eastern version of the Women Climbers Northwest organization. She would like the association to offer an opportunity for women to socialize and climb with other women, slide shows, newsletters, and climbing trips. (For information, contact her at 92 Rogers Ave. #2, Somerville, MA 02144; (617) 666-5334.)

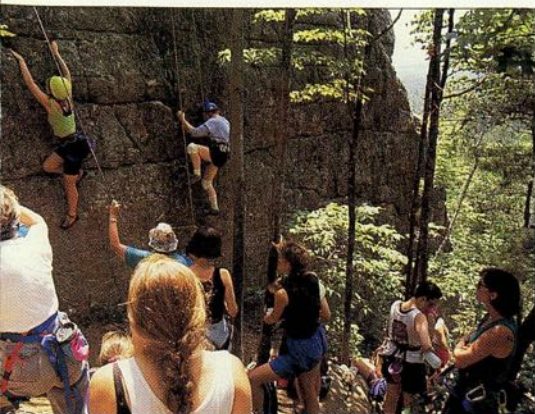
That evening came the prize giveaway, at which everyone got a prize or two, choosing from tables generously piled with donated goods. Then followed slide shows by Nancy Frederickson on climbing the West Rib on Denali, and myself, from *Climbing*, contrasting traditional climbing meets and exchanges with today's competitions and World Cup tour. (The women cheered to hear that women superfinalists in world events today are frequently placed on the men's finals routes and often climb very high on them, even to the point where they would have placed among the top men.)

Women's Rock Day was set up mostly for beginners, and for women climbers simply to meet and get a chance to climb with other women. Answering a questionnaire after the event, over a third of the women checked "camaraderie" as what they liked best about the day, with 18 percent saying "peer support" and 17 percent citing "affordable." The price, \$15 a head, was a pretty good deal for a day out climbing and learning knots, etc.

The event may change, though. It's getting too big to handle, in terms of the hundreds of set-up hours and the time participants waited to get on routes.

Patty Wespiser-Gill, the organizer, is playing with some ideas, although she has recently moved to Colorado Springs and has not decided whether to take up the invitation to run the event again.

"One thought is to do this every two years, another is to change the format," she



Action at the North End of Cathedral Ledge, where some 150 of the participants gathered.

says. "Focus on beginner climbers one day and have a seminar for intermediate and advanced climbers another day. It could cover leading, rescue, aid, and technique."

To me, a visitor, special events like the Women's Rock Day these days seemed good-spirited but rather anachronistic. They were a needed and compensatory thing at one time, years ago, when women had fewer opportunities to climb, but perhaps not anymore, with so many women today out on the rocks and mountains. And, in terms of fairness, they're awkward — wouldn't it sound objectionable if there were a men-only climbing day or trip? On the other hand, I do believe in what works. Look at the numbers for this and similar events around the country, such as the Women That Rock day in Jackson, Wyoming, two years ago. They're big: there's something going on, a need and a desire. Actually, I think if a similar event were held for guys, they wouldn't come.

Mused a local and longtime climber, Steve Larson, who that day avoided the crowds with a trip to Cannon Mountain, an hour away, "It seems kind of antithetical to climbing, going out there with hundreds of people. But I've heard only positive things about it."

"The support of the day doesn't just end on the day, it keeps going," says Wespiser-Gill, speaking of the many letters and thank-yous that organizers, sponsors, and IME received both years. In answering the questionnaire, 67 percent of participants said they'd volunteer to help with future events.

The day after the event, a woman walked into the IME store and saw one of the Women's Rock Day flyers that had been posted. She hadn't known about it. "That was yesterday?" she wailed to the salesperson behind the counter, Alec Behr. "Well, can you put me on the mailing list for next year?"

— Alison Osius

Even as a kid, I hated restrictions. "Todd's quite a handful," my teachers would say. I had them climbing the walls. Who knew twenty years later I'd be climbing a few walls myself.

— Todd Skinner,
Rock Climber



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European winter hotspot

El Chorro, Spain

Spain's Mediterranean Costa del Sol is a ravaged land. What was once a magnificent coastline is now a strip of concrete: apartments, hotels, and bars, 200 yards deep stretch as far as the eye can see. From Malaga to Gibraltar the sun seekers jet in during the summer for their two weeks of roasting on the beach, dieting on french fries, and discos. In the winter, senior citizens from Great Britain, Germany, and Scandinavia escape the fog and frost of northern Europe and pass the winter comfortably just across from the north African coast. Some of the more discerning climbers are starting to catch on.

But the climbing takes place just a short distance inland, in the real Spain. Small white houses cluster around impressive churches and are surrounded by defensive walls. Donkeys are often still used for transport, and oxen plow fields of almost biblical stoniness. Here are mile upon mile of rolling farmland (with almonds, oranges, and olives), a population that lives very much on the poverty line, and El Chorro.

El Chorro is the original "one-horse" town. If Clint, with a cheroote clenched between his teeth and eyes reduced to slits against the Spanish winter sun, were to ride down the main drag astride a decrepit burro, nobody would give him a second glance. Scabby dogs scavenge for scraps as the goat herder steers his animals down the street and the climbers sit outside the Station Bar, taking in the scene and sipping a cold beer after a hot, hard day on the rock.

Although there are numerous other crags, the El Chorro area is the most important climbing center in the south of Spain, offering impeccable limestone and a variety of cliffs, all with a distinct character, from slabs to caves. But the beauty of El Chorro is the fact that you don't have to climb 5.12 to have a good time, and its unique access can be as thrilling as the climbing.

Mike Appleton and Nigel Baker on *Pillier Dorado* (5.11c), El Polverin, in February.

Photo: Chris Craggs

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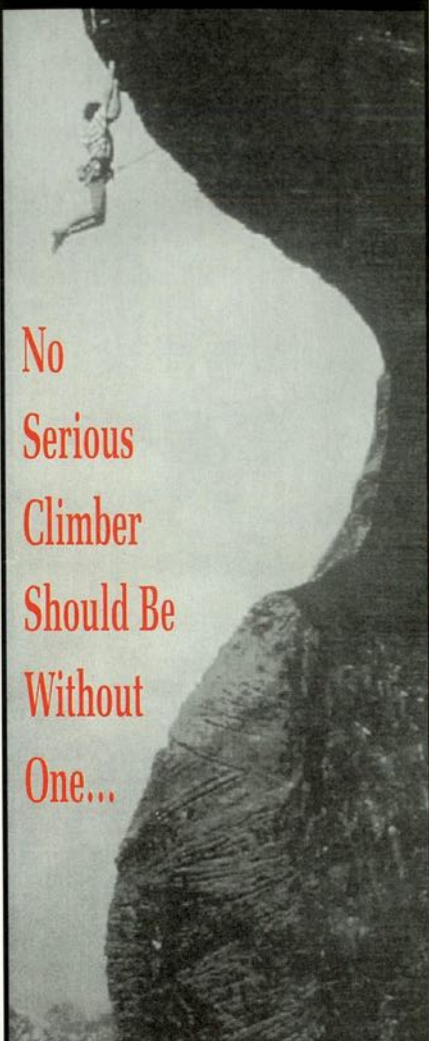
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Forty miles inland from Malaga, a rocky ridge, a thousand feet high and split by an awesome ravine, bars access to the interior of the country. In the 1920s a series of railway tunnels were punched straight through the cliffs as part of a hydroelectric scheme. To get workmen into the gorge a spectacular catwalk was constructed along the sheer side of the cliffs and when King Alfonso officially opened the hydro project, the walkway became known as El Camino del Rey, or the King's Way. The venture was an economic failure, and the walkway fell into disrepair, but 70 years later it is still hanging on, but only just. Now the railway offers an easy way to El Chorro, and the tunnels and walkway access the myriad cliffs.

The walkway is not a place for those lacking a head for heights — a stumble on 99 percent of it would be fatal. Most of the handrails have long since found a resting place in the bed of the gorge, and in places falling rocks have punched holes in the walkway floor. A fixed grin and stony stare are de rigeur as you clip into wire cables and sidestep across these gaps.

With over 80 routes from 5.5 to 5.12b, the wide slabby cliff of Los Cotos in the center of the gorge is the main attraction. Facing due south and shielded from the prevailing winds, this sheet of grey limestone is the ideal winter crag. From the parking lot by the station you reach it by walking through four tunnels. Remember, this is a main railway line, and the trains are fairly frequent and fast; a stiff breeze often blows through the tunnels and the trains have a horrible way of sneaking up on you.

The central section of the cliff is especially popular, with a collection of a dozen or so routes around 5.8 to 5.10a, all well bolted. As warm-ups try *Route 1* (5.6) or the slightly harder *Inominata* (5.8). The right side of the slab is steeper, and here *Super Galleta* (5.10a) and *Los Mandriles No Comen Galletas* (5.10c) are especially worthwhile. The climbs continues up the slabs to the right for another 40 or so routes, almost all of which are brilliant. Especially noteworthy are the deliciously sustained *El Viajero Amable* (5.11a), the very thin *Guerros del Abismo* (5.11d), and the even thinner (match edges and razor blades) *Guirilandia* (5.12a).

Through the next tunnel lies my favorite cliff in the area: El Polverin. This 200-foot wall, plumb vertical, is home to a clutch of superb "big" pitches in the 5.11a to 5.11c range, supplemented with classics in both higher and lower grades. The routes here are often sportingly bolted, demanding a certain confidence. Espe-

cially memorable are the *Pillier Dorado* (5.11c), and *Habitos de un Perturbo Irreversible* (5.11d) with a 30-foot runout up 5.10c territory. Also worthy is the five-pitch *Paco Eugene* (5.10b), which follows a striking line up the right side of the cliff and saves its crux for the last few moves of the last pitch.

Above the dirt road that runs east from El Chorro is a superbly situated line of cliffs and towers that go under the collective title of Las Encantadas. Initially, these cliffs were largely ignored because of the steep 15-minute approach from the station. In the past year, this situation has been remedied with the opening of a refugio below the cliffs, and new routes are going up like gangbusters. Superb pitches like *Un Lait Fraise Por Monsieur* (5.12b), *Gros Rouge* (5.12c), and *Un Dura de un Freeke* (5.11c) became instant classics. For something a little tougher, the ultra-sustained and ultra-sharp *La Mulas Comen Muchos Cuerdos* (5.13c) should give you (and your fingertips) something to think about. Further up the hill the crag of El Corral hosted a competition in 1992. The circus has gone, but the routes remain: *Los Muyayos* (5.11d) and *Monododo de Mono* (5.13d) are the pick of the 20 or so climbs here, with plenty of gaps yet to fill in.

Recently there have been access problems with the locals who farm below some sections of the cliff, precipitated by climbers trampling over cultivated land and even taking baths in the water supply. It is hoped that common sense and consideration will overcome these difficulties.

Presently, there are a few climbs of more than a ropelength. On the extensive Frontales cliff behind the village there is only one bolted line, the seven-pitch classic *El Amprax* (5.10a). Further right some huge caves are home to several short routes and the first pitch of the highly recommended *Poema Roca* (5.11b, .12d, .12a, .14a, .11d, .11c), the route is fully bolted and the belay seats have been left in place; there can be few finer limestone outings anywhere.

Before ending this whistle-stop tour of El Chorro, I must mention the only route that utilizes the full height of the cliffs. The memorable 11-pitch *Zeppelin* (two pitches of 5.11c and the rest somewhat easier) climbs from the chaos of boulders in the bed of the gorge to a shoulder where vultures lurk, high on the ridge. The crux overhang is spectacular bucket pulling in a dramatic situation while the rest of the route is just good honest fun.

— Chris Craggs

(continued on page 36)

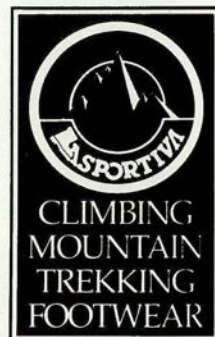
"THE KEY TO CROSSROADS

is one move where both of your hands are slapping up two aretes, your left toe is hooked and ninety percent of your weight is on this super frictiony bump that you just smear to the max, after that there's a whole series of edges that take you to the top. You can't do it in slippers, you need the stiffness that a boot gives you, but you still need to be able to smear ... it's such a great thing to be able to climb granite like that ... it opens an entire world of possibilities."

Ron Kauk on the Tao Rossa and his new Yosemite route *Crossroads* (5.13c).

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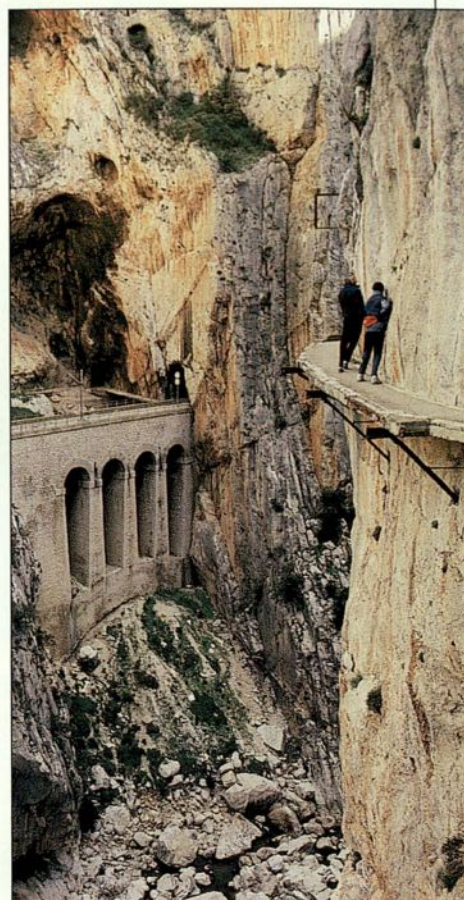
El Chorro, Spain

Getting there. El Chorro is situated 40 miles inland from the international airport at Malaga, where you can reach it by train in just over an hour, or you rent a car at the airport (try Premier Car Hire; phone: 0279 641040; book ahead for substantial savings).

To get there by car, follow the road out of the airport and turn left (east) along the coastal highway toward Malaga. After a couple kilometers, the road crosses a river, the Guadalhorce (that also runs through the gorge of El Chorro). Turn right and pass under the highway to reach a road heading inland and passing through an industrial area. Follow this, turning left at any junctions for four kilometers to a T junction opposite the chemical works. Turn left and follow this tortuous road through Campanillas, Estacion de Cartama, and Pizarra. Five kilometers after Pizarra a left turn crosses the valley and rises up the hill to the spectacularly situated town of Alora. Take this. Turn right at the first set of traffic lights, and follow the road for 12 kilometers to cross the impressive dam into El Chorro.

Seasons. October through April is the best time to take advantage of the mild Mediterranean weather.

Accommodations and supplies. In El Chorro, the Bar Gargantua (opposite the station) has pleasant rooms; the prices are fairly variable, and markedly more expensive over holidays and when it's raining. There are also cheap rooms in Alora,



One of the more exposed sections of the walkway on a windy day.

There are also cheap rooms in Alora, which is 15 kilometers from El Chorro (you can catch the train to El Chorro from here daily).

You can camp for free in the woods at the end of the track leading to the gorge, in the orange groves in the center of the gorge (a 30-minute walk from the station), and at the refuge below Las Encantadas.

Two small shops in El Chorro stock most things, and a van selling bread and fresh vegetables calls daily at the village. A much cheaper option is to stock up in Alora (there are a number of small supermarkets on the right as you approach from El Chorro) or Malaga. Malaga has a couple of climbing shops on the Calle de Carretera (north of the city center). Don't forget about the daily siesta.

Guidebooks. The Station Bar has a topo guide available for perusal, and there is a recently published guide in English: *Andalusian Rock Climbs* (available by sending \$15 to Chris Craggs, 2 Rustlings Court, Graham Road, Sheffield, S10 3HQ, England).

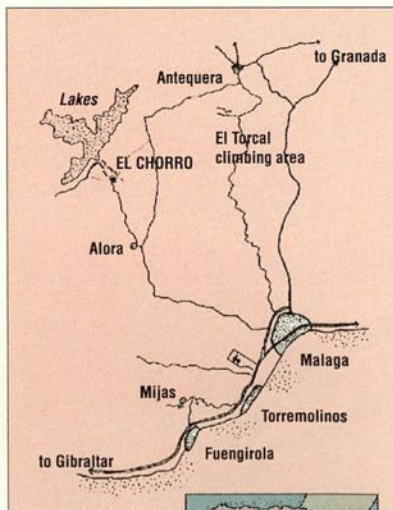


Photo: Chris Craggs

AMGA: twists, shouts, and stamps

The famed French mountain guide Gaston Rebuffat once wrote, "What would a guide be without someone to lead?" He was reminiscing about a climb he'd guided and enjoyed almost 40 years ago. Today in America guides are posing a similar question, only with a more urgent spin: what good is a guide without clients and places to take them? These are the two ingredients of any successful guiding business, and depending on whom you ask, access to both is either being threatened or advanced by the American Mountain Guides Association (AMGA).

The AMGA consists of more than 300 mountain guides and climbing instruc-

divides the American guiding community.

Any member of the AMGA who operates a guide service or climbing school can apply for accreditation. A review team of AMGA members determines whether an applicant conducts his business safely and employs appropriate procedures. According to Steve Young, the AMGA's executive secretary, "About 75 percent of the guide services that apply for accreditation actually receive it."

Certification, on the other hand, is awarded to individuals, who may become certified as alpine or rock guides, or both. (The AMGA will soon add ski-guiding certification to its existing programs.) Applicants are tested in areas of leadership, judgment, client care, technical expertise, rescue skills, and environmental consciousness. Young puts the certification success rate at about 70 percent, and the number of AMGA-certified guides at approximately 40.

Critics of the AMGA's accreditation and certification programs charge that the AMGA is not qualified to assess a guide's abilities. Michael Covington, who owns Fantasy Ridge Mountain Guides, was an early

member, but walked out in 1986 when the association decided to pursue certification. "They define the lowest common denominator in the climbing community," he says. "What makes a good guide can't be measured in any exam. A good guide is experienced, but he's also emotionally sensitive."

Young, however, believes it is possible to appraise a guide's judgement. "We're not trying to be dogmatic, but I think it's a cop-out to say you can't assess someone's abilities as a guide."

Young says the educational benefits offered through the AMGA certification courses are reason enough to pursue certification. He adds, "Michael might even learn something if he took them."

Charlie Fowler, an AMGA-certified guide, agrees that the association's strong suit is education. "Being certified hasn't really helped my business dramatically, but I feel I'm a better guide for going through the program," he says. Fowler believes certification "offers the [guiding] profession some direction."

But that direction is exactly what concerns AMGA critics, who view accreditation and certification programs as synonymous with formalization and standardiza-

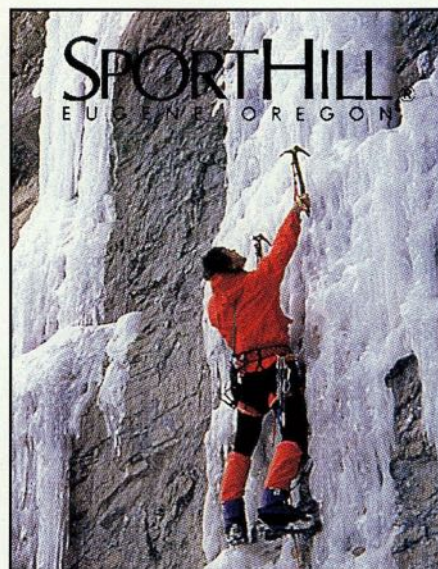


How does the AMGA fit into the American guiding profession?

tors. It began in 1979 with 12 founding members as the American Professional Mountain Guides Association. Until 1986, when membership opened to all active guides and instructors, only those who met predetermined criteria as rock, ice, or ski mountaineering guides were admitted. In 1987 the APMGA dropped the "P" from its long name.

No one takes issue with the AMGA's stated objectives: to promote high standards of safety, professionalism, knowledge, and skill among mountain guides and climbing instructors. What the AMGA's critics object to is the direction the association has taken since establishing its goals. "The AMGA started out with one mission, then made a 180-degree turn," says R.L. Stolz, who, with his wife, Karen, owns Alpine Adventures in Keene, New York. "The AMGA set out to create an information exchange but instead became a stamp of approval."

For example, the AMGA promotes two "stamp" programs: an accreditation program for guide services and climbing schools, and an individual guide-certification program. Both are at the heart of a controversy that



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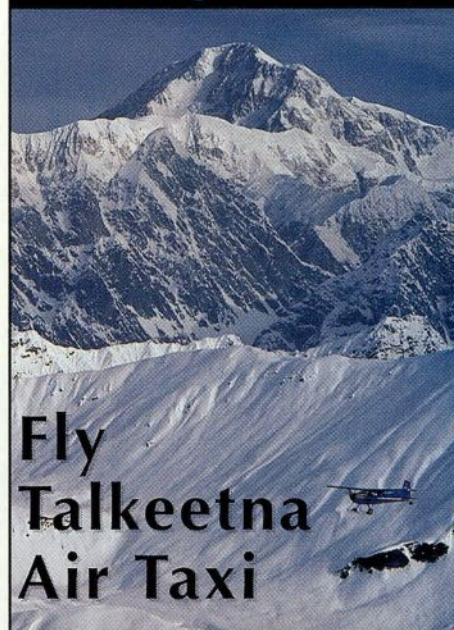
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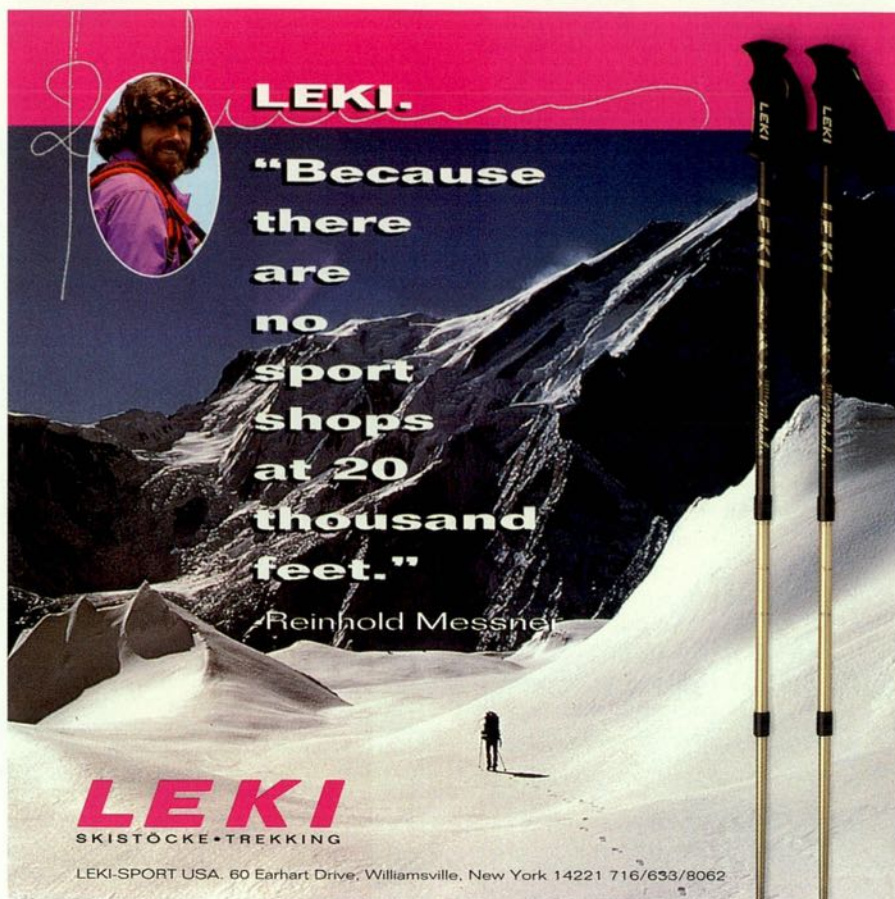
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tion, two processes of conformity that not only run counter to the guiding industry's reigning independent spirit.

Certification could threaten non-certified guides' access to clients and places to take them. The AMGA's opponents are concerned that climbing consumers, insurance companies, and land managers might come to base their decisions about a guide's qualifications simply on his AMGA affiliation, rather than experience, track record, and personal compatibility. "There's an assumption that accredited guides operate at the highest standards," says Stolz. "But most of our best guides aren't accredited or certified."

Covington agrees, and believes that a guide's performance in the field is the better measure of his abilities. "A guide should provide full disclosure [of his safety record] to his clients so they can judge for themselves how good they feel about going out in the field with him," he says.

Covington also is concerned that, if the AMGA's accreditation and certification programs continue to gain acceptance with land managers and insurance companies, the guiding industry will be even more vulnerable to lawsuits than it already is. The legal term for Covington's fear is "conferred credibility." The plaintiff in a liability case could name not just a guide and the guide's insurance company, but the National Park Service and the AMGA for conferring credibility on a guide he deems incompetent. Because Covington feels as strongly as he does that the AMGA's programs measure a guide's abilities inadequately, he says, "I can't wait to be called as a witness in a conferred credibility case."

According to Mark Houston, an AMGA member, accreditation and certification have already attracted the attention of many land managers. "Some have [implemented] or are planning to implement these programs as part of their permit application system," he says.

Houston himself further believes the AMGA's main objective should be to increase commercial access for accredited and certified members. In a recent editorial in the AMGA's quarterly *Mountain Bulletin*, he proposes that, "If the AMGA became a vehicle for obtaining access to otherwise inaccessible lands, the strength of the organization and its attractiveness to potentially new members would increase dramatically."

The AMGA takes a lot of its cues from the Union Internationale Association des Guides de Montagnes (UIAGM), which it hopes to join in the next year. The UIAGM is comprised of 13 member countries, and acts as an authority to their representing associations. Associations can join the UIAGM, but UIAGM-certified-



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photo: Colin Samuels Mick Wheeler at Argentiére Glacier

member status is granted only to individual guides. Once a guide receives UIAGM certification, he is free to practice in any of the 13 countries the union represents.

This system works in Europe and in other countries because associations sanctioned by the UIAGM have the legal authority to regulate guiding within their own countries. Without UIAGM certification, a guide cannot practice legally in the countries the union represents. Not so in the United States; the AMGA does not have regulatory authority, but its influence over land managers is becoming quite significant. It was largely due to the AMGA's findings in an independent review of Alpine Ascents International that the National Park Service reconsidered its decision to grant one of seven Denali guiding concessions to AAI (see "Battle over guiding concessions heats up," *Climbing* No. 139, page 28. Since this story was published, the NPS affirmed its initial decision to grant the concession to AAI.)

Covington, for one, doesn't want the AMGA to gain regulatory powers. "The AMGA is a special-interest group," he says. "The federal agencies do a much better job of administering our land-use policies than the AMGA ever could, because they care more about our natural resources than about commercial access."

Stolz doesn't believe the AMGA is in a position to present itself to land managers and the UIAGM as the official representative of the American guiding community. "There need to be fewer voices opposed, first. Right now [the AMGA] works better for marketing than it does for quality control. If the AMGA is going to have a tremendous amount of control," says Stolz, "then it better take responsibility for it and become more restrictive than it is solicitous."

Most American professional associations are not imbued with legal regulatory powers. The American Medical and Bar Associations don't regulate the activities of their members, and their members don't have to be such to practice. Still, a lawyer who wants to practice in Utah, for example, has to become a member of the Utah State Bar. He has to pass Utah's bar exam, and before he can even take that test, prove he attended an ABA-accredited law school.

It's constitutionally improbable that the AMGA will ever gain legal regulatory powers. But as its influence over land managers and climbing consumers grows, the AMGA's position as the official representative of the American guiding community will surely strengthen. What remains for the AMGA is to convince a jury of its peers that it deserves the power and influence it's gaining. A verdict is pending.

— Byron Freney



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South of Sixty

Ellsworth Mountains, Antarctica

High, cold, isolated, and grand, Antarctica's Ellsworth Mountains are rapidly becoming the latest exotic alpine hotspot. Beginning at a southerly latitude of 79 degrees, this slender chain of polar peaks winds its way south in an aesthetic row of pristine, 4000-meter delights.

Last November, when the sun crept southward enough to raise the Ice Continent's temperature to a balmy minus 30 degrees F, climbers of every nationality

ascended in 1986. Today 145 people have stood on the top of Vinson; a third of those reached the summit last year.

Last season the Ellsworth Mountains were visited by a large, eclectic group of climbers. Doug Scott and Roger Mear led a nine-person group up to the summit of Vinson. The large party moved slowly; after nearly a week of battling a brutal stretch of polar weather, the group summited in a raging gale that numbed body parts, froze contact lenses to the eyes, and left the Himalayan veteran Doug Scott with his first case of frostbite in 30 years of climbing.

the sixth ascent of Mount Shinn, Antarctica's third highest.

As a warm-up for future plans, Jay Smith and Conrad Anker guided their party up the unclimbed south face of Vinson. The team, Smith, Anker, Clive Duval, Steve Plumb, Paul Teten, Joe Blackburn, and Jim Fries, climbed a steep icefall to a long, sloping plateau for what seemed like eternity until they reached the base of the summit pyramid, a 60-degree slope of mixed climbing. A patch of bad weather had been moving down from the north all day, and as the party approached the summit they were confronted with a wall of cloud and snow, apocalyptic winds, and minus 68 F temperatures.

In a hard judgement call the team turned and descended, just 50 meters below the summit. The wall turned out to be a five-day storm, the worst of the season. The group titled the route *From the Heart*, and dedicated it to Mugs Stump, who had originated the trip but was tragically killed last spring on Denali.

Also on the south side of Vinson, the American Robert Anderson came one peak closer to completing his goal of becoming the first person to solo all Seven Summits. In just a few days, traveling alone and light, Anderson completed two new routes, climbing to the summit and back twice by two separate lines. Vinson was the sixth summit on the list — the last is Everest. Anderson has previously attempted Everest, via the Kanshung Face.

There were a few new footprints in the virgin snow, most notably those of Smith, Anker, Teten, and Duval on Mount Craddock (4650 meters), one of the continent's last big unclimbed peaks. On the way to Craddock the team traveled what they called the Texas Glacier, a large icefield under the west face of Craddock. As they approached its center, a five-square-mile sheet of ice settled, releasing explosively at the four corners. "It was like a sonic boom," said Anker. The pair guided their clients up the moderate snow-and-ice climb alpine style, gaining 6800 feet in 13 1/2 hours and reaching the summit on December 14. They called their route the Western Spur.

Prior to the Western Spur climb, Anderson and Blackburn made the first ascent of Mount Atkinson (3240 meters), by its east face. Smith and Anker climbed a direct route on the face the next day while waiting for better weather for



Clive Duval, Paul Teten, and Steve Plumb at 4000 meters on the Vinson Plateau during the first ascent of *From the Heart*, south face of Mount Vinson.

made their way to the land "south of sixty." Most of the Antarctic alpinists came afflicted with a case of Seven Summits fever — a malady characterized by the desire to climb the highest point on each continent. As Antarctica's highest peak, at 4897 meters, the Vinson Massif saw most of the attention.

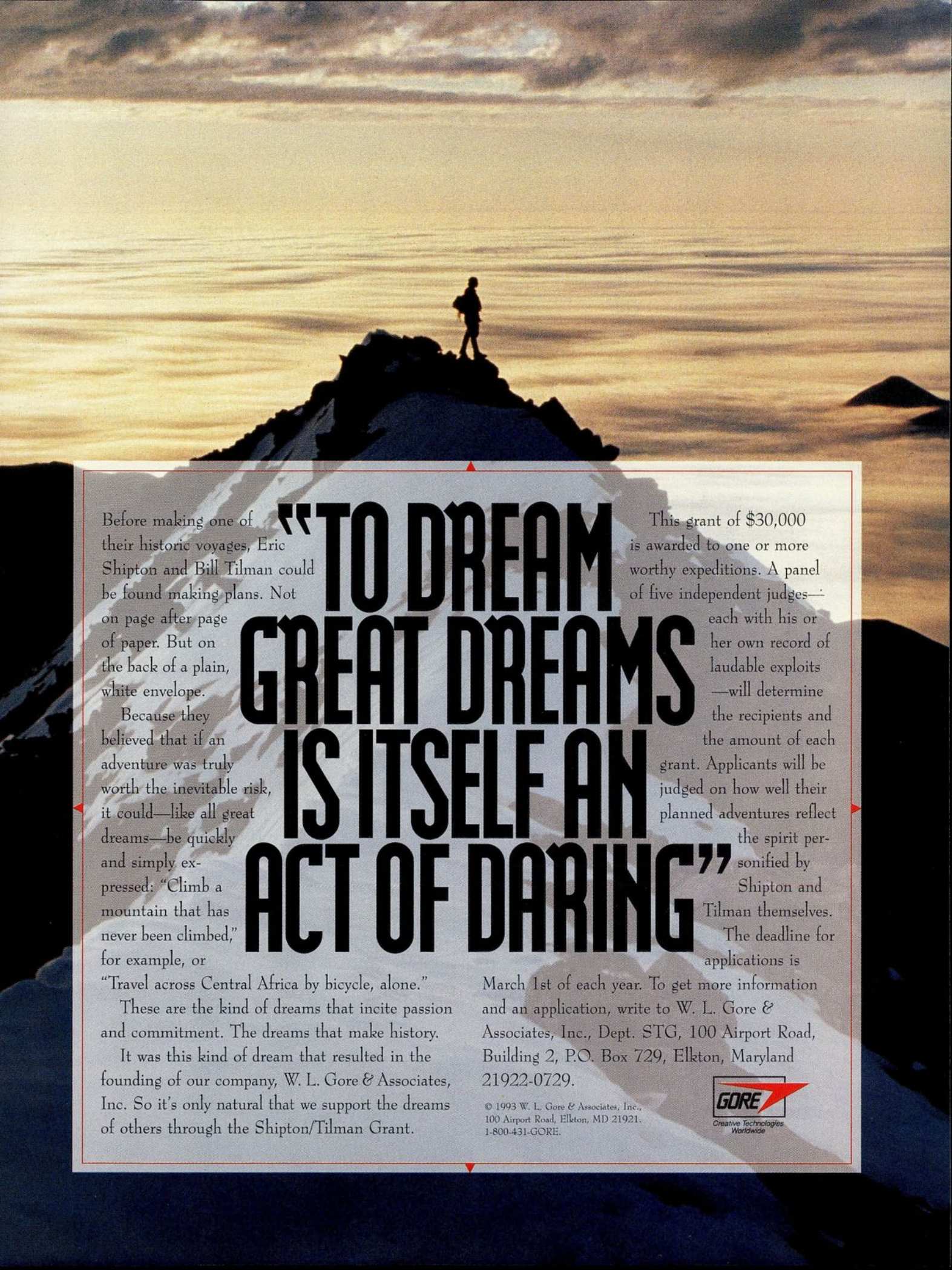
The Vinson Massif was first climbed in 1966 by a group of American geologist/surveyors, with support of the American military. In a six-week period the team made the first ascents of numerous mountains: Shinn, Ostenso, Gardner, Long Galbles, Tyree (home of a 6000-foot west face, first climbed by the late Mugs Stump) and Vinson.

Vinson was not climbed again until two of the Seven Summits originators, Dick Bass and Frank Wells, made the second

The total of 43 climbers who made the top of Vinson this busy season included Oswald Oelz. Oelz first climbed Vinson in 1986 with Reinhold Messner to complete his own Seven Summits quest. He returned the second time because, as he put it, "There is no other view like it." Oelz, along with the three other "Smiling Swiss" — Markus Itten, Diego Wellig, Peter Weber — and camp manager Brad Wroblewski, completed the climb in a quick 13-hour round trip under a windless blue sky, for the first ascent of the season.

Elsewhere on the Vinson Massif, Andre Hedger and Sundeep Dhillon of England made the first ascent of a 4800-meter Vinson sub-peak, four kilometers east of Vinson main. The pair named it Mount Kershaw, after the late ace Antarctic pilot, Giles Kershaw. The next day they made

Photo: Jay Smith



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Mount Craddock, and Teten climbed the Northeast Ridge several days later.

When asked his advice on Antarctic climbing, Smith replied, "Bring lots of money and your own beer."

Elsewhere on the continent there were several groups pushing themselves across the white desert. Erling Kagge of Norway glided to the South Pole in a 50-day sprint to make the first solo journey. A few weeks later four American women, led by Anne Bancroft, skied to the pole. Bancroft is best known for her 1986 dogsled trip to the North Pole with Will Steger. Upon completing the South Pole journey she became the first woman to reach both poles.

Meanwhile two Brits, Ranulph Fiennes and Mike Stroud, nearly completed the first unsupported ski across the continent. The two fought through minus 60 F temperatures and 110-knot winds for over four months, covering more than 2000 kilometers.

By the end they both had major frostbite and had lost over a third of their bodyweight. Fiennes had such a severe foot infection that he was unable to take his boot off for fear of not getting it back on. After running out of food and time, the pair aborted their bid and radioed for assistance. When the Adventure Network Twin Otter arrived, they were so weak they could barely walk the 50 feet to its door. They were picked up just 300 kilometers from their goal, McMurdo Base. This journey is probably the most demanding polar trip to date.

The climbing potential in the Antarctic is astonishing, rivaling that of the Alaska range 100 years ago. A few of the major peaks in the Ellsworths remain unclimbed, and most of the climbed peaks have been done by only one route. Further, the Ellsworths are only one range; other major Antarctic areas, e.g., the Trans Antartics, remain virtually untouched.

Antarctica is one of the last pristine places on earth, and probably the only place on the planet without some sort of government. Yet with interest in Antarctica booming, it could become another of the world's throw-away ecosystems, another place for mankind to pollute and abuse.

At present, there is only one company that transports climbers to the Antarctic: Adventure Network International. After three months of working for ANI, I am pleased to report that it has done an exemplary job keeping the Antarctic clean. Everything was flown out — even urine. When I left basecamp in early January there was no human trace left on the Vinson Massif except the frame of the base tent and a few ski tracks.

— Brad Wroblewski



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Died

— Julie Culberson, 36, of Park City, Utah. Culberson was a professional guide for the American Alpine Institute and a ski patroller at Park West. She also worked at the Waterford School, where her husband, Matt, 36, is the middle-school principal.

Julie and Matt were 1600 feet up the 2000-foot Aemmer Couloir on the North Face of Mount Temple in Canada on August 9, carrying coils and moving well, when they were struck by an avalanche and swept to the base of the couloir. Both knocked unconscious, they came to at the same time. Julie had multiple fractures of her left leg, including the femur. Matt had rib fractures, a punctured lung, and an injured elbow. They decided that he should leave for help, going a couple of miles down a drainage and talus slope to a lake where there is a popular day hike. He left her with his food, water, and extra clothes.

He could only go 20-30 minutes at a time before passing out, however, and bad weather moved in, so that he would awaken disoriented. He was out two nights before reaching the lake and help Wednesday. A helicopter flew in that afternoon, but Julie had died, probably on Tuesday of internal bleeding and exposure, according to the medical examiner. A few minutes before the avalanche hit, an exhilarated Julie had said, "This is what it's all about."

Among many other climbs, the couple had done the Cassin Ridge on Denali together (*Climbing* No. 134), had been on an expedition to Annapurna I, and involved with Denali rescues last May (*Climbing* No. 133). A full obituary will appear in the next issue of *Climbing*.

— Dan Culver of Vancouver, British Columbia, 41, an outdoor-adventure guide, while descending from the summit of K2 in Pakistan, July 7. Culver was part of a seven-person team, led by Stacy Allison of Portland, Oregon, on the Abruzzi Ridge.

Culver summited behind Phil Powers and Jim Haberl, none using oxygen. He fell from the "bottleneck," the crux of the route, at around 6 p.m., and went over the South Face. Culver and Haberl were the first Canadians to climb K2.

Culver had climbed Everest by the South Col route, guiding with Alex Lowe, in 1990, and with the late Mugs Stump had guided a trip up the Vinson Massif in Antarctica. Previously, he had done most of his climbing in the Canadian Rockies.

An environmental activist, he was instrumental in getting the Tatshenshini river system in British Columbia designated as wilderness this summer, though he did not know that before his death.

"He was a very positive person. He was



Julie Culberson on Annapurna I in 1991.

a driving force on the expedition," says Allison. "He just wanted to be on the mountain, to go, go, go. He was the one who would get up at midnight to look at the weather and say, 'I can see a star, maybe we should go.'"

Culver is survived by his wife of six months, Patti Culver, his stepson, Ryan, and his parents, Dennis and Eleanor Culver.

— Gene Prater, 64, one of the Northwest's leading mountaineers, of cancer, February 2. A farmer in Ellensburg, Washington, Prater was a pioneer mountaineer, and friend and mentor to many.

In 1955, Prater made the second ascent of the Liberty Ridge on Mount Rainier. Over the years he did several first ascents on the mountain, including the Curtis Ridge, and he was extremely active in the Cascades, especially on and around Mount Stewart, where his ashes were scattered. A chapter about him appears in the book *Cascade Voices* by Malcolm Bates.

Prater is survived by his wife, Jeri, a brother and two sisters, and a son and daughter.

— Corbin Rich, 17, of Idaho Falls, Idaho. According to reports, Rich had climbed the Grand Teton and was descending when he slipped on snow and fell about 1000 feet. Rich died instantly.

Married

— Polly Ivers, 29, a nutritionist, and Jim Hall, 31, a former JRat employee and now a brewer for the Rockies Brewing Company, May 15, in Park City, Utah. Currently living in Boulder, the couple is expecting a small belayer in late October. Shortly before becoming pregnant, Ivers put up the route *The Pollenator* (5.11d/5.12a) next to Colin Lantz's *The Colinator* in Rifle, Colorado.

— Julie Leino, former member of the Canadian Sport Climbing Team, and Jean-Pierre Charbonneau in Toronto, Ontario, July 3.

— Brents Hawks, 33, and Arcelia ("Arcy") Castaneda, 28, July 31 in Jackson, Wyoming. Hawks is owner and Castaneda-Hawks is the retail store manager at the Teton Rock Gym, Jackson. The two took a post-wedding trip to the Canadian Rockies.

— Steve Guthrie, 36, an employee of Marmot Mountain Works, an independent guide, and a climber of 22 years, and Teresa Broxton, 40, a climber and registered nurse, in Seattle, August 7. After the wedding, the two set off on a two-month trip to Nepal.

— Doug Valverde, 24, a Devil's Lake regular, and Joanna Oyer, 23, August 14, in Rockford, Illinois.

— Mimi Stone, 34, and Yale Lewis, 28, in Moran, Wyoming, September 4. Stone is an anesthesiologist and Lewis a newspaper journalist. In 1987, Stone reached 28,000 feet on the Great Couloir Route on Everest's north face. She will head back to the same route next autumn on the Razor's Edge expedition, which Lewis is likely to join. The two will live in Pocatello, Idaho.

Born

— Mikaila Buszowski, to Barb Clemes, 37, and Joe Buszowski, 35, of Canmore, Alberta, August 8. Clemes, a member of the Canadian Sport Climbing Team from 1989 to 1992, is a physical therapist at Banff Sports Injuries Clinic. Buszowski is

a UIAGM mountain guide, heli-ski guide, and author of many new routes in the Canadian Rockies. They plan a stateside road trip with their daughter (their first child) in October.

Expecting

— Carla Firey and Jim McCarthy of Seattle, longtime Northwest climbers, their first child, in late October. Firey, 41, is an artist and McCarthy, 46, a construction supervisor.

Injured

— Merrill Bitter of Salt Lake City, who shattered his ankle on a rock route in Ferguson Canyon. Bitter had just quit work, and he and Diane Emmerichs were three weeks into a two-year climbing vacation (to be continued upon his recovery!) when the incident happened.

Bitter was taking a light day and was on a 5.10 he had soloed in the past when he got absorbed in placing a marginal piece. He was testing it when it popped. "It happened so quickly I was off and on the ground before I could blink," he says. He fell about 10 feet. He and Emmerichs splinted the ankle with a jacket, bark, and tape, and he hobbled out with the help of two walking sticks.

Says Bitter, who had done some particularly hard solos in the past year, "It's really made me stop and think about my soloing — no factors outside my control were involved.... This experience will change climbing for me." He should be back to full strength by early winter.

— Also in Utah, that same weekend of June 26-27, in American Fork, Mike Fredericks, a very experienced climber, fell from the anchors on *Caress of Steel* due to lack of communication between himself and his belayer as to whether he would rappel or be lowered. He broke his back but did no serious spinal damage and should recover well.

— Royal Robbins, 58, of Modesto, California, owner of Royal Robbins, Inc. clothing company and a former leading Yosemite Valley activist and ethicist, on July 24. Robbins had come down from a climb on Sonora Pass and was pulling his rope when it dislodged a rock. He saw it coming and sidestepped, avoiding worse injury, and took the hit on his shoulder. He broke his collarbone and some ribs, and punctured a lung. Robbins expects a full recovery and to be back on the rocks soon.

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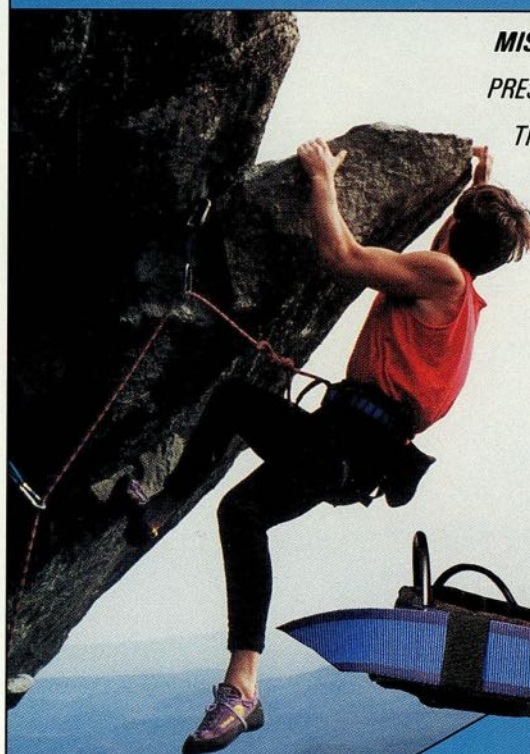
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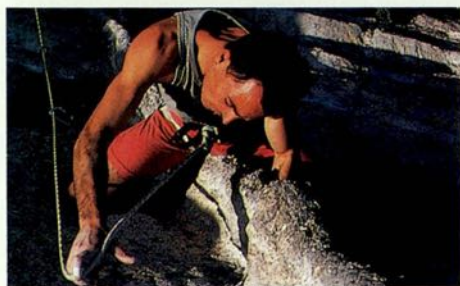
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Hot Flashes

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Matt Samet quietly tears it up

16-year-old French climber knocks off *Slice of Life*

Roger Briggs and more hard free climbing on the Diamond

Robyn Erbesfield has just another good day

The amazing grace of the Frenchman François Legrand

Hans Florine punches it on *The Nose*

Todd Skinner frees *Direct Northwest Face of Half Dome*

■ In the Salt Lake area, the unassuming Matt Samet, 21, of New Mexico, sent many of the area's hardest climbs in lightning-quick times. At American Fork Canyon, during his two-week trip, Samet did *Cannibals* (5.13d) in two days, and *Frying* (5.13c), *The Shining* (5.13c), *Wizards* (5.13b), and *Inferno* (5.13b), in one day each. Although *Cannibals* has seen several ascents, most have been sieges, and Samet's fast ascent was the first real advancement in style in two years.

In Logan Canyon, on the China Wall, Samet on-sighted *The Secret Sharer* (5.13a) and *Sport Fest* (5.12d).

Another Salt Lake local, Bobbi Bensman, 31, recently redpointed her 40th 5.13, with *Burning* (5.13b), in three days, in American Fork. Bensman also did *White Noise* (5.13b) in American Fork, and in Logan Canyon, *Secret Sharer* and *Vulcan Crawl*, both 5.13a, in a few tries each. At Hyrum Canyon, a new area near Logan, Bensman on-sighted *Greyhound* (5.12c). Behind Lynn Hill and Robyn Erbesfield, who have both on-sighted 5.13b and redpointed 5.14a and 5.13d, respectively, Bensman has the strongest record of hard ascents among American women.

Jeff Webb of Salt Lake City is also having an excellent season. In American Fork, he did *High-water* (5.13c) in one day and *The Love Boat* (5.13c) in two days, as well as *Burning* (5.13b).

In other news, Jonathan Knight repeated *Blue Mask* (5.13c), and Dale Goddard repeated Boone Speed's new route *Soul Fishin'* (5.13c) on the El Diablo Wall at the Hell Cave.

■ *Editors' note: Typically, notable redpoints are suffixed by the number of tries. This distinction, however, is nebulous, as the definition of a try can vary dramatically. The number of days on a hard route is probably a better measure — a day is a day and you only have so much juice in one day. Readers will note that both tries and days are cited in this column,*

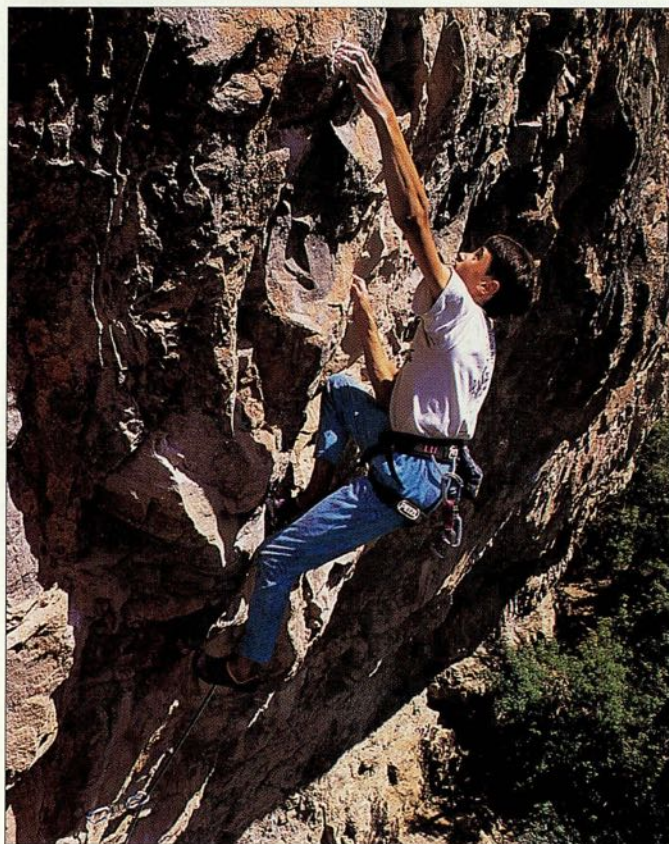


Photo: Peter Noebels

Daniel du Lac, 16, of Montpellier, France, on *Slice of Life* (5.14a), Rifle, Colorado.

due to inconsistency of our sources' reporting; however, we encourage climbers to report days spent on a redpoint rather than tries.

■ Rifle Mountain Park, Colorado, saw high-powered activity this summer. There, Samet continued to rage, making the first ascents of *Dumpster Barbecue* (5.13c/d) over six days, *Fluff Boy* (5.13c) in two days, and *Believe It* (5.13c), a direct continuation of *Never Believe*, in two days. He also redpointed Mike Pont's *Der Stuhl* (5.13c) in two days, Colin Lantz's *Sprayathon* (5.13c) in two days, Erik Johnson's *Pro Session* (5.13c) on his second try, Phil Benningfield's *Path* (5.13c) in two days, and Kurt Smith's *Cryptic Egyptian* (5.13c) in two days.

Other news from Rifle includes the visit by a 16-year-old French climber, Daniel du Lac. During his three weeks at Rifle this summer, du Lac climbed 55 routes. Du Lac pulled the second ascent of Kurt Smith's *Slice of Life* (a possible 5.14a), on his

sixth attempt. Having never before climbed a route of such difficulty, du Lac couldn't comment on the grade. He felt, however, that his best effort in Rifle was redpointing *Fluff Boy* (5.13c) on his second try. Then, finding a series of knee bars on Christian Griffith's *Gay Science* (rated 5.13d), du Lac quickly fired off that route, third try, and thought it was probably 5.13c. Other of his redpoints include the second ascent of *Cryptic Egyptian*, *Rendez-Spew* (5.13b), *Vision Thing* (5.13a), and *Apocalypse* (5.13a).

Du Lac's best on-sight — his first 5.13 — came on his last day at Rifle, with *Beer Run* (5.13a). His other on-sights at Rifle included *Matador Pants* (5.12d), *Fully Automatic* (5.12d), *The Beast* (5.12d), *Quick Draws* (5.12d), and *Gun Shy* (5.12c).

Kevin Gonzales, 17, of Colorado Springs, spent 50 days climbing with du Lac this summer. At Rifle, Gonzales on-sighted *The Eighth Day* (5.13a), for its third ascent, and *Kill for*

François Legrand — positive thinking

François Legrand has created his career like a master carver creates a sculpture. He has always had a vision, and has simply removed that which obscured his potential.

It's easy for us to admire the products of his unmatched, four-year dominance: three World

the United States for a holiday with three friends. He rented a mobile home and traveled across the West for two weeks, seeing the sights and climbing at his usual pace of two days on and one day off. It was the first time in four years he had missed a

World Cup to travel. For many Americans, it was the first chance to watch Legrand climb, and see the rumors confirmed.

One day in Rifle, by 1:00 p.m. Legrand had climbed 14 pitches, four of which were 5.13a on-sights. Three were 5.13b/c's he tried to on-sight; he fell high, and then completed them after a brief hang to chalk up. A week earlier he had nearly on-sighted *Slayer*, a 5.13d at Cave Rock. He fell, continued to the top, lowered, pulled the rope, and after resting for 10 minutes red-pointed the route.

François started climbing when he was 5 years old. Until age 12, it was a weekend activity, something he did with his family and not for himself. Then in his early teens, climbing began to possess him; he started doing poorly in school and spent more and more time on the cliffs surrounding his hometown of Grenoble. Finally, unwilling to limit his climbing for the sake of his education, and unable to contend with the consequent pressures at home, the 15-year-old François quit school, packed his things, and hitchhiked to the South of France. Being careless, he made his home in a cave on the Plage, a large ledge that splits the main cliff at Buoux. For several years, François climbed in the South of France, improving to the point where he was able to red-point several 8b+s (5.14as) before he even began competing.

Legrand describes his climbing as though climbing and competing were two separate careers. His climbing career began at age 5, the competing career at 18. The latter has consumed his life.

The World Cup season and Masters circuit allow only three spare months a year. These are Legrand's hardest training months, when he works to improve his weaknesses. Often the weaknesses that he is working on do not directly benefit his competition performance, but serve to raise his overall skill level. François does not see himself as being a powerful climber: "Power is really not that important in competition, it is more continuity (endurance) and resistance that counts," he says, "but if I neglect to build power I don't progress as fast." During these same months, he also runs intervals to build his cardiovascular fitness and maintain his tenacity.

Legrand maintains a two-days-on, one-day-off schedule even through the height of competition season; he says he enjoys climbing too much to take more than one day off. He only slows to one-day-on, one-day-off during the few crucial days before each event. Most competition climbers take two days off before an event, but he thinks that would only make him phlegmatic and poorly tuned.

Despite the continuous level of energy he expends, Legrand retains a positive attitude; the enormous volume of climbing seems natural to him. He has stayed virtually injury free, due both to luck and his patient daily warmups. "I am a professional, you see, so if I take two hours each day running, stretching, and even just beginning to move, it's OK," he says. "It's not time wasted that I should have been climbing."

Another factor in his affirmative outlook is Legrand's lack of competitiveness away from the arena. "When I am at the cliff I am there to climb, not to compete. If someone wants to compete with me away from the competition, I won't climb with that person."

François's best friend, the Japanese climber Yuji Hirayama,

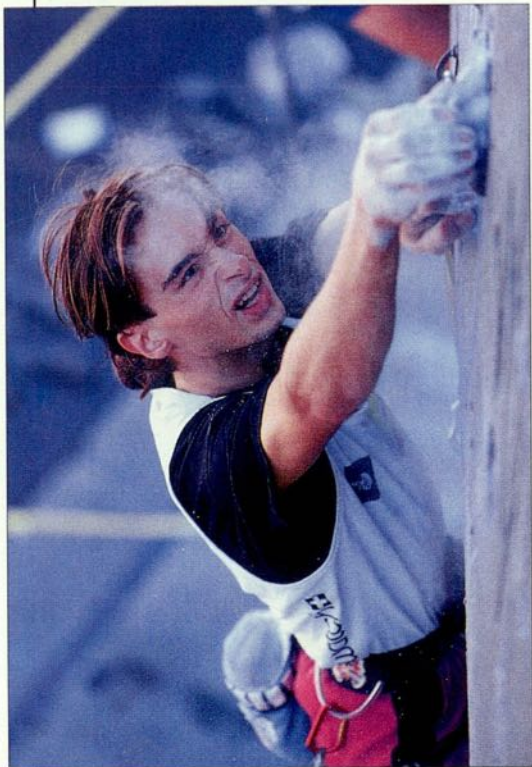
is also his number-one rival. "I have shared the most important times in my life with him. Times when we shared an apartment and did nothing but train together all day and night. It was when I first started to win competitions. If I am asked now about Yuji, I don't think I like him, I think rather I love him. Even now, because of this and because his attitude about competitions is so good."

At competitions, Legrand is known for his humor, for clowning around, and enjoying antics that throw his rivals off guard. At the 1993 French World Cup in Toulon, he danced in place in a corner, facing the wall and flapping his arms. He seemed indifferent to the confused glances of his neighbors.

During pre-event isolation time, nervous anticipation can blow many climbers' psyche, as they work out harder and harder doing boulder problems. "People are always looking at me, comparing themselves to me, thinking that they can do moves I can't, but I don't waste time with that," he says lightly. "A competition on the warm-up wall means nothing. And very often they do moves I can't, but those are often the people who fall very low in the event."

Even at World Cup and national competitions, Legrand keeps a relaxed perspective. "I do not compete to win, I compete because I love the show," he says. "I love the crowds and the chance to work hard to perform at my best at any given time. I have been to many competitions where I have won but I have not been happy because I did not climb well. I have been much happier at events when I have finished poorly but felt I did climb well."

Legrand's love of a crowd shows in many ways. At the World Championships in Innsbruck, Austria, he dazzled the audience by climbing the roof on the finals route with two consecutive figure-4s. He later said they were the most efficient way to do the moves, but he couldn't disguise a smile. Off-stage, too, Legrand, never shy of his fans, stays poised for the



The Frenchman François Legrand at the Berkeley World Cup in 1990.

Cup overall victories, two World Championship wins, and a remarkable consistency that has brought him first place as many times in World Cup competitions as the second- and third-ranked climbers have qualified for the finals. But just as we most respect the sculptor who saw form where there was just rock, we must recognize that Legrand's genius lies in his divining and combining his diverse talents. "I have no one strength," he says. "I've tried to develop my skills equally."

Though he is only 23, François' face is already creased from smiling. He is lightly built but not thin. His arms are lithe and smooth, betraying only a suggestion of veins. When he is sitting, his relaxed demeanor conceals his strength. Yet on the rock, he is tireless and graceful.

In August, François came to

limelight by carrying a huge fluorescent pen for signing autographs and posters.

At the Outdoor Retailer trade show in Reno this August, he was like a butterfly, flitting from booth to booth, happy with the attention he was getting and approachable to all.

When asked about his definite, refined climbing style, Legrand offers a calculated, involved thesis. "I try always to move my body in the direction of the next move. I pull very quickly into position, often very high, higher than I need to be, then I move my arm slowly to the next hold, unless it's a dynamic, then the body movement and the arm movement are combined in one." François is as definite in his way of thinking while climbing as he is in his movement. "I try always to understand what the move is asking of me before I try it.

"I don't climb by feeling," he adds. "I climb by thinking and making definite decisions. The only time I get into trouble on routes is when I choose wrong."

Speed, he says, is not as important as pacing and rhythm. "Sometimes you must climb very fast though several moves and sometime slowly to recover and prepare for the next hard section. To always climb slow is to fall off when it gets hard and to climb always fast is to miss rests and go into sequence wrong."

It is easy to think, that with his record, Legrand has no world left to conquer. Isn't a burn-out imminent? And if so, what next?

"I love the chance to perform," Legrand says. "It doesn't make me nervous. If I don't feel like going to an event, I don't. I don't let sponsors pressure me. I do these things because I can do them now and I enjoy them. I make so many contacts now there are always possibilities, so who can say what I will do in four years. [Burnout] is something for the moment I don't worry about."

Too often, top climbers, like addicts, begin to despise their passion, their enslavement to it; Legrand, however, is a testament to the power that comes from the joy of human endeavor.

— Christian Griffith

Thrill (5.12d); and redpointed *Apocalypse*, *Cryptic Egyptian*, *Fluff Boy*, and *Sprayathon* (5.13c). He flashed but did not on-sight *Rendez-Spew*.

At press time, we received an intriguing report of a 14-year-old Spanish climber "Danny" (last name unknown), who on-sighted *Rendez-Spew*, for his 160th 5.13b (French 8a) ascent.

Scott Franklin of Bend, Oregon, had a fine week at Rifle, on-sighting *Rendez-Spew*, *The Eighth Day* (second ascent), *Matador Pants*, *Vitamin H* (5.12c/d), and *Debaser* (5.12c/d). In an impressive show, Franklin came within 20 feet of on-sighting *Cryptic Egyptian*; after falling, he hopped back on from his high point and climbed to the top. Franklin made the second ascent of *Gay Science*, also feeling it was 5.13c, and redpointed *Sprayathon*, second try.

In other notes, Kurt Smith snagged the second ascent of Matt Samet's *Dumpster Barbecue*, followed by Steve Hong on the third ascent. Smith also re-established *Skeleton* after Hong broke the key hold last year, giving it 5.13c. At the Arsenal, Smith did *Sprayathon*, third try. Jeff Webb also did *Sprayathon*, in one day, and Mike Pont's *Der Stuhl*, in two days.

Colin Lantz and George Squibb made the second and third ascents, respectively, of *Fluff Boy*, which Ian Spencer-Green, 14, also did, in three days. Bobbi Bensman on-sighted *Black Caesar* (5.12c/d) and, last season, *Sing It In Russian*

(5.12c), and Shelley Presson of Boulder redpointed *Debaser*, second try, and last season did *Vitamin H*, second try.

As of press time, Colin Lantz of the Rifle Climbers Coalition, a group organized to work with the Rifle Town Council on access issues, reports that the bolting ban is still in effect, but will likely be lifted, with some restrictions, in the near future. The town council is reportedly willing to work with climbers, and may open a new campground at the top of the canyon to accommodate the increasing traffic in the area.

■ In August, on the Diamond on Long's Peak, Colorado, the long-time Boulder climber Roger Briggs, 42, established yet another high-country testpiece. On the steep right side of the face, *The Joker* (5.12 AO) takes a line to the right of *King of Swords*. The incredibly sustained route contains four 5.12 pitches that not only have reported "real" 5.12 cruxes but stacks of 5.11 climbing as well, all at 13,000-plus feet.

In his best effort at freeing the route, Briggs shared leads with Steve Levin, who made no-falls ascents of *King of Swords* and *Ariana* earlier in the summer. The pair reportedly took falls on several pitches and lowered to rests before continuing, and finally, on the pitch above Table Ledge, had to pull on a couple of pieces in the absurdly wet, slimy section "The Last Laugh." The climb, therefore, awaits a totally free ascent.

Still, *The Joker*, named in honor of the late Derek Hersey, who figured in the route's inception, offers the hardest high-country free climbing in the state.

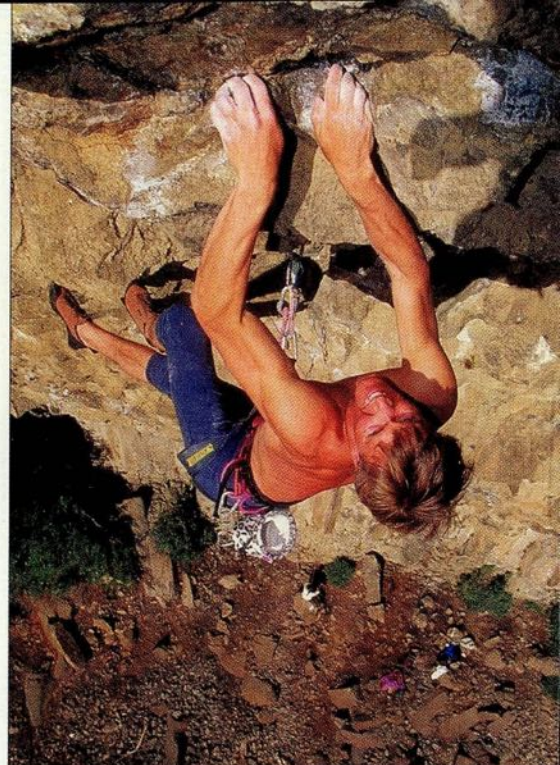
The master of Diamond free climbing, Briggs is responsible for most of its hardest free routes, includ-

ing *Ariana* (5.12a, 1985, on-sighted crux, with Bill Briggs), *King of Swords* (5.11d, 1985, with Dan Stone), and *Eroica* (5.12b, 1987, with Eric Doub).

■ In mid-August, Alan Lester and Eric Doub, both of Boulder, made the first "non-Briggs" ascent of *Eroica* (5.12b). Leading all but the first 5.11 pitch, Lester on-sighted both 5.12 cruxes as well as the hard 5.11+ pitches. He felt the lower and supposedly easier 5.12 pitch was the hardest of the route, as it was more sustained than the 5.12 pitch above. The climbing on *Eroica* is intricate and time-consuming, which increases the likelihood of getting nailed by the notorious Diamond thunderstorms, and is one of the reasons the route has repulsed numerous parties. For example, on the 5.11+ thin corner pitch, Lester said he used most of a triple set of RPs; that pitch also involves a sporty traverse out of one corner to another, with the possibilities of falling back into the corner or even slicing the rope.

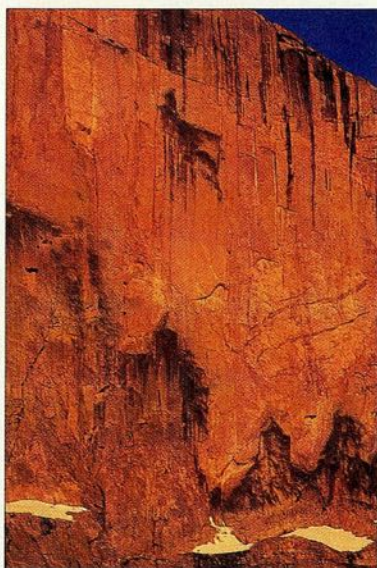
Lester calls *Eroica* the best climb he's done in Rocky Mountain National Park. "Ten stars," he says.

■ At Serre Chevalier, France, Robyn Erbesfield recently on-sighted *Phenome de Roger* (8a, 5.13b). Then in a single day in August, at the cliff Anglar in St.



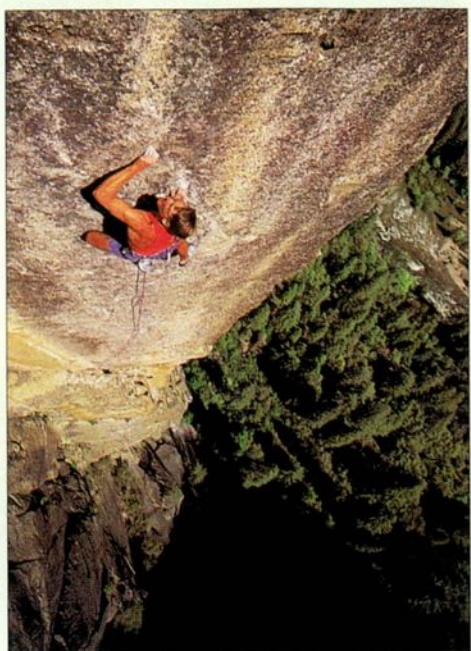
Tom Herbert on one of his new routes, *Escape From Alcatraz* (5.13d), Sonora, California.

Photo: Chris Falkenstein



The Diamond's "right side."

Photo: Jeff Achey



Ed Barry on his new route *Whipcord* (5.13c) on the Rostrum, Yosemite.

Antonin, she on-sighted three 7c+s (5.13a) and one 7c (5.12d): *Le Fauve et La Fauvette*, *Le Colonette Orange*, *Le Figuier*, and *Le Grand Méchand Look*. A few days later, Erbesfeld did the first ascent of *Merci S'il Vous Plait Encore* (8a+, 5.13c) at Anglar.

■ In Yosemite, the longtime local Ed Barry established *Whipcord* (5.13c), an exposed outing near the top of the Rostrum, and possibly the hardest pitch in the Valley.

■ At the soon-to-be-liberated Jailhouse Rock (an access agreement is in the works), high-end activity was hot this spring, with Tom Herbert adding six 5.13+ routes to the existing two. Herbert's new creations include *Escape from Alcatraz* (5.13c/d), a continuation of *Alcatraz*, *Birdman* (5.13c), the bouldery *Death Row* (5.13d), and the pumpy *Assassin* (5.13d). To date, Jailhouse has one 5.11d, 14 5.12s, and 16 5.13s.

Ed Barry repeated *Lockdown* (5.13c), followed by Hidetaka Suzuki, while *Jailbait* (5.13c) saw numerous repeats, the fastest coming from Doug Englekirk, who succeeded on his fourth try. Will Nazarian redpointed *Alcatraz* (5.13b), second try.

Then came the French, for a week last spring. Jibé Tribout's on-sight of *Birdman* (5.13c), was likely the hardest on-sight in America. Both Tribout and Francois Lombard on-sighted *Lethal Injection* (5.13a), *The Fugitive*

(5.13a), and most every 5.12 on the cliff. Both also redpointed *Haul of Justice* (5.13b) second try, as did Englekirk.

■ They called it "20 in 20." During a binge beginning July 17 and ending August 5, a team of four — Hans Florine, Nancy Feagin, Christian Santelices, and Willie Benegas — climbed 20 of the routes featured in Steck and Roper's book *50 Classic Climbs in North America*. Their sojourn took them from Yosemite Valley to the Utah desert to Colorado to Wyoming's Wind Rivers. Florine estimates the team ascended 60,080 feet (averaging over 3000 feet per day in the 19 days they took), traveled 137 miles on foot, drove 69 hours, canoed 2 1/2 hours, and climbed 241 pitches.

In California, they climbed Mount Whitney, at 14,494 feet the highest point in the Lower 48, and the next day drove through Death Valley, the lowest point. In the latter, to keep their van from overheating in the 100-degree heat, the travelers strapped Benegas to the front of the vehicle, where he periodically poured water on the radiator and down his throat.

■ In mid-August, Florine soloed *The Nose* on El Cap in a blazing 14 hours 11 minutes. "I find it hard to believe," says Steve Schneider, a friend of Florine's, who set the old record of 21 hours 44 minutes in 1990, expressing not skepticism but amazement. "Seventeen, 18, maybe, I'd believe, but 14?" Florine free-soloed a couple of easy sections and used some pendulum and lower-out tricks he had learned from Peter Croft and Dave Schultz on previous ascents.

Amazingly, no one else was on the popular route, eliminating the time-consuming chore of passing. Florine was able to stay hydrated with water left on the route by other climbers. He did the first pitch and last rappel by headlamp, and made the roundtrip in 17

hours, beating closing time at the Loft Restaurant by five minutes.

Florine calls it the most rewarding day of his life, and says, "I was just on."

■ In Yosemite Valley, California, Todd Skinner of Lander, Wyoming, with various partners, spent 61 days, from June 1 until August 1, free climbing the *Direct Northwest Face* of Half Dome. Skinner, a longtime hard climber, feels the Half Dome climb is the culmination of a dream. Six years ago, Skinner and Paul Piana, also of Lander, had sketched out a plan to free climb what they considered to be the four great walls of North America: El Cap (*Salathé Wall*, 1988); Mount Hooker (North Face, 1990); Proboscis (*The Great Canadian Knife*, 1992); and Half Dome.

Skinner made an initial 20-day reconnaissance of the Royal Robbins/Dick McCracken aid line (VI 5.10 A3+) with Piana, then climbed for 20 more days with Nancy Feagin of Jackson, Wyoming. Skinner next recruited what he calls "a team with huge fire power": Scott Franklin of Bend, Oregon, and Steve Schneider of Mammoth Lakes, California.

During the first 55 days, Skinner et al prepared the first dozen pitches of the route up to Grand Terrace, toppling, bolting, and climbing what he calls one "capsule," or section. These pitches are the hardest of the climb, involving a few "horrific 5.13 slabs." Skinner says he got sick of being on slabs after the first of four in a row. "It was a matter of foot endurance, and not getting nauseated [by that type of climbing, his least favorite]," he jokes.

"If you can imagine: 88-degree slabs with hardly any holds and mostly just smearing ..." says Steve Bechtel of Laramie, Wyoming, another climber involved in the ascent.

For the final "capsule," Skinner climbed with Bechtel and Chris Oates of Canada. The final push took only two days, as the difficulties on the upper part of the route eased to mostly 5.11+ to 5.12. The six pitches up to Big Sandy Ledges, says Bechtel, were "some of the best I've ever done," climbing a series of corners, some with

"Devils Tower style" stemming.

The climb joined the *Regular Northwest Face* at Big Sandy for the Zigzags and one final slab pitch (5.12c) 100 feet below the Visor. But that was soon forgotten, says Bechtel, when the climbers pulled over the top to "sunbathing women, who gave us food and water."

Skinner redpointed all the hard 5.12 and 5.13 pitches, and every pitch was redpointed by someone on the "summit" team. The 24-pitch route is graded VI 5.13c.

Franklin, another top American climber disputes the ascent, however. His most specific reason is that, he says, on redpoint, Skinner grabbed long slings hung from the anchor at the top of the second 5.13 pitch. Doing so, says Franklin, meant avoiding the final move, a delicate maneuver into a tenuous no-hands clip position.

"Sure, I grabbed the anchors, but the climbing was done," says Skinner. "I'm not trying to pull wool over anybody's eyes — the truth is on tape [the entire ascent was videotaped]."

"The pitch was done," agrees the videographer Rod Fox, who was filming on the redpoint. Bechtel concurs.

Questioning the free ascent for what may seem a minor infraction appears harsh, says Franklin, but his own definition of big-wall free climbing means starting at the bottom and grabbing nothing but rock: no slings, no anchors, treating the climb as basically one long pitch as a soloist would. Before Franklin had a chance to climb the difficult pitches himself, he and Schneider quit the venture because of a dispute over another development. "If we weren't willing to pose [for photos without pay] for three days," says Schneider, "Todd didn't need us."

In the final analysis, Skinner says the experience was positive: "98 percent good, and 2 percent bad." Meanwhile, Skinner has gone back to Wyoming where he continues to develop the popular (and steeper) crags of Wild Iris.

■ At the Red River Gorge, Kentucky, David Hume, 12 years old, redpointed *Thirsting Skull* (5.12c/d), second try (after only one hang on his first attempt), and on-sighted *Flying Monkeys* (5.12a).

COMPETITIONS

Battling the bulges

Hunter Mountain, New York

Music reverberated from huge tents as people from all walks of life cruised around scoping the action that filled the Hunter Mountain ski resort's sports trade fair.

The New York resort was also the spot for the National Sport Climbing Championships, held Friday and Saturday, August 27-28. Competitors traveled from far and near to earn points, win big bucks (\$2000 for each winner, \$1000 for second place, and \$850 for third, with prize money

About 35,000 people showed up for the weekend at the resort, though only about 100 watched the entire competition. The climbing included two on-sight quarterfinals for men and women, and two on-sight semifinal routes for women, on Friday. An overfull Saturday saw two more on-sights for the men's semifinals, a session on a worked route, a redpoint attempt, and the on-sight finals, which ended at 1:30 Sunday morning.

The climbers, when they finally got to compete in the redpoint round Saturday at 4:30, fired up the show with exciting performances. Scott Franklin, Doug Englekirk, and Jim Karn all completed the men's route (5.13c). Franklin had almost onsighted it during the previous 15-minute work time, but had stopped a few moves from the anchor to save energy. Seth Johnson, 19, and John Cronin, a native New Yorker, came close to redpointing.

Two unfortunate events on the women's redpoint route (5.12+) influenced the women's final results,

which would be calculated in terms of combined meters climbed on the redpoint and final on-sight route. First, Bobbi Bensman, climbing strongly and intelligently, looked well on her way to redpointing, but was told to stop a few moves short of the anchors because she ran out of time. Next, disappointingly, Shelley Presson stepped out of bounds low on the route at an inconsequential area, obscurely marked. During her 15 minutes of work time, Presson had on-sighted high on the route and then worked it efficiently and elegantly, looking like a certain top finisher. In the end, Mia Axon was the only woman to redpoint the worked route, blasting up it.

A grueling two-hour wait for route changing followed. At 8:30 p.m. the action began again with the on-sight final round. The weather cooled off considerably and artificial lights created a dramatic effect.

Among the women finalists was a rela-

tive newcomer, Hillary Silberman, who had won the Women's Open. The women went first, with Bensman the only one to on-sight the final (5.12b/c). Suzanne Paulson, who has been climbing consistently well in many competitions this year, placed fourth overall. Tiffany Levine shone on this route, climbing her way to third place on it after performing decently throughout the previous rounds. Axon pumped out several moves below the anchors, but on combined meters from both routes, won by one hold.

Pat Adams, the fourth-place male finisher, commented to Bensman, "A few seconds and one hold cost you a thousand bucks!"

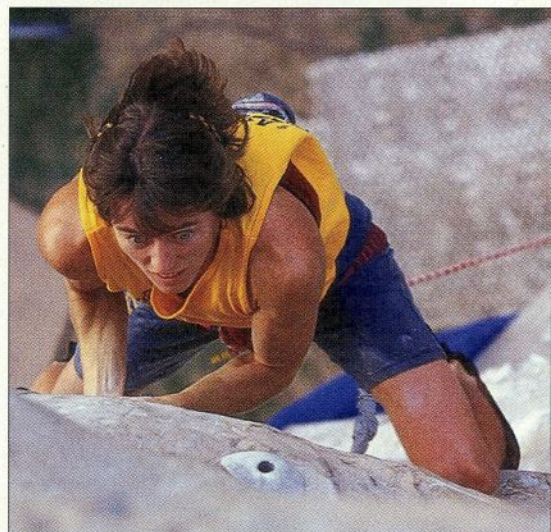
All the male finalists climbed well through the opening third of the on-sight



Doug Englekirk winging his way to a win at the Hunter Mountain nationals.

going to all finalists), and pull down on bulging plastic routes. Tony Yaniro and Mike Pont set the courses with help from Mike Call and Kathy Yaniro, both of whom had just finished a course on route setting for national comps. All four put together an assortment of fun and interesting routes. Ralph Erenzo was chief organizer and Peter Darmi head of jury. Darmi fortunately faced none of the epic judgement calls that had plagued the last few nationally sanctioned competitions.

There was a strong field of enthusiastic, pumped-up competitors. The weather, despite the heat and humidity of a New York summer, was surprisingly tolerable — at times, even pleasant. A new wall, 50 feet tall, 30 feet wide, and overhanging by 16 feet, proved to be extra challenging to competitors and route setters. The wall crew, headed by Jordan Mills, was outstanding.



Mia Axon at Hunter Mountain, New York.

route (5.13a/b), until a powerful and tricky corner rejected most of the field. Adams was the first to break through this barrier. Karn, recovering from a broken foot this spring and not climbing as confidently as usual, still showed his exciting and aesthetic style: he punched a long dyno high on the route, then slapped to a desperate blue hold before winging off.

Englekirk, climbing high with his usual tenacity and grimaces, grabbed and held the evasive blue hold, but reversed, realizing it was virtually useless. He reached out right to a small hold and then fell trying to secure the blue one again.

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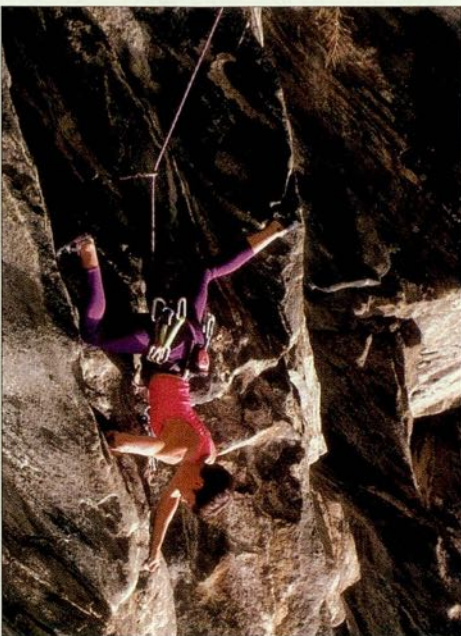
Mia Axon hits high notes this year

the next day I can fall off something and then I can begin to doubt myself." Twentynine years of playing the harp, and 12 years of professional performing, have given Axon a mental arsenal, however, with which to battle qualms. "I [used to] put more pressure on myself as a musician than I have to date as a competitive climber," she says, "but the two are so similar. Like in music, you have to just let it happen at a comp. You have to stay focused and try to control or use your adrenalin. I also think that memorizing all that music must help me remember the routes when I've got just a few minutes to see the wall."

After the national competitions, Axon plans to participate at the Nuremberg World Cup competition on November 5, off because she's so strong."

Says Sarah Spaulding, one of Axon's long-time climbing partners, "I've seen Mia make some incredible technical mistakes during comps, and then just pull it

Axon in action in Clear Creek Canyon, Colorado



Mia Axon's name doesn't always ring bells among climbers. Over the years she has defied the usual climbing patterns by popping up at sport crags, desert spires, and ice columns with equal frequency. She has a quiet demeanor that belies the intensity driving both her climbing and non-

Those on the national climbing-competition circuit, however, equate the name with a powerful, calm climbing style that often bags Axon the win. Moreover, she fits climbing into an already full life, in which she works full time, and her cool performances reflect her previous vocation as a professional harpist.

In the past year, the 34-year-old Boulder

resident has become a strong presence on the comp scene. This spring during Colorado's Tour de Pump indoor sport climbing series, she dueling with Italy's Luisa Iovane, a proven performer at the world level, each besting the other twice. Axon capped off the Tour with a win at the national showdown at Denver's Paradise Rock Gym on April 4.

June at Cary Kook in Emeryville, California, Axon had her first real dose of disappointment when, forgetting what seemed to some competitors an arbitrary rule, she advanced a hand on a route's first move before both feet had left the ground. She was allowed to finish the route, and flashed it, but was disqualified later after organizers looked at the videotape.

ly a lack of concentration and I learned from it," she says. "Competition climbing is a young sport in this country and we're all learning as we go. In every comp there's always somebody who feels like they've been shafted. I guess it was my turn."

A month later, Axon took second behind Bobbi Bensman at the Snowbird competition in July and then headed for the Hunter Mountain ASCF National Climbing

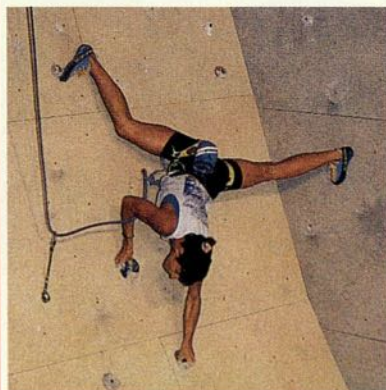
the end of August, to place first. Axon is small, and naturally thin and wiry, a former college gymnast whose climbing competition philosophy is quite simple. "My goal," she says matter-of-factly, "is to finish the route. You know, I found from talking to a lot of the other competitors that they weren't even planning on getting to the top."

Still, Axon says her own mind can

sometimes catch her off-guard. "My confidence is such an ethereal thing," she says. "One day I'll climb really well, but

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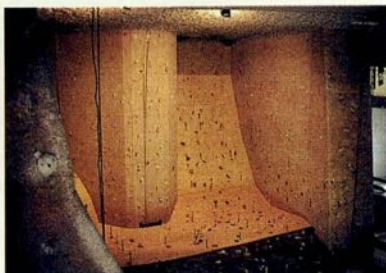
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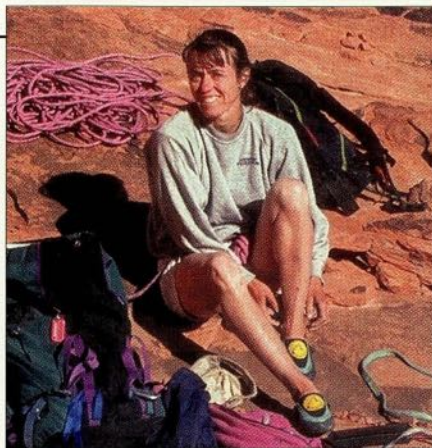
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At Red Rocks, Nevada.

but, she says, "I'm reluctant to place expectations on myself at World Cup comps. If you want to be a true competitor, you have to make competitive climbing second nature. I've made a conscious decision not to quit my job and climb full time, so that might not happen for me."

Axon, who grew up in Ann Arbor, Michigan, started climbing as a child with her father. Years later, while majoring in harp performance at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, she received a fellowship to attend the 1983 summer music festival in Aspen, Colorado, where she learned to lead climb. Since that time, her repertoire of climbing has stretched from Grade IV ice to difficult desert routes. Axon calls the desert one of her favorite places on the planet, and her list of ascents there is extensive, including the Sister Superior, the Rectory, the Priest, Moses, Castleton, and North Six Shooter (all in the Colorado Plateau), as well as several 5.12a cracks in Indian Creek.

"Right now, sport climbing happens to be driving me," says Axon. "It gives me specific goals, but it's still just one chapter in my climbing. The bigger picture is more a way of life."

Her list of achievements on the rock includes on-sighting *A Virgin No More* (5.12d) in Penitente Canyon, and at Smith Rock, redpointing *Churning in the Wake* (5.13a) and *Oxygen* (5.13a/b), each in two days. She also flashed (did not on-sight) *Darkness At Noon* (5.13a).

Coming into her own in her mid-30s, Axon says, "I can see myself getting better for maybe the next four years or so. Of course, sometimes I catch myself wondering, what if I had been a full-time climber 10 years ago ... oh, the potential, what I could have done. But I think one of the reasons I'm climbing well now is because I've managed to mix it in with other things that are important to me. I do have a very rich life."

— Diane French

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**Also
Vertical Dance Show**

(continued from page 51)

Franklin climbed easily up to the blue hold, and then crimped a heinous wall feature before falling. He and Englekirk tied because they both held the blue hold.

Since Englekirk and Franklin had tied in every round on every route, they would go to a superfinal, which had to be constructed fast — it was close to midnight.

Englekirk climbed first, and in typical Englekirk style, pulled off several moves with his arms completely chicken-winged before he peeled. At around 1:00 a.m., Franklin came out. He styled up the difficult route, looking unstoppable. Trying to readjust his hands on blobby slopers, he flew off suddenly, to the spectators' surprise, one move below Englekirk.

The two got their awards at 1:30 a.m., the other finalists having got theirs before the superfinal. The award ceremony took place as the wall crew was tearing down; except for the two superfinalists, only the jury and a few close friends were present, waiting to party at the nearby Heartbreak Hotel.

— Georgia Phipps
(Results below.)

Hill steps out, Zardini for men

Kranj, Slovenia

A number of the world's top climbers — 12 men and five women — tested themselves on July 2 in the Sport Park of Kranj, at the Rock Master competition organized by the alpinist/rock climber Tomo Cesen and the Sportna zveza Kranj association.

J.B. Tribout (FRA) designed excellent routes that were both difficult and enjoyable. Only Lynn Hill (USA), emerging from retirement from competitions for the occasion, was able to reach the top of the women's route.

Nathalie Richer (FRA), who has been competing at the world level for some seven years, fell from the last holds on the women's final.

Among the men, only Luca Zardini (ITA) flashed the finals route. Yuji Hirayama (JPN) and Elie Chevieux (SWI) reached the same high point.

— Jozef Nyka
(Results below.)

Competition Results

WORLD CUP

Black Sea, Bulgaria
August 27-29, 1993

Women

1. Robyn Erbesfield (USA)
2. Susi Good (SWI)
3. Nanette Raybaud (FRA)
4. Liu Sansos (FRA)
5. Elene Puchinnikova (RUS)
6. Natalie Richer (FRA)

Men

1. François Petit (FRA)
2. François Lombard (FRA)
3. Fabien Mazauer (FRA)
4. Alberti Gnerro (ITA)
5. Ian Vickers (UK)
6. Elie Chevieux (SWI)
7. François Coffy (FRA)
8. Luca Zardini (ITA)

MASTERS COMPETITION

Serre Chevalier, France
July 22-24, 1993

Men

1. François Petit (FRA)
2. [tie] Yuji Hirayama (JPN)
2. [tie] François Legrand (FRA)
2. [tie] Philippe Mussato (ITA)

Women

1. Susi Good (SWI)
2. Robyn Erbesfield (FRA)
3. Nanette Raybaud (FRA)
4. Isabelle Patissier (FRA)

ROCK MASTER

Kranj, Slovenia
July 2, 1993

Women

1. Lynn Hill (USA)



Hunter Mountain,
New York.

5. John Cronin
6. Hank Caylor
7. Seth Johnston
8. Timmy Fairfield

Women's finals

1. Mia Axon
2. Bobbi Bensman
3. Tiffany Levine
4. Suzanne Paulson
5. Shelley Presson
6. Hilary Silberman

1993 SUMMER BOULDERING COMPETITION

Coyote Rock Gym
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
August 7-8, 1993

1. Bob Bergman
2. Daniel Poggi
3. Jody Miall

ASCF Rankings (as of August 29, 1993)

(Last 12 months of competition; * indicates non-U.S. contestant; top three men plus two alternates and top two women plus two alternates are U.S. Climbing Team until January 1; rankings are for ASCF members.)

Men

1. Jim Karn
2. Doug Englekirk
3. Scott Franklin
4. Pat Adams
5. Will Gadd*
6. John Cronin
7. Hank Caylor
8. Christian Griffith
9. Jordi Salas*

10. Gary Ryan*
11. [tie] Seth Johnston*
11. [tie] George Squibb
13. Tony Yaniro
14. Bob Bergman*
15. Hans Florine
16. Mike Pont
17. Kurt Smith
18. Ric Geiman
19. Frank Dusi
20. Jason Campbell

Women

1. Robyn Erbesfield
2. Bobbi Bensman
3. Mia Axon
4. Shelley Presson
5. Tiffany Levine
6. [tie] Suzanne Paulson
6. [tie] Georgia Phipps
8. Nancy Feagin
9. Susan Price
10. Hilary Harris
11. Zoe Kozub*
12. Mindy Shulak
13. Kathy Yaniro
14. Kadi Johnston
15. Kristen Peterson
16. Hilary Silberman
17. Sarah Wieland
18. Crystal Rowland
19. Diane Russel
20. Anne Smith

Note: Some questions arose about the ASCF rankings published in Climbing No. 139. Those were accurate. There were some unexpectedly low placings because dues-paying ASCF members are ranked first.

Competitions Calendar

October 2, Los Alamos, New Mexico.

Fourth Annual Los Alamos Meltdown to benefit The Access Fund. Registration \$15 in advance or \$18 on site. Recreational, advanced, and expert categories, local and non-local divisions. Contact: Los Alamos Mountaineers, P.O. Box 987, Los Alamos, NM 87544, (505) 672-1285.

October 2-3, N. Vancouver, British Columbia.

Edge Regional Climbing Competition. National Sport Climbing Committee regionally sanctioned. Categories: beginner/intermediate, junior (17 and under), masters (40+), and open. Contact: Sean Fader, Edge Climbing Center, #2-1485 Welch St., N. Vancouver, B.C., Canada, (604) 984-9080. Fax: (604) 985-2974.

October 9-10, Colorado Springs, Colorado.

National Competition. Contact: The Sport Climbing Center, 4650 Northpark Dr., Colorado Springs, CO 80918, (719) 260-1050.

October 16-17, Louisville, Kentucky.

Rocksport's Third Annual, Bluegrass Climbing Classic. ASCF-sanctioned event. Deadline for preregistration is October 8. Juniors, men's & women's recreational, advanced and elite divisions. Contact: Jim Link, Rocksport, Inc., 3383 Freys Hill Rd., Louisville, KY 40241, (502) 425-5884.

October 30-31, City Rock, California.

Pumpkin Pump. Contact: (510) 654-2510.

November 12-14, Montreal, Quebec.

Canadian Sport Climbing Championship at College Andre-Laurendeau. Early registration fee \$40; after October 22 \$55. Men's and women's categories. Contact: Nicolas Valence (514) 364-3320, ext. 249.

November 13-14, Chicago, Illinois.

Windy City Blowout II. Beginner, intermediate, advanced, and open. Space limited to the first 125 competitors. Pre-registration \$30; day of event \$35. Contact: Will Menaker, Athletic Club Illinois Center, 211 N. Stetson, Chicago, IL 60611, (312) 616-9000.

ASCF Update

Reno, Nevada

The American Sport Climbers Federation has decided to restructure itself to address the needs of "elite" and "recreational" climbers separately. At a meeting August 17 at the Outdoor Retailer trade show in Reno, board members also proposed that they be elected by the climbers whose needs they will be representing, and are considering a ballot on which all elite ASCF members can vote.

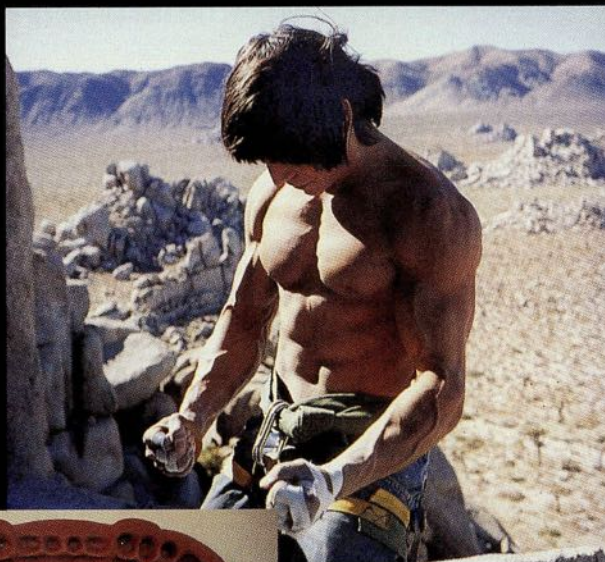
In the interim, Hans Florine will be responsible for the elite climbers' side of the organization's business, while Ralph Erenzo, executive director, will be concentrating on representing and addressing the needs of recreational climbers.

Also, through Erenzo's efforts, a low-cost insurance plan is being developed for ASCF-member climbers.

The ASCF wall-standards committee, which included several manufacturers of artificial walls, separated from the ASCF with the latter's blessing in order to join ORCA (the Outdoor Recreation Coalition of America).

— Hans Florine

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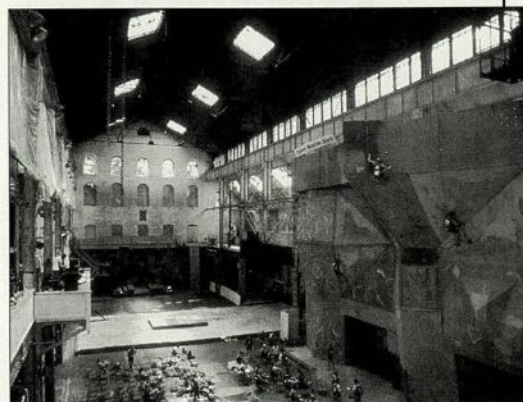


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Events

Compiled by Lynn Thomas

October 3-8 and 11-16, Joshua Tree, California
AMSAR Technical Rescue Seminars. Joshua Tree National Monument, California. Six-day vertical rescue courses. Contact: American Search and Rescue Institute, Inc., P.O. Box 2399, Yucca Valley, CA 92286-2399; (619) 365-3114.

October 14-17, 1993, Louisville, Kentucky
ASCF National Judges Certification Course is being offered in conjunction with the Rockport Bluegrass Climbing Classic. The course will be taught by Peter Darmi. Cost: \$150; \$75 deposit to reserve a place. Contact: Jim Link at (502) 425-5884.

October 23-24, 1993, Albany, New York
Second Annual Fall Rock Rally at Rockworks Indoor Climbing. \$20 preregistration fee. Cash/merchandise prizes. Contact: Rockworks Indoor Climbing, 1385 Vischer Ferry Road, Clifton Park, NY 12065, (518) 373-1215.

October 30-31 and November 1-8, 1993, Joshua Tree, California
American Mountain Guides Association Annual Meeting and Mountain Medicine for Mountain Guides Course. Two day annual meeting with speakers and presentations. Followed by eight days of mountain medicine and rescue training, directed by Peter Hackett, M.D. Contact: AMGA, P.O. Box 2128, Estes Park, CO 80517, (303) 586-0571.

November 6-7, 1993, Tulsa, Oklahoma.
1st Annual Forearm Frenzy. Boulder and climbing, shoe demo, t-shirts, raffle for prizes, and camping at nearby Keystone State Park. Contact: Julie Glass, (918) 492-6302.

November 5-7, 1993, Banff, Alberta, Canada
The 18th Annual Banff Festival of Mountain Films at the Banff Centre. The world's best mountain films and videos. Continuous screenings, presentations by guest speakers, public forums on mountain issues, adventure trade fair/craft sale. Opening presentation by Reinhold Messner; celebration of the 40th anniversary of Everest first ascent. Contact: Banff Festival of Mountain Films, Box 1020/Stn. 38, Banff, Alberta, Canada, T0L 0C0, (403) 762-6441/Fax: (403) 762-6277.

November 20, West Yorkshire, England
Seventh International Festival of Mountaineering Literature. Contact Terry Gifford, Bretton Hall, College of the University of Leeds, West Bretton, Wakefield, West Yorkshire, WF4 4LG, UK.

December 3-5, 1993, Denver, Colorado
American Alpine Club Annual Meeting. 91st annual meeting to be held at the Regency Hotel in Denver. Day and evening programs include presentations by many of the world's premier mountaineers, photographers, and adventurers. Special awards banquet Saturday evening. Contact: The American Alpine Club, (303) 384-0110.

February 12-13, 1994, Munising, Michigan
Michigan Ice Fest. Toproping/lead climbing on waterfall pillars and seepage curtains. Possible Lake Superior crossing to Grand Island for rarely climbed formations. Speaker/slide show, raffle, dinner. Registration/map packet \$5.00. Contact: Mark Reisch, Great Lakes Ice Climbing Newsletter (616) 372-9811.

March 10-13, 1994, Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada
North of Superior Orient Bay Ice Festival. Prefest program, courses, clinics, slideshows, competition. Contact: Shaun Parent, Icefest Coordinator, P.O. Box 2204, Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada P7B 5E8, (800) 667-8386.

Please keep in mind that the deadline for the Events Calendar is two months prior to issue date. Climbing is published in February, April, June, August, October, and December.

A C C E S S

Compiled by Sam Davidson

The Hueco Tanks of the East

There are precious few "secret" climbing areas any more. The desire to share great climbing with other climbers nearly always overcomes local protectionist sentiments. Still, a few outstanding climbing areas exist that have not been exposed to the greater climbing community. One of the very best of these is Howard's Knob, a premier bouldering area near Boone, North Carolina.

Howard's Knob would have remained obscure if not for a serious access problem. Earlier this year a 65-acre parcel of land containing the Howard's Knob boulders was purchased by a real estate developer who intends to build homes on the property. The developer reacted predictably upon learning that hundreds of climbers regularly boulder at Howard's Knob; in mid-July, he closed the area to climbing.

The development proposal for Howard's Knob was reviewed by the Watauga County Commissioners on August 16. The proposal's likely approval spurred an intense community reaction. Local residents, Appalachian State University students, environmentalists, and climbers have joined forces to oppose the development of Howard's Knob.

The Access Fund has pledged to help preserve climbing at Howard's Knob, and will contribute funds to help buy part or all of the property. While negotiations proceed, local climbers (including Woody Keen, president of the Boone-based Misty Mountain Threadworks) are soliciting funding from other conservation groups.

As this issue goes to press, the future of Howard's Knob is uncertain, and climbers should refrain from climbing at Howard's Knob until further notice. Contact Joey Hensen at (704) 265-3124, or Misty Mountain Threadworks at (704) 963-6688 for more information.

Dwindling resources

New England climbers just can't get a break. Earlier this year they lost a quality

sport climbing area when the crags at Safe Harbor, Pennsylvania, were closed. In May, climbers were denied permission to climb on the main wall at Niagara Glen, a provincial park in Ontario, Canada. And in July, Northeast climbers were booted from Joe English Hill in southern New Hampshire, and the popular West Upper Bolton Wall in Vermont was posted with "No Trespassing" signs.

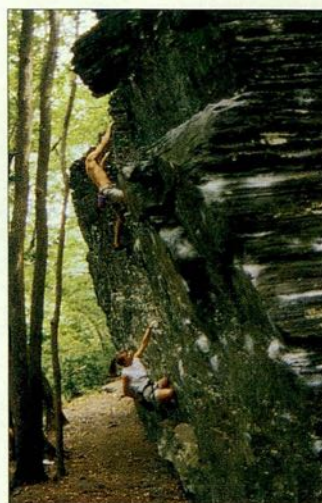
At the Upper Bolton Wall the prognosis for climbers is optimistic. The landowner expressed a desire to work with climbers on an agreement that would allow climbing to resume there. The Access Fund has

proposed to pay for a survey and subdivision of the Upper Bolton Wall from the main property, provided the landowner will donate or sell this subdivision to the Access Fund. Climbers should contact Mark Guider at Climb High, at (802) 985-5056, for an update on this area.

Climbing activity at Joe English Hill dates to the 1920s, and the area's granite offers hundreds of traditional and sport routes. Although Joe English Hill lies on government property administered by the Air Force, climbers have had no

problems until this summer, when military police began evicting them. Access to Joe English Hill apparently depends on the whim of the post's commanding officer. Local climbers are petitioning the Air Force to reopen this area to climbing. For information on the status of Joe English Hill, call Al Rubin, Access Fund Regional Coordinator, at (413) 549-5872.

At Niagara Glen, Buffalo climbing instructor and attorney Steven Fox has been working for months to convince the Niagara Parks Commission (Canada) that climbing should be allowed on the area's largest rock wall, but the Parks Commission denied the appeal based on the anticipation of lawsuits and rescue problems. Parks Commission policy does permit climbing on the smaller boulders scattered around the main wall. Fox is continuing to work to have this prohibition lifted. For an update on the climbing at Niagara Glen, call Steve Fox at (716) 852-3800.



Climbers on the Main Wall at Howard's Knob, a premier bouldering area near Boone, North Carolina, that is threatened by development.

Photo: William Baker

Walk a Crooked Path

Smith Rock State Park, near Bend, Oregon, is one of this country's most hassle-free climbing areas. But in July of this year, Smith Rock locals got a taste of access trouble.

While Smith Rock's famous welded tuff receives the most attention from climbers, the columnar basalt of the adjacent Crooked River Gorge offers a complement of hundreds of sport and crack climbs. The Upper Gorge area is typically accessed not through the park, but via a bridge to the east that provides the only other public crossing of the river. This bridge is part of an irrigation flume that is a crucial link in Jefferson County's agricultural water supply system.

This summer, officials from the Bureau of Reclamation, worried about bungee jumpers and people tossing debris into the canal, closed the bridge to public use. Now, the only access to the Upper and Lower Gorge areas is through the park, and what was a 10-15-minute approach has become an hour-long grind.

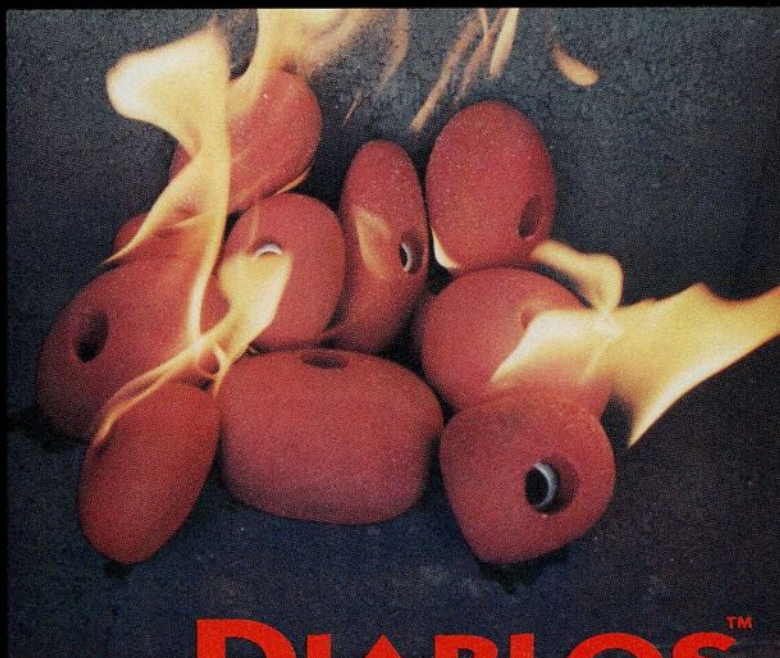
Doug Crispin, chief ranger at Smith Rocks, expressed concern that this closure would create impact problems in the park, as the high number of joggers, mountain bikers, and other regular users of the bridge would be funnelled onto the park's river crossing. Crispin has approached the Bureau of Reclamation about restoring access to the Upper Gorge bridge, but in the meantime urges climbers not to climb over or damage the fence that has been erected there.

Access to the Upper and Lower Gorge climbing areas at Smith Rocks is problematic for other reasons. Some of the crags are on private property, and a few of these are closed due to liability concerns.

For more information on climbing on the Crooked River basalt at Smith Rocks, contact the Smith Rock State Park at (503) 548-7501 and consult the Climber's Guide to Smith Rocks, by Alan Watts.

This column reports on news and activities regarding climbing access around the country. For more information on specific events and areas, or to report an access problem or success story, please contact Sam Davidson, The Access Fund Coordinator, 159 Nacional Street, Salinas, CA 93901; (408) 424-4705.

To receive more detailed information on access, subscribe to Access Notes, the Access Fund's quarterly newsletter, by making a donation of any amount to The Access Fund, P.O. Box 17010, Boulder, CO 80308; (303) 938-6870.



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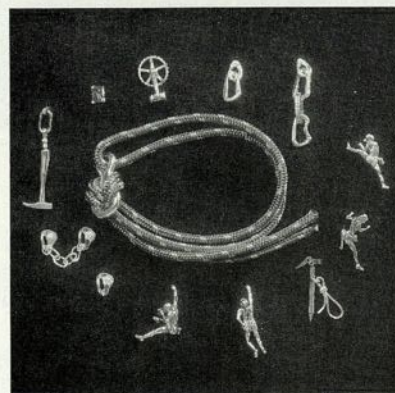
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Postcards from the Edge

by Greg Child

The sporting life

Vanity got the better of me on a recent visit to my native Australia and led me to compete in the Australian National Sport-climbing Championships, held at Mount Victoria, near Sydney. I used the ploy that I was entering for purely academic reasons, to

funereal. Competitors sat silently in the autumn sun like dour young lizards, stretching, meditating, plugging into Walkmen, or pacing like death-row inmates counting the minutes before the noose was fitted to their necks. Swept up in the nervy mood, like everyone else waiting those three hours for their 10-minute session on the wall, I made endless visits to the portable john. My bowels hadn't been so efficient since I had dysentery in Pakistan in 1985.

Out in the arena, where the 45-foot wall stood, we heard the audience screaming for blood as competitors in the division before us climbed up, then lobbed off. Our sweat took on the acrid odor of tension. I tried making conversation with my companions. Chat, I knew from storm-bound mountain bivouacs and other scary alpine times, helped quell nervous jitters. But talk in the isolation tank consisted of lambasting the coursesetter and the moguls running the competition, and downgrading other

climbers' routes, though I did strike up a conversation with a young skateboarder who, with puffed pride, described his recent expulsion from high school for drug abuse.

Guards were posted everywhere, armed with boomerangs and muskets, to prevent us from sneaking around the back and peeking at the course. Nobody trusted us.

Finally our guard got a message on the walkie-talkie to escort us to the wall for a three-minute preview of the route.

We were paraded up to the wall past the suddenly silent crowd. It seemed a religious moment, as if the bulging plywood structure was a pagan edifice, the crowd a worshipful horde of pilgrims, and we the sacrificial lambs.

Our three minutes began. Mark Baker, winner of most of the competitions down under, produced a pair of binoculars, no less, and began scanning the wall, inspecting holds and scribbling notes on a sheet of paper.

"Do the rules allow that?" I asked.

"Sure, they do it in France," he said, then I noticed that other competition veterans were charting the wall with sextants, night vision goggles, and X-ray specs, then speed-writing hieroglyphics and equations on notepads. Left to rely on my memory alone, which had been vaporized long ago from too many jaunts toward 8000 meters, I realized I had no chance. All I saw were random blobs of plastic on a sea of plywood.

Herded back into isolation, we were then led to the wall one by one. The longer one waited, I found, the greater the volume of nervous byproducts one produced. It seemed that no sooner did I pee than my bladder would fill again. Where did it all come from? By afternoon the latrine was overflowing and a nervous line of climbers blocked entry to it. Clearly, setting off on the wall carrying a dram of excess fluid would be disadvantageous. If an enema had been available we would have fought over it.

"Hey, mister," I heard a young voice squeak from the sidelines, "are you one of the climbers?" Two kids on tricycles had evaded the guards and stood before me.

"Yes," I told them.

"What are you doing?" they asked.

"I'm peeing."

"Why?"

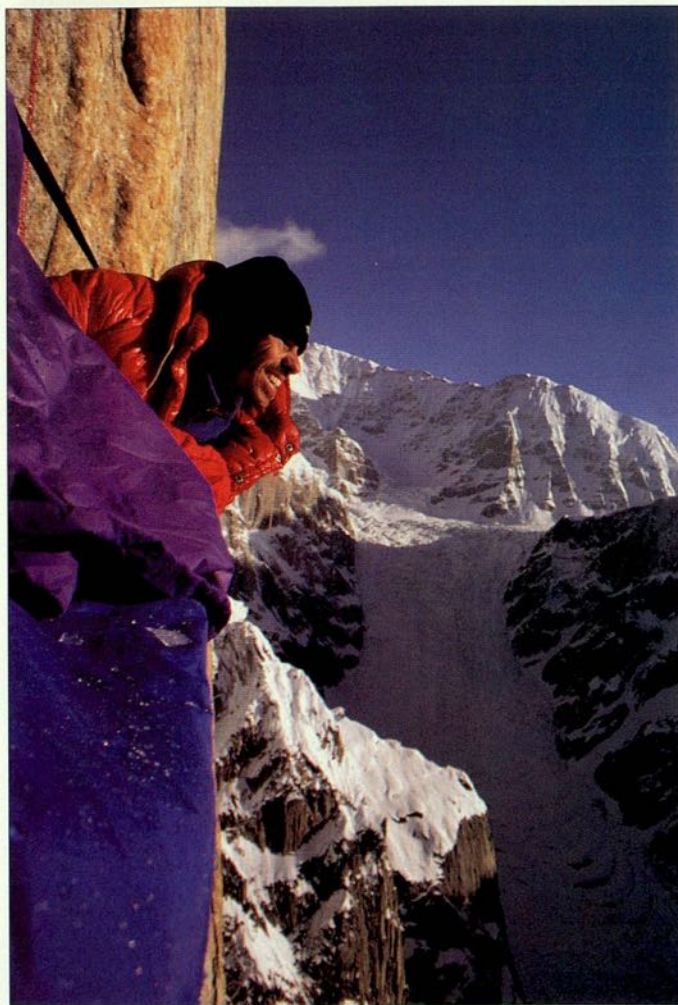
"Because I'm nervous."

"Do you think you'll fall?"

"Yes."

"Then what's the point?"

"Go away."



Greg Child in a more familiar situation, on Nameless Tower, Pakistan.

see how I reacted under the pressure of UIAA rules. It was a scientific experiment. I wasn't serious about trying to win, and to prove I was in it for a lark I joked that in the qualifying round I'd climb dressed in lederhosen, braces, and bright-red knee socks.

But I didn't.

Back in isolation, I got serious. I couldn't help it. The mood there was

Photo: Mark Willford

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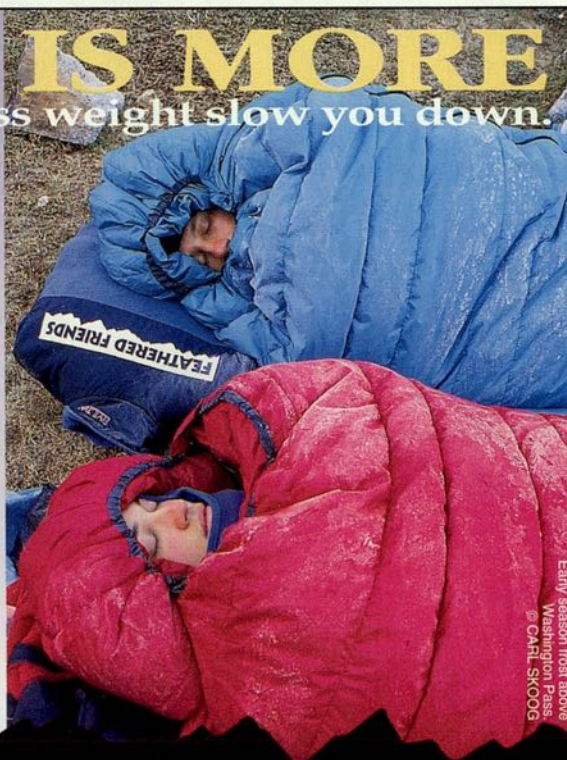
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Early season frost above
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My turn to climb came. I got on the wall. My mind went blank for four minutes, then I was at the end of the route. Ohmigod, I thought, now I've got to go through this again for the finals.

Back in isolation, I sat with 11 contenders for the big finale. For this round I had contemplated pulling a can of beer from my chalk bag, popping it with a flourish of spraying foam, guzzling it down, then chowing into a Dagwood-sized burger before stepping onto the wall. Just to show I wasn't serious.

But I wouldn't.

Four hours passed before I got my turn to climb. I spent the time sitting silently, visualizing the plastic barnacles I'd soon be adrift on. Thoughts of the route made my hands sweat furiously. Automatically, I began chalking up, even though I was sitting still. Before I knew it the bag was half depleted, and my hands were gummed with a white slime as viscous as a slug belly. I wiped it off, and in the process noticed that my finger nails needed trimming. Fretting that my digits would have a micron less crimping area, I became neurotically body-conscious and detected another burgeoning reservoir in my bladder. But before I could rectify any of that a guard connected me to a rope, then pushed me onto the stage.

At the first Snowbird World Cup, in 1988, I had watched Patrick Edlinger stun the crowd and his peers when he sauntered to the top of a wall that had beaten the best that the world had to offer. Where others slapped for holds or quivered as they held on with gutbusting power, Edlinger danced cat-like, weightless and elegant with his blonde shock of hair swaying in the breeze. Those who saw him climb that day learned the meaning of "poetry in motion," and they went away moist-eyed, convinced that climbing was, after all, art. In a climbing life, there are a few precious moments when everything comes together on a climb. It coincides with a heady electric tingle that you feel in every molecule of your body. Edlinger had it running through his veins that day, and whether your game was mountains or crags, big-wall routes, or bolted sport climbs, cracks or faces, traditional style or hangdogging, 5.14 or 5.7, the Frenchman's fingers and feet tapped out a message that was the same for all: be there, be focused, be your best.

That was Edlinger, though, and this was me. Confronted by the wall and a cheering or jeering crowd — I couldn't tell which — my testicles retracted as if I was surrounded by a gang of skinheads armed with two-by-fours. A huge digital clock began counting out the first sec-

onds of my climb. Keira, the four-year-old daughter of a friend, waved to me from the crowd. I took it as encouragement; she was too young to hold a grudge against me and I'd read to her from her storybook that very week. Then I faced the plywood, latched onto a hold, and stepped into the fray.

Negotiating a route through judges, photographers, and TV cameramen dangling on ropes and from scaffolding, I climbed 10 feet up and crouched beneath a four-foot roof. Clipping a quickdraw, I began feeling out the first crux.

Streaks of chalk and bloody bits of fingernail embedded in the plywood indicated my predecessors' highpoints, and told me the move was burly. Gripping a troublesome pocket with one hand and a buttock-shaped blob with the other, I eyed the hold I was intending to crank to and began high-stepping toward it, concentrating for all I was worth.

The noise from the crowd intensified as the gap between my fingers and the hold shrank. It was a rousing sound, a positive note, and it coaxed my fingers a millimeter closer to their destination. Above this noise I heard the cheers of Keira: "Come on Greg, come on Greg!" she yelled. Her voice caused images from that children's story book to cloud my thoughts. Instead of focusing on a precise crank, my mind's eye tracked the progress of a purple hippo in a tutu bouncing across the frontal lobe of my brain.

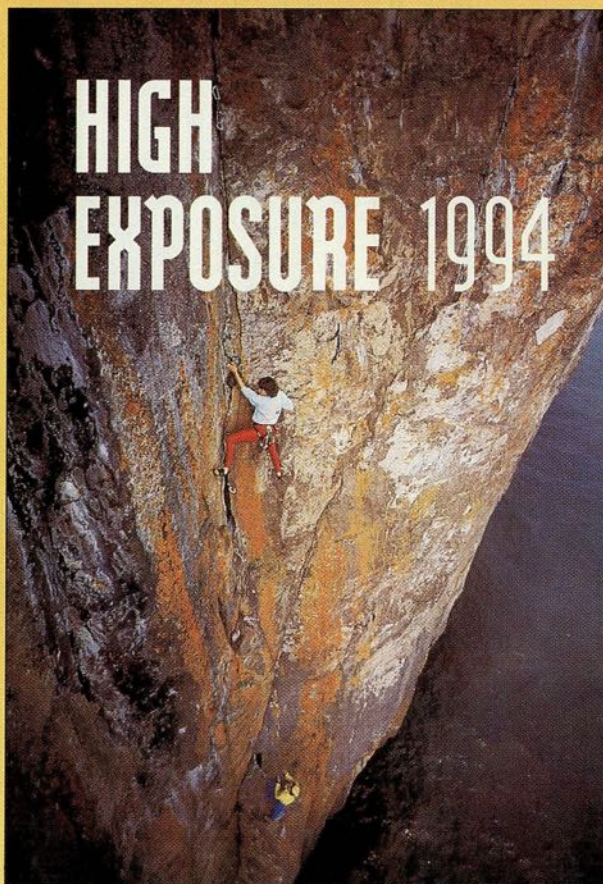
"Shut up Keira, shut up Keira," I thought. Then I saw my reflection mirrored in a TV camera lens pointed toward me. "Shit," I thought, "I don't look like Patrick Edlinger at all. I look like the picture on my driver's license."

The blood rushed out of my hands, leaving them cadaverous and cold, and flowed into my forearms, which swelled like sausages. My legs wobbled, my feet sketched about the wall. I felt suddenly as if a brick had been slipped into my pants. It was do or die, so I flapped at the hold.

My fingers missed their rendezvous. I clutched a handful of air, then dropped onto the rope. A sad noise rose from the crowd, then applause. It all happened in two-and-a-half minutes.

Soon after, Mark Baker took the title, the crowd went to the pub, and workers began dismantling the wall. My experiment had been a success. I learned that earplugs are essential equipment to block out the sound of noisy fans. Next time I'll bring a telescope too. And to prove I'm not serious, I'll embark up the wall with ice axes and crampons. I'm certain there is nothing in the UIAA rules forbidding that.

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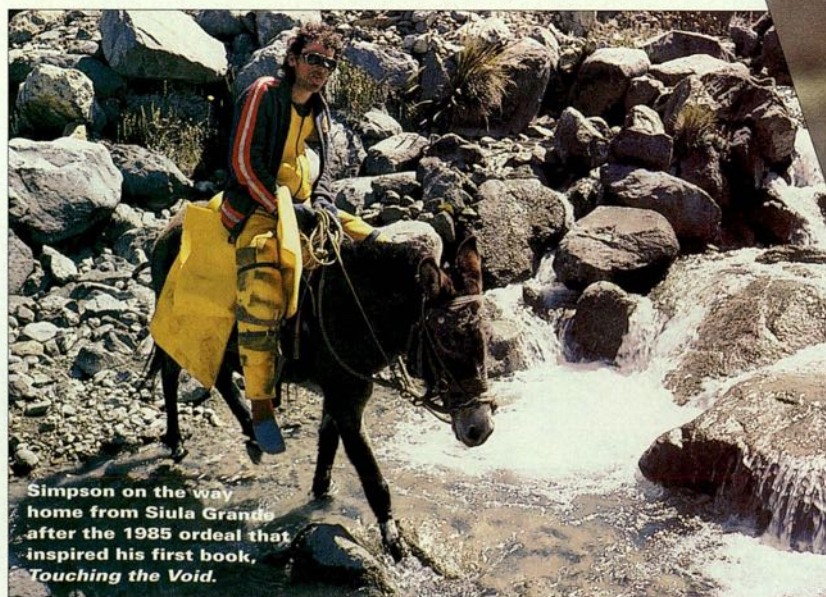
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Trading Places

When Joe Simpson came crawling out of a crevasse in Peru eight years ago, he was only trying to survive, or at least not die alone. No one could have dreamed how completely his life would be transformed.



Simpson on the way home from Siula Grande after the 1985 ordeal that inspired his first book, *Touching the Void*.

Photo: Simon Yates

Photo: Steve Lewis



By Alison Osius

Joe Simpson is walking his wiry gray pooch, Muttley, who is as always hysterically excited to be going, among the three-foot-wide chestnut trees in Abbeydale Wood. Simpson is limping, since Muttley's walk yesterday aggravated some old injuries. He is near home, in Sheffield, England.

I ask, with some hesitation, how Simpson — author, climber, and very expert survivor — feels about jokes concerning his incredible history of accidents: including the bivy ledge

that collapsed beneath him and his partner in the Alps, leaving them hanging on two execrable anchors all night; being dropped, with a broken leg, deep into a crevasse, and mourned and left for dead, in Peru; and the 600-foot fall, off a big Himalayan face, that bashed up *his* face.

It's all in how something's said, he answers, and who's saying it, and whether the person assumes Simpson was an idiot or knows he had done hard routes.

I tell him how, in an editorial meeting back at *Climbing*, we'd questioned why a person of only 33 had just written his autobiography. "Maybe he figured he better do it now," said someone, chortling, "while he's still alive."

Simpson laughs. "I'm not sensitive about my accidents," he says. "I'm sensitive about being [considered] a bad or foolish climber. Apart from the avalanche," and here he puts both hands up, palms out, "and the ice climbing thing — those were my fault — the others were not my fault." In those two early incidents, he was, he says, "very young and stupid."

Simpson is often called lucky, but actually he's had a whole lot of the *bad* variety. His facial makeover, for example, was due to a faulty crampon — someone else's. Simpson's climbing partner fell unexpectedly and pulled him off.

Crash! Muttley, intent on the Frisbee that Simpson is throwing him, smacks straight into a tree. He returns glaze-eyed, tilting.

"Awww, Muttley," Simpson strokes the small dog's head, trying to open its mouth. "Here, let's have a look." Blood begins to bead up in a clean, inch-long sheared white patch between Muttley's eyes. Joe throws out his arms, eyes wide. "Even my fuckin' dog has accidents!"

It's a series of miracles that Joe Simpson, now 34, has survived the things he has, but it's yet another one that he can write about them so well. You can divide his latter years cleanly into three parts, each for a book, each book well-received. *Touching the Void*, a runaway international success, is the riveting and candid tale of how he saved himself in Peru. When his climbing partner was forced to cut the rope holding the injured Simpson, Simpson plummeted deep into a crevasse and, nearly four



Ian Whittaker being rescued off the Dru. He lost his boots when the bivy ledge collapsed.

"I'm not sensitive about my accidents, I'm sensitive about being (considered) a bad or foolish climber. Apart from the avalanche," and here he puts both hands up, palms out, "and the ice climbing thing — those were my fault — the others were not my fault." In those two early incidents, he was, he says, "very young and stupid."

group flashed with a brilliant lunacy — and to some degree still does — in which, certainly, alcohol and other sources of high spirits play a salient part.

This Game of Ghosts and *Touching the Void* resonate, similarly, beyond themselves. *Touching the Void* is the story of some-

agonizing days later, came crawling into basecamp. Even then, he still almost died, as he reached camp only a few hours before his friends were to depart. Many climbers have said *Touching the Void* is the best climbing book they've ever read.

The novel *The Water People*, ethereal but largely autobiographical, was the catharsis *Touching the Void* was supposed to be, and represents Simpson's mastery of a life that success had spun out of control. *This Game of Ghosts*, newly out in July, is the whole picture, rough in a few spots but packed with gems and passages that make you laugh out loud, and containing some of the best ruminations in print on the meaning of climbing. The books work like a trilogy, and the last makes you want to go back and reread the second, voyeuristically looking for the true parts. A fourth book, Simpson's second novel, is in the works.

If not for Peru, would he have written even one book? Simpson doesn't hesitate. "No."

It is *This Game of Ghosts* that Simpson calls his best book, the one that means the most to him. The narrative moves from his rambunctious childhood in the Far East through to the present. Though a memoir, it's also a chronicle of his generation of British climbers — such as Andy Fanshawe, Andy Parkin, John Stephenson, Arnie Strapcans, Mark Miller, and Rob Uttley — who came after Chris Bonington, Doug Scott, Alex MacIntyre, and Tom Patey but before the current batch of rock gymnasts. And it stems in large part from the deaths of 11 of them. This middle

one real, a regular, accessible guy — the plain name “Joe” even chances to be perfect — who surmounts great odds. One painful ramification of the book is how nearly Simpson missed his friends at basecamp in Peru, making us think about other people who must have made such efforts to survive but died nevertheless, and we’ll never know about them or what they did.

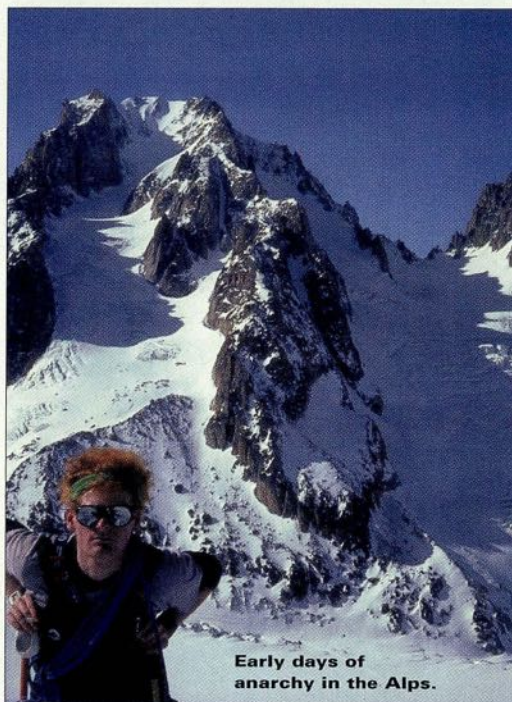
In *This Game of Ghosts*, Simpson is writing his peers’ stories in the framework of his own. Knowing how much has happened to him makes us aware of the worlds within worlds lost with each of those who died.

My first meeting with Simpson is on a spring evening, and is to be at the Broadfield Ale House, though I don’t know yet just how appropriate a location that is. I tell him, over the phone, the color of my jacket. How should I recognize him?

Simpson laughs. “I’m short, I’m all covered in scars, and I’ve got a squinty left eye,” he says. His eye got rattled in its mooring during the fall in the Himalaya, and he’s just had laser surgery on it.

I’m expecting a scowling scrapper, this guy who crawled out of a crevasse; who, as an invitee at a recent literature festival, raved for 20 minutes against “political correctness,” and then left; whose faxes during arrangements for this series of interviews have been terse and occasionally impatient. Although, when he was off on a six-week mountain trip, there was that little joke — “Am leaving for Nepal on Saturday and will be back on 20th April (hopefully).”

Just inside the Broadfield is a crowded bar where two preoccupied, no-nonsense barmaids are handing out pints of Trembly’s and Butternuts. Beyond lie a rust-colored carpet,



From 1980 to 1985, Simpson amassed a fine, solid Alpine record, doing over 50 climbs, including ascents of the Walker Spur, Central Pillar of Freney, North Face of Les Droites (in winter), and The Drus Couloir. *This Game of Ghosts* tells us about the characters he lived with, the wild close calls, the deaths, and the kind of madness that prevailed.

table. Eventually I remark that his scars really look good, much better than I expected. He’s tilting his face, giving a tour, tapping his cheek: “My eyebrow was hanging down here,” he says. I’m looking with interest up his nose, which was torn sideways. It just doesn’t look that bad.

long wooden tables, a phalanx of games tables, and a cluster of pin-ball machines against rust-and-white wallpaper. So who is this animated, straight-backed, cleancut person coming forward from a snooker table to shake hands, speaking in cheery cultured accents? In the past, Simpson has sported a dyed orange pelt or Stevie Wonder beads and dreds, but now his crinkly black hair is short-cropped. He wears black jeans and a sporty black zip-neck top.

He and his close friend John Stephenson must step back to the snooker table to finish a game, and then are replaced there. “We’ve been kicked off because we’re *useless*,” Simpson explains.

Soon he’s being prompted to talk about *This Game of Ghosts*, written, he says, “to try to justify climbing, which I’ve failed to do, and to explain it.” Since the book was sparked by his friends’ deaths, it may sound morbid, yet “it’s an affirmation of life.” He breaks off and laughs, saying, “But four pints down probably isn’t a good time to explain it.”

Still, Joe will try. “It’s not about casual climbers, but hard climbers. Why don’t we climb at half the danger and half the grade? Do we do a hard route because we love it, or to come in here to the pub and wave your willy around and say, ‘I’ve done it?’” He has written his memoirs now while he remembers and cares deeply about everything.

Simpson is informal and spectacularly unselfconscious. Ask about his recent surgery, and he draws a schematic diagram of the eye on the sign-up blackboard by the snooker

Simpson flicks a spent but live cigarette onto the bricks under the snooker table. "I heal well," he says. Just as well.

There's a joke around Sheffield. Q: "How'd Joe Simpson get out of that crevasse?" A: "He talked himself out of it." Ask Simpson a question and you might get five answers, if not necessarily the one you were looking for. "I'll get to the end of this 15th diversion," he'll promise. Not that his friends would let the detours pass unnoticed. "Get to the point!" they say.

Simpson may spend his days on his own, writing, but his sphere is very much the world of others. "Joe is very well regarded in Sheffield," Gill Kent, editor of *On the Edge* magazine, says. And he is known outside of it. But ask his friends, climbers all, if he's considered a point of community pride and you'll get blank looks. He is what he's always been. Those who have known him since before everything hit the fan — and he hit the bestseller lists, wham-bam book and lecture tours, TV shows, and Beverly Hills Hilton (in a long limo) — keep him grounded. They make him fetch his turn of rounds at the Broadfield even when he's on crutches.

"If I ever was stupid enough to get pretentious," he says, "my friends would collapse laughing at me."

The mountaineer-author Chris Bonington has written in the foreword to *Touching the Void* of his first meeting with Simpson, in Chamonix: "He was dark, with a slightly punk hairstyle, and there was something abrasive in his manner. I found it difficult to take him in my mind from the streets of Sheffield into the mountains."

Simpson is urban. He's out most every night, almost always at the Broadfield. He's also hilariously entertaining, the kind of guy you'd invite to a party and hope he could make it. You could ask him to dinner, of course, but he probably wouldn't come. He's a see-you-at-the-pub type.

Simpson's an awful listener, unsurprisingly, though he declares he listens to his editor. You must strive to get a thought in edgewise, or to complete it. He doesn't always respond or seem to hear your comments, though he might bring one of them up later. But the difference between him and many talkers is that his monologues are interesting, full of ideas and opinions. He also gets into deep, involved conversa-



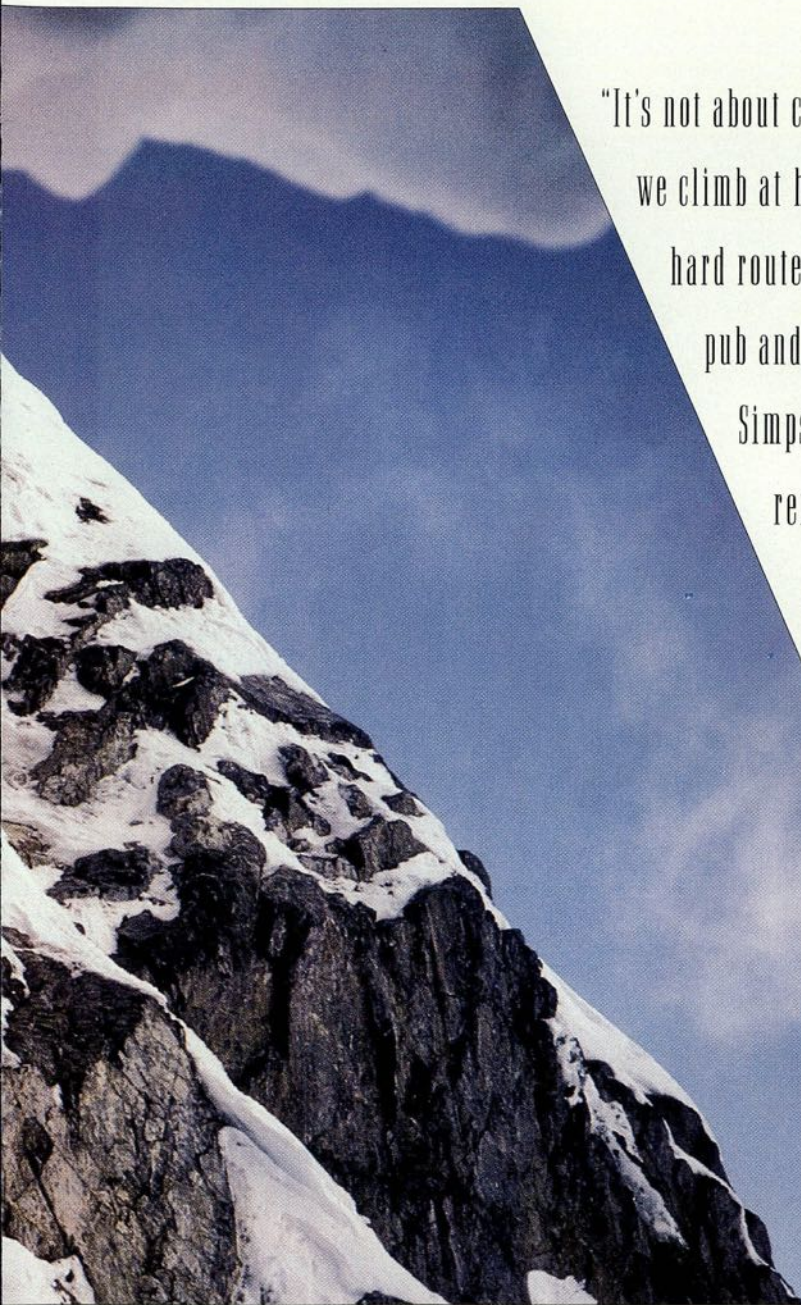
Simpson high on the first ascent of the West Face of Siula Grande, before the accident.

tions with friends, and certainly can ask searching questions about their lives or projects. And he is responsive to the very presence of others, openly enjoying their company.

Simpson is always ready to laugh at himself, but doesn't suffer the criticism of others easily. He is passionate, stubborn, and volatile; he'll argue an opposing viewpoint for hours, just to do it. When he digs in on a point or engages in any kind of acrimonious exchange, you can virtually see a steel trap come down over his face. It's no problem to imagine Simpson doing the kinds of things he has done: cussing a prospective employer out; stomping off; slamming down a phone; intending never to speak to someone again; or banging his fist down on a ticket agent's desk when told there's no smoking on his flight.

When he and his friend Geoff Birtles, editor of *High* magazine and also a man of opinions, get together, there seems to be no swaying or acknowledgement. Birtles has written,

Photo: Simon Yates



"It's not about casual climbers, but hard climbers. Why don't we climb at half the danger and half the grade? Do we do a hard route because we love it, or to come in here to the pub and wave your willy around and say, 'I've done it'?"

Simpson has written his memoirs now while he remembers and cares deeply about everything.

to ride his tricycle down a steep flight of 29 stairs. He gripped the handles, leaned back to lift the front wheel (her suggestion), and "hung on the raging bucking bronco that my trike [became]," as he wrote in *This Game of Ghosts*. He bashed down the stairway toward a patio. Then "for a moment everything was peaceful and quiet as I hurtled through the air towards the wisteria tree." He cracked his head on it, and was taken away to get new stitches, which crossed over the old ones.

Many adventures later in the book come those about climbing, such as the time in Glencoe, Scotland, in 1981 when, as a literature and philosophy student at Edinburgh University (which he attended precisely because his family wanted him to go to Oxbridge), Simpson, who had led one Grade II ice route, leapt up a Grade IV. He hadn't bothered to put a wrist loop on his new axe. He also restlessly climbed up to and over a stalled fellow climber. "I noticed that Dick was less tense [when] I had stopped hacking away between his legs," he would write in *This Game of Ghosts*. Above, he

pumped out and fell, and had to leap outward to clear Dick. Simpson plummeted 70 feet to the deck, broke three ribs and cracked three others, got a hairline fracture of the fibia, ripped his trapezius muscles, and knocked his bladder out of whack. On the walk out, he fell into a river.

In the Alps the summer before his senior year at the university, Simpson descended too early from the summit of Les Courtes down a sunlit 2500-foot face, and got slammed by an avalanche. He rode clear to the glacier. "All I could hear was hissing," he says, "then myself screaming when I started hitting rocks." He ended up with few injuries — something that looked like a bullet hole in his forehead, a few crampon holes in his cheek, and a concussion — considering the possibilities. "That avalanche," he says, "was my fault. I learned a lesson that I will never ever forget, and thankfully I was allowed to live."

He also learned the many joys of climbing, which became all

"I usually lunch with him and find him argumentative, belligerent, and opinionated, but never dull." One night at the Byron, another of Simpson's regular haunts, Birtles says, "You can see why Joe got out of that crevasse. He's a terrier. It'd take a lot to kill him."

Simpson was born an obstinate month late to parents of Scottish, Irish, and English descent, and grew up in Malaya and Gibraltar amid a ferocious, combative, loving family. Joe's older sister Sarah was his special mentor and tormentor.

At age five Joe jumped over a pile of wood only to find a 15-foot stone wall on the other side, over which he dropped head-first onto a set of stone steps. Later, he was at home from school recuperating when Sarah taunted and tempted him into trying

he wanted to do. He left the university six months before graduation to devote himself to climbing, though he would return to Edinburgh in 1983-84 to finish and get a Masters Degree in English Literature.

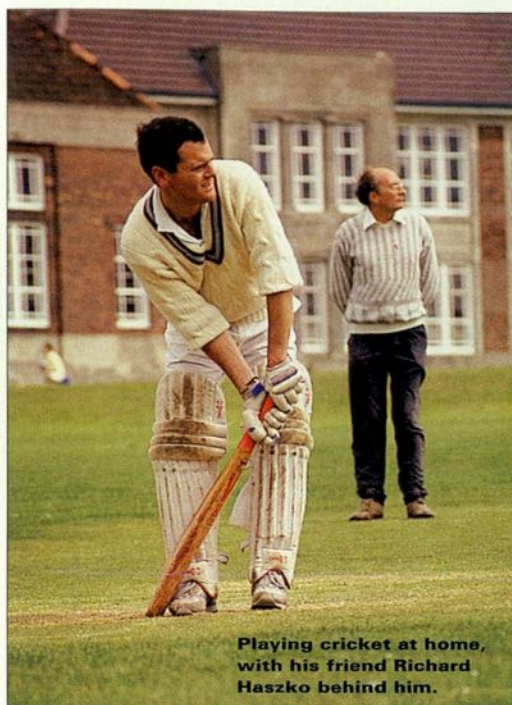
He hitchhiked south to Chamonix, France, to live in profound squalor with a group of Brits, "the Alpine Binmen," in honor of their job of emptying trash cans.

From 1980 to 1985, Simpson amassed a fine, solid Alpine record, doing over 50 climbs, including ascents of the Walker Spur, Central Pillar of Freney, North Face of Les Droites (in winter), and The Drus Couloir. *This Game of Ghosts* tells us about the characters he lived with, the wild close calls, the deaths, and the kind of madness that prevailed.

One celebratory New Year's Eve in Chamonix, Simpson and Murray Laxton dragged plastic kiddie sleds to the nearest ski jump. Simpson launched first, to sail 35 feet through the air. "Unfortunately it was immediately apparent that the sled was not designed to fly," as he wrote in *This Game of Ghosts*. "In the air it exhibited the same lack of control it had on the ground as well as taking on the aerodynamic qualities of a large house brick."

The sled half-flipped forward. Simpson smacked down on his head, neck driven forward and nose crunching, then battered 200 more feet down the slope. Murray criticized his takeoff technique, and went ahead and crashed himself.

There was, too, the bivy ledge on the Bonatti Pillar on the Dru, which collapsed as Simpson and Ian Whitaker slept on it. They were suspended, each tightly encased in a sleeping bag, from a remnant of their ropes, which had been cut by the rockfall. The rope was attached only to a flexing piton and a newly loosened flake, from behind which gravel was streaming. The two hung, tormented by cramps and terrified every time either moved,



Playing cricket at home, with his friend Richard Haszko behind him.

Geoff Birtles has written,
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motor scooter; Simpson, the night before leaving for Ama Dablam, seeing an orange traffic cone and thinking it'd be a great idea to kick it across the road. He took a mighty swing, found it was set on a concrete stump, and went off to the Himalaya with two broken toes. Another time Joe thought it

for 12 hours. When a rescuer arrived, worried that the weight shift would pop the anchors, each argued vigorously to be lifted first. Today Simpson repeats their claims with relish. He's most unembarrassed. He says smartly, "Well, you've got to have your priorities, don't you?"

The stories, well told in the fine British tradition, make you laugh until you cry, and the off-the-record ones are even wilder. There are lots about "scrapping," although at the pub for lunch one day, Simpson alleges that his fights have been "mainly defensive. I've never hit anyone first."

"Except one," Birtles says so meaningfully that it's not hard to guess who that was. Simpson tips his head at Birtles and explains. "I missed him."

In the Broadfield one night, a group including Simpson, Stephenson, Richard Haszko, and John Fleming gets on a roll. One story, "How John's Legs Got So Long," tells of how, late one night on the way home from a party, Stephenson out of habit climbed a stone tower, but slipped dynoing to the last ledge, which he hadn't thought might be covered in snow. He fell 30 feet, landing straddling a stone wall. Half a dozen supplements to the tale involve the unrepeatable particulars of his injuries and convalescence. Doctors would peek under Stephenson's bandages and, while he watched hoping for assurance, wince sideways with "Ssss" intakes of air.

There are car crashes, and a hundred party stories: Stephenson riding through a bonfire on someone's

Photo: Steve Lewis

would be a "jolly" idea to put an empty cider bottle on a passed-out friend's head and kick the bottle off. He missed, caught his toe sideways on a chair, and snapped it — the toe, not the chair.

Or there was the time Simpson was pushing his friend Neil Milne around in a wheelchair, headed down a hill, couldn't keep up on his bad ankle, and coolly let go.

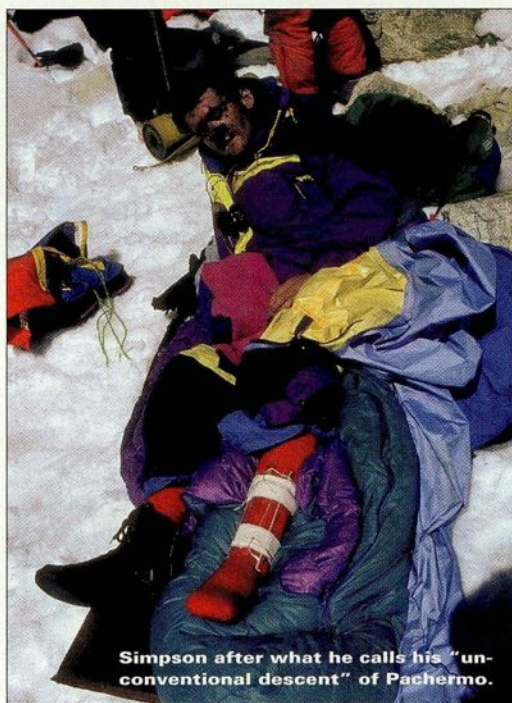
"OK, right, slow down, slow down," Milne began saying, not knowing Simpson was 50 feet behind him and receding fast. The chair hit a car, and Milne "did" his ankle: "It put him up for four months," recalls Simpson.

"Any resemblance between these incidents and falling off mountains is purely coincidental," says Richard Haszko.

Sheffield, in Yorkshire, is a green, green place, even for the U.K., its streets edged with enormous lime trees and beeches. The streets smell of the trees, of lilacs, rhododendron and other bushes, curry, baking bread, and exhaust. It is a hilly city, ringed with huge parks of wilderness moorland, and dotted with smaller ones full of steep winding trails.

There are at least 2000 climbers in this town; the Foundry, its big rock gym, gets 2500 visits a week. Most climbers live in the southwestern part of town, in places like Hunters Bar or Nether Edge, walking distance apart. It's a patchwork section, containing everything from grand stone homes with Jaguars (pronounced Jag-you-ars) in the driveways to shabby hotels. It's also the part closest to the chocolate and green moors of Derbyshire, rich with rock outcrops, half an hour away.

The highly developed pub scene incorporates all strata of climbers. If you're a VS (a British grade) leader who would like to meet others, someone can tell you which pub to go



"There are no insights except crawling on a broken leg is terribly painful," Simpson says. Then, "Perhaps I don't want to share my insights because they terrify me. There are a lot of what ifs. If I follow those questions down the line, it scares the shit out of me, it takes me back to that."

to on which night. If you want to meet a Joe Simpson or a Paul Nunn, same thing.

Simpson lives here, in Abbeydale, on a plain street of brick row houses, their backyards walled in stone. At the end of the street, a hill is slashed across with Van-Gogh-yellow gorse, vibrant to see, unpleasant to tangle with.

Inside his place, slim but three-storied, plants cover the kitchen window and ivy is overrunning the bathroom. In back is a neat fenced garden, enclosing lavender lilacs, clematis, nasturtiums, red geraniums, loads of blue-purple lobelia, and some lupin just planted by Simpson's girlfriend of seven years, Jackie Newbold.

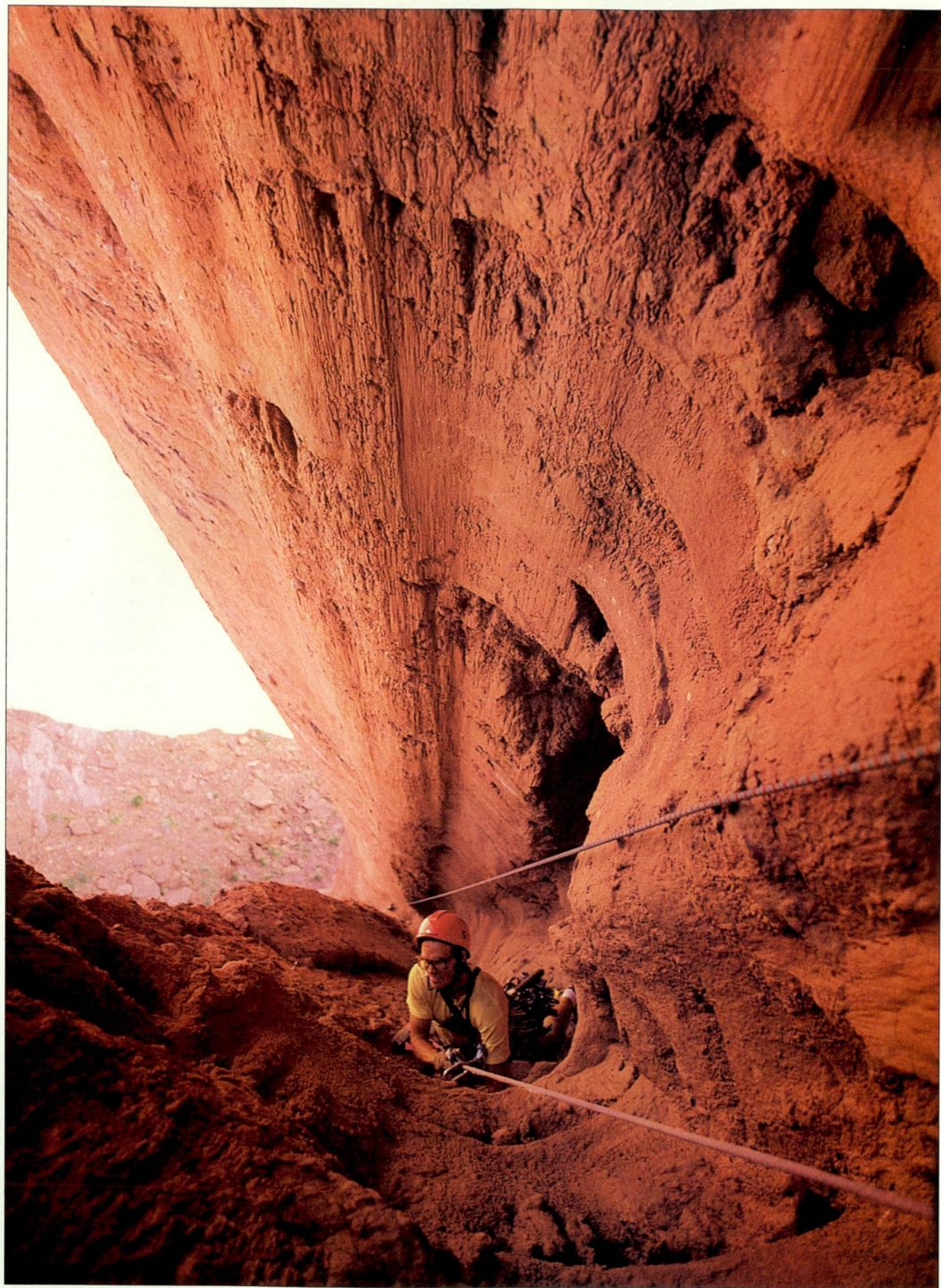
The kitchen wall and living room are covered in black-and-white photos of mountains, climbs, and the helicopter rescue from the Drus. The stairs are lined with color photos of climbing and topped with a big poster of a young Bob Dylan.

There are days of conversation in the kitchen, Simpson sitting alertly at the table or stepping about the room. His expressions are vivid and his gaze steady; his wide eyes are dark hazel-blue, his nails deep-bitten. His accent is public school (what Americans call private school), with some Irish phrasing — such as the oath, "Jesus, Mary, and Joseph!" — thrown in. Or the Yorkshire possessive, "me," as in, "Don't listen, I'm talkin' out me ass." Simpson smokes about 30 cigarettes a day, though he quits before expeditions, and makes and offers coffee. He may fix and have toast and bacon without interrupting his conversation.

We get to the genesis of it all, Peru. Oddly enough, Simpson and Simon Yates decided to go there because they thought it sounded safe. Two friends had just been killed in the Himalaya. Simpson talked to Al Rouse (who has since died on K2), who suggested the west face of

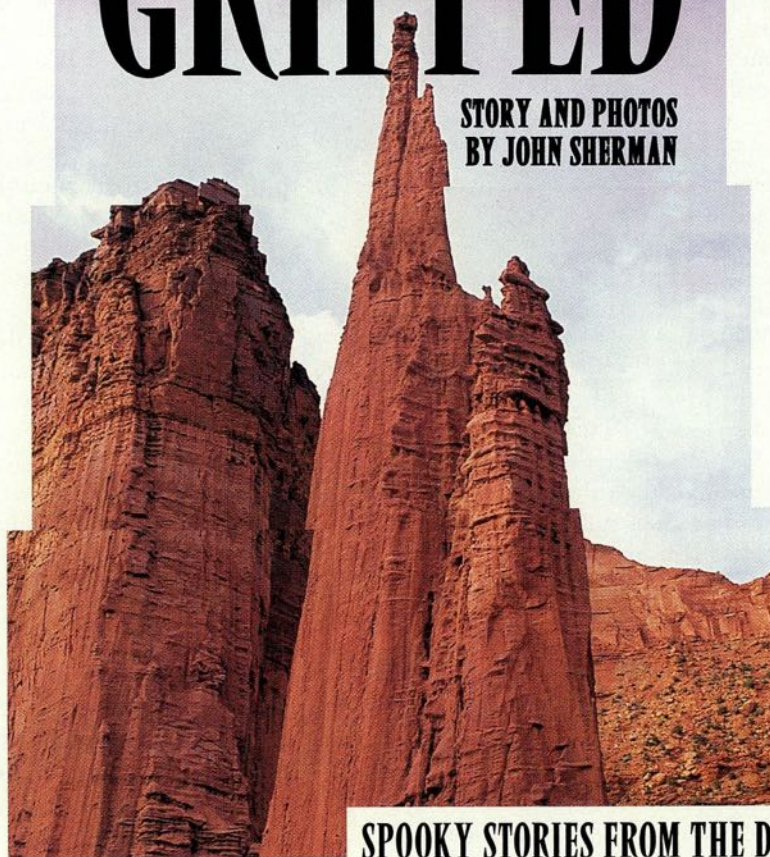
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Photo: Mal Duff



TALES FROM THE GRIPPED

STORY AND PHOTOS
BY JOHN SHERMAN



**SPOOKY STORIES FROM THE DESERT,
IN WHICH THE AUTHOR SUFFERS AT THE HANDS OF HIS PARTNERS,
THE ROCK, AND UTAH'S 3.2 BEER LAWS.**

"This is not negotiable."

Tom Cosgriff was on the line, feeding me some bull.

"Listen, we had a deal," I said. "Remember? We were going to climb illegal desert spires until we got caught or you had to go back to Norway."

"No. We gotta climb A5 in the Fisher Towers." Cosgriff was adamant.

"Tom, you aren't getting me anywhere near those petrified turds. Besides, they're legal. What fun will that be?"

"This is *not* negotiable. We're going to the Fishers."

Damn him. How could I say no? He never does. Like the first climb we did together — *Gorilla's*

Rob Slater in the chimney on the Doric Column (left); and the Citadel (above).

**HE STEPPED ON A DRILLED PIN AND BLEW THE HOLE APART.
HE NAILED KNIFEBLADES INTO MILLIMETER-THICK CALCITE SEAMS.
WITH ENOUGH POUNDING THEY'D GO TO THE HILT AND HOLD BODY WEIGHT.
THIS WAS TOM'S IDEA OF A GREAT VACATION.**

Delight, a classic 5.9 in Boulder Canyon — me with a knee that bent only 60 degrees, Cosgriff with a cast on his wrist. No problem. Now the poor bastard spends most of the year stuck behind a desk in Norway, eyeing some plump blond secretary gobbled in makeup. I relented. Nevertheless, deep down I knew this was his way of getting even for that time I visited him in the Yosemite jail, the time I asked if I could borrow his haulbag, since he wouldn't need it for awhile.

He did bend an iota, though, and I got my sentence reduced. We'd climb the 350-foot Gothic Nightmare, hidden far behind the Titan in the Mystery Towers group of the Fishers. Endwise, it looks like one of the Coneheads wearing a jester's cap, dangle bells sprouting out of the top. From the side it resembles a sailfish fin. The Gothic was still unrepeated after two decades, a fact that appealed to Cosgriff. It was rated only A3, a fact that appealed to me.

There was one hitch: we needed gear, lots of it. Hence my descent into the abode of the Evil Doctor, Tom's pal, *Climbing* magazine's gear editor, Duane Raleigh.

Had I not been with Tom, Raleigh would surely have never let an arch-traditionalist like me in his house. As it was, Duane was nervously trying to keep an eye on me, his gear, and his wife, all at the same time. In the gear room, my comments on some non-standard items were not well taken. When we left, Duane pulled Tom aside and whispered the doctor's orders: "Make him suffer."

At first, the suffering was limited to humping gear up the long approach, dumping it at the base, and hiking out. Then it intensified when we went for beer and pizza at Moab's famous Poplar Place. The jalapeno, garlic, and green pepper combo was, said Tom, "the most evil pizza I've ever had." Tougher to swallow was the wimpy 3.2 stout. The waitress assured us, "A lot of people are really happy to find beer like this in Utah." Yeah, that's like the happiness one feels when he's in jail, and only getting "befriended" by the little guy.

The next day we both felt like we'd passed a hibachi's worth of glowing briquettes. We tried a new, uglier approach through several inches of snow. Conditions on the Gothic were wretched. All around, the snow was melting, loosening stones, which hit



Pro on the First Mudfield of the Citadel (above); and Mike O'Donnell leading the second pitch on the Gothic Nightmare (right).

others, until thunderous rock slides would rip down the walls of the Mystery Towers amphitheater.

We had reached the base, and were now committed to bucking out double loads in defeat. We hadn't climbed an inch. There was no sense in lugging out the beer, so we sat in the saddle between the

Citadel and the Gothic Nightmare, and swilled. By the time we had split a six of King Cobra tallboys, tons of debris had worked its way down, and our psyche had worked its way up. Tom started leading.

Only the thought that Tom was suffering more than I was made the shady north-face belay stance bearable. He stepped on a drilled pin and blew the hole apart. He nailed knifeblades into millimeter-thick calcite seams. With enough pounding they'd go to the hilt and hold body weight. This was Tom's idea of a great vacation.

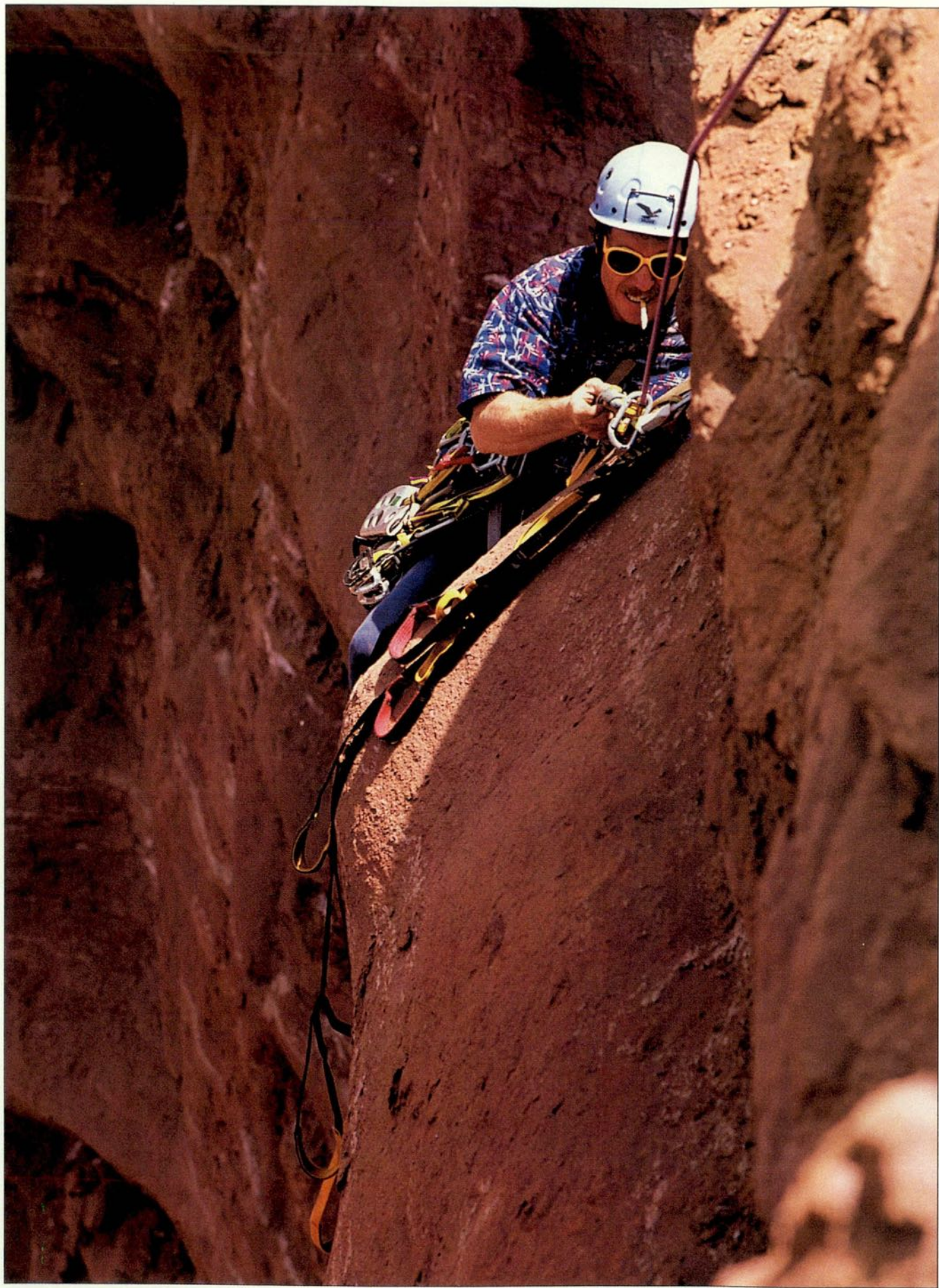
A few hours later he was at the belay, and I was following. I could've cleaned the pitch with a Fisher-Price hammer. Now it was my lead.

Damn it. This isn't funny." My yelps only made Cosgriff laugh harder. "Shit shit shit shit shit." My voice was getting higher. "Watch me." It was 20 degrees Fahrenheit, I was in tennis shoes and thin wool gloves, and I was free-climbing vertical mud. Not out of my own free will. The perfect #3 Friend placement I had excavated from the mud, jump tested, and moved up on had just exploded, leaving a depression the size and shape of a chili bowl. The only reason I hadn't fallen was that one foot was stemmed onto a knob. Now I was stuck: one foot on the knob and my shoulder pressed against the opposite wall of the dihedral. All the nearby holds were covered in dirt from my attempts to excavate the next placement. The pump flooded in.

Every piece was a time bomb, and if I fell, it would be onto the anchor. The day before, Tom had stopped me climbing so he could tie off the belay line. He hastily put another bolt in the anchor because the old ones were pulling out under his weight.

"If I get down to that last piece, I will lower off, let Tom finish this, and retire from aid climbing forever." Such were my thoughts, and "What if I don't?"





**THEN CAME A BIGGER FEAR. NOT THE THREAT OF IMMINENT INJURY,
BUT THE FEAR THAT IF I DIDN'T GO BACK UP,
I WOULD BE A CHICKENSHIT FOREVER.**

I reached down below my feet to the last piece, my balance big-rack, clothes-bundled, tilt-out awkward. My hands and feet were slipping on the dirt. I could grab the stem of the Friend, but knew that it would rotate out if I tried to lower onto it. My only hope was to clip on some aiders and step in.

I had one lousy inch of nylon to step through but it was lying flat against the wall like it was glued there. I tried to flick the aider away from the wall and kick my foot through, usually an easy trick, but not with the top step. The curses spilled out of my mouth in angry tones, plaintive tones, and tearful pleas.

One lousy inch of nylon.

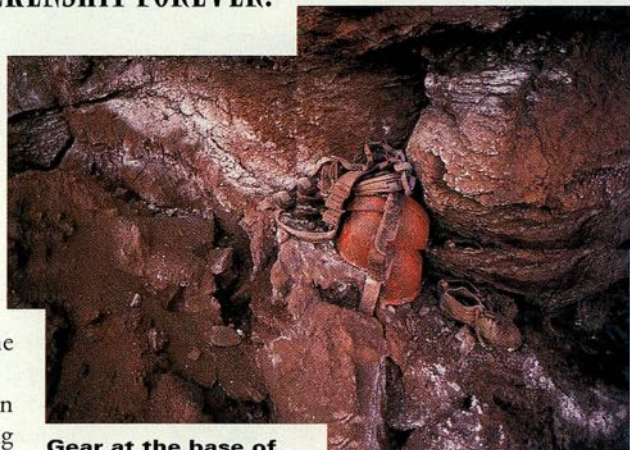
The pump clock was ticking down. Then, like in some McGyver script, when he defuses a nuclear device with a pocket knife, as the timer reads one second left, my foot slid through. I eased my way down, clipped into the piece, and rested my helmet against the wall.

The panic vanished, replaced by a nervousness about the piece I was resting on. Then came a bigger fear. Not the threat of imminent injury, but the fear that if I didn't go back up, I would be a chickenshit forever.

I can't remember how long I hung there, regrouping mentally, forcing the decision, willing courage. Finally, I stood up, grabbed my hammer, and started gouging at the crack through the mud, waiting to hear that scraping sound when I reached real rock, my mind focused on one thing: making that next piece stick.

The summit ridge offered sunshine and snow and no evidence of how Bill Forrest and Don Briggs traversed it to its far-away highpoint. All we found was a hawser-laid rap sling encircling a pile of rubble; 20 years ago it was a sturdy pinnacle. We sat on the ridge, with nothing to do but listen to the intermittent rumble of the towers and walls eroding around us. Four trips in and out, a 200-mile beer run to Grand Junction, and two short, frigid pitches on the north face were all for naught — we bailed.

What possessed me to go back? Or should I say, Who? Not Cosgriff. He was pecking his keyboard, sneaking peeks at chunky hips and painted lips, and suffering through economically induced sobri-



Gear at the base of the Gothic Nightmare after the storm (above); and O'Donnell cleaning on the route (left).

ety (seven bucks a beer in Norway). No, only one other person could drag me back to the fudge-brownie and stale-bread summits of the Mystery Towers. My partner of countless Eldo epics; the man who sent me on my first heading and hooking lead on El Cap, without telling me that the first ascensionist had decked on the same pitch; The Provider who lent me his portaledge, which ripped, sending me for a headfirst, 4 a.m. wakeup call; Mr. Confidence, Mr. Cocki-

ness, and lover of all that is ovine — Robbie Slater. The Team was back together.

This time it was June. The beauty of the maroon-walled, Roadrunner/Coyote approach canyon was lost in the heat, loose sand, and shoe-sucking quicksand.

Our objective was all three Mystery Towers: the Doric Column, the Citadel, and the Gothic Nightmare.

First was the Doric. Say it fast and it sounds like Dork, which is just what it looks like.

Kor was first to try it, but backed off when he saw how much drilling would be required. Forrest and George Hurley then bagged the first ascent in 1969, sneaking onto the summit while their British partner Rod Chuck, tired of being bombarded at the belays, rested on the ground. The Yanks pulled their ropes on the way down. Chuck was not amused. Twenty-three years later, in 1992, a fellow Brit, Steve "Crusher" Bartlett, revenged the injustice, making the second ascent with George "Chip" Wilson.

The first pitch was mostly free climbing. A 5.7 dirt mantel gave me brief pause, half an hour or so, for reflection. It wouldn't have taken so long if I didn't keep glancing down to see our half-naked companion sunbathing at the base. Knowing Rob's penchant for flat-chested blonds, I had no worries about him being distracted from his belay duties.

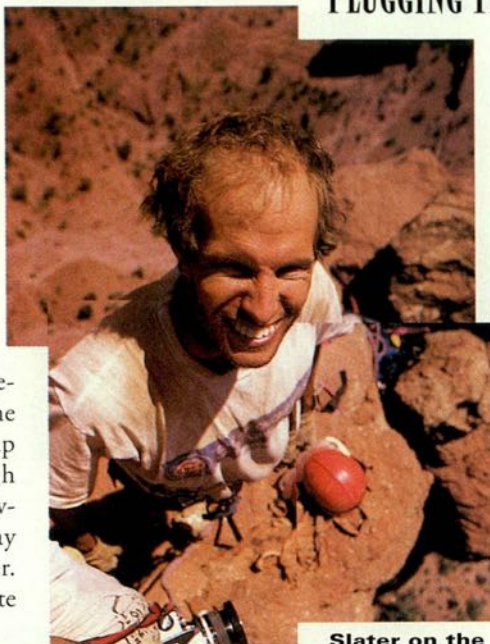
Soon, the anchor was cause for thought. Crusher's bolts, now two months old, were already coming loose in the soft rock. I drilled another, feeling the vibrations through my feet. Later, I could feel Rob clean pins 40 feet below.

The next three pitches climbed a mud-encrusted chimney/groove that resembled the inside of a giant gutted fish. Here, the second-ascent crew had freshly riveted Forrest's bolt and bathook ladder for us, so progress was quick and easy for the leader. For the belayer, it could never be quick enough.

**MUD CLODS BOMBARDED THE BELAYER'S HELMET EVERY FEW MINUTES,
AND GOGGLES, BANDANNAS, AND LONG-SLEEVED SHIRTS
COULDN'T KEEP THE DIRT FROM GRINDING AGAINST THE TEETH,
PLUGGING THE EARS, AND INVADING EVERY PORE.**

Mud clods bombarded the belayer's helmet every few minutes, and goggles, bandannas, and long-sleeved shirts couldn't keep the dirt from grinding against the teeth, plugging the ears, and invading every pore. Days after the ascent my nose continued to produce twin strands of red-brown mucus.

On top we basked in the late-afternoon sun, strolling about the spacious summit, clambering up the boulder marking the high point. Forrest and Hurley, not having known they'd bag it the day they did, had not left a register. Crusher had, however, with a note that said, "The Citadel is next."



Slater on the narrow summit of the Citadel.

The Citadel and the Gothic — both unrepeated, both prizes, both tottering piles of choss you could piss a bolt hole into. Crusher might come back any day, so the Citadel was next.

The Citadel looks like an Olympic medals stand viewed in a funhouse mirror, the kind that stretches you out so you look like Manute Bol. The first pitch appeared to be a casual dirt scramble, so I volunteered for the lead.

Off-route from the start, I had soon paddled across a dirt slab I dared not reverse. I had no gear in, and below was a series of 35-degree dirt shelves with six-foot drops between them. It would be an ugly fall, like rolling a 165-pound baseball down 10 flights of stairs.

As the dirt under my feet continuously gave way, I slowly walked in place. I desperately needed pro, but the only weakness in the rock slab at my chest was a seam thinner than a pencil line. I had no RURPs, so I pounded two knifeblades in. One actually went in half an inch, before it busted off the side of the seam. I tied off and equalized the pins, then agonized over the flexing 5.5 mantelshelf in front of me for another 15 minutes.

I figured I'd rather fall going up than going down, and figured I had little choice. What I didn't figure was that the dirt above was dark brown, facing south, and now heated to over 100 degrees. When I got there it was too hot to hang onto. Fortunately, the angle was low enough that I could chop steps with my hammer, like ice climbing in the Sahara.

A hundred feet of zigzag climbing had netted me only 40 feet

in elevation. The next anchor was half a rope away so it was decided — I don't remember by whom — that I should lead up to it and get us a full rope off the ground. Had I read Hurley's 1970 article on the Mystery Towers in *Climbing* prior to our ascent, this would surely have been Rob's lead. In it, Forrest recounts the fall he took on this pitch when a 1/4-inch bolt broke under his weight. He had removed the bathooks below, and the only pro left between him and a lengthy fall was a fold he tied off in the mud curtain. Miraculously, the thread held.

I had read about the Mystery Towers in the guidebook, however, and was aware of certain tricks used to ascend them: the curtain tie-offs for one, pins forced in calcite veins for another, and angles driven into the mud tent-stake style. Within 30 feet I had employed techniques two and three, as well as some steps carved in the mud. I reached a bolt and promptly backed it up with the worst bolt I ever placed.

Next came a blank section. The only hint of passage was a couple of millimeter-deep dimples, the remnants of bathook holes. Given that most of the old bolts were now hanging about an inch out from the rock due to erosion, I figured that Forrest drilled bathook holes roughly an inch deep. At first I tried to preserve Forrest's pattern: two to three holes, then a bolt. In the last two decades, however, not only had the rock changed, but so had the technology. Bathooks were no longer in vogue, so as Crusher had done on the Doric, I put rivets in my freshly drilled inch-deep holes. An ethical quandary ensued. Forrest had taken more risk — his hook holes were empty after he passed them. He had nothing to stop a fall except a bolt every 15 feet or so — small consolation in this rock. At least I had eight cents worth of soft steel carriage bolt plugging every hole, plus thicker bolts backing up his 1/4-inch coffin nails. It didn't seem sporting, even if my rivets were the weakest money could buy.

I stopped backing up Forrest's bolts, and began tying off their exposed shanks and using them as rivets — the ones that didn't pull out in my fingers, that is. I nailed whenever possible. Fifty feet above my last bolt, I shuddered, looking down at the string of bent rivets and shaky pins beneath me. A long stretch and I hooked the pick end of my hammer through the rotting slings and gingerly pulled up on the anchor.

Slater chuckled up the next pitch, in the process performing the impossible — he fixed a pin in the Fisher Towers. Half an

(continued on page 158)

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by Steve Schneider

Excalibur

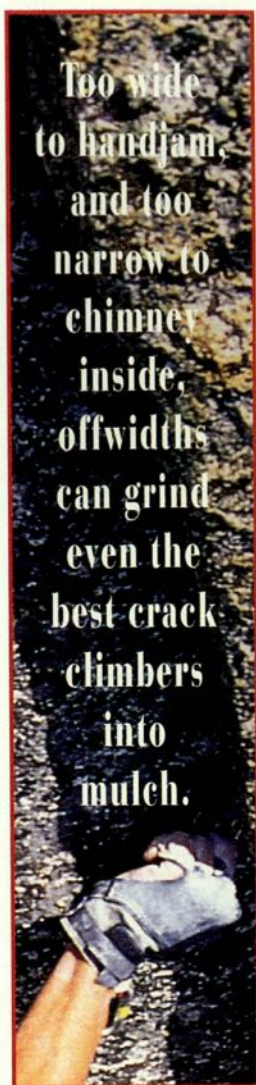
Freeing the Sword from the Stone

Rising almost 3000 feet from base to summit, it is distinguished from other big-wall climbs by its wide cracks. Over a half dozen pitches on *Excalibur* are in that most-feared category: offwidth.

Excalibur takes a line just left and parallel to the *Salathé Wall* on the southwest flank of El Capitan. Rising almost 3000 feet from base to summit, it is distinguished from other big-wall climbs by its wide cracks. Over a half dozen pitches on *Excalibur* are in that most-feared category: offwidth. Too wide to handjam, and too narrow to chimney inside, offwidths can grind even the best crack climbers into mulch. George Meyers' taunt, in his 1979 book *Yosemite Climber*, that the cracks "await the activities of the free climber," fell on deaf ears. Back then the route was plenty extreme just to aid.

Bill Price on pitch 17 (5.10d) of *Excalibur*.

Photo: Steve Schneider



Jeff Schoen on the 7th pitch (5.12a).

gance of line. Platform bivouacs, such as Guinevere's Bed at midroute and The Round Table near the top, added a friendly dimension to the climb. A traditional campfire made from the wooden blocks would culminate each ascent. Early parties, few that they were, agreed on one thing: *Excalibur* was a route for "big boys" only.

After Todd Skinner and Paul Piana free climbed El Capitan's *Salathé Wall* in 1988, many climbers began to scour the grade VI walls. They weren't looking for thin nailing and hooking, but were seeking established routes that would go mostly, if not all, free.

Trying to free climb walls isn't new. In the early 1980s Max Jones and Mark Hudon instituted a "free as can be" policy for their big walls, whereby they would free climb what they could, and aid the rest. Their futuristic and brilliant efforts resulted in numerous long routes, including the *Salathé*, going largely free. This attitude captured my imagination, and, in the spring of 1992, I embraced it on another great El Cap route: *Excalibur*.

Excalibur's fifth pitch alone was hard enough to keep the line from being a trade route. When Jim Bridwell first climbed this thin seam during an attempt on the route in the early 1970s, liberally employing RURPs, hooks, and copperheads, it was perhaps the most difficult aid pitch in Yosemite. But it wasn't the seam that thwarted the first ascent, it was the wide cracks on pitches eight and nine. These smooth, uniform, and unrelenting cracks were too wide for conventional equipment, and Yosemite hardmen were repeatedly turned back.

In 1975, Charlie Porter and Hugh Burton concocted a solution. By sandwiching 6-inch pitons with 2-by-4 wooden blocks, they created 8-inch "stacks." Using ingenuity like that of Warren Harding, who cut the legs off a stove to make the large pitons crucial for the first ascent of *The Nose*, Porter and Burton were able to overcome these pitches. What they found above were mostly continuous crack systems, many big enough to accept fingers, a prerequisite for free climbing.

Excalibur's fearsome wide cracks were tempered by the allure of its sweeping golden corners and ele-

I had tried *Excalibur* 10 years earlier when John Barbella invited me to join him. His earlier attempt had been foiled when a falling rock broke his partner's hand. John had six pitches fixed, and I jumped at the chance to join him.

We nailed for three days, noting pitches that might go free. For the wide cracks we used the latest technology, stacking the wooden blocks with four-inch Friends, the largest protection then available. While only a little more secure than piton sandwiches, the new setup did offer quick hammerless placements.

Then the Easter weather crapped out. Snowfall led to a rainstorm. A waterfall developed and completely drenched us, our haulbags, and bivy gear. With nightfall and colder temperatures approaching fast, we decided to retreat down the nearby *Salathé Wall*. From the top of pitch 16, John lowered me 200 feet, where a gargantuan pendulum and a 60-foot jumars up a tattered fixed line placed me on El Cap Spire, where we bivied in a snowstorm. When the sun broke two days later, we descended the *Salathé*, and I vowed to return to *Excalibur* in a serious bid to free climb it.

The route nagged at me for years, and pushed me into mastering offwidth techniques. Practicing on "wide" routes such as *Bad Ass Mama*, *Mother Superior*, and *Twilight Zone*, I added moves like Leavittation, armbars, and knee-scutting to my climbing repertoire. I wasn't the only one infatuated with *Excalibur's* wide cracks, either. Those offwidths repeatedly repulsed strong free attempts. Indeed, the cracks had become one of the Valley's most sought-after prizes.

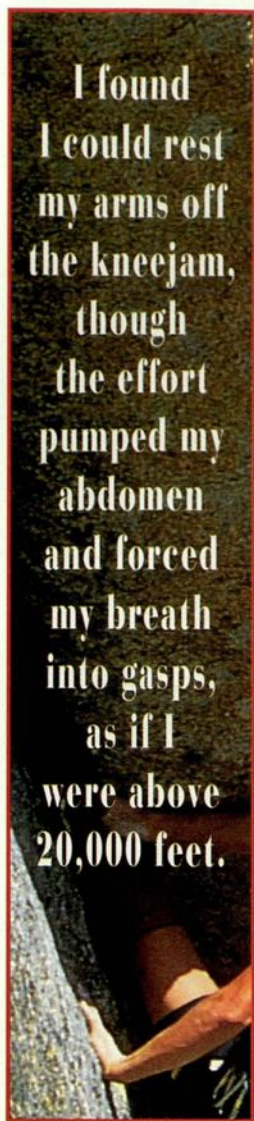
In February, 1992, I searched for a partner to share the adventure, and ended up asking Bill Price. That's the Bill Price. The same Bill Price who in 1980, helped establish 5.13 in Yosemite with his ascent of *Cosmic Debris*. And the same Bill Price who, with his wife-to-be Angie, made the second ascent of El Capitan's then-hardest route, the *Sea of Dreams* (VI A5), where he assumed the monumental task of leading, hauling, and cleaning every pitch.

Bill was as home on a desperate finger crack as he was on an A5 hooking nightmare. Ten years ago no climber could match his combined abilities in free and aid climbing. Then he had children. For eight years, Bill worked as a carpenter in Antioch, California, raising his two kids, Willie and Bianca, letting his climbing talents slide. Stepping on the scale one day, he was slapped by his relative obesity. He had been in the rat race too long. It was time for a change. It was time to climb again.

Bill joined the CityRock gym where I worked, and started training. Off the couch, he could still cruise 5.11, but he had trouble with the nuances of plastic climbing. His leave of absence had left him out of touch with sport-climbing techniques like hangdogging and backstepping. He even cut the rubber bands off his new quickdraws. When I told him that the bands kept the bottom carabiner from flipping upside down, he said, "I thought they were for hanging them up on the display rack." Within two years, Bill dropped 15 pounds, redpointed *Soap on a Rope* (5.12d) at Sonora, and was game



I found
I could rest
my arms off
the kneejam,
though
the effort
pumped my
abdomen
and forced
my breath
into gasps,
as if I
were above
20,000 feet.



Schneider on the 12th pitch (5.12b).

for anything. He had made the second ascent of *Excalibur* years before, but my proposal to push free climbing on the route lured him into getting on it again.

We discussed goals for our ascent. Foremost, we wanted to free as much as possible. Realizing that there would be blank sections, I set a goal of doing *Excalibur* 75 percent free. Second, we wanted to replace the route's decrepit quarter-inch anchors with bomber half-inch bolts. We would crowbar out the old bolts, enlarge the holes, and slam in new bolts. The upgrading would help future ascensionists and, we hoped, set a precedent for improving inadequate anchors on all of El Capitan. Third, we were to have fun in some of the most human-devouring offwidths ever attempted.

We started in May. Bill flew up the crux A4 pitch, a delicate series of hook and tiny copperhead placements, showing a casual demeanor in the face of a potential 100-foot fall. Higher, I managed the first free lead of the eighth pitch, a clean overhanging 6-inch crack that fell at 5.12b. Although strenuous, the pitch succumbed to kneebars and handstacking — basic Leavittation.

For protection, I tied a long leash from a homemade #6 Friend to my waist and moved it along as I climbed, placing another big cam below me every 20 feet.

Things were going well, and it looked as if pitches five and seven would go free at hard 5.12, but Bill had to return to work that week. We fixed eight pitches and rappelled off. I suggested that a third person join us, so I could work on freeing the lower pitches while Bill was gone, which would set us up for the final push on his vacation the following week. I mentioned Jeff Schoen.

Although not as well known as Bill Price, Jeff Schoen was a talented Yosemite free climber. An easygoing sort of guy, Jeff had accompanied Hans Florine and me on several free-climbing excursions. His high motivation, casual attitude, and wit made him a prime big-wall candidate. At first I just asked if he'd like to help free climb *Excalibur's* lower pitches. We went up midweek and worked the moves of pitch five, a thin finger crack that went free at 5.12d. Jeff seemed to like the route, and when I asked if

he would join Bill and me, he heartily assented.

Our plan was to fix the first nine pitches before committing to the route. The big head start would let us take a slow pace of two pitches a day, and improve our chances of free climbing. I even imagined a rest day somewhere along the way. On our last day of fixing, Jeff sent the seventh pitch at 5.12a. Then I told Bill, who was back from his job, that it was his task to free the ninth. Yosemite connoisseurs will remember the picture of Bill in *Yosemite Climber* aiding the ninth pitch using the 2-by-4 stacks. It seemed fitting that Bill should have first crack at this body-stuffing offwidth from hell.

Armed with large cams, Bill lurched upward, precious inches at a time, his breathing accelerating as his energy diminished. If he was Superman, then this crack was Kryptonite. Twenty-five feet off the belay, he was utterly spent, and finished the pitch with some aid. He did replace the two old bolts, paving the way for a safer free-climbing attempt. Exhausted, we rappelled our fixed lines to the comfort of the valley floor, now 1000 feet below.

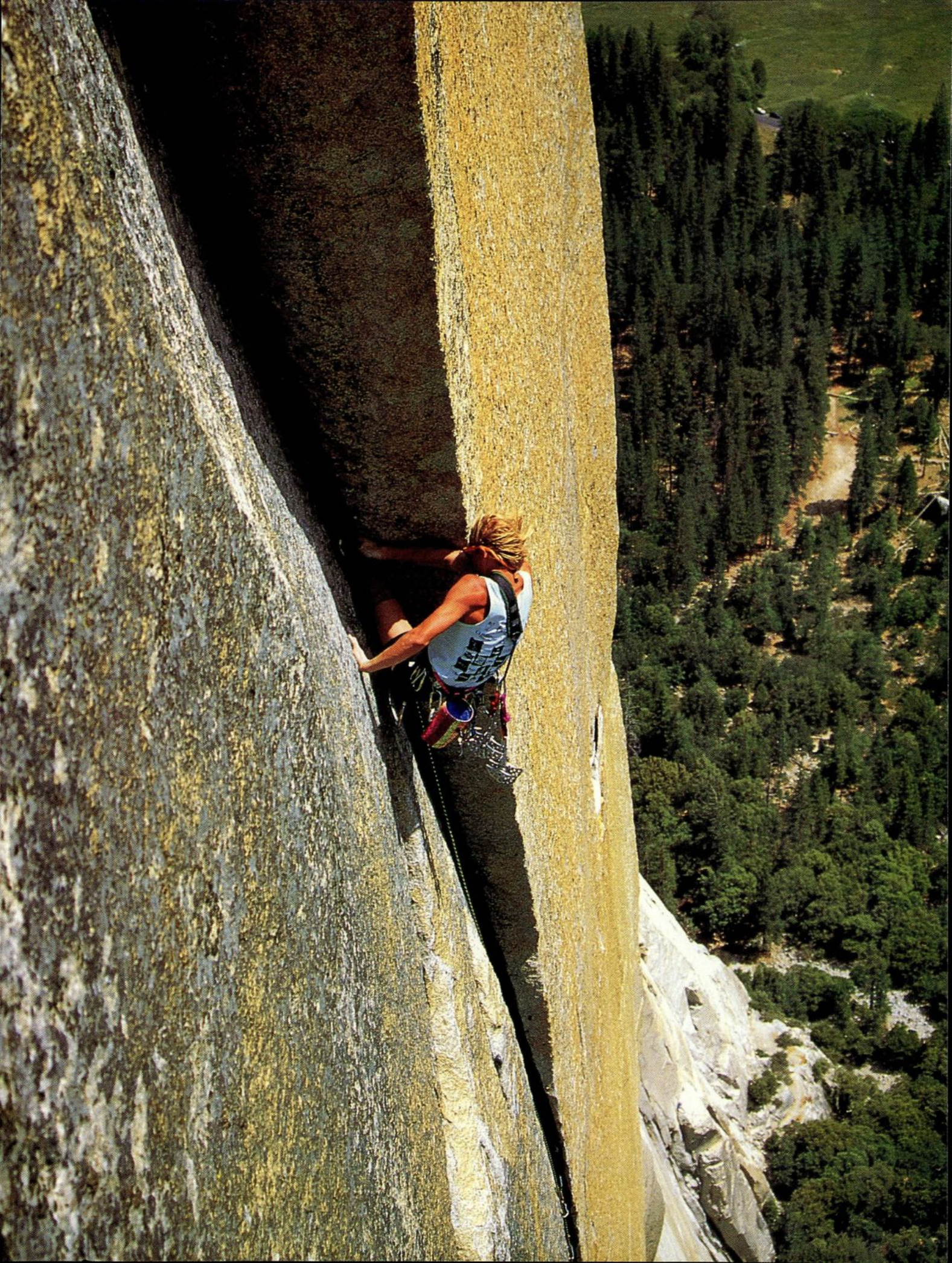
After a much-needed rest day, we assembled a huge pile of supplies at the base. Into five haulbags we stuffed 16 gallons of water, three cases of beer, food and bivy gear for nine days, and a duffel bag of Lycra. Our plan was for Bill and Jeff to haul the bags while I saved my strength for another assault on the ninth pitch. We would maintain this teamwork strategy throughout the climb, maximizing our free-climbing potential. I thought I was clever to avoid the arduous hauling until I took my first step off the portaledge into the maw of the ninth pitch. I sputtered upwards, losing some flesh along the way, just managing to flash the evil section. I deemed the pitch an honest 5.12c.

I asked Jeff if he would set up a bivy while Bill and I used the remaining light to fix pitches above. Jeff explained I should set up camp since he really didn't know how; he had never done a big wall. Bill and I were incredulous. We had just assumed, since Jeff was a local, that he had wall experience. So while Bill and Jeff fixed above, I set up our portaledges.

On day two, Bill aided a dirt-filled seam too thin to free climb. Then Jeff led his first aid pitch. Once rated A4, it finished with a hooking/rivet-ladder sequence. Bill coached him along, offering his wealth of knowledge for support. Jeff whimpered on the creaking rivets as if each placement was a time bomb ready to explode.

The next pitch, which joins a major crack system that runs for hundreds of feet to El Cap Spire, is the most spectacular section of the entire climb. A hundred and forty feet long, the 13th pitch goes from a friendly two inches to a gaping six inches wide. I donned an armory of big cams, feeling much like a medieval knight in shining armor. I could barely move.

Easy handjams led to the vertical fist section. When the crack got too wide for a fist, I decided to gamble. Instead of using Leavittation, I tried to layback the crack. While less secure, laybacking would get me quickly up the crack, and



On our
ninth and
final day,
we hit the
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longed to
swill beer
at the deli
and swim
in the
river.

**Schoen leading
pitch 23 (5.11d) off
the Knights of the
Round Table bivy.**

kneejam, then the handstack, in endless repetition. Slowly, the belay got closer. After struggling for nearly an hour, I clipped the anchors and yelled, "I'm the king of the world!" Sport climbing has its kiss of success, but there's nothing like the nirvana release from mastering a punishing offwidth. It was my proudest flash ever, and over a year later it still puts a strut in my stride. I rated it 5.12d. After all, who would believe I flashed a 5.13 offwidth?

Another two days of great crack climbing — some free, some aid — brought us to pitch 17. From there we were able to swing over to El Cap Spire, our roost for the next three nights. Two Canadians already occupied the ledge, but there was still plenty of room. Then a team of four Brits joined us, and the nine of us had a rather cozy slumber party.

We spent the next few days backtracking down on the lower pitches in an attempt to free climb them, and eventually pushed the high point above the Spire. Day five brought the climb's biggest argument. Pitch 18, a beautiful stretch that traversed left on dime edges reminiscent of Tuolumne, would go free. However, the first crux was protected by A3 pins and nuts that were inadequate for hard free climbing. One bolt would make it safe. I called to Bill for the bolt kit. His mutinous look said "no way."

Bill argued that I was ruining a good aid pitch, and wasn't

with less effort. Problem was, after 10 feet I couldn't let go to place protection. I had to get back into the crack, but the corner had rounded out so much I couldn't pull into it. With arms pumping, and looking at a healthy plummet, I made a last-ditch effort and dynoed into a knee jam. This actually worked, and I quickly established a handstack. I was exhausted, and with 50 feet of overhanging water-polished offwidth to go, further free climbing felt impossible.

"Help me, I'm gassed," I yelled to my buddies, who instantly became a cheering section, passing energy up the rope to me. Renewed, I found I could rest my arms off the kneejam, though the effort pumped my abdomen and forced my breath into gasps, as if I were above 20,000 feet. I began to realize I had one chance to free climb the pitch, as it would take me days to recover enough strength to attempt it again, and by then we would have moved on. I moved my

respecting the tradition of the first ascent. I argued that why should I and others be held back because the first ascensionists were not good enough to free climb this section and bolt it properly. It was an intricate argument that will, undoubtedly, be fought again on Yosemite's walls. We turned to Jeff for a decision. He said to put the bolt in, and so with Jeff restraining Bill, I added it. The pitch went at 5.12d.

Our slow two-pitch-a-day pace continued amid complaints. A nearby *Cosmos* party, headed by Greg Epperson, was passing us and would soon be off the wall. Bill missed his family, and I questioned his well being when he used my Walkman to listen to Billy Graham. Jeff had some mysterious business dealings (I suspected a girl was involved) to attend to, and longed to be back on horizontal ground. For my part, although I missed my girlfriend, I was completely happy as each day we free climbed beautiful cracks on a stupendous wall. Bill and Jeff both added new 5.12 pitches, while I redpointed a 5.13a tips crack on pitch 21.

On one section it was necessary to yard off two large blocks, but since Team *Cosmos* had closed in on us this was a dicey proposition. We tossed the first block a reasonable distance away, but the second block was a 200-pound monster that I could barely tip out. It cleared Epperson and party, 100 feet below, with only 15 feet to spare. A distressed Eppi called up, "That was *sooooo* close." I joked that the biggest block was yet to come. They pleaded for their lives.

On our ninth and final day, we hit the wall. We longed to swill beer at the deli and swim in the river. The last pitch involved a sleeper offwidth section that spit out Jeff. Bill was the man of the hour, dispatching the pitch with his crack-master technique.

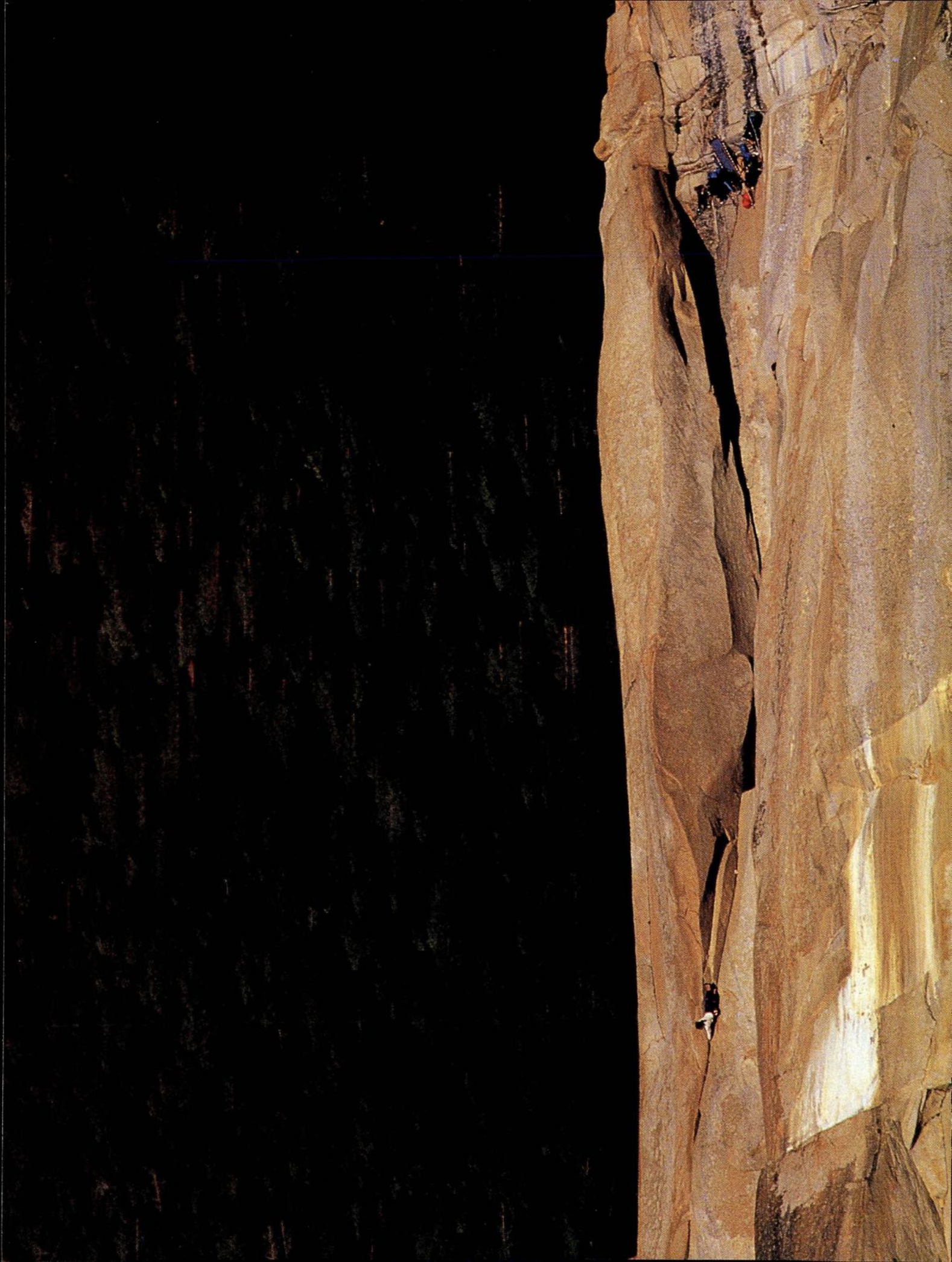
With no over-the-edge anchors, the three of us took a laborious hour to hand-haul our bags to the summit. After dispensing with our software bombardier style, we humped the hardware down the East Ledges descent by headlamp, arriving in Camp 4 at 1 a.m.

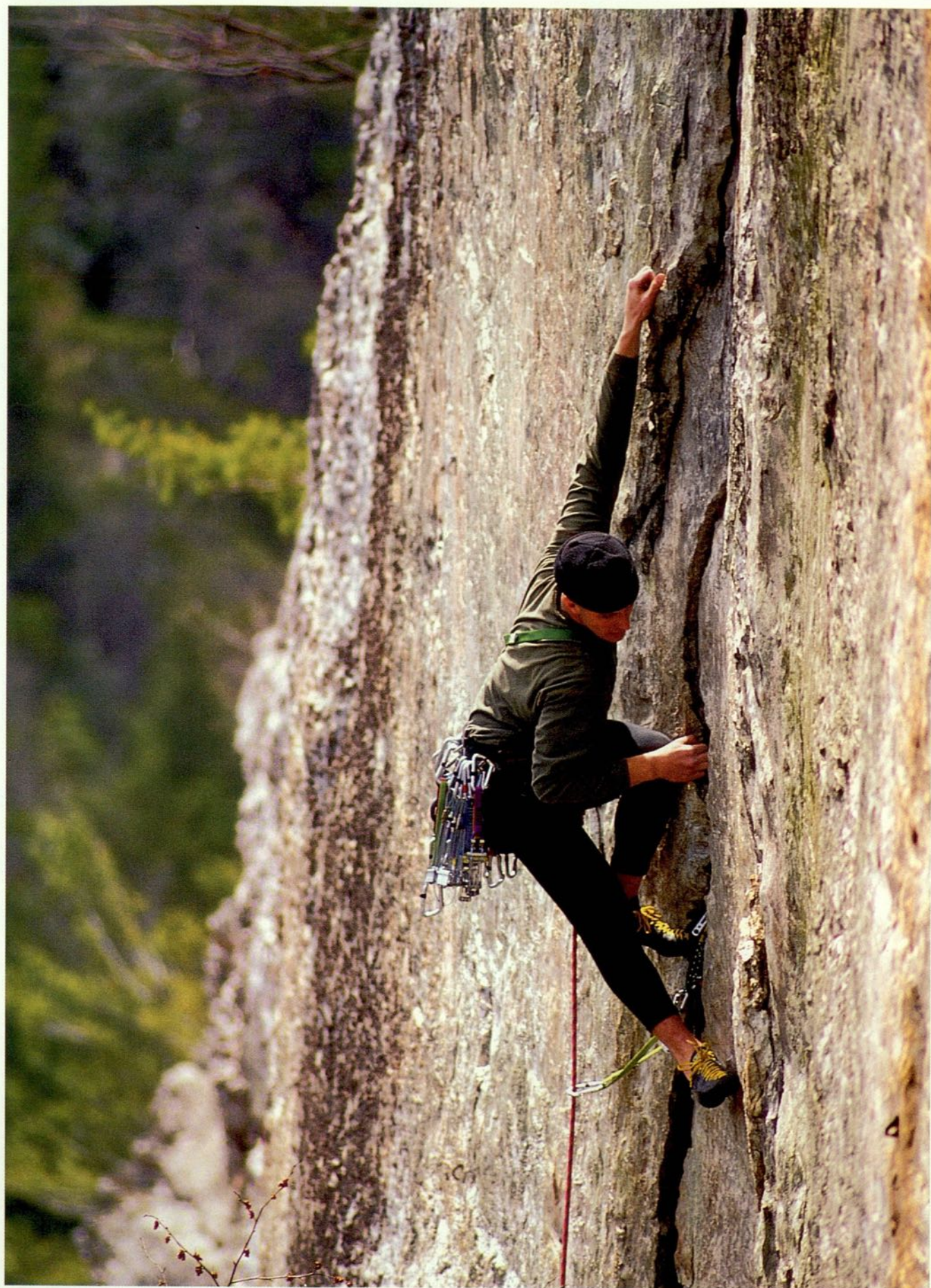
Excalibur had been an arduous journey that tested our patience and stamina. My hands curled into gnarly claws that not even copious amounts of ibuprofen could relieve. But our goal of 75 percent free was realized, and we had replaced 29 rotten bolts along the way.

More routes could be done on El Cap this way. The *West Buttress*, *Muir Wall*, and *Lurking Fear* are likely candidates. The biggest prize, however, is *The Nose*, and recent attempts suggest this route might go entirely free in the near future. Even so, a big wall doesn't have to be 100 percent free to make it a "free climb." *Excalibur* is one such climb — predominantly free, immensely difficult, and totally outstanding.

Steve Schneider, a longtime Yosemite and Tuolumne Meadows local, has an unusual penchant for offwidths, but also enjoys face climbs, such as his Raging Waters (5.13c) in Tuolumne. He recently red-pointed To Bolt or Not to Be (5.14a), at Smith Rocks, Oregon.

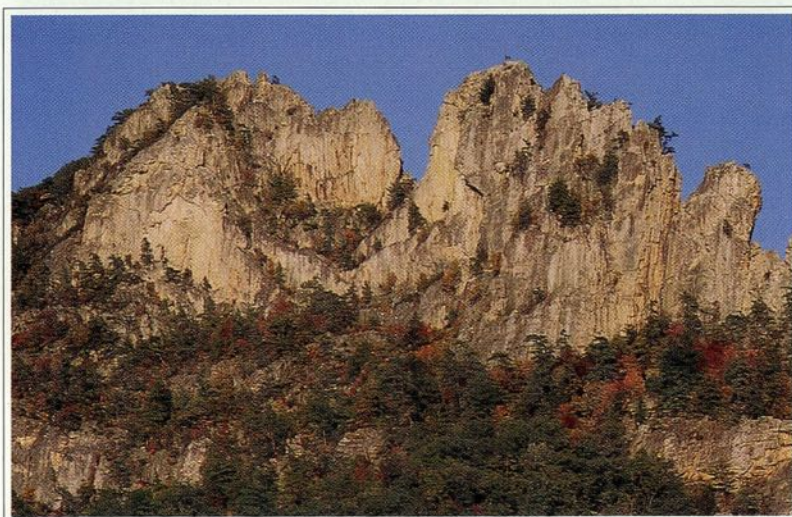
Photo: Greg Epperson





LITTLE BIG MOUNTAIN Seneca

BY TONY BARNES PHOTOS BY JOHN BURCHAM



■ ■ ■

One flawless day in October of 1987 I stood at the top of the *Crack of Dawn* at Seneca Rocks, West Virginia, with Hunt Prothro. A longtime Seneca climber and Washington-area ceramic artist, Hunt was exceedingly able and graceful on the rock. That and the fine day were reasons enough for my excitement to be out climbing — but Mother Nature had more in store. As we coiled our ropes, an awful roar sounded nearby. Another low-flying A-6 out of Norfolk Naval Air Station, I immediately thought. Wrong. “That’s got to be the Gendarme,” said Hunt, just as an immense dust cloud, full of somersaulting pines, rolled into view below. Indeed, the Gendarme, a prominent 30-foot pinnacle in the Gunsight Notch between Seneca’s two peaks, had given up its ancient fight with gravity and toppled over (fortunately, with no one aboard or below). The sense of stupendous happenstance left a lingering charge on the rest of that autumn day.

Andy Richter on *Frosted Flake* (5.9-), Seneca Rocks, West Virginia.



A climber rummaging in the rubble a few days later found the top anchor, a few loops of webbing threaded through hangers — complete with bolts — intact and free of any shard of stone. The relic soon joined the memorabilia, historical artifacts, and bizarre gear festooning the walls of The Gendarme, John Markwell's climbing shop in Seneca Rocks, a village of 600 souls (and many, many sheep), which sits just below the cliffs. John had named his shop after the landmark almost 25 years before, and he bore up well under the dark-humored condolences, issuing commemorative T-shirts and pondering the significance of "because it isn't there." Gone with the spire was one of the most dramatic and enjoyable 5.4s in the East. Despite tales of turn-of-the-century attempts to blow it off with dynamite, the top-heavy spire, with its 15-degree list to the west, saw innumerable ascents over a period of about 50 years.

Rock climbing in the eastern United States used to mean the escarpments of New York's Shawangunks, the granite Ledges near North Conway, New Hampshire, the domes and gorges in that other granite state, North Carolina — and Seneca Rocks, West Virginia. Don't be embarrassed if this last name doesn't ring a bell. Even back when this handful of areas was the be-all and end-all of Eastern climbing, Seneca Rocks was neglected, the weekend and holiday haunt mainly of regulars from the Washington, D.C., area, Pennsylvania, and Ohio.

A twisting drive leads up into the Allegheny mountain region known as the Potomac Highlands. Upon entering the narrow valley of the North Fork of the South Branch of the Potomac, you'll soon come in sight of an astounding castle of a crag, big enough to be thrilling in the Appalachian scale of things. Closer inspection reveals that the rocks are not merely a cliff on a mountainside, but in fact a free-standing quartzite fin with a summit ridge no wider than a sidewalk.

The tops of the fins along the North Fork are about 900 feet above the valley floor, with up to 300 feet of rock exposed. The surrounding round-shouldered Allegheny mountaintops are 1000 or more feet higher, and nearby Spruce Knob (4862 feet) is the state's highest point. The fins, made of hard rock similar to that of the Shawangunks, are the remnants of Mississippian sea strata, which were bowed into a gargantuan subterranean arch by tectonic collision. Erosion

has left the arch's jagged edge, tilted radically upward, protruding from a line of serrate hills, the River Knobs, one of which provides Seneca's stout little approach.

Clean white and orange walls of gem-hard stone provide a dense selection of nearly 400 climbs, from 5.2 to 5.12.

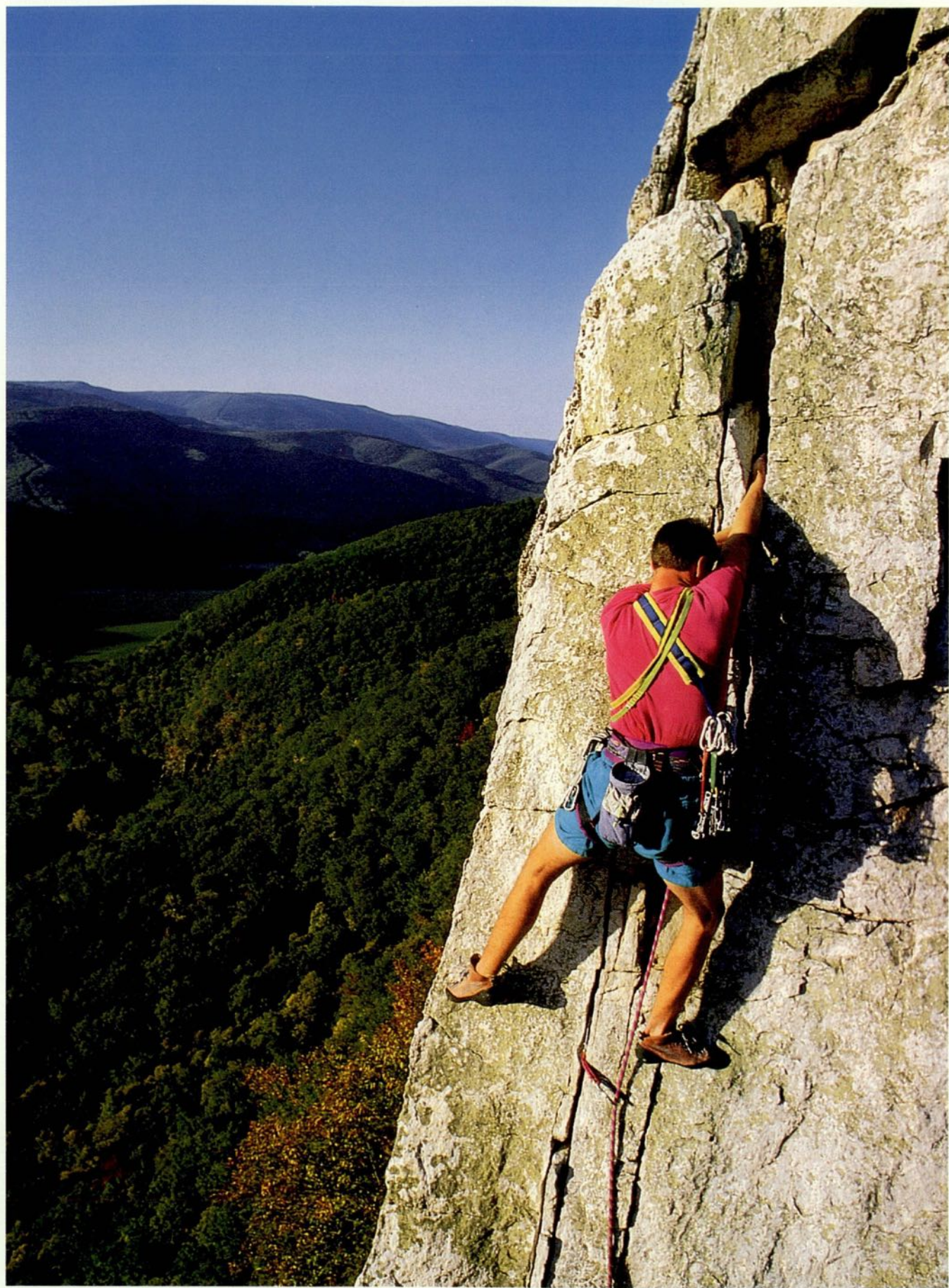
Though some great new sport climbs have been put up on the airy walls, Seneca still stands out for classic, multi-pitch routes requiring good protection-placing and route-finding skills. The same little big mountain atmosphere, remoteness, and exposure that created a devoted following from the 1940s through the 1960s still casts its spell. Outrageous positions and steep, featured rock mean plenty of righteous routes in the 5.3 to 5.9 range, with the airiest summit east of the Mississippi as icing on the

cake. Tony Soler's eponymous 1958 classic, for example, is a long, two-pitch 5.7, which tops out on the hair-raising high point of the knife-edged South Peak.

Aside from multi-pitch moderates, Seneca also shines in the harder, wired-nut-protected plums that were plucked in the late 1960s and 1970s. A host of motivated people (still actively represented by Howard Doyle, Eric Janoscrat, Mel Banks, Prothro, and others) moved from the main features out onto the discontinuous thin cracks lacing the smoother walls. One example is *Terra Firma Homesick Blues*, put up in 1975 by Herb Laeger and Eve Uiga on what is arguably Seneca's single best wall, the east face of the South Peak. In the reserved manner of the day, the pair called it 5.10+; it's now considered 5.11c and is still a formidable lead, though I had the pleasure of watching Eve just walk it a couple of summers back, Herb barely concealing his perturbation as she delicately front-pointed on frictionable peanuts and scalloped edges many feet above her last RP.

Seneca's history is full of bold and talented climbers. Some of the earlier characters star in a 1966 film *Up Rope*, which records the training antics and exploits of early Potomac Appalachian Trail Club (PATC) members, with footage from the 1930s and '40s. Don Hubbard's narration concludes at one point that climbers must be suffering from "arrested mental development." Watch the jerky, black-and-white sequences of club members being flung into the air as they body-belay the practice bucket "Oscar" and you'll agree. The free-spirited film features the flute and singing of Jan Conn, and captures the ambience of the early Seneca years.

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These pioneers made do with little gear. Hubbard, Paul Bradt, and Sam Moore carried a legendary three carabiners when they embarked on what they thought was the first ascent of the South Peak in 1939 (via the *Skyline Traverse*). You can be sure they were intrigued and a bit dismayed when they discovered in the summit rocks the mysterious petroglyph "D.B. Sept 16 08," an inscription still visible today. The initials are apparently those of a government surveyor named Donald Bittinger, who worked in the region after the turn of the century. The easiest way to the south summit (now called *Old Ladies*, 5.2) involves exposed, fifth-class climbing. If Bittinger was alone, this was a remarkable achievement.

During World War II, 10th Mountain Division troops trained extensively in the North Fork Valley for cliff assaults in Italy. They banged so many aid pegs into one wall that it's still called the Face of a Thousand Pitons. The army iron is long gone, leaving virtually no trace in the wall that now hosts the fine climbs *Triple S*, *Agony*, *Crack of Dawn*, and *Marshall's Madness*. Tenth Mountain climbers did some of the first free climbs at Seneca as well, including the popular *Conn's East* (5.5) and *Conn's West* (5.4).

Right after the war, most Seneca regulars were PATC climbers from D.C., or were members of the Pittsburgh Explorers Club or the Pittsburgh Social Climbers. Herb and Jan Conn were among these early activists, as were Andy Kaufmann and Chris Scordo. In the 1950s and early 1960s, Arnold Wexler, John Christian, Tony Soler, Jim Shipley, and others put in many of the classic moderates that so distinguish Seneca, climbing the likes of *Pleasant Overhangs*, *Soler*, *Green-wall*, and *Triple S*. This last route, a sustained 5.8, is a storied East Coast favorite which stems and fingerlocks up an irresistible dihedral. In 1960 the prototypical radboy Shipley, a talented teenager who joined Wexler and crew for PATC outings at Carderock, Great Falls, and Seneca, became the first in a long line of free climbers to quake to its top. His name for it, *Shipley's Shivering Shimmy* (now just *Triple S*), still aptly describes the predicament of many of the climb's suitors.

In 1966, George Livingstone established Seneca's first 5.10, freeing the intimidating *Madmen Only* on the Bell Wall on the west face of North Peak. In 1971, John Stannard intro-

duced 5.11 to Seneca by heel hooking out the bouldery *Totem* roof. Others who pushed standards throughout the 1970s were Cal Swoager, Marty McLaughlin, Jessie Guthrie, Jack Beatty, and too many others to cite here.

The very serious *Bell* was Seneca's first 5.12, and stands as a formidable challenge for those willing to test their boldness against that of the 1983 "over-30" first-ascent team of Cal Swoager, Alex Karr, Mel Banks, and Hunt Protho, who took wingers the 82nd Airborne would have been proud of as they worked toward Swoager's final, committed lead. In 1988, John Bercaw and Rod Hansen freed the longstanding Cave problem *Satisfaction #1*, renaming it *Fine Young Cannibals* and rating it 5.13a. Repeat ascents have suggested a 5.12d rating, in which case Seneca has yet to sport a 5.13.

Most hardpersons now opt for those new routes with more and better fixed protection than either the *Bell* or *Cannibals* offers. If that's you, try *Time Flies* (5.11a/b), *Mr. Jones* (5.11c),

Put a Wiggle in Your Stride (5.11d), *Brothers in Arms* and *The Threat* (5.12b), and *Psychodriller* and *Bray No More* (5.12c).

Many routes of the 1980s and 1990s received bolts placed from aid, hooks, and on rappel — a trend that began in 1975 against strong resistance from a traditional local contingent, which adhered to the "nerve and skill" definition of style. That was the ideal defended by Bercaw, then a rising star on the Seneca scene, in his adamant 1979 essay "What Price Glory?" (*Climbing* No. 56) protesting the trend toward sport-climbing tactics at Seneca and the Gunks. At Seneca, one bolt on *Sunshine* (5.10) and two on *Changeling* (5.11) were the first offenders in the gradual acquiescence to a climbing style that, though less exacting, opened up increasingly blank faces.

Later, Bercaw himself did go on to do a spot of drilling on the likes of *Hishiryo* (5.12c) and *Brothers in Arms* (5.12b), but even his bolted routes retained the element of boldness. Other activists of this transitional period also pushed standards in traditional style. Notable among such climbers was the local guide Pete Absolon, whose routes like *Summer's Eve* (5.10d X) demonstrated a seldom-matched attunement to Seneca stone.

Bercaw, Rod Hansen, Pete Absolon, Eddie Begoon, Mike Artz, Greg Smith, and Tom Cecil have all made valuable recent additions, with outrageous hooking to place bolts a

THE VERY SERIOUS *BELL* WAS SENECA'S FIRST 5.12, AND STANDS AS A FORMIDABLE CHALLENGE FOR THOSE WILLING TO TEST THEIR BOLDNESS AGAINST THAT OF THE 1983 "OVER-30" FIRST-ASCENT TEAM OF CAL SWOAGER, ALEX KARR, MEL BANKS, AND HUNT PROTHO, WHO TOOK WINGERS THE 82ND AIRBORNE WOULD HAVE BEEN PROUD OF ...

hallmark of much of their work. There are bolted and "mixed" climbs sprinkled all over Seneca Rocks now, with concentrations on the Circumflex and Bell Walls of the North Peak, off Broadway Ledge on the east face of South Peak, and in and around the South End Cave.

Some of the changes at Seneca — increased use and erosion, new route development, the replacement and improvement of old fixed belay anchors, etc. — are common to most climbing areas, while others are unique. In 1985, major flooding scoured and transformed Seneca's landscape. Homes and 16 lives were lost. Relief funding allowed National Forest officials to finish some long-planned recreational developments. These included a \$2 million campground (with hot showers, a great view, and low fees), and a steel footbridge connecting the re-landscaped visitors center grounds with the rocks on the other side of the river. People who remember crossing the North Fork on successive generations of wooden swinging bridges (or interim jerry-rigs) will find the experience of cragging here less rustic but safer.

The community has changed as well. Don Hubbard, who made the first ascent of the Gendarme with some friends in 1940, was 88 the autumn it fell. He and Wexler, his frequent ropemate, had been visiting Seneca less and less in recent years. The following spring Wexler cleared his remaining things from the tiny cabin he retained for their visits, across from The Gendarme and Harper's and Yokum's general stores in downtown Seneca Rocks. Down from the walls came framed prints from first ascents in the Canadian Rockies. (The pair was part of the 1955 expedition that made the first recorded ascent in the Northwest Territories' Cirque of the Unclimbables, a name coined by Wexler.) They and others of their generation who had been active until recently were the authors of Seneca's prime 5.4-5.7 routes. *Skyline Traverse*, *Conn's West Direct*, *Ecstasy*, *Westpole* — these and other moderate routes remain fresh and enjoyable to climbers of all levels of ability. The vacating of this "basecamp" marked the end of an era.

In Bill Webster's 1989 updated guidebook, many of Seneca's conservative route ratings were bumped up a bit. Now the most grievous sandbagging is alleviated, and with *Cottonmouth*, *Castor*, and *Orangeaid* all upgraded to 5.10, honors for the hardest 5.9s in the universe fall once and for all

to the Shawangunks. Unlike the Gunks, though, Seneca approaches often involve third- or fourth-class terrain, and getting off the South Peak requires multiple rappels or vertical 5.2 downclimbing, so it really helps to have a plan for getting off before you start up.

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The sport-climbing boom at the New River Gorge occurred just in time to take a little pressure off Seneca's hard-hit trails and slopes. Signs and trailmarks are sparse (though recent Access Fund-supported trailwork has helped), and Seneca's steep, friable soil and the force of mountain rains make erosion a serious problem. Please avoid bushwhacking. Erosion, extreme fire hazard, and the potential for human waste contamination of Roy Gap Run, Seneca Creek, and the North Fork River are all real con-

cerns. The West Virginia state motto is *Montani Semper Liberi* — Mountaineers are Always Free. Put your environmental ethic before convenience and adventure, and with care, our climbing experiences at Seneca will be wild and free for generations to come.

In this day, when climbing in West Virginia is virtually synonymous with the New River Gorge, guess where certain Gorge activists are frequently spotted, catching some exposure and getting back to their roots? The mature mixed forest surrounding Seneca Rocks is home to an incredible variety of birds; you'll surely hear the maniacal laugh of the piliated woodpecker (don't take it personally). There are weasel, red fox, and black bear on the lower slopes. The national peregrine reinstatement program has been active in the region (though no hack sites were put on the rocks themselves), and the falcons can be seen darting about the horizontal strata exposed on nearby North Fork mountain.

Ask return visitors what Seneca means to them and you hear recurrent themes: classic moderates, unmerciful steepness, clean vertical crack systems, and routes that seem hard for the grade. If you're lucky, you'll pull into town just in time to catch the west face aglow with the day's last light, only to encounter a genial gang unwinding on the porch of The Gendarme, telling tales and planning the weekend's adventures. It just might feel like coming home.

Tony Barnes has lived at Seneca Rocks on and off for seven years, working for the Seneca Rocks Climbing School and as a freelance writer.

Climber on Madmen Only (5.10a), east face, South Peak.



LITTLE BIG MOUNTAIN Seneca LOGISTICS



Seneca is a long-established and well-visited area, worth showcasing but more than ever in need of a gentle touch from the hands and feet of climbers. Camping, parking, and access are well laid out so conflicts with landowners, the Forest Service, and the terrain are easily avoidable. Local people are friendly, but also proud and somewhat insular; climbers' antics remain a mystery to many who still farm North Fork bottomland in their great-grandparents' footsteps. The region blends aspects of the Deep South with those of the Pacific Northwest. The Harpers and Yokums vie clannishly for general store business on opposite corners, recalling legendary feuds down in the coal counties, while clear mountain rivers crash down past spruce and hemlock forests.

Getting there. Seneca is within a day's drive for about a third of the folks in the United States. Interstate 81 flanks the region to the east; I-79 runs to the north and west, I-64 and I-77 to the south. Seneca is 34 miles east of Elkins at the junction of Routes 33, 55, and 28.

Seasons. Climbing at Seneca is consistently comfortable from April through October, with a decent frequency of mild winter days. Midsummer thunderstorms are common, while the rainiest

months are April and November. The best season is probably fall, for both climate and colorful foliage.

Camping and lodging. Seneca Shadows Campground (Forest Service): showers, inexpensive walk-in sites; reservations suggested for late June through mid-August: (800) 283-2267. Hedrick's 4-U Motel: two miles from town, restaurant: (304) 567-2111. Yokum's Motel, Cabins, and Campgrounds: one mile from town, restaurant: (304) 567-2351.

Other facilities and diversions. There are two general stores, a well-stocked climb-

ing shop (The Gendarme: 304-567-2600) and two guide service/climbing schools (the Seneca Rocks Climbing School, affiliated with The Gendarme; and Seneca Rocks Mountain Guides: 304-567-2115). Sorry, no bars or pubs in town. Your best bet for other eateries and watering holes is Elkins. The Seneca Rocks area is full of mountain biking, hiking, fishing, paddling, and serenity destinations.

References. *Seneca, The Climber's Guide*, by Bill Webster, 1989 (updated edition to be available by summer 1994; in the meantime, inquire with locals about newer routes); *East Coast Rock Climbs*, by John Harlin, Jr.



Recommended routes.

Mellowest:

Old Ladies (5.2)
Skyline Traverse (5.3)
Gunsight to South Peak (5.3)
Roux (5.3)

Mild:

Le Gourmet (5.4)
Conn's West Direct (5.5)
Conn's East (5.5)
Candy Corner (5.5)
Critter Crack (5.6)

Moderate:

Ecstasy (5.7)
Westpole (5.7)
Soler (5.7)
Pleasant Overhangs (5.7)
Greenwall (5.7)
Traffic Jam (5.7)
Tomato (5.8)
Lichen or Leave It (5.8)
Triple S (5.8)

Difficult:

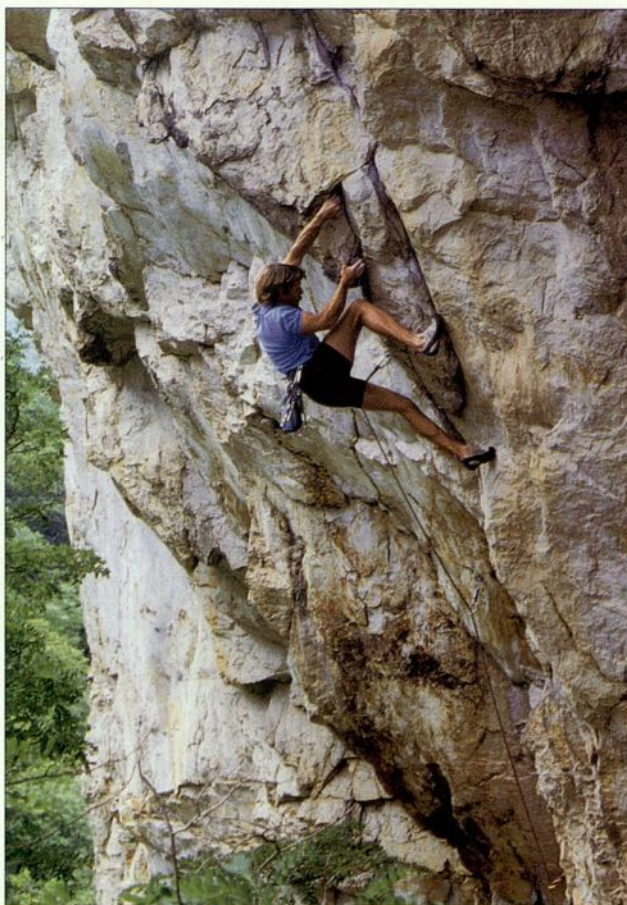
High Test (5.9)
Marshall's Madness (5.9)
Bring on the Nubiles (via Westpole) (5.9+)
Castor (5.10a)
Crack of Dawn (5.10a)
Cottonmouth (5.10a)

Very difficult:

Sidewinder (5.11a)
Spock's Brain (5.11a)
Drop Zone (5.11b)
Muscle Beach (5.11b)
Time Flies (5.11b)
Hooked on a Feeling (5.11c)
Thunderbolts (5.11d)

Out there:

Burning Tendons (5.11d/.12a)
The Threat (5.12b)
Bonsai (5.12b)
Psycho Driller (5.12c)
Bray No More (5.12c)
Heavy Fuel (5.12c/d)
Fine Young Cannibals (5.12d/.13a)



Tony Barnes on *The Threat* (5.12b).

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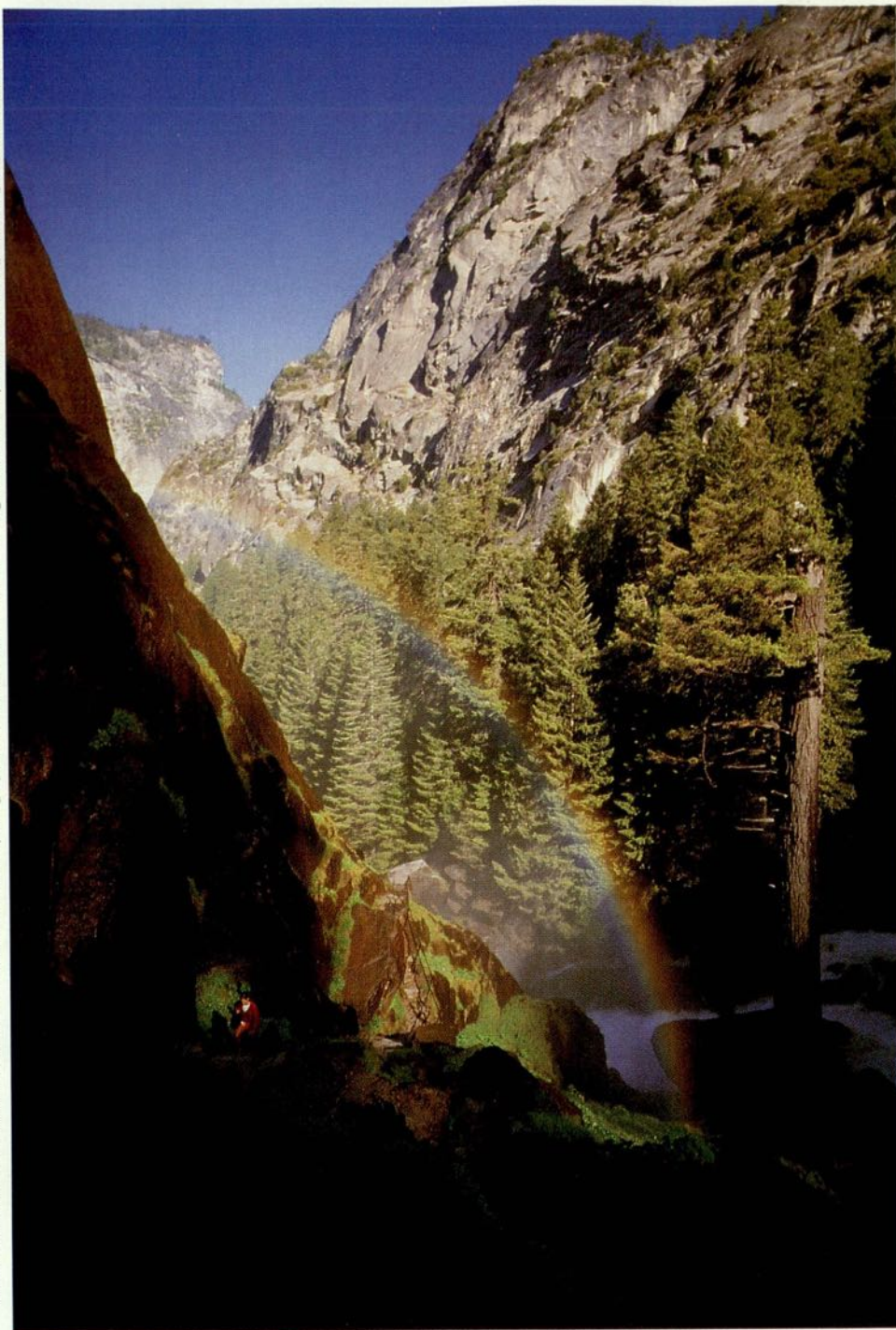
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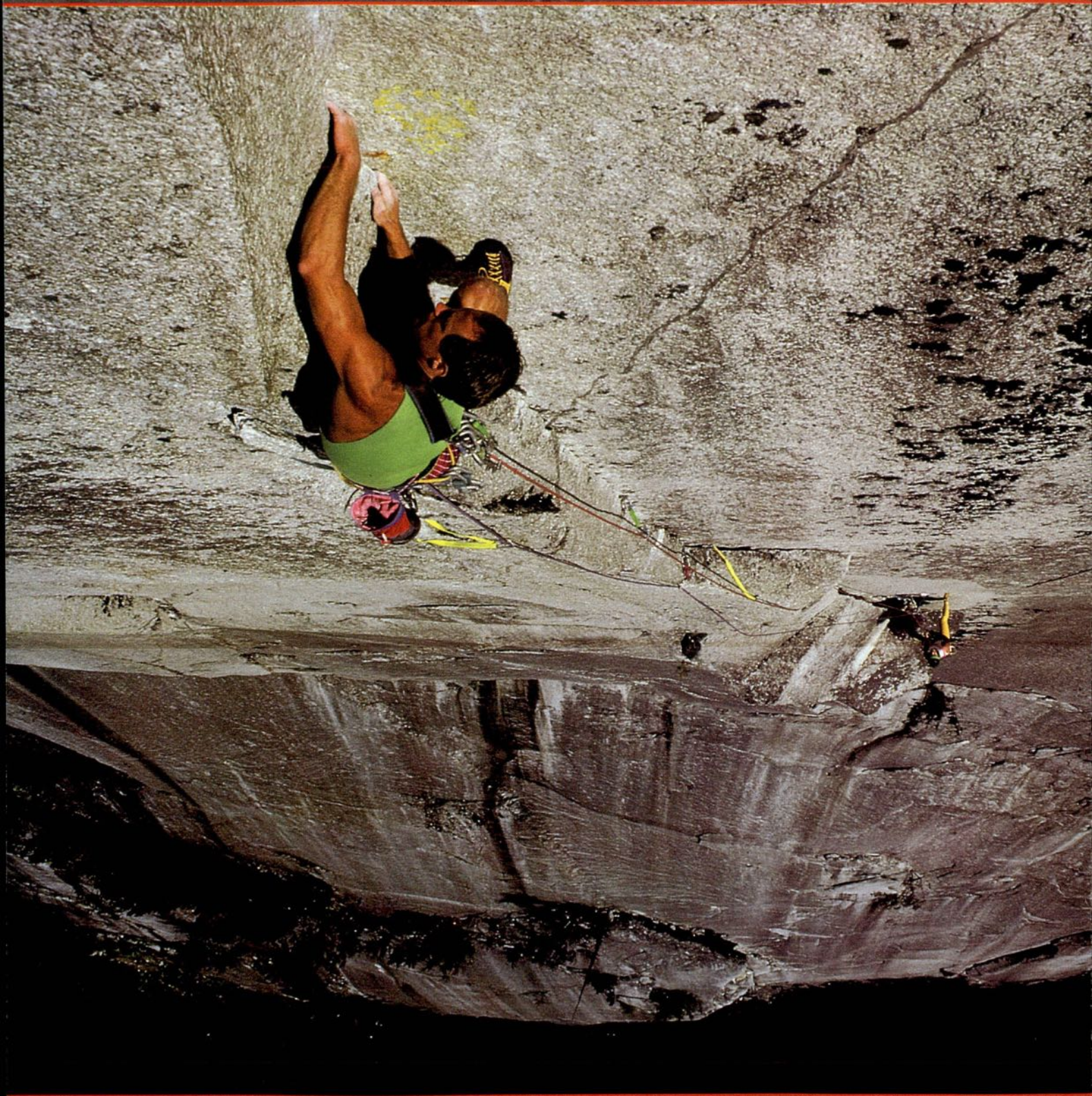


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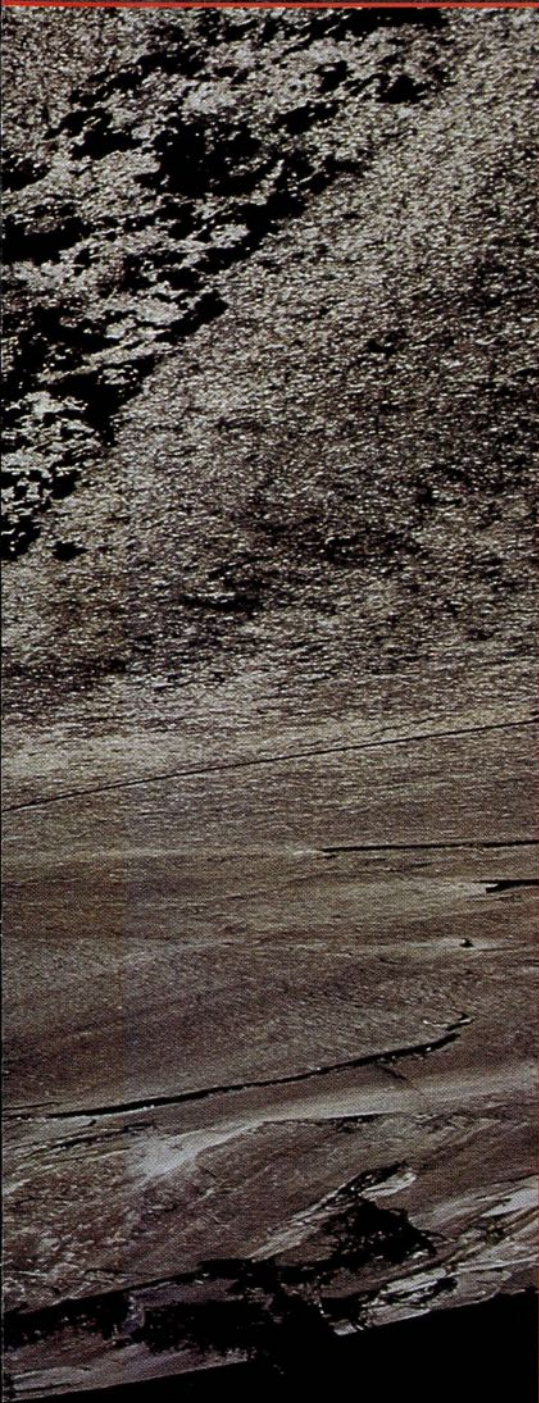


George Smith and Martin Crooke on *The Dangler* (E4 5c), Dingle, Southern Ireland.

Photo: Glenn Robbins

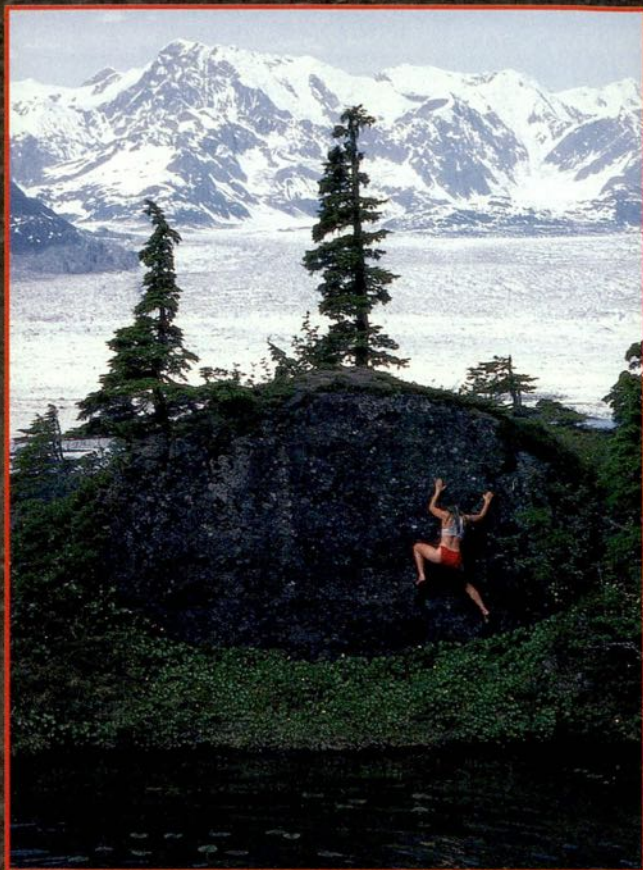


Bob Alison on *The Sword* pitch (5.11a), *Grand Wall*, Squamish Chief, British Columbia.
Photo: Kevin McLane



Rit Kellog attempting a new route
on Mount Huntington, Alaska.

Photo: Clay Wadman



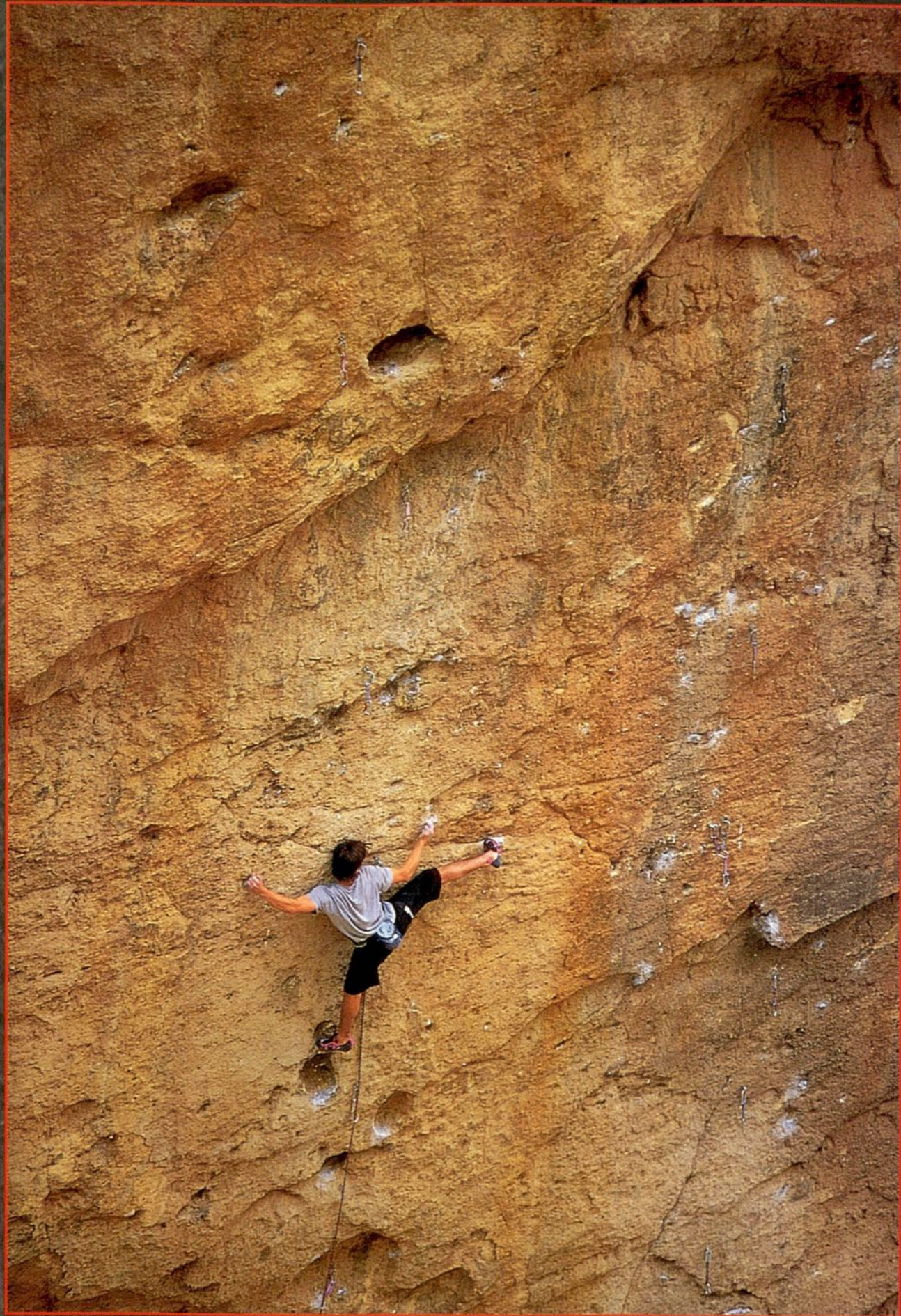
Fawn Bassett bouldering at Prince William Sound, Alaska, with Columbia Glacier and Columbia Peak in the background.

Photo: Greg Golet





Devils Tower, Wyoming.
Photo: Kennan Harvey



Jason Karn on I Am Bad Man (5.14a), Smith Rock, Oregon.

Photo: Chris Falkenstein

A strange sporting event took place the other day. A man in a fetal position under a hurdle caught a runner in midair.

Is this fun, or what?

To Antonis Achilleos, part-time busboy, full-time amateur photographer, it is. In fact, to Antonis, making great photographs is more fun than making touchdowns, jump shots or holes in one.



Antonis Achilleos, pro busboy, amateur shooter, dove under a hurdle to catch a flying woman with his Nikon N6006. Please don't try this at home.

out of his car, then flung his body under a hurdle and waited. Was it worth it?

What do you think?

Antonis used an N6006 to experiment with and expand creativity.

It autofocuses quickly and precisely in light as dim as a single candle. There's Spot Metering, Center-Weighted Metering, and Matrix Metering, for rapidly changing light conditions or fast-moving action.

"Hey, Mister, duck!"

There's a powerful pop-up flash with 28mm coverage.

Here Antonis brightened the foreground by increasing the flash one stop. And he underexposed one stop to maintain the ominous sky and provide contrast to the brightly lit foreground.

To create a sense of motion (as if she needed it), he used Rear Curtain Sync, See the N6006 at authorized dealers where you see this symbol. For more on the exclusive Nikon MasterCard, call 1-800-NIKON-35.



This is it. The Nikon N6006. Autofocusing, a built-in flash, interchangeable Nikkor lenses. It's how amateurs get their stuff in magazines. Just ask Antonis. For a free booklet call 1-800-NIKON-35.

which fires the flash just before the shutter closes, and he shot at 1/15th. Even though

the flash isn't designed to cover the entire frame, Antonis chose a 24mm AF Nikkor to exaggerate the angle. He could have picked any one of nearly eighty legendary lenses. The same lenses most pros use behind the dugout or in the end zone.

The N6006, however, is the Nikon for people who don't have press credentials. Or sideline passes.

You see, this is the Nikon that amateurs show their stuff with. This is the Nikon for people with a passion for photography who just happen to be dentists, plumbers, or busboys.

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Because who knows what you'll see flying in the air on your way to 7-Eleven?



Homestretch

—by—

Antonis Achilleos, busboy

One afternoon, while driving to get a Slurpee, he spotted a vision of beauty in sweat socks flying through the air.

Something clicked.

He grabbed his Nikon N6006, leaped



Quick Clips

Compiled by Duane Raleigh

Pig rodeo

Rappelling with a pack or haulbag can be complicated and dangerous. A common



The safe method for rappelling with a heavy haulbag or pack.

mistake is to try and wear the pack on your back. A light pack doesn't present a problem, but staying upright with a heavy pack is a struggle, and can fatigue you to the point where you lose control of the rappel.

There is a simple solution: clip a long runner to the pack or bag, and then clip the runner to the belay/rappel loop on your harness, and rappel as normal. This keeps the bag out of the way down by your feet, and lets the rappel device, not you, take the load.

— Orval Sowder
Eugene, Oregon

Little big wall

Tired of carrying a full-page topo that turns into a soiled, illegible rag halfway up a long free or aid climb? Fix that by taking the topo to a copy shop and shrinking it to wallet size on a reducing xerox machine. Weatherproof the topo by laminating it with regular 2-inch-wide clear packing tape, and punch a hole through it to

take a carrying cord. This topo "card" fits neatly in a pocket, or just clip it on the rack.

— Pete Takeda
Grand Junction, Colorado

Super soaker

It's common courtesy to scrub chalk-caked or dirty holds after you have finished a session on the boulders. But sometimes the holds are out of reach, inaccessible, or are such a mess that a mere brush just doesn't cut it. That's when you break out the pressure sprayer and hose those crimpers down. A pump-up pressure sprayer, like the type made for nuking bugs and weeds, will sanitize holds 20 feet away, works like a water pik to flush out pockets and other hard-to-reach holds, and also removes all the chalk — an attribute worth noting in areas where "civilians" take offense to chalk smears.

You can get a cheapo sprayer, which does a fair job, at Wal-Mart for under \$10, but the higher-pressure models do better and last longer. The sprayer is mostly suited to bouldering,



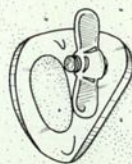
To clean up dirty or over-chalked boulder problems or sport routes, try a simple pump-up sprayer.

but it also works for zapping sport routes.

— Terrence Middleby
Point Pleasant, Pennsylvania

Wing it

The bolt ladders on popular aid routes are usually missing the hangers and nuts, making two wrenches (one for the leader and another for the second), hangers, and a handful of



No muss, no fuss: wing nuts for hangerless aid bolts.

nuts part of the standard trade-route rack. Simplify things by substituting wing nuts for the regular ones. Wing nuts, besides being easier to start on semi-stripped bolt studs, let you dispense with the wrenches.

— Onan J. Goat
Hell's Kitchen, New York

Best of a bad thing

If the aid placement you need already has a broken copperhead or RURP clogging it, try tapping a beak on top of the RURP or into the copperhead itself. This trick is much faster than chiseling out the old piece, and can be easier on the rock.

— Clay Hilferty
San Carlos, California



Save time and the rock by tapping a beak over a broken head or RURP.

Such a mess

You are on the Big Stone just about to lead the overhanging A4 pitch. As you try to leave the belay your hooks grab your leg loops and you can't go anywhere. To solve this never-ending problem, put the hooks on the same carabiner with 15 tie-offs and tangle them into a mess real good. This may sound stupid, but now that the hooks are preoccupied they will leave you and the rest of your gear alone, and when you do need the hooks, a few shakes will set them free.

— John Wasson
Flagstaff, Arizona

Soft touch

Do you dread waiting for your new shoes to "soften up"? Are your new slippers a little too stiff? If so, you can speed up the softening process by simply placing your shoes, sole up, on a hard flat surface, and whacking the sole with a ham-

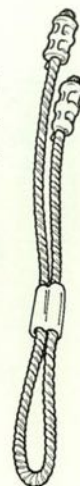
mer for a few minutes. This will break down the midsole, making the shoe more flexible.

— Jim Thornburg
Berkeley, California

Heads up

Here's a technique for making self-equalizing copper or aluminum heads for extremely thin placements where a single head won't hold body weight. Construct them as follows: assuming you have a Nikkopress and the cables and swages, take a standard-length copperhead cable and swage a head on each end. Slip another swage over the cable so that the cable forms a U. Don't crimp this swage, rather leave it loose so it can "float," letting the piece equalize itself after you paste in both heads.

— Randy Leavitt
San Diego, California



Equalizing heads for those dicey placements.

Hidden hex

Sometimes when placing a hex nut, the knot in the cord can be too big to fit in a thinner section of the crack below the piece, making a solid placement difficult.

On the larger size hexes — # 8 and up — try tying the knot inside the nut. Leave about two inches of tail on each side of the knot and tuck these toward the inside of the hex.

— Mike Clelland
New York, New York

A tidy method for slinging hexes.

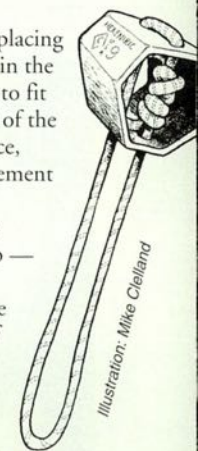


Illustration: Mike Clelland

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EQUIPMENT

Working for the clampdown

Ascenders compared

by Duane Raleigh

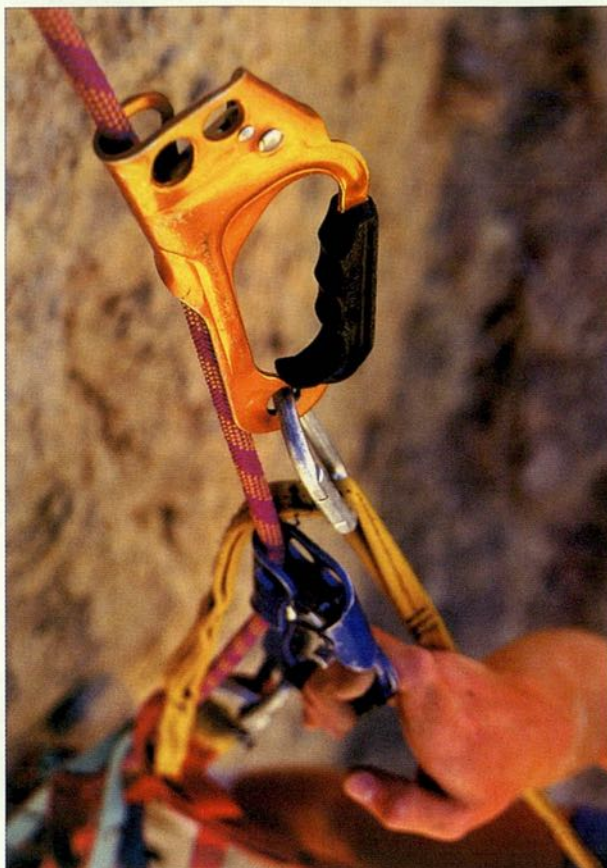
Hollywood likes to present climbers as seminal Gabe Walkers who slap — solo — for icy slopers, hand-over-hand up ropes, and, in the end, win the girls. Call us pantywaists, but who among us is fool enough to lunge — rope or no — for a snowed-up hold? And, to the further disappointment of the misinformed hordes, climbers know that skiers get the girls. Maybe it's because us weaklings need ascenders to scale ropes.

We at *Climbing* can't offer advice on landing a mate — ask Dr. Ruth or Sly for that — but if you're in the market for a pair of ascenders and don't know a Jumar from a Clog, step into our office. Over the course of several years we used every full-size, handled ascender on ropes strung from Mount Huntington to the Kingfisher. (See sidebar for details on handleless ascenders, like the Gibbs.)

Among other things, we learned that while every model performs well for several tasks, none is ideal for all situations. For example, the Petzl Ascender works like a champ for motoring up straight shots of fixed rope and hauling bags, and grips an icy rope like a dog on a ham bone. The cam-release on the Petzl, though, is tough to manipulate, making it a poor choice for cleaning aid pitches, where you can remove and reset the top ascender up to 50 times on a single pitch. In comparison, you can whip a Jumar off and back on the rope faster than Verm can snap another picture of himself, but then Jumars slip on icy ropes.



Jumars, a reliable standby for big wall use.



Putting the Petzl ascender through the wringer.

The solution is to home in on your priorities — big walls, mountaineering, glacier travel — and buy accordingly. (Our recommendations pertain to standard climbing situations only; they do not apply to rescue, industrial, or other types of work, where strength needs and features required are much different.)

Price. \$25 separates the least expensive ascenders, the Petzls, from the highest priced ones, the Jumars. Sure, that price difference can represent a day's takehome, but you are still wiser to cough up the extra dough and get what you really need.

Rope compatibility. All the ascenders we tried grip 9- to 11-mm climbing ropes. The Petzl and Clog ascenders also latch onto 8-mm ropes, a common size for fixing on mountains, and the Jumar works on ropes as skimpy as 6-mm, just in case you're brave enough to trust that twine. But beware, merely because ascenders

work on small-diameter ropes doesn't mean you're safe. These size ropes not only cut easier, but are more prone to slip through the gap between the ascender cam and frame, a real and deadly threat when the rope runs diagonally or horizontally. This danger is most pronounced with the Kong Modular, which, shockingly, can pop off a 9-mm rope under a less-than-body-weight load. With any ascender and rope combination, stay alive by tying frequent back-up knots, and on traverses and roofs, clip the ascender frame to the rope (see Technique, Figure 11, page 136).

Strength and durability. Not even King Kong Bundy could break any ascender using his body weight alone, but it still pays to be cautious. (In the worst case an ascender should have to hold you, your partner, and the haul bags, or about 500 pounds.)

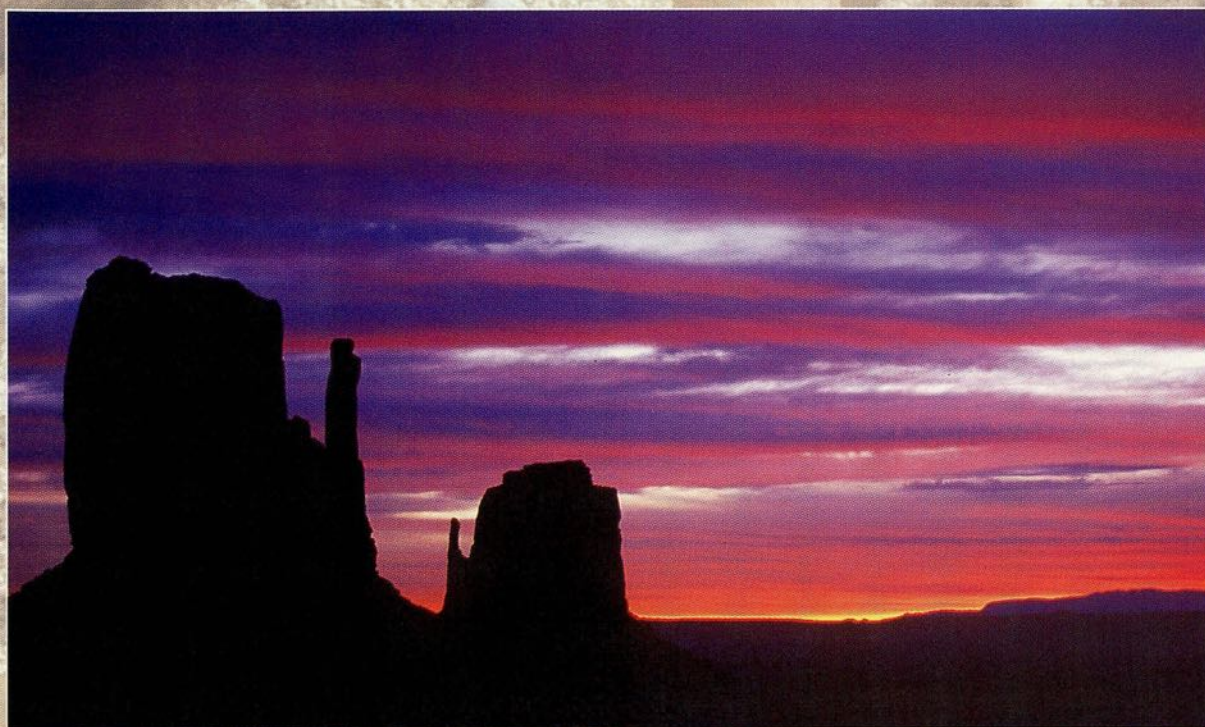
As an extra measure you might think to look for UIAA approval. Don't kid yourself. The UIAA tests are so mild (in a nutshell, an ascender has to withstand an 880-pound static load five times on each rope without damage) that approval can mislead you into thinking you've bought a safe product.

The UIAA-approved Kong Modular, for instance, is the most dangerous piece of gear we've seen — its cam safety can release unexpectedly (we just avoided a serious mishap while testing this model), or it locks down so tight you have to tap it with a hammer to make it open. We were stunned that such a frightening product could get UIAA approval. (Since our test, Advanced Base Camp, Kong's U.S. distributor, has recalled this ascender.)

The Petzl ascender is also UIAA approved. None of the other manufacturers bother submitting their ascenders for testing, although all would pass.

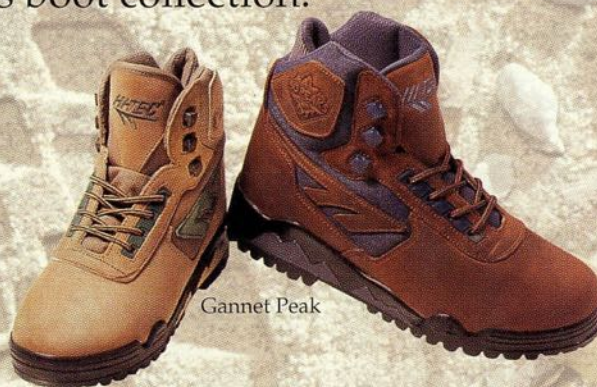
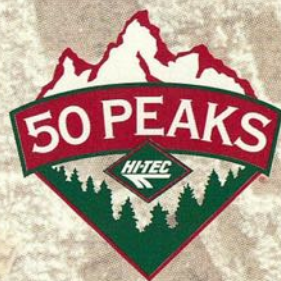
Most manufacturers list ascender strength in terms of frame strength (see chart), a poor reality check. A few companies also list a much lower number, the

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Ascenders

Model	Price (pair)	Rope diameter	Strength (frame)	Comfort	Ease of operation	Works on icy ropes	Comments
Clog Expedition	\$95	8-11mm	1500 lb	A	B	✓	suitable for mountaineering, glacier travel, and big walls; large handle and molded grip is comfortable and accepts mittens; awkward trigger; no bottom clip-in hole
CMI Ultra	\$99	9-12mm	5000 lb	B	B		suitable for big walls; knurled trigger rubs thumb; hold-open feature on cam is a hassle
Jumar	\$115	6-14mm	1800 lb	C	A		suitable for big walls; easiest ascender to operate; pre-tested; grip requires padding; cast aluminum frame requires webbing back-up
Petzl	\$90	8-13mm	4400 lb	A	C	✓	suitable for mountaineering and glacier travel; large handle and molded grip is comfortable and accepts mittens; UIAA approved; pre-tested; tiring to remove from rope; cam teeth can snag rope; difficult to downclimb with

one that tells how much load an ascender will bear before its toothed cam tears the rope. Ascender strength on a rope, however, varies wildly depending on the rope brand and its condition. As a rough gauge, *Climbing* tested each ascender on a new 9-mm rope. All held 1000 pounds without damage to the rope or ascender itself. At 1100 pounds the incised Petzl ripped the sheath, and all other models soon followed suit with none holding over 1800 pounds.

Petzl does go one step further and subjects their ascender to dynamic tests, including factor-one falls on 10- and 11-mm ropes. Impressively, their ascender holds, although rope damage is severe. The test shows that the ascender is made of strong stuff, but don't

Back up Jumars by threading a sling through the top eye, taping it to the handle (make sure the tape doesn't interfere with the safety trigger), and tying it through the primary clip-in loop.

misconstrue it to mean that you can use the Petzl as a self belay.

Another point worth noting is whether the ascenders are pretested at the factory for defects. The chart lists models that are.

Finally, long-term dependability is an issue, but once again all the ascenders we've used are about equal and you'll have a hard time ever wearing out any pair. The exception might be the Jumars, which have somewhat fragile cast-aluminum frames (all others use more resilient stamped or extruded aluminum) that could crack under a misguided hammer blow. Just in case, rig Jumars with a back-up sling threaded through the top ascender eye and the clip-in loop (see illustration). Also, discard any ascender that's been dropped, begins to slip on a dry rope, or shows any sign of wear or damage including cracks, loose rivets, or, more likely, weakened springs.

Function. It boils down to this: can the ascender do what you need it to?

Mountaineers want an ascender that

holds on an icy rope, is easy to operate with a gloved or mittened hand, and is compatible with standard 8- to 9-mm fixing ropes. The Jumar and CMI ascenders grip icy ropes about as well as bald tires do a slick road, so forget them.

The Clog and Petzl models fit the whole bill, but overall our testers preferred the Clog, stating that it was the easiest to get off and on the rope, and its shorter cam teeth don't snag the rope. A small inconvenience to the Clog is its lack of a bottom clip-in hole, an oversight that necessitates slinging the handle with webbing.

The needs for glacier travel are similar to mountaineering, but because here you'll manipulate the ascenders less than if you were actually climbing, operational ease isn't as important, and any of the two previous models work fine.

As stated earlier you can remove an ascender dozens of times when cleaning an aid pitch, so for big-wall climbing a model that is easy to operate with one hand is preferred to one that tests your finger dexterity. And because you'll end up yarding on the ascenders more than you'd like, handle-grip comfort is a priority as well.

The venerable Jumar is far and away the easiest ascender to operate, making it the big-wall standard. The Jumar's handle is a bit uncomfortable, a situation you can remedy by wrapping the bottom of the handle with a generous pad of cloth tape. The Clog ascender is another popular wall ascender. Its advantages are that it is initially more comfortable than the Jumar and latches onto icy ropes, a real attribute in case you encounter winter conditions. The Clog's disadvantage is that its trigger is harder to manipulate, although most climbers develop a knack for it.

CMI's Ultra Ascender is similar to the

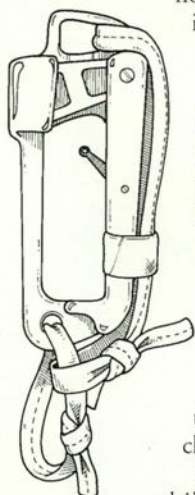
Jumar, but has a sturdier frame — a feature that alone makes it worth big-wall consideration — and a comfortable molded grip. Its drawbacks are a knurled safety trigger that can rub your thumbs raw, and when you take the ascender off, the cam, by design, catches on the underside of the trigger, an annoying trait.

Serious big-wall enthusiasts will want to avoid the Petzl ascenders. These work well in the mountains, but their fang-like cam teeth make down-jugging difficult, and snag the rope if you don't swing the cam fully open when removing the ascender, something you're bound to do.

Warning. There are a lot of ways to buy it, and using an ascender as a self belay on a fixed toprope is one of the most sure fire. Excluding Petzl, none of the manufacturers covered in this review recommend using their ascenders for any sort of self-belaying. The Petzl catalog gives their Ascender a "good" rating for self-belaying on a fixed rope. We, however, would never dare use it that way. Instead, we would opt for a real solo device, like the Rock Exotica Soloist (reviewed in *Climbing* No. 131), or dredge up a partner.



The Clog, a top choice for big walls and mountaineering.



Where to get them

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CMI
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Jumar/Blue Water
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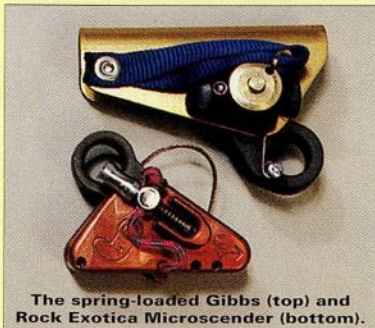
Petzl/Pigeon Mountain Industries
(706) 764-1437

Rock Exotica
(801) 292-1044

Getting a handle on it

Handleless ascenders

Wall and alpine climbers need handleless ascenders like they need handleless hammers or ice tools. Those uses aside, these succinct ascenders do offer advantages in



The spring-loaded Gibbs (top) and Rock Exotica Microscender (bottom).

some situations, like slogging up endless fixed ropes on a mountain-side and crevasse self rescue.

The spring-loaded Gibbs, a popular model among cavers, and the Rock Exotica Microscender are the top two handleless ascenders, and both grip on icy ropes, a big plus on the mountain. But their best feature is their on-rope security. You have to take the units apart and reassemble them around the rope (a two-handed procedure), making the risk of having the rope pop free virtually nil — a feature you'll praise while slogging up a thousand feet of fixed rope strung along a snowfield.

Another hot selling point, but one of less real concern, are the Gibbs' and Microscender's cam design. Both ascenders use ribbed cams that squeeze the rope for purchase, rather than bite into it as do standard toothed cams. Until you fall the difference between cams means little or nothing. But should a stone crack you on the head and you slip and shock load the fixed rope, the ribbed cam is less likely to skin the sheath off, making you more likely to stay alive.

The Microscender only weighs five ounces, but is expensive at \$60. Rock Exotica also makes a larger version, the Rescuscender for the same price. The Gibbs are less expensive at around \$36 apiece.

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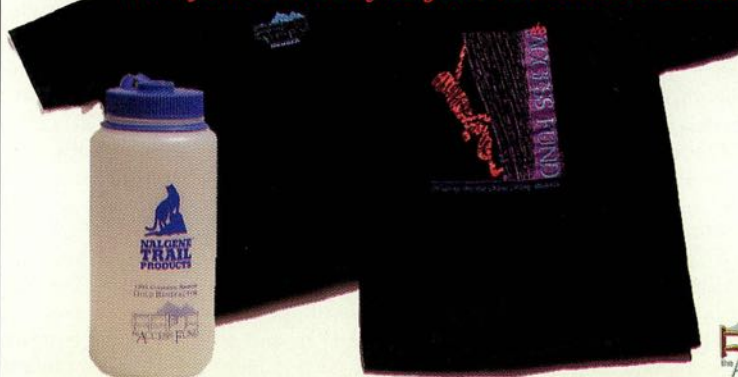
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ment clogs easily, fortunately, the unit breaks down in a matter of seconds and cleans nearly as quickly using the built-in scrub brush, which also works as a gauge to tell you when the filter is worn out. Other standard equipment includes a 30-inch intake tube with a weighted strainer that lets you draw water straight from the source, even if it's only a puddle, and keeps debris out of the intake.

At \$150, the Mini Filter is a big buy. However, one filter element can clean 1000 gallons, more or less, depending on how often you have to clean it. That ciphers down to 15 cents a gallon — still cheaper than Falstaff. Replacement filters are \$70.

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insidious: bad water. Those seemingly innocuous brooks you've been lapping out of can teem with protozoa, like the common giardia lamblia, a parasite that takes up residence in your duodenum and uses you as an incubator.

That's bad, but there's worse. Raw water can also host life-threatening bacteria, such as the ones responsible for typhoid, dysentery, and cholera.

But you needn't go thirsty. The Katadyn Mini Filter has a microporous ceramic element that works sorta like a coffee filter to strain out pestilence, germs, and sediment, leaving sparkling clear, and (in the United States anyway) potable water.

The ceramic filter's 0.2-micron pores screen out bacteria and protozoa, but viruses, like the one responsible for hepatitis A (an inflammation of the liver, usually caused by drinking fecal-contaminated water found in Third World countries) are smaller and slip through the filter. Foreign travelers will want to either boil or chemically treat the water with virus-killing iodine, which also

it one of the smallest and lightest water filters around. It's the first filter compact enough that I'd consider stowing it in the pack "just in case," or tucking it away in a fanny pack for replenishing the water bottles on day trips or long runs.

Katadyn's claim that the Mini Filter will produce a half-quart of water in one minute is wishful thinking. I pumped the unit as if in the grips of a 5.13 flash, and at best only got a cup and a half of water per minute. (My cohorts fared little better.) That was with clear water, too; murky water took longer. A realistic flow rate is around a cup a minute (one quart in four minutes), although even that pace is hard to maintain for more than a couple quarts. For filtering water on a regular basis or for more than one person, a larger unit, like the Katadyn Pocket Filter (reviewed in *Climbing* No. 130), with a faster filtering rate is in order.

Cleaning the filter element once it clogs with sediment is the bane of most water filters. Not so with the Mini. Although its small filter ele-

Catch of the day

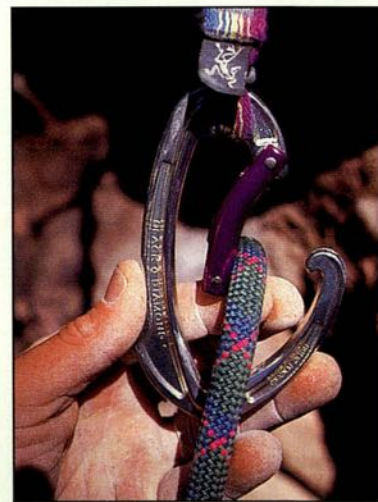
Black Diamond's latest contribution to the wide world of carabiners is the Fin. Like most bent-gate carabiners, the Fin is designed for the business end of a quickdraw to allow rapid, easy clipping, a significant factor in sport as well as ice climbing. The first thing that struck me was the Fin's size and shape — it is a good half to three-quarters of an inch longer and wider than most other bent-gates. The huge bottom "basket" accommodates not only the rope, but fingers as well, and the unique "fin" tab on the outside spine provides finger-catching stability on hard clips. These and other unique features lend a futuristic look to the Fin, which seems to pay little heed to its long evolutionary line.

The Fin is remarkably light. One would expect that such a colossal piece would be plagued with a proportional increase in weight. Not so with the Fin.

Through a process called hot forging, Black Diamond pushed the Fin's design limits and kept its weight at a mere 52 grams — the same as their Big Easy bent-gate.

Does the thing work? A month of sport climbing at the local crags revealed the Fin's good and bad points. It has excellent grabability and exceptional gate clearance. Black Diamond's state-of-the-art quality control and testing ensure high strength and silky smooth operation. And the Fin's fat 11-mm rope-bearing cradle — the widest of any bent-gate carabiner — won't devour your rope.

I found that "pinch" clipping works well due to the biner's tapered shape and fin tab. "Flip" clipping (middle finger in the basket and rope between thumb and forefinger) is a chore: the sheer size of the Fin makes tripping the rope through the gate awkward. Other climbers had similar comments while some with



The Black Diamond Fin.

larger mitts, swore the Fin is the best dogleg to ever trundle down the pike. Perhaps a scaled down model would be the ultimate ...

The Fin is \$12.95, a couple bucks more than standard bent-gates, but then this is no run-of-the-mill carabiner.

— Pete Takeda

In memory of Mugs Stump

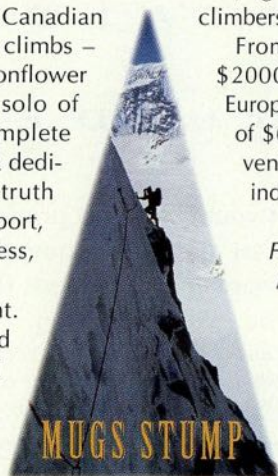
Mugs Stump was one of this country's most prolific and visionary climbers until his death in a crevasse fall in Alaska in May, 1992. Best-known for his first ascent of the Emperor Face on Mount Robson in the Canadian Rockies and his triptych of brilliant Alaskan climbs – the East Face of the Moose's Tooth, the Moonflower Buttress on Mount Hunter, and a one-day solo of Denali's Cassin Ridge – Mugs was the complete climber, adept at all forms of the game. Both a dedicated athlete and a seeker after a higher truth beyond the physical manifestations of his sport, he saw climbing as a celebration of boldness, purity, and simplicity.

Sponsored by Black Diamond Equipment Ltd., Climbing Magazine, Patagonia, Inc., and W.L. Gore & Associates, Inc., the annual Mugs Stump Award will help support small teams tackling difficult climbs in the great mountains of the world. Climbs proposed should present an outstanding challenge, either a first ascent, significant repeat, or

first alpine-style ascent; awards will be made to climbing teams whose plans best exemplify the philosophy of "fast, light, and clean," with special emphasis placed on climbers leaving no trace of their passage.

From an annual pool of \$10,000, two grants of \$2000 each (for trips to Alaska, South America, Europe, and other relatively low-cost areas) and one of \$6000 (for more expensive Himalayan or Arctic ventures) will be awarded each year. Teams and individuals from North America are eligible.

Further information and applications for the Mugs Stump Award are available from Patagonia, Attn. Mary Martin, P.O. Box 150, Ventura, CA 93002. Applications for climbs to be made between March 1, 1994, and February 28, 1995, are due January 1, 1994; awards for this period will be announced in February, 1994.

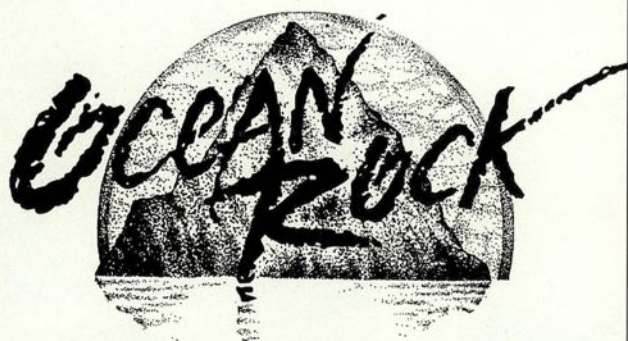


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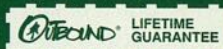
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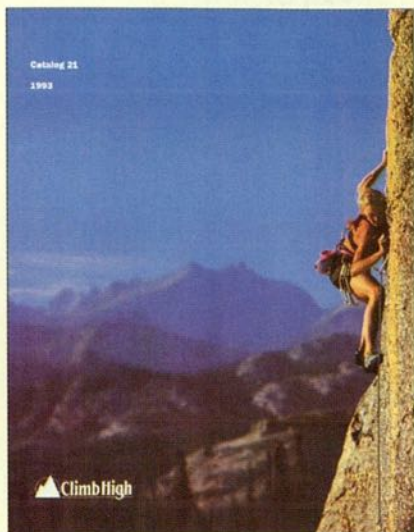


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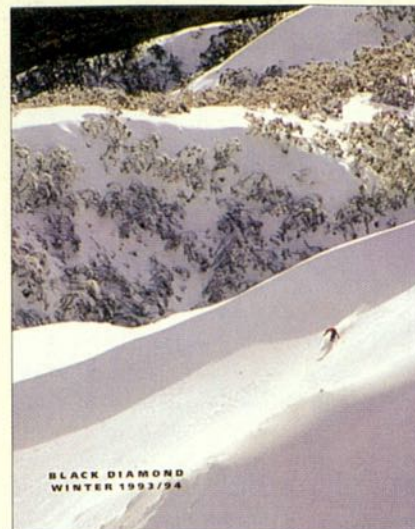
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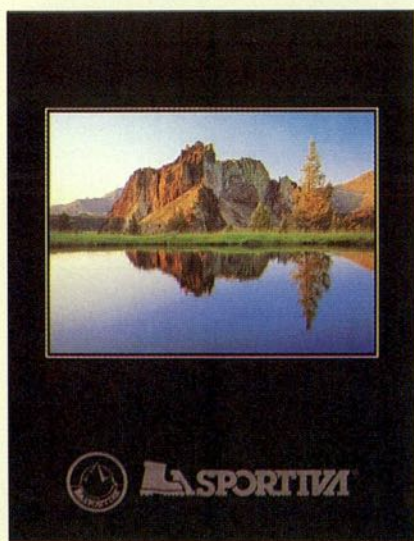
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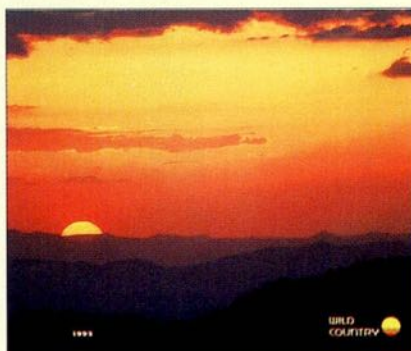


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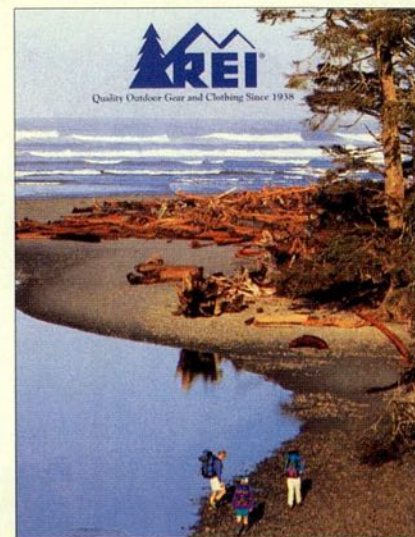
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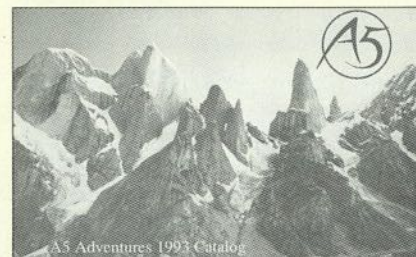


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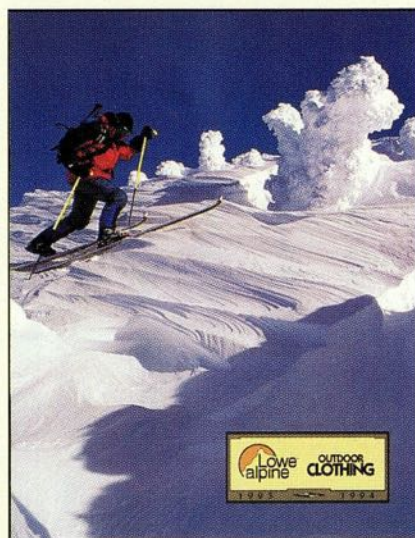


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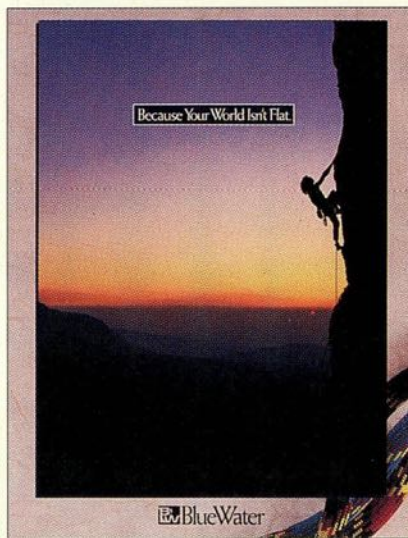
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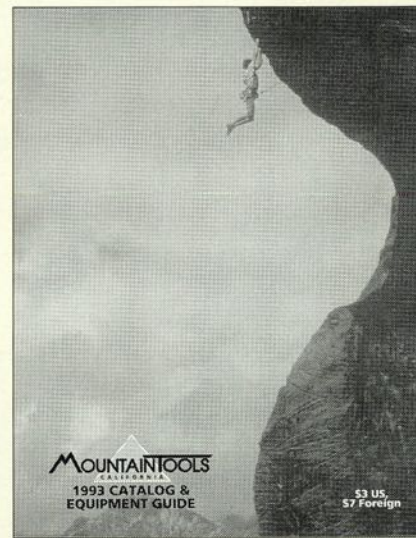


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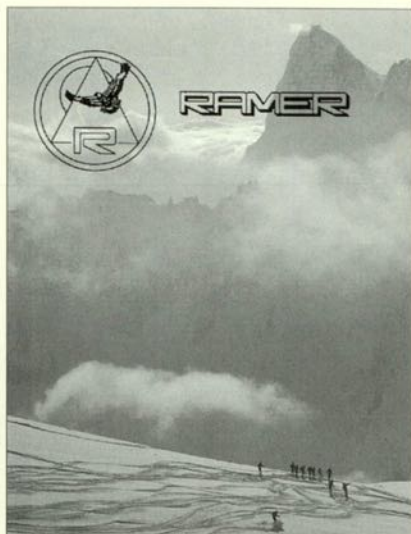


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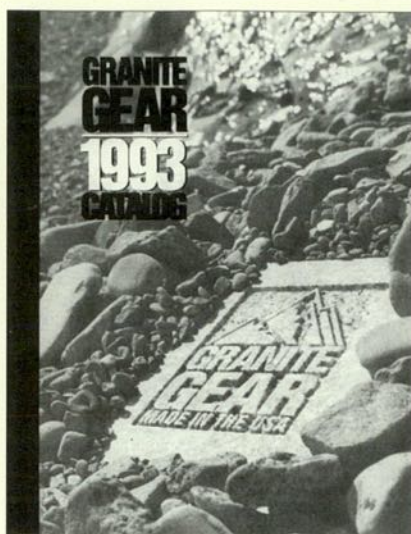
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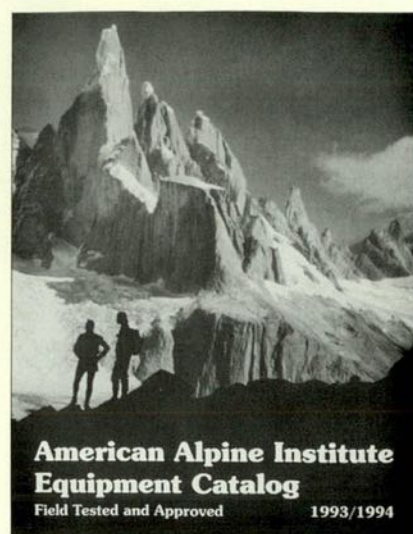
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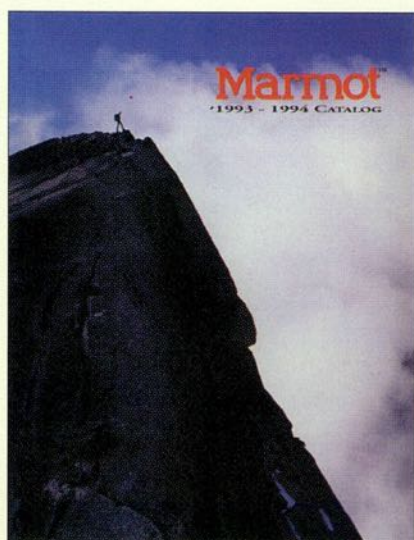
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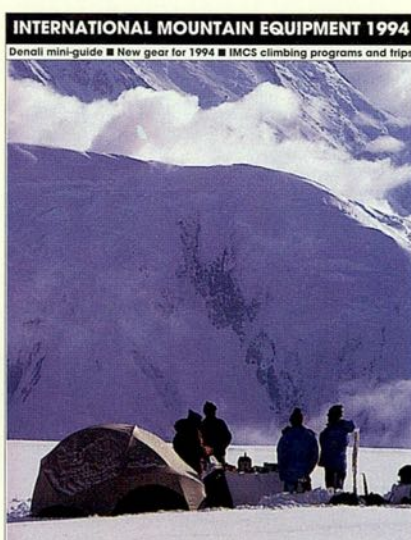
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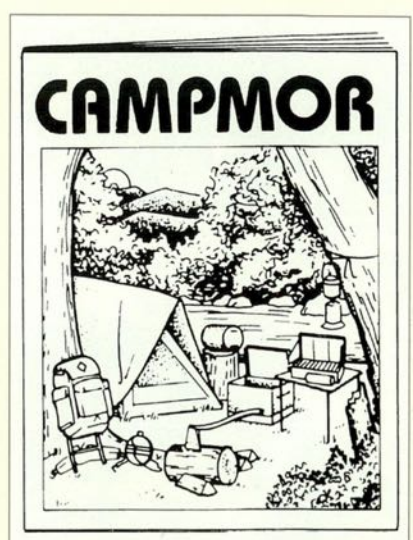
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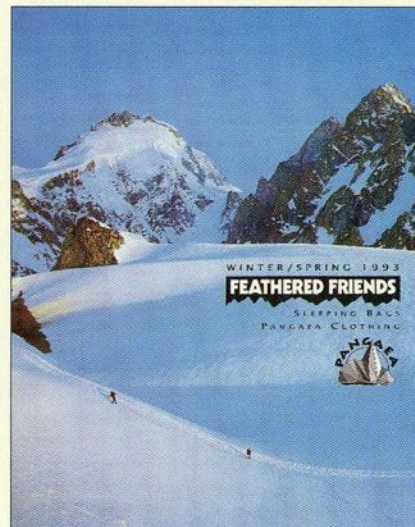


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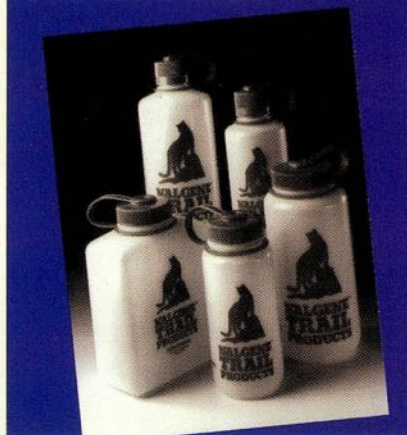
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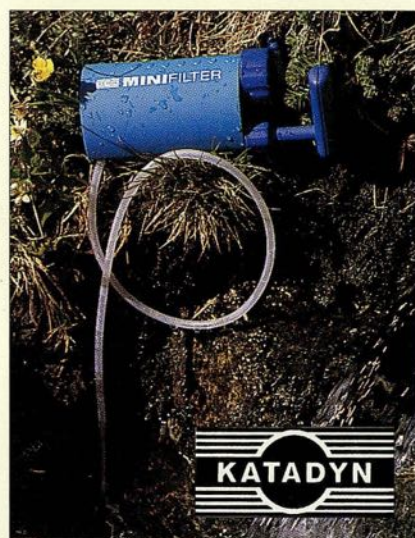
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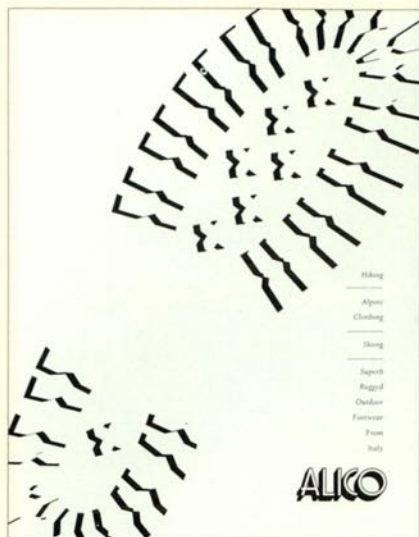
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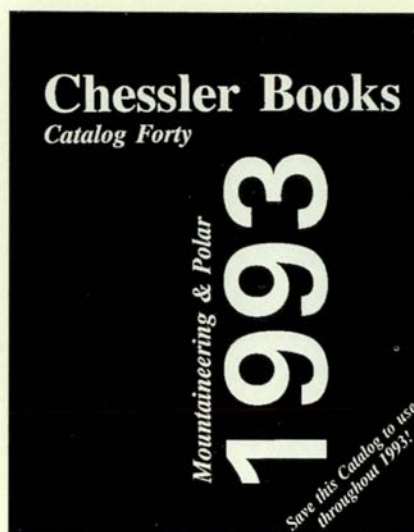
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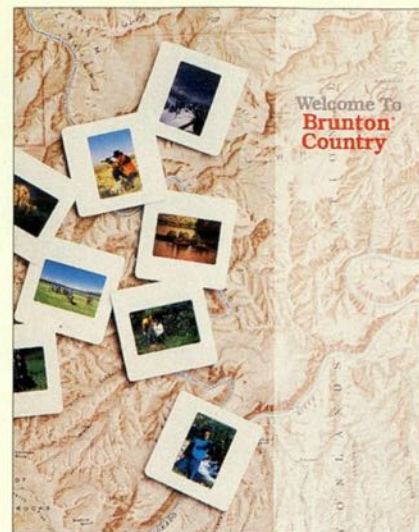
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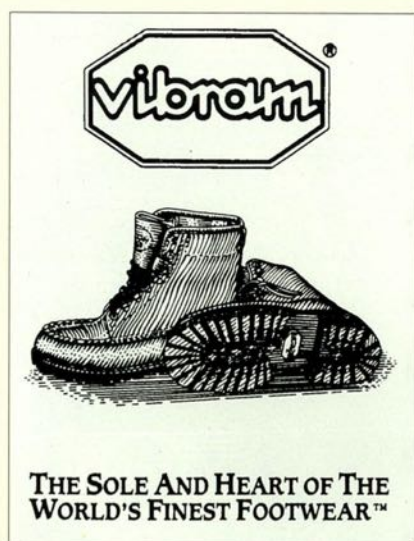
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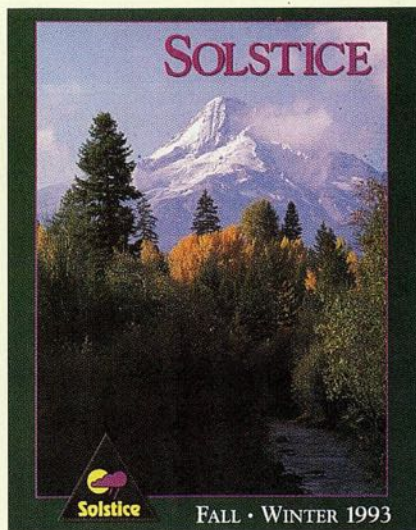
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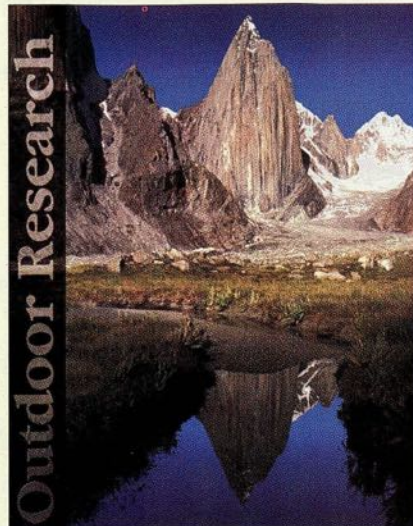
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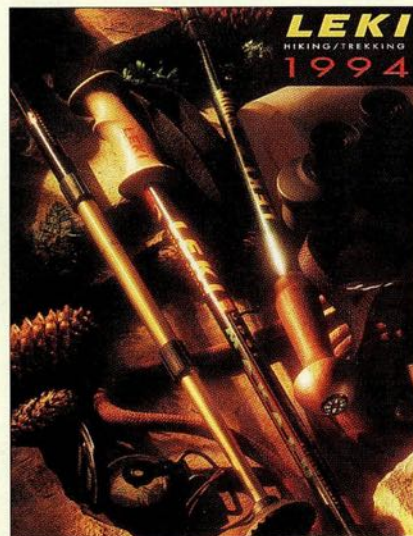
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EXPEDITIONS

Trango tango

The ultimate in alpine rock?

by John Middendorf

The sight of the Great Trango Tower and Nameless Tower from across the Baltoro Glacier has inspired all those who have passed on the way to K2, the Gasherbrums, and Broad Peak. Though mountaineers have coveted the higher peaks since the early 20th century, it wasn't until relatively recently that the Trango Towers have seen activity.

The east faces of the Great Trango Tower (6286 meters) and Nameless (or, confusingly, Trango) Tower (6237 meters) are among the largest vertical faces of the world. In 1975 the area opened for climbing after being closed for many years. Nameless Tower was ascended for the first time by a strong British team of Mo Anthoine, Joe Brown, Martin Boysen, and Malcolm Howells, on their second attempt, in 1976. In 1977, Galen Rowell, John Roskelly, Kim Schmitz, and Dennis Hennek made the first ascent of Great Trango Tower by the easiest route up the western side.

More recently, Nameless Tower has born the brunt of the action, with at least one new route established every year since 1984.

The 5000-foot *Norwegian Buttress* (VI 5.10 A3) on Great Trango Tower was the first route on the massive east face, climbed in 1984. This led to the first ascent of the East Summit (6231 meters), a climb marred by tragedy as the first ascensionists, Hans Christian Doseth and Finn Daelhi, were killed on the descent. Great Trango is a large peak with three main summits, all over 6000 meters. In summer 1993 Xaver Bongard and I established the second route, *The Grand Voyage* (VII 5.10 A4+ Grade 4 ice), on the east face.

Getting to the Trango Towers isn't easy, and the first mountains you must climb are made of red tape. But once over that

hump you'll find paradise in an area with relatively good weather. The following information should reduce the potential for uncertainty and mistakes looming at every stage in the travel to the Trango basecamps. In Pakistan, knowing how to get to the base of the mountain can make

west faces. The rock is good granite, and Nameless Tower is the more featured of the two peaks, having numerous cracks and possible lines. You can approach Nameless from either the Trango or Dungee Glaciers, and the Great Trango from the Dungee Glacier. Great Trango's approach is more serious and dangerous than the Nameless approaches.

Weather and season

We climbed in June and July and had good weather: never excessively windy, with mild to occasionally fierce storms. August and September are also usually good, but the frequency of avalanches increases later in the season, making some of the approaches too dangerous. This area of the Himalaya sees very little monsoon action.

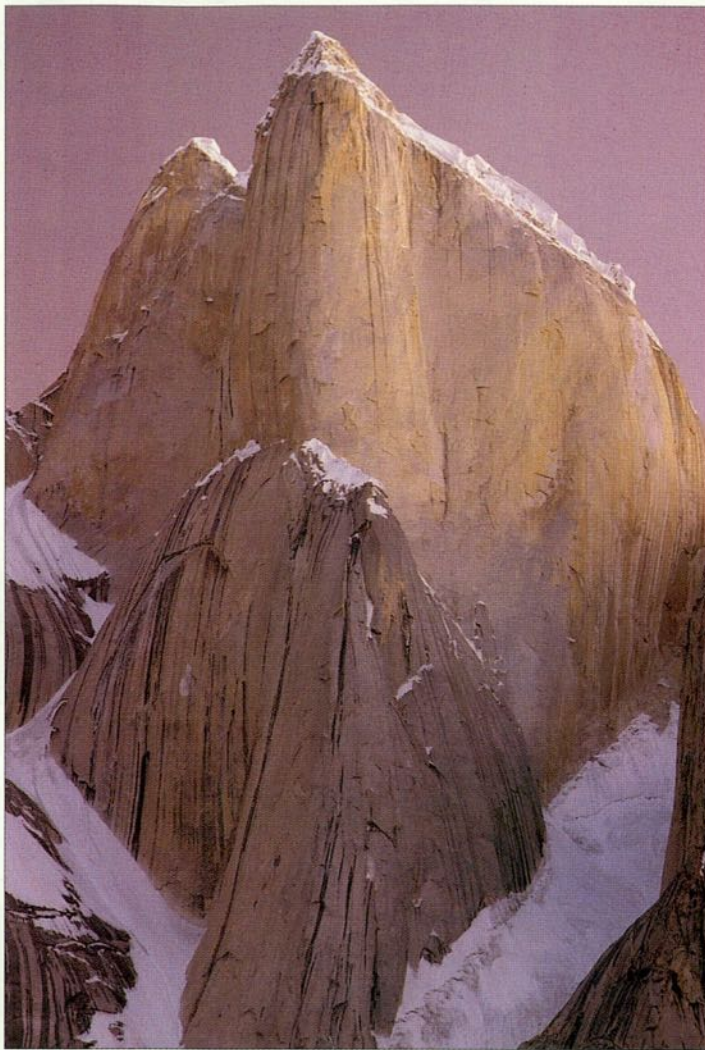
Tactics and climbing gear

Siege tactics are common. Exceptions include the *Norwegian Buttress* and *The Grand Voyage*, which went up in "capsule style," a system where climbers continually move a few ropes up the face, but forgo the comforting rope linkup to the ground. Last summer, two teams of Spanish climbers used minimal fixed ropes and gear to make fast repeats of routes on Nameless Tower.

Bring a big-wall rack (precise gear selection depends on your intended route) and portaledge for the wall routes. You'll also need ice gear for the approach and summit.

Permits and visas

The Pakistan Ministry of Tourism requires a permit for climbing. Write the ministry at: Government of Pakistan, 13-T/U Commercial Area, F-7/2 Islamabad. Permits are issued only to teams of four or more. Name each member specifically on your application. (You can, with difficulty, change the names later.) In 1992 a permit for a 6000-meter peak cost \$1000.



The Great Trango Tower, Baltoro region, Pakistan.

the difference between success and failure; if a team isn't careful and/or lucky (as we were), it may exhaust its motivational, emotional, and financial reserves before even getting to the mountain.

The climbs

Nameless Tower has eight routes, all on its southeast and southwest faces. Great Trango has two big-wall routes and one variation on its east/northeast face, and several alpine routes on the northwest and

Photo: Ace Kvale

The Ministry must receive applications no later than October 31 of the preceding year, and you must finalize any changes four months prior to your arrival in Pakistan. The application needs to include your specific dates of arrival and departure, members (including specified leader), reserve members, general size (amount of gear), details of how you intend to travel to and from the peak, information on the peak, backup second, third, and fourth choices in the event your peak isn't available, and specifics (including passport information) of the leader and expedition members.

You'll also need a visa, which you can obtain after your permit is approved, from the Consulate General of Pakistan, 12 East 65th Street, New York, NY 10021.

Inoculations

Get immunized for hepatitis A, diphtheria, tetanus, typhoid, and malaria. (The last isn't required, but is highly recommended.) Check with the State Department or the U.S. Public Health Service, (202) 647-1488, for current international health warnings.

Getting there

Fly to the Islamabad/Rawalpindi airport. Check out excess baggage charges, which vary between airlines, before committing to the cheapest flight. Also, switching carriers somewhere along the way may be cheaper, but is guaranteed to be a major hassle. British Airways and Pakistan International are the two international airlines to Islamabad/Rawalpindi.

Note: a single-ticket price to Skardu (the flight stops in Rawalpindi anyway) may be cheaper than the other option of getting a ticket to Rawalpindi, and then another to Skardu.

Rawalpindi: do not pass go

You'll have a lot to do in Rawalpindi. Plan on staying four or five days. Many expeditions hire an agent in Rawalpindi to help with all the red-tape, arrange for travel to Skardu and Askole, and set up a guide for the porters. An agent in Rawalpindi costs \$300 or more, but unless you've waded through the bureaucracy before, it's money well spent.

Here's what you'll need to do, get, and have with you in Rawalpindi.

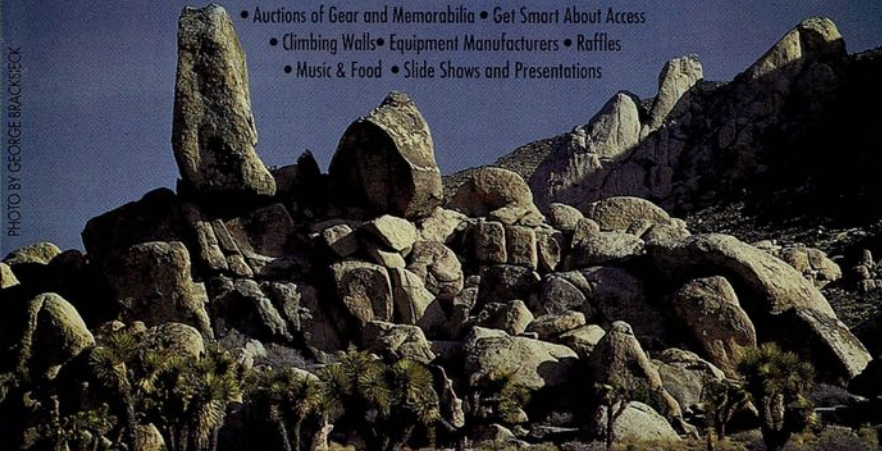
1. Get a residence permit (available at the police station) and line up a "preliminary briefing" with the Minister of Tourism by just showing up at his office and waiting. The expedition leader will have to meet with the minister to discuss insurance and equipment for the liaison officer, and set up a date for a formal brief-



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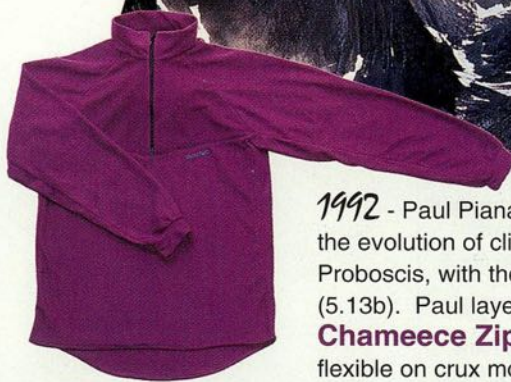


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1992 - Paul Piana nudges the evolution of climbing style on Proboscis, with the *Great Canadian Knife* (5.13b). Paul layers with a MontBell **Chamee Zip Neck** to stay warm and flexible on crux moves, and still look sharp in Watson Lake roadhouses on the way home.

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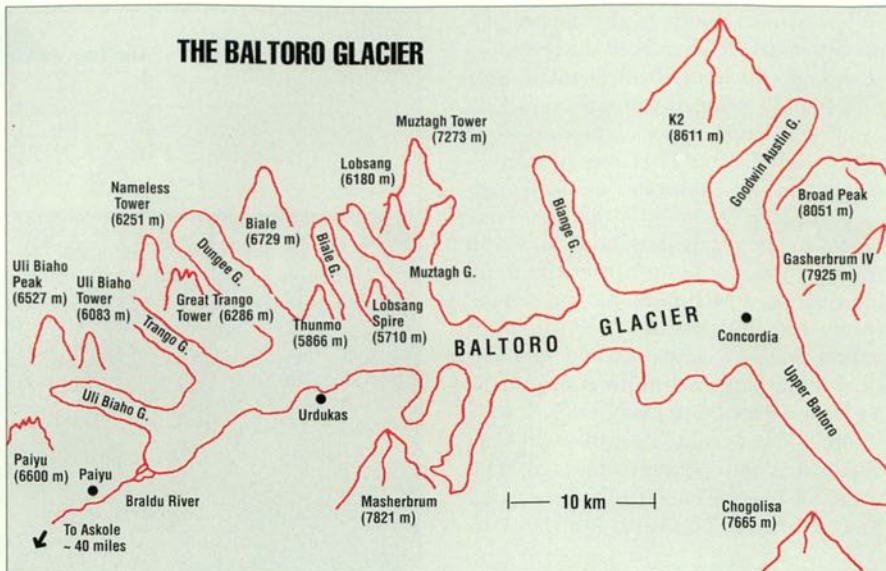


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ing, in which all members of the expedition must participate.

2. You'll be assigned an army officer (the liaison officer or L.O.), who will assume that he will be an active climber on the mountain. It's in your best interest to appease him. In addition to wages, you'll have to outfit the L.O. with full expedition gear, including among other things, new boots, a sleeping bag, tent, and full clothing. Buy cheap but new items for the officer; he will invariably be disappointed with a used but excellent Gore-Tex jacket, while content with a cheap but new K-mart plastic one. Bring most of his gear from home, as there isn't much available in Pakistan. You will receive details of the L.O.'s clothing and boot sizes once your permit is approved. L.O. wages are \$12 a day while you are in Rawalpindi, and \$6 a day in the mountains.

3. You must also hire and outfit (with

similar quality gear as the L.O.) a cook, who will cost you about \$6 a day. At our hotel, several people applied for this position.

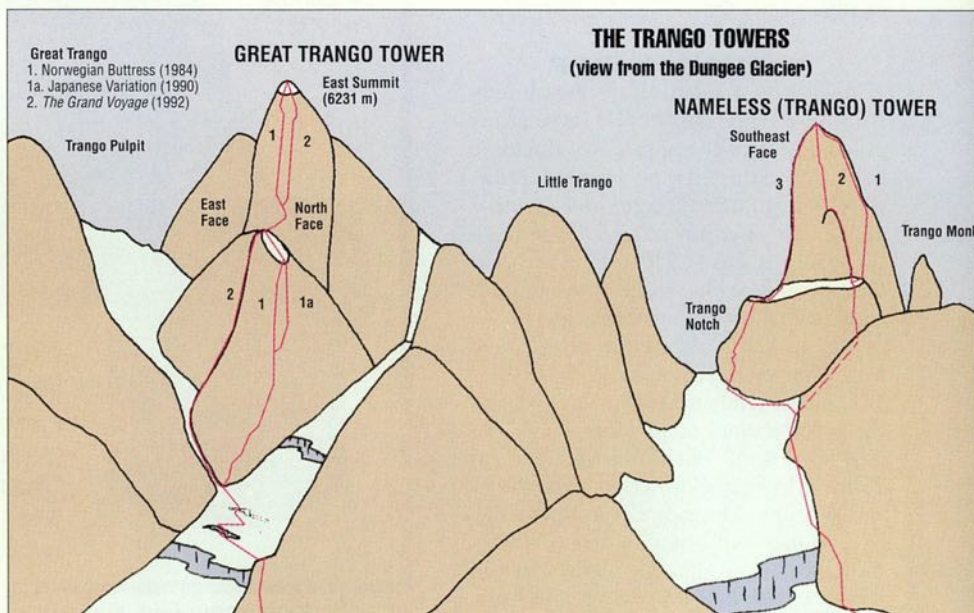
4. Outfit each porter with shoes, socks, and sunglasses, available in Rawalpindi at a cost of around \$6 per porter.

5. Buy insurance for the porters, cook, and the L.O.

6. You are required to put up two major insurance bonds: one for the environment (\$1000); and one for rescue (\$4000). Set the bonds up with an insurance company in the U.S. You will get the bond money back provided you keep the camps clean and don't need a helicopter rescue. In addition, a \$200 environmental "contribution" is required.

10. Collect all shipped items, and show the itemized customs clearance to the Minister.

11. Bring four passport-style photos of



yourself for the police and the Ministry of Tourism.

12. When everything is at long last copacetic, the Minister will approve the expedition at a final briefing.

13. Buy basecamp food, large kerosene stoves, lanterns, and cook kit. Wait to pick up bulk items like flour, kerosene, and cooking oil in Skardu — although you'll pay more for them there, the extra cost is more than offset by not having to transport these items so far. Also pick up tarps for the porters and basecamp construction, and get plastic containers for holding the porter's 55-pound loads.

Food

You'll need about 2 1/2 pounds of food per person a day. Bring provisions for the climb itself from home. Good wall food staples include dried beans and vegetables, powdered potatoes, two-minute noodles, powdered soups, powdered drinks (tea, coffee, fruit drink, cocoa), chocolate, candy, plain biscuits, sugar biscuits, cheese, jam, butter, dried fruit, and muesli. For basecamp you'll need biscuits, rice, lentils, powdered milk, canned cheese, Tang, tea, sardines, tuna, sugar, garlic, onions, potatoes, spices, noodles.

The open-air markets are tempting, but don't sample the local cuisine unless the food is piping hot and freshly cooked — this means no salads or anything rinsed in tap water. Chai (sweet tea with milk) and bottled soda are generally safe. To save money on bottled water, bring a water purifier for hotel tap water.

Travel

Once you fulfill all the regulations in Rawalpindi, it's time to move to Skardu, the capital of the Northern Territory. You

can get here by bus for \$300 per team. The trip takes over 24 hours, and is exhausting but beautiful. You can fly to Skardu for \$30 per person, plus excess baggage charges. Flying is recommended unless you desire a true cultural and wild experience.

Skardu. This is the last outpost of any size, and from here you must arrange porter loads and jeeps for the ride to Askole. The jeep road to Askole was finished recently, and is a great boon to expeditions to the Baltoro. Our expedition required three jeeps and drivers for our five team members, cook, L.O., and 46 porter loads (2530 pounds of food

weighing scale and enough plastic containers for the porters' loads.

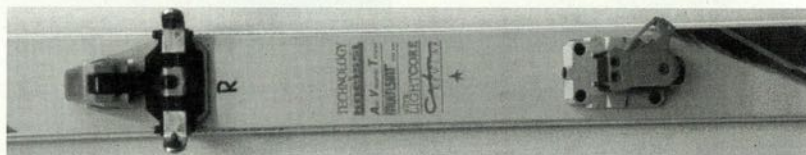
Askole. The starting point for the trek to basecamp is a tiny village with no goods available. This is where you will officially hire the porters for the three-day, 50-mile trek. Each will cost you \$50, and will carry a 55-pound maximum load. During the climbing season you may also find porters at the nearby camping spot of Chango.

The trek

Cable and bridge crossings have tolls (usually 15 rupees, about 60 cents) for

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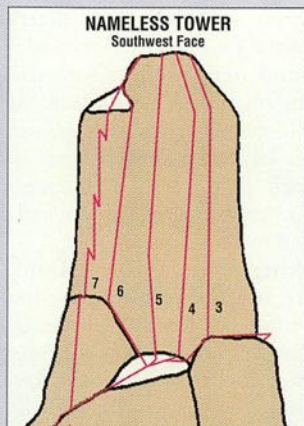
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- | | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| 1. Japanese (1990) | 5. British (1976) |
| 2. Kurtyka-Loretan (1988) | 6. Spanish (1989) |
| 3. Yugoslav (1987) | 7. Swiss-French (1987) |
| 4. German (1989) (Eternal Flame) | 8. Child-Wilford (1992, between #2 & 3) |

(Approach routes 5, 6, 7, 8 from Trango Glacier, routes 3 and 4 from either side.)





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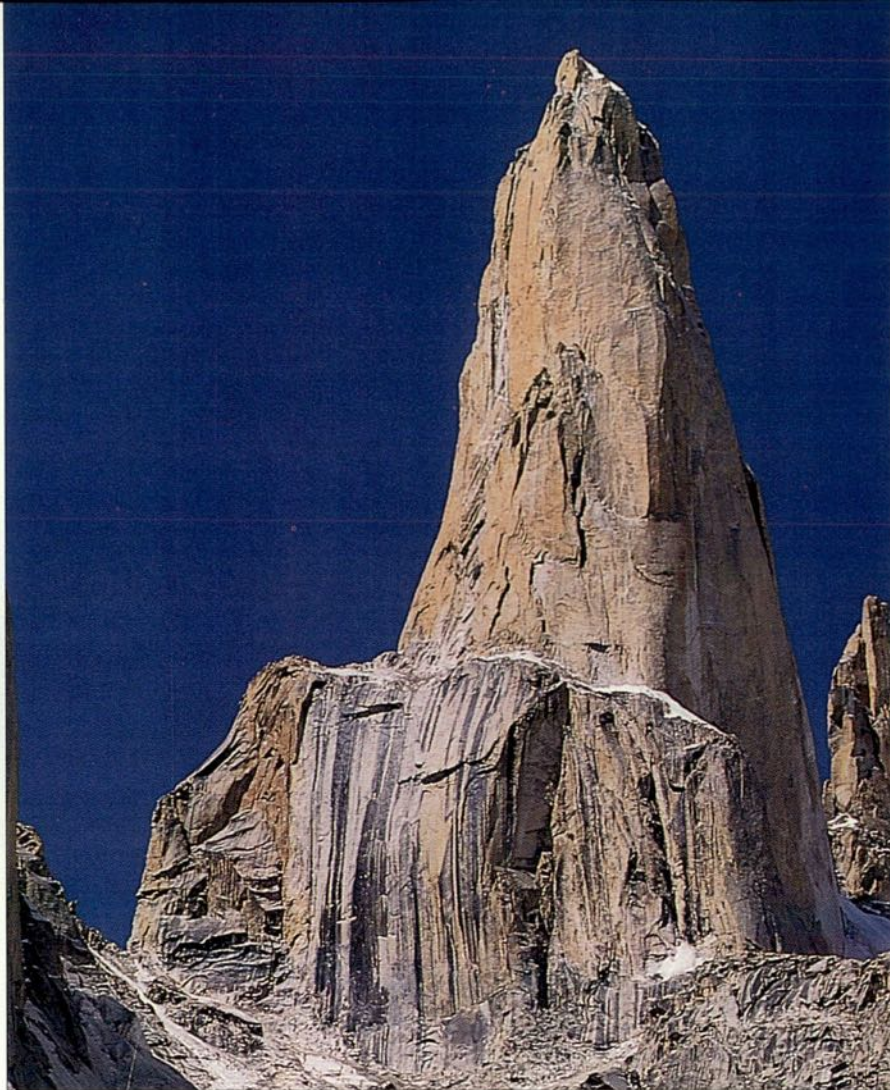
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The southeast face of Nameless Tower.

Photo: Greg Child

Basecamp

Basecamp location will depend on your climb, but there are several good sites on each of the Trango and Dungee glaciers.

A comfortable basecamp is the key to resting during down times. Due to the long and sometimes technical approach to these climbs, you may also need several intermediate camps to get to the start of your climb from basecamp. Bring individual member tents, and a sturdy kitchen (stone walls are readily built, but you'll still need tarps and lots of cord). Stout boxes for sitting on or even lawn chairs are nice luxury items.

Garbage

Keep the mountains clean. Put trash in one place at basecamp. When the expedition is over, let the porters take what they want, then burn what will burn, and toss the ashes and the rest into a deep crevasse in the glacier, but carry out batteries and other toxic items. We had two porters lug out all our 110 pounds of garbage, but near Skardu, our L.O. dumped it in the Braldu River, which was its likely destination in any case.

Equipment

Miscellaneous gear. Water purifier (for tap water and glacial melt), radios, shovel, spring balance for weighing loads, wallet for kitty, black water bags with waterproof closure and valve for melting snow, spare cord for porters, and binoculars.

First-aid kits. You need two kits, a full medical kit for basecamp and a smaller one for the climb. Both should include light and heavy pain killers, antibiotics (Septra DS, erythromycin, Cipro), Flagyl for amoebic dysentery or giardiasis, antidiarrheals, antibacterial ointment and wound items, eye-wound items, iodine for purifying water, antihistamines, anti-inflammatories, sunscreen, moleskin, tape, and splints.

Repair kit. Knife, small sewing kit, duct and cloth tape, candles, baling wire, parachute cord, crampon tools and spare parts, and nylon patches.

Cooking gear for the climb. Two climbing stoves, including one hanging propane/butane (Markill Stormy is best) with a length of copper wire for constructing a heat exchanger, and one kerosene stove for melting snow (the MSR XGK is excellent). You'll also need a stove repair

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kit, and 10 liters worth of fuel bottles. Count on one half-liter gas canister of fuel per day for two people. One extra-large pot with lid for melting snow.

Water on route

You need approximately one gallon of water a day, and more above 5000 meters. Insufficient water intake affects your performance and can contribute to pulmonary or cerebral edema and thrombosis, which also increases the chance of frostbite. You'll probably have to melt snow for water, a time- and labor-intensive process.

Altitude

The Great Trango and Nameless are over 20,000 feet high, so acute mountain sickness is a real threat, although the pace of a wall route, where climbers usually average less than 500 feet of altitude gain a day, gives you plenty of time to acclimatize. The drug Diamox is widely used to prevent and reduce the symptoms of altitude sickness, but beware: Diamox is a diuretic, and can have harmful side effects.

Costs

The following expenses are calculated for five people, and do not include climb-

ing, camping, and personal gear, the kits for the L.O. and cook (cost about \$400 each), or airfare to Rawalpindi (approximately \$2000 round trip).

Permit	\$1000
Food and fuel	2000
Freight to Rawalpindi	800
Barrels	400
Agent (optional)	300
Kitchen for basecamp	120
Tarps	50
Insurance	150
Gear for 46 porters	270
Skardu roundtrip transport (includes freight)	500
Basecamp cleaning	200
Cook's fees for 45 days (includes food and wages)	350
L.O.'s fees for 45 days (includes food and wages)	400
Guide for porters	120
Jeeps to Askole	270
Jeeps from Askole	90
46 approach porters' wages	2300
18 return porters	900
Hotels, food, taxis	350
Miscellaneous fees, etc.	130
Total	\$10,700, or \$2140 each.

References

Maps are available from Chessler

Books, (800) 654-8502.

You'll need the Karakoram Maps (Leomann) Sheet 2 and 3; Karakoram Maps (Swiss Foundation) Sheets 1 and 2, and the Mundik, Jammu, and Kashmir topos.

Personal gear

- Standard mountaineering wear
- Plastic double boots
- Trekking boots
- Base-camp sneakers
- Climbing boots
- Helmet
- Trekking poles and brim hat
- Clear flexible tube (1/2-inch by 4 feet) for collecting water
- Sunglasses and spares
- Headlamp, extra bulbs and batteries, and spare mini-mag light
- One-liter water bottle
- Camera, radio, and tape player
- Solar charger and rechargeable batteries
- Lighters and pens of various types (some work better than others at altitude; also make great gifts for the porters)
- Mug and spoon
- Bivy gear: two sleeping bags (one for base-camp, another for the climb), bivy sack, basecamp tent, and three sleeping pads
- Large pack and day pack
- Waterproof dry bags for personal items

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Ascents

Nameless Tower

- 1976. First ascent of southwest face by Mo Anthoine, Joe Brown, Martin Boysen, and Malcolm Howells.
- 1987. Yugoslav Route established by Slavko Cankar, Franc Knez, and Bojan Srot.
- 1987. New route by Swiss/French team of Michael Piola, Patrick Delale, Stephane Schaffers, and Michel Fouquet, who parapented off the tower.
- 1988. New route by Swiss-Polish team of Voytek Kurtyka and Erhard Loretan.
- 1988. German party repeats the Yugoslav route.
- 1988. Wolfgang Gullich, Kurt Albert, and Hartmut Munchenbach free climb the Yugoslav Route, at 5.12.
- 1989. New route by the Spanish team of Miguel Angel Gallego, Jose Luis Clavel, Chiri Ros, Jose Seiguer.
- 1989. *The Eternal Flame* (5.12c) established by Wolfgang Gullich, Kurt Albert, Christoph Stiegler, and Milan Sykora.
- 1990. Jeff Lowe and Catherine Destiville repeat the Yugoslav Route.
- 1990. Japanese Takeyasu Minamiura solos new route and is stranded when his parapente snags on the wall 250 feet below the summit. He is rescued after six days by Satoshi Kimoto and Masanori Hoshina, who climb the British 1976 route in four days.
- 1992. Spanish team of Lorenzo, Santiago, and Pepe repeats the Kurtyka/Loretan.
- 1992. Spanish climbers repeat the Yugoslav Route.
- 1992. Koreans Young Chu, et al, repeat the Yugoslav route.
- 1992. Greg Child and Mark Wilford establish a new route.

Great Trango Tower, Main Summit (Main-summit routes are alpine climbs.)

- 1977. First ascent of the West Face by Galen Rowell, Kim Schmitz, Dennis Hennek, and John Roskelley.
- 1985. Scott Wollums and Andy Selters climb the Northwest Ridge.
- 1988. Italian Maurizio Giordani solos the Northwest Ridge.

Great Trango Tower, East Summit

- 1984. First ascent of the Norwegian Buttress by Hans Christian Doseth and Finn Daelhi; both climbers died on the descent.

The Norwegian Buttress was climbed to the rim, but not the summit, by a Japanese team in 1990 and a Spanish team in 1991.

- 1992. First ascent of *The Grand Voyage* by John Middendorf and Xaver Bongard.
- 1992. Australians Nic Fetteris and Glenn Singleman climb Northwest Ridge and BASE jump off.

TECHNIQUE

Aid climbing 101

Part II: Getting the rope up there

by Duane Raleigh

They say we are red-meat-eating beer bellies. They call us SLOBS. They are right, but are missing the point.

Aid climbing isn't about one-arm lock-offs or looking stylish. It is about pounding dinky scraps of metal into a rock and then hanging from them. It is a thinking game where the puzzle is fitting the right scrap in the right place. Masters of this sport are craftsmen who, like Porsche mechanics, can solve intricate problems with a few deftly placed hammer blows.

So stuff down that chili dog and grab your hammer. In the August issue we geared up for the *Zodiac* on El Cap. Before we head into the A3 of the White Circle on that route, let's take a few practice swings at the pins, and also learn how to solve standard aid problems, like negotiating expanding flakes and setting up belay stations.

Pitoning. To nail, select a pin, put it in a crack, and hit it. You'll get proficient by doing it. At first you'll be inclined to overdrive the pitons, but as you gain experience you'll develop a knack for just how much you need to beat them.

In solid Yosemite-like rock, size a piton so it will slip into the crack to around mid-shank. A good placement will ring as you drive the pin. A piton that rings and then quits has bottomed out, in which case remove it, select a slightly larger one, and don't drive it quite so far.

Not every piton placement need hold a Peterbilt. With A1 and A2 cracks it's more efficient (and easier on the rock and the second) to bury the first pin, then intentionally make the next three or so piton placements body-weight only, and follow those with another sinker placement.

Forget all the above when nailing soft rock, like Canyonlands or Zion sandstone, where you want to make every piece as solid as you can. Pins in soft rock will rarely ring, and even when they sing all the way to the eye you can sometimes still wiggle them out with your fingers. Fire in as large a piton as possible. This may mean putting a 1-inch angle into what would be a 1/2-inch granite placement.



Following a hook traverse on the *Zodiac* (VI 5.10 A3), El Capitan.

Nailing soft rock requires a finer touch, and takes more time than granite, so be patient. It sometimes takes unconventional gear too. Leeper Z pins and SMC shallow angles are especially useful, filling the same range as Lost Arrows, but holding better. Those vintage 2- to 4-inch bongs also help, sticking when cams won't, like in dirty or crumbly rock, pods, flares, and horizontals typical of a desert grunge wall.

Always try, of course, to minimize scar-

ring by using the right size pin and not overdriving, selecting nuts or cams when appropriate, and, on the second's part, careful cleaning (most of the scarring happens when pitons are hammered out).

Pitons work in parallel-sided cracks, but try to exploit constrictions that will box the pin in, giving it added holding power. When you have a choice, select a horizontal crack over a vertical one, and

(continued on page 128)

Photo: Duane Raleigh

Knock off an El Cap aid route and people will respect you. They'll ask you for advice. Tom Brokaw will take you fly fishing. Your life will change. That's what

can cut your teeth on such historic aid walls as the *South Face* (A2), a 10-pitch route with one bivy on Dinner Ledge, and *The Prow* (A2+), a slightly harder line

(A3), goes off the left side of Ahwahnee Ledge.

Guidebook: *Yosemite Climbs*, by George Meyers and Don Reid; Chockstone Press.

Season: Year round, but spring and fall are best.

Squamish, British Columbia, Canada

Most famous for its dramatic free climbs on mint granite, the towering walls of Squamish also lend themselves to clean aid climbing and serious nailing. *The Negro Lesbian* (A4), *The Sheriff's Badge* (A4), and *Breakfast Run* (A5), are three of the stoutest aid routes. *Wrist Twister* (A3+) and *Uncle Bens* (A3) are more moderate and popular.

Guidebook: *The Rockclimbers' Guide to Squamish*, by Kevin McLane; Merlin.

Seasons: April to October.

Baja, Mexico

South of Yosemite, past Mexico in the Baja's Sierra Juarez Mountains, three miles from the ghost town of El Progreso, looms El Gran Trono Blanco. This 1600-foot escarpment holds mostly free routes, but does have a handful of granite aid lines, although don't count on YOSAR to winch you off if you get hungry. *The Giraffe* (A4) is the cliff's premier nail-up.

Guidebook: None.

Season: Winter.

Baboquivari Peak, Arizona

Big aid walls in Arizona? Get outta here. Or get to Baboquivari Peak, southwest of Tucson, a holy place to the Papago Indians. Though the aid lines tend to be broken and interspersed with free climbing, the *Cradle of Stone* and *Dreams of I'tol* have stretches of A4.

Guidebook: *Backcountry Rockclimbing in Southern Arizona*, by Bob Kerry; Chockstone Press.

Seasons: Anytime but summer.

Zion National Park, Utah

A veritable sandstone Yosemite, but

less sanitized. You say you want to aid, but only for a day, and you'd like to leave the pins behind as well. This is the place, and the *Touchstone* (C2) and *Spaceshot* (C2+) are the lines.

If you also want to smite some steel, Zion is still the place. Fourteen-hundred feet high, Angel's Landing has *real* nailing on a *real* wall. Mega lines are the *Swiss-American Route* (A4) and *Ball and Chain* (A4).

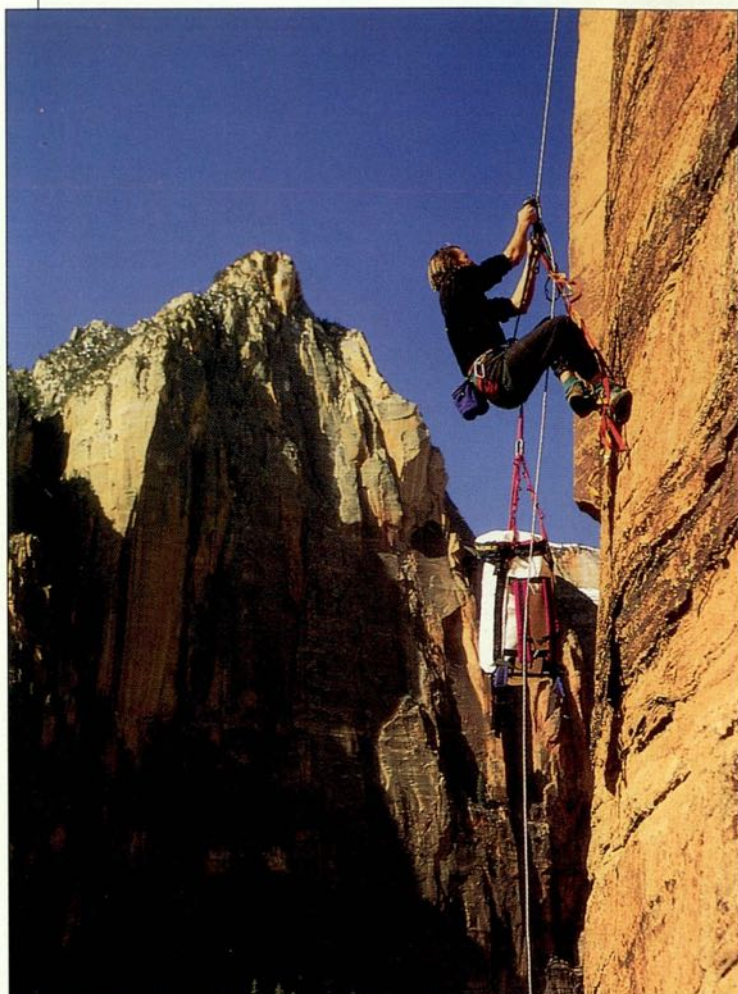
You can't overlook Abraham, the center of the Three Patriarchs, either. This sweep of red stone is Zion's grandest wall, and hosts the *Radiator* (A4), Walt Shipley and John Middendorf's unrepeatable *coup de grace*, which Middendorf says "is more difficult than the [Wyoming] *Sheep Ranch* [on El Cap]."

Guidebook: The visitor center has a loose-leaf guide.

Seasons: Year round, but both winter and summer tend to extremes.

The Fisher Towers, Utah

These towers look small, but get big the instant you stick a pin in one. Repugnant to free climbers, the Fisher Towers' aberrant, crusty walls were made to order for extreme nailing. To see if the area is for you, test the waters on the *Regular Route* on the Ancient Art, which goes mostly free and clean, and the *Colorado NE Ridge* on the Kingfisher, a long bolt ladder with a few pin placements. Both climbs take about a half day each. More tenuous lines include *West Side Story* (A3) on Cottontail, and *Phantom Spirit* (A3) on the east arete of Echo Tower. Pack extra big angles and a Sun Shower.



John Middendorf in the wall paradise of Zion National Park, Utah.

you'd like to think anyway.

But maybe you live too far away or just don't have the time to tackle El Cap. Are there other walls where you can still reap glory and get scared witless?

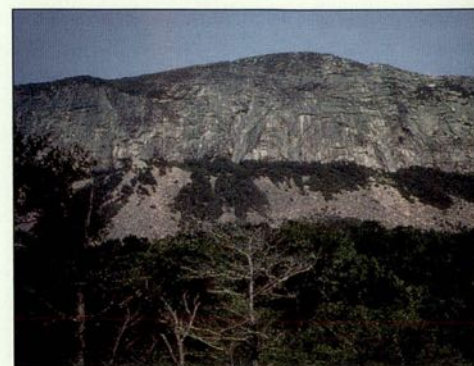
You betcha. Our aid junket begins west in Yosemite, then switchbacks for the East Coast.

Yosemite Valley, California

The rock is so crisp and clean you'd swear it just came out of the kiln. And then there's the unrivaled exposure, endless difficulties, and hammock bivies. El Cap? Half Dome? Could be, but there *are* other aid walls in the Valley. For starters, there's the Washington Column, where you

of equal length. There's stiffer stuff, too. Have you ever been to *Electric Ladyland* (A4)? Up the Merced, past Mirror Lake, guarded by terrible manzaneta thickets, sits Mount Watkins. On the austere South Face, *Hook, Line, and Sinker* (A3+) and the *Bob Locke Memorial Buttress* (A4) are fine outings. Both are Grade VIs, so plan accordingly.

Down valley, next to Bridalveil Falls, the Leaning Tower didn't get its name for nothing. Expect steep. The *West Face* (A2) is cruiser with many bolts, making it an ideal route to work the bugs out of your hauling and dangling. An interesting variation, *Wet Denim Daydream*



Cannon Cliff in New Hampshire offers a wall experience for East Coast climbers.



For something completely different, try the crumbling Fisher Towers in the canyonlands of Utah.

Guidebook: *Desert Rock*, by Eric Bjornstad; Chockstone Press.
Season: Spring, fall, winter.

Wind Rivers, Wyoming

Rent a packhorse in Big Sandy and drive the beast 18 miles over Hailey Pass to Mount Hooker. The mountain's original aid line now goes free, but there's hope yet; recent new-route activity, like Steve Quinlan and Midden-dorf's *Third Eye* (A4), revolves around real nailing.

Guidebook: *Climbing and Hiking in the Wind River Mountains*, by Joe Kelsey, 1980 (outdated).
Season: Late spring, summer, and early fall.

Longs Peak, Colorado

Although the east face of Long's Peak, or the Diamond, is regarded as a haven for alpine free climbing, it wasn't always that way. Until 1975 the wall was the domain of serious nailers. And to some extent it still is. The right side of the Diamond offers a half dozen aid climbs, including the *Jack of Diamonds* (A4), and the *Dunn-Westbay* (A3).

Guidebook: *Rocky Mountain National Park, The Climber's Guide*, by Bernard Gillet; Earthbound Sports, Inc.

Seasons: Early summer to early fall.

The Black Canyon of the Gunnison, Colorado

It has a bad rep, but Black Canyon rock really isn't that bad, and besides, where else can you top out by your car? This may be the most neglected big-wall area in the country. Right now there's only a score of aid routes in the entire

canyon. That's bound to change.

On North Chasm View Wall, *The Hallucinogen Wall* (A3+) is steep and clean, and popular. Less congested, but a touch flakier, are the *Nose* (A4) and the *Dragon* (A4) on the Painted Wall. All are grade VIs.

Guidebook: The visitor's center has loose-leaf topos.

Season: Early spring and fall.

Whitesides Mountain, North Carolina

Dixie's got more than granite slabs. Sleep in a portaledge at the Gold Mine bivy six pitches up the *Blarney Stone* (A4), on the big face of Whitesides. While you're lying there, scope out the *Volunteer Wall* (also A4) to your right, your next project should you survive tomorrow's A4 hook pitch. The 700-foot-high granite face of Whitesides doesn't have a load of aid climbing, but what is there is hard.

Guidebook: *The Climber's Guide to North Carolina*, by Thomas Kelley; Earthbound Sports, Inc.

Seasons: Fall and winter.

Cannon Cliff, New Hampshire

Cannon may not be a big-wall aid destination, but if you're in the area, routes like the nine-pitch *Ghost* (A3) and *Ghost Roof* (A4), and the six-pitch *One Drop of Water* (A3), will certainly get your underwear up in a bunch.

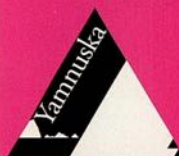
Guidebook: *Rock Climbs in the White Mountains of New Hampshire*, by Ed Webster; Mountain Imagery.

Seasons: Spring, summer, and fall.

— DR

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Fixed stuff. The old, rusty, rotten, and partly broken fixed gear strewn all over *Zodiac* makes for that route's most danger-

Cammie. Using camming units is easy, and you already know the basics. Add to your knowledge the fact that for aid climbing, if two cams stick in the rock, the piece will probably hold body weight. Another tip: use the Loper "Friend of a Friend" as a short chacter stick to make long reaches.

Nutting. Stopper-like nuts are the most useful for aid climbing, although those old forgotten hexes occasionally come in handy. For any nut to hold, it has to wedge in a constriction, which is usually in a crack, but can also be a gap between two nubbins, a pocket, or an old pin scar. In dirty or crumbly placements, mine out the debris with a long knifeblade so the nut can rest against solid rock. When there's a doubt, rap the nut with a hammer to seat it. These "stopperheads" work especially well in pin scars. (Purists will boil at the last concept, but a rapped-in nut is still environmentally gentler than any piston.) Be open to odd nutting possibilities — for example, don't rule out nuts opposed in a horizontal crack — and use plenty of long runners to keep the nuts from lifting out as you get above them.

Hooking. Hooking hooks scary, and can be, but a sinker hook placement can also be technically easier than nailing or nutting, and may even be so solid you can leave it for protection. When you're on a hook, try to keep your weight straight under it. And move smoothly — herky-herky motions can cause the hook to pop. As an added precaution you may want to wear real rock shoes, which help keep your feet from skating around, and use chalk so you can crimp on a face holds to steady yourself as you step up in the aiders.

chisel over the head and hammer on it until it's one with the rock; rest it and move on.

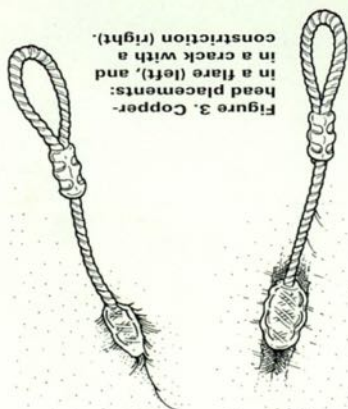
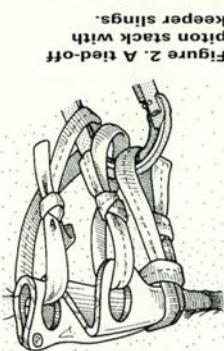


Figure 3. Copper-head placements: in a flare (left), and in a crack with a constriction (right).

To place a copperhead (or aluminum-head) you need two things: a blunt chisel, and a shallow corner or groove. An ideal placement has a slight constriction to it, although flares also work well (Figure 3). Place a copperhead like this: scrape the placement clean with a knifeblade, and brush or blow out any remaining debris or dust; set the head by lightly tapping it with the pick of your hammer; place the blunt

Copperheading. Heading is distasteful work that is hard on the rock, so do it only when necessary. Trade routes have some or all of the heads fixed, but when you venture into unnamed land you'll have to place these yourself. Heading will seem intimidating at first, but don't worry!

tie-off, and remember to thread a keeper sling through all the eyes (Figure 2).



**Figure 2. A tied-off
piton stack with
keeper slings.**

die a stack afords.
 Leeper Zs and angles nest well against
 one another, but you can stack any pin
 combination. Your gear and the situation
 will demand how and what you stack.
 Sometimes it's best to drive all the pins

Stacking. Don't think you need to be Charlie Porter to use stacking, which is simply shimming one or more pins against another to tighten a loose placement. Times to stack include when you've run out of large-enough pins, or when the placement is so shallow you need the extra

daily chain to each piece as you drive it. That way, if the pin you are on pulls out, the party driven one might catch you. And go easy. Hammer until you think the piece will hold body weight, then quit. It's better to underdrive an expanding placement than to pound away and risk losing all the pins below, or the flake itself. Established routes usually have expanding flake on the second pitch of *Zodiac* expands but isn't listed as such. Always be on the alert. Any thin or hollow-sounding flake or block is suspect, and even seemingly solid blocks, some the size of freight cars, can expand.

When you must nail an expanding flake, use an oversize pin as the first placement. The large pin will take some of the expansion out of the flake, making subsequent placements more secure. Clip your

Expanding flakes. Expanding placements — those chunks, flakes, or blocks that aren't solidly attached to the wall — are often the mental and technical cruxes. Nailing them is tricky because a piron will spread the crack like a prybar, loosening the lower placements. Camming devices (Friends, Camalots, and the smaller Aliens are popular for aid) and slide nuts (the Lowe Ball Nuts work well) expand with the flake, making them more secure than pions. When cams or sliders won't fit, try regular nuts. That failing, and if the crack is thin enough, experiment by rapping in copper-heads. Use pions as a last resort, and even

through the eye so you won't lose the piece if it pulls. Also, when possible, angle the eye of the pin slightly up so the tie-off doesn't slide off. This is especially important with 1/4-inch and larger angles, which don't have "heads" to catch the tie-off.

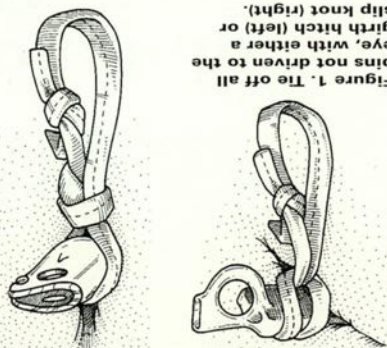


Figure 1. Tie off all pins not driven to the eye, with either a girth hitch (left) or slip knot (right).

You can tie off pins with either a girth hitch or slip knot (Figure 1). With any tied-off pin, thread a long "keeper" sling

In straight-in "splitter" cracks, drive the pin, then tie it off. When the placement is at a corner, however, like on the first pitch of *Zodiac*, you'll have to cinch the tie-off around the pin before pounding it. Driving a pin tied off this way nearly always frays or cuts the webbing, so don't expect to reuse it, and don't count on the place-

either of these over a pin driven straight up in a roof. The latter placement, however, can be good if it's in good rock and things like a horseshoe.

When a piston doesn't drive to the eye, tie it off to reduce leverage. Pins in blown-out scars nearly always need a tie-off; or better yet, use sawed-off pins, which you can drive

(continued from page 125)

(continued from page 125)

ous climbing. Treat fixed gear, including old bolts and rivets, as junk.

Load-absorbing runners, like the Yates Scream Aids (absorb 250 pounds) and Screammers (absorb 500 pounds), add some security to body-weight-only placements. In really bad situations you can string together several Scream Aids or Screammers to double or triple their load-absorbing capabilities.

Back cleaning. Our *Zodiac* rack is spare, but by backcleaning and reusing gear we can get up any of the route's long, uniform cracks. Backclean or "leapfrog" gear with extreme caution. Backcleaning cuts down on rack weight, but it also can get you dangerously strung out, and complicates cleaning, especially if the pitch traverses. Sometimes it's just not worth it.

Testing. You wouldn't eat pizza from Degnan's Deli without sniffing it first. Likewise, don't move onto gear without testing it.

Bounce testing is the standard check, and it goes like it sounds. Clip a pair of aiders to the piece you wish to test, step into the lowest rung of one of those aiders and bounce. A light hop will generate around 250 pounds (assuming you weigh 150 pounds); an aggro jump, one that sends the rack up around your ears, will earn about 500 pounds. If the piece pulls you might drop a foot or so onto the lower placement, which should hold provided you tested it well. Minimize that fall distance by staying low in the test aider, and with really grim placements you may want to clip two aiders together in a long chain, and do the bouncing from well below the lower piece. As always, clip a daisy chain to the test placement to save it (and your spare aiders) if it blows.

Most pieces that survive the bounce test won't pull out while you're on them. However, if the piece were really poor, bounce testing may have just loosened it. Soft-rock placements can also test fine, then ooze out if you stay on them too long. In those situations and other times, such as sideways moves, it's more practical to just ease onto the placement and hope for the best. Again, it helps to stay low.

Moving up. Efficient aid climbing requires a system. Here's one that works well in most situations:

1. Clip a set of aiders to the new piece.
2. Clip one of your two daisy chains to those aiders.
3. Test the piece.
4. Move onto it.
5. Retrieve the aiders and daisy from the previous placement.
6. Walk up in the aiders until you can set

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your fi-fi hook on the placement.

7. Clip the rope in.

8. Study the next placement and then make it.

9. Repeat.

Variations on this theme exist, of course, and if you find another that works better for you, go with it. But as a rule, only clip the rope in when your tie-in knot is level with the placement. Clipping the rope in over your head will only lengthen your potential fall by about six feet. And especially don't clip the rope overhead and then use it to "pulley" yourself up. Nor should you use the rope to "take," as you do in sport climbing. Winching and hanging on the rope doubles the load (your weight *plus* an equal counterweight) on the placement. Instead, use your daisy chain and fi-fi to rest and hang.

The angle of the wall and the integrity of the piece will dictate how high you can get in the aiders. On vertical rock, you can get up in the sub-loops, the smaller set of steps sewn inside the second ones, and extend your reach by a foot or so, cutting down on the number of placements you'll have to make. You can't get as high on overhanging rock and will usually have to settle for the second step. Slabs nearly always let you operate out of the top steps, or better, the grab loops. Traverses, like the one under the overlap on *Zodiac's* second pitch, and horizontal roofs require different tactics. In these instances it's best to stay in the third or even fourth step.

Poor placements are another matter. Try to stay in the second steps. Thrashing around to get higher loads the piece up more, and worse, exerts an outward force.

Free climbing. *New Jersey Turnpike*, the outrageously steep line up the right side of the North America Wall, has mandatory 5.10 face climbing on it. If we were doing that route we'd bring rock shoes and chalk, but on most walls you can aid the so-called free sections if you have to, as when it's raining.

When the rock is dry and all other conditions are amenable, it can be faster to free climb up to the 5.9 level than to aid. Moves or sections harder than 5.9 are usually best dealt with from aiders, or "french free," where you pull on gear (usually fixed) or just use it for resting. Free climbing might earn you brownie points in your mind, but unless you're bent on eliminating aid, go the easiest, safest, and quickest route. When you do launch out on free moves, take pains to put in lots of good pro. You might feel lame for sewing up a stretch of 5.5, but you'll thank yourself when the free climbing ends with a hook or head move.

Free sections on aid routes are typically, though not always, rated harder than they really are. That's because when you're shouldering a heavy pin rack, and wearing gloves and boots, they feel that way.

Setting up the belay. Like the rack, keep the belay organized. Get a tangle going and you won't be able to tell what is clipped where, and in the confusion you might accidentally send yourself, your partner, or the haul bags, to the last roundup. Besides enhancing safety, a clean belay will also save time by making the lead changeovers hassle-free.

Before you construct the anchor, visualize where you will be, where your partner will come up and then transfer over to the lead, and where the haul bags will hang. To avoid messes, try to keep these three loads spaced apart and equalized across the anchor system. Also think about how you will break the anchor down. For example, the haul bag will be the first thing to go, so don't have its knot or daisy chain pinned underneath other knots or slings.

Horizontal anchors make organizing the belay simple, but are more difficult to equalize. To be safe, hang yourself from one piece, your partner, who is jumaring the lead rope, from another, and the gear and haul bags from yet another (Figure 4). Of course, chain all the placements together with either the lead rope or runners. If you are out of runners or rope, or



Figure 4. The horizontal station shown here simplifies the belay setup, but is harder to equalize.



Figure 5. A vertical belay is simple to set up, but crams everything together, making good organization crucial.

a piece is far away to one side, tie the lead rope to the strongest piece, and then use your aiders (provided they are runner strength and in good shape) to join the rest of the placements to it.

Vertically strung belays are simple to equalize, but usually cram everything together, so more than ever, organization is crucial. There are many ways to equalize vertical anchors, but most are impractical on a big wall. A simple pseudo-equalized method involves tying the rope to the lowest piece and then "chaining" it to other placements (Figure 5). If you're low on rope, simply chain to the bottom two pieces and use runners and aiders to incorporate the higher placements into the system.

Tie off to the anchors using either clove hitches (Figure 6) or overhand figure-8s. The clove hitch has the advantages of being adjustable and easier to untie after it has held weight, while the figure-8's open

loop lets you clip other placements to it.

Give yourself about six feet of slack when you tie off so you can maneuver for hauling. Use your daisy chains to adjust your distance from the belay.



Figure 6. The clove hitch is easy both to adjust and untie.

Fixed belay anchors. Back up all fixed anchors. Even seemingly bomber stations, such as the multiple-bolt one under the roof on *Zodiac's* first pitch, can fail. Treat bolts, old ones in particular, with suspicion — most are about as reliable as a VW van. If the anchors around you aren't satisfactory, lead a couple placements up the next pitch, then downclimb and incorporate them into the belay.

Hauling. Hoisting the bags can be grueling and demoralizing. Wall success often hangs as much on your willingness to absorb punishment as it does on technical mastery.

A simple haul system, one that works for bags lighter than you, is as follows:

Clip the haul line and pulley to a belay anchor. When possible, use an anchor off to one side so the haul will be out of the way. Set the haul line in the pulley and place one ascender upside down on the side running to the haul bags. Clip the ascender to the anchor, and clip a few pieces of gear to the ascender's bottom "eye" to prevent it from lifting as you haul. Reel the slack out of the haul line. Put another ascender, right-side-up, on the other side of the rope. Attach an aider to this ascender and leg haul by executing high steps (Figure 7), or clip to the ascender with one of your daisy chains and do "squats" to raise the bags. When the bags are too heavy for either of these techniques you'll have to use the "body haul,"



Figure 7. The simple leg haul works well for bags no heavier than you.

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Figure 8. The body haul is the technique for hauling the big pigs.

which goes like this: give yourself about 10 feet of slack on your tie-in leash so you have room to operate. Clip the ascender to your harness, and using your body as a counterweight, pull up on the side of the rope going to the bags and "walk" down the wall until you hit the end of your leash (Figure 8). Hand over hand or jumar back up the rope (or climb up a chain of aiders strung for this purpose) and repeat.

The bags may snag under a roof or in a chimney. In this case, lower them a few feet and try to bounce them loose, or clear them by holding the haul line away from

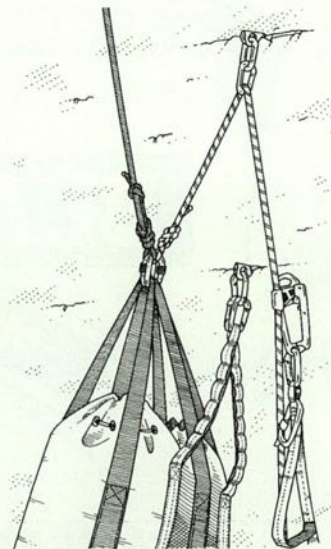


Figure 9. Rig a mini-haul to free the bags from the belay anchors.

the wall as you try to lift them. If those methods fail, have your partner give the bags a kick as he cleans the pitch. Once the haul bags arrive at the belay, hang them on their daisy chains and then tie them in short with the haul line.

Before you haul, communicate with your partner so he has time to get the bags ready to haul. If you're the one preparing the bags, make sure the haul line isn't twisted around the lead rope, and on overhanging or traversing pitches, lower the bags out on their tag line. When the bags are too heavy for you to lift and unclip from the station, rig a mini-haul by running the tag line through a high carabiner, and then hoist the bags by attaching your rappel or belay device to this rope and cranking down on it (Figure 9).

Belaying. Holding onto the lead rope is the belayer's primary job, but it isn't the only one. An attentive belayer helps the leader by keeping the right amount of slack in both the lead and haul line, and when the leader calls down for more gear, sending it up in an organized fashion.

Cleaning. You can learn more about nailing by cleaning one pitch than by leading an entire wall. As you remove the gear, study how it was placed and note how difficult or easy it was to extract, and then compare that against how much your leader moaned on that particular piece. What you'll discover is that gear in granite is usually better than you'd suspect, while placements in sandstone are much worse.

The secret to cleaning is getting into a position that gives you easy access to the placement. Sometimes this means jumaring to the next piece and then reaching down. In traverses or roofs where the leader spread out the placements or back cleaned, take a piece off your rack, set it in between his placements, get on it with your fi-fi, and then remove the low piece.

Remove pitons by knocking them back and forth until they loosen enough to pluck out. Listen to the pin as you hit it; it will change in tone the instant it is loose enough to extract. If you're worried about dropping the piton, clip a "cleaner biner" and sling to it and clip this to your gear rack. The biner will make hitting the pin more difficult, but keeps you from losing it. Once you designate a carabiner for this purpose, don't use it for climbing.

Getting pins out from behind expanding flakes is hard. The pin can move several inches back and forth, but the clamping action of the flake will prevent the pin from coming out. Try clipping the cleaner biner on the pin and pull out on it as you hammer. If the pin still won't budge, drive

an oversized piton next to it. This larger pin will spread the flake and free the smaller stuck one. The larger pin should be easy to remove provided you don't drive it too far.

RURPs, Beaks, and heads can be trouble to get out. If they show signs of breaking — cracks or frayed cables — leave them fixed. Clean a Beak by tapping up on the bottom of the shaft. Remove a RURP or head by clipping a chain of carabiners to it and then to the hole in your hammer head, and swiping up and out. Alternately, substitute a sling, or a wired nut with the nut slid back, for the carabiner chain.

Nuts and cams remove the obvious way, although sometimes in the heat of the wall it's easy to overlook this. Avoid the temptation to jerk willy nilly on these pieces. Be patient, study the placement to determine how it was made and how to reverse the piece out. A stubborn nut may need jimmying with a long knifeblade to jar it loose. Use a Friend of a Friend on buried camming units, or loop the open ends of two wired nuts over each side of the trigger, and tug on these while pushing the stem forward.

Lowe Balls (and all other slide nuts) are a breeze to place, but are nearly impossible to extract by hand alone once they've held a load. The easiest way to remove slide nuts involves lightly tapping a knifeblade against the underside of the bottom wedge.

And don't haphazardly slap gear on your sling. Organize it by size and type as you go, and you'll minimize changeover time at the belay.

Jumaring. The only thing more painful than watching someone struggle with their ascenders is being the person on the ascenders. "Jugging," or jumaring, the generic term for ascending a rope using any mechanical ascender, is easy — if you're set up right.

Snap both ascenders on the rope. If you're right handed, put the right ascender (usually the blue one) on top and orient it so the open side of the frame faces you. Vice versa if you're a lefty. Use locking carabiners to attach one daisy chain from your harness to the right ascender, and the other to the left. The spacing of the top ascender is critical. Put it out too far out on the daisy and you'll have to use your arms to pull yourself up. Set it in too close and your stroke will be short and inefficient. Place the top ascender so that at its maximum height you can reach it with your elbow slightly bent (Figure 10).

You'll always load the top daisy chain, but the bottom one serves only as a back up, so its spacing isn't as important. You're fine here as long as the bottom daisy has some slack when its ascender is pushed up

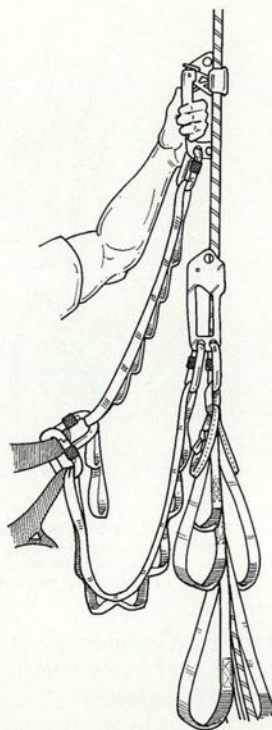


Figure 10. Setting the length of the daisy chain on the top jumar is crucial.

to just underneath the top ascender.

Clip a pair of aiders to the bottom ascender (you don't necessarily need aiders on the top ascender), put a foot in the second rung of each aider, and stand up.

Ascend by shoving the top jumar up the rope until its daisy comes taut, then slump in your harness. Push the bottom ascender up to meet the first, and at the end of that stroke press off with your feet and simultaneously slide the top ascender up again. As you jumar, focus on thrusting with your feet. Use your hands for balance, not pulling. Efficient jumaring involves getting into a rhythm, and having the top daisy chain fine-tuned to your reach. For the first 40 feet or so (and after you tie safety knots) the rope will lift when you try to raise the bottom ascender. Counter this by simply "thumbing" the cam — don't mess with the safety latch — to release it and let the rope slide through.

On overhanging rock you'll tend to spin, but besides trying to maintain a smooth stroke, there's nothing you can do about that. If your top arm is getting pumped, shorten the daisy chain to that ascender.

Jugging ropes strung on slabs can be awkward. Try stepping out of the aiders and using your feet on the rock.

Jumaring, like rappelling, can be more dangerous than the actual climbing. No ascender is foolproof and all can accidentally pop off the rope. Stay alive by tying safety knots. Start by tying an overhand figure-8 in the rope just below your bottom ascender, and clip the knot to your harness with a locking carabiner. Tie in

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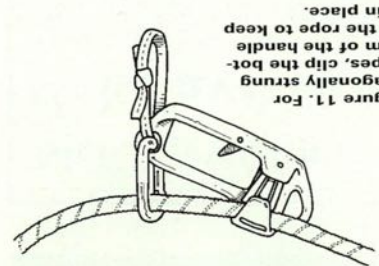
Jim & Julie Okonek

under that rat's nest of bleached and although it's hard to tell exactly what lies in this case is a couple of solid fixed pins, cleaned up to the pendulum point, which Let's tackle pendulums first. You've ready for them.

Pendulums, roofs, and traverses can present formidable problems if you're not mentioned above.

the rope, and backed up every 30 feet as always, make sure you're tied to the end of around each piece to clean them. As you may have to jump the top ascender wall steepens (but the line remains plumb) out ever having to unclip them. As the you push the ascenders up the rope with- over vertical are simple to clean, letting Straight-up pitches that are vertical or just Pendulums, roofs, and traverses.

verses and clip the bottom of the ascender handle to the rope to help keep it in position (Figure 11).



this way every 30 feet, and only unclip and untie the old knot *after* you've clipped to the new one. Also, make it a habit to tie in whenever you have to jump the jumars around a knot joining several ropes together. If for some reason you can't tie in (fixed ropes anchored at both ends, for example), use a prussik knot as a backup. Ascenders can twist off diagonally strung ropes, so be especially wary on tra-

Figure 12a. Cleaning a pendulum. While hanging just below the pendulum point, pull up a loop of rope below your end back-up knot.

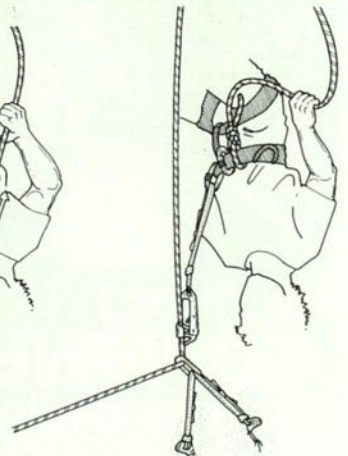


Figure 12b. Jab the loop through the anchor slings and clip to it with a locking carabiner.

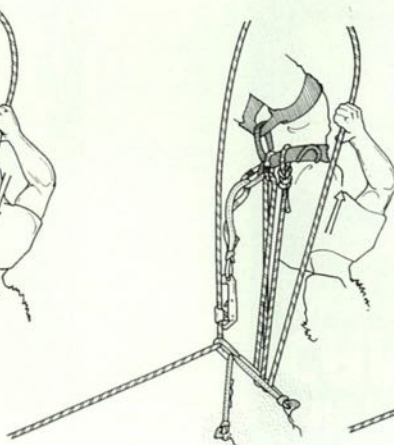


Figure 12c. Suck up on the loop to relax the rope, which you then unclip from the slings.

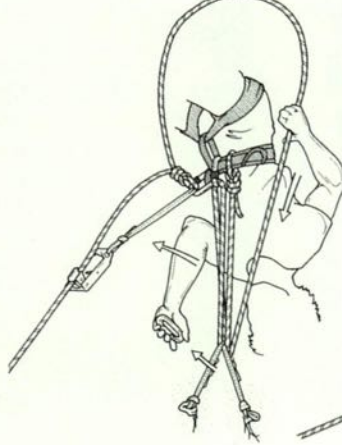
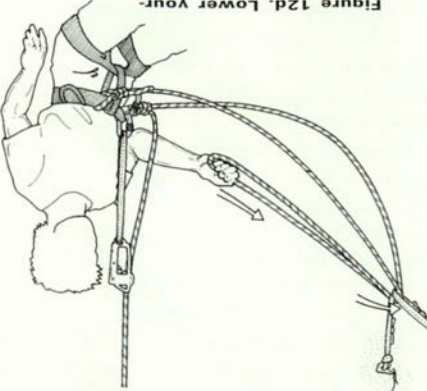


Figure 12d. Lower yourself out by feeding slack to your loop, and once you're across the traverse, release the loop and pull it through to retrieve it.



Wall strategy and psyche

Fixing. You can take off without fixing, and earn extra style points. Fixing ropes (two is standard) gives you a jump start and eliminates one wall bivy. It also buys you time to hump loads to the base, organize, get psyched up, and pose down in the Mountain Room Bar.

On the *Zodiac* we fixed the first three pitches — the A2 corner, the A1 roof traverse left, and the mangy bolt ladder to Dead Bird Ledge — with two ropes. We could do this because, as is often the case, the pitches are short and circuitous.

Bivouacs. After all that work and sweat, it's time to eat and rack out. Bivies, hanging ones especially, *make* wall climbing. Give yourself plenty of time (at least an hour) to set up and enjoy. Organizing a belay and assembling portaledges is confusing enough in broad daylight; no way do you want to deal with those chores in the dark. If you have to, knock off early, set the bivy up, and fix the next pitch.

Psyche. When the going gets bad, thoughts of retiring to the easy chair, remote control, and cold ones can infiltrate all thoughts. Shake it off. It helps to know that at one time or another everyone wants to go down. Successful wall climbers overcome this human failing. If you have enough food and water and the weather looks good, slow down, or stop altogether, and regroup. Don't look at the wall as one extremely long route; rather, treat each pitch as its own climb. People who fail on walls usually do so because they quit, not because of the technical difficulty.

Suck it up, persevere, and when you get down, all those mortgage payments, bills, and that stack of work will seem like A0. Well, for a week or so anyway.

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Tom Gilje and Mike Lechlinski
on *Straight to Hell* (5.12), The
Needles, California.
Photo: Mari Gingery

CLIMBING



Charlie Fowler on *Upper Ames Falls*,
Telluride, Colorado. Photo: Brian Bailey

TRAINING

The weakest link

Exploiting your strengths won't make you a better climber

by Dale Goddard and Udo Neumann

This is the first of a three-part series of excerpts from the forthcoming book, Performance Rock Climbing. Part two will cover engram training and technique.

Imagine you decided that for a hobby you would get an old, sputtering VW bug. Looking at the shabby car you see numerous improvements that would help its performance. But since the car's most immediate problem is that it won't go faster than 20 miles an hour, you decide to overhaul the engine.

After some work, the car can go 40 miles per hour on the flats, but a horrible trembling cripples the car at higher speeds. Loose steering now seems the limiting factor. But instead of fixing the steering you continue to work on the engine until you can force the car through the vibrations. You've now reached a critical point with the car. The best engine in the world won't keep the car from shaking, so its performance will remain plateaued until you address its weakest areas — the steering.

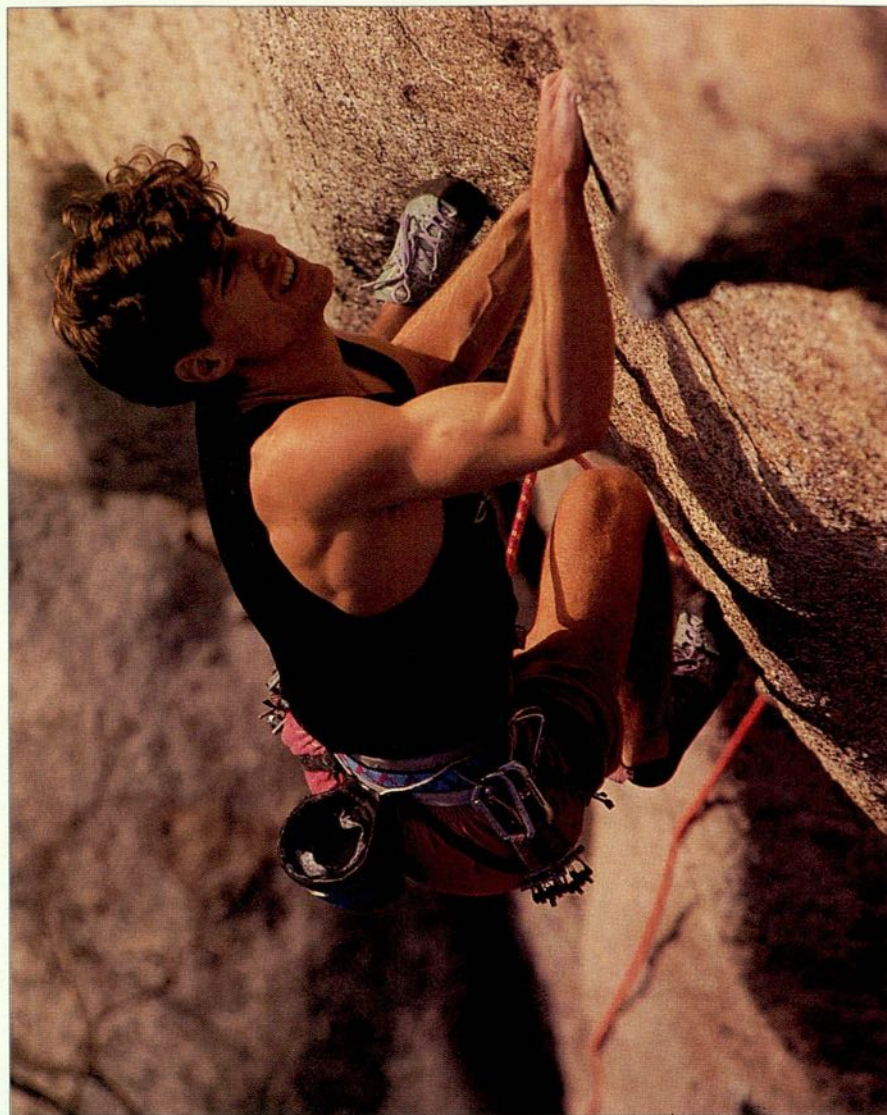
The weakest link principle

As with the car, your climbing performance is derived from an elaborate chain of abilities that must act in concert to produce motion. That performance will be pulled down to the level of your weakest ability, just as a chain is only as strong as its weakest link.

A small change in your weakest area will have a great effect on your overall performance, while a large improvement in your strongest areas will have a small effect. Maximize your improvement by discovering your weakest area and targeting it in your training.

The challenge, however, is to find your weak spot by asking yourself the right questions and persistently examining your climbing. Self-examination will shed light on your weaknesses. (Remember your strengths — they will continue to give you confidence and motivation.)

Different weaknesses lead to different training needs, as the following example illustrates.



Dale Goddard reinforcing his positive engrams.

"Climbing is so complex!" lamented the late Wolfgang Gullich, Germany's top climber, at the point of tears.

It was early in the climbing season, and Gullich had been trying *Sale Temps* (5.13b) in France's Verdon Gorge for five days without success. What made his failed efforts sting was the fact that he had just finished a winter of intense training that had added to his already vast power reservoir.

But lack of power was not his limitation before his winter of training, and it wasn't his problem after his season in the gym.

His words revealed not only the frustration of choosing a wrong priority, but also insight into his error. Climbing is a complex

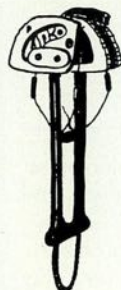
summation of many skills, and it was the skill areas he neglected that held him back. Gullich returned home, changed his training focus to weaker areas, and went on to put up the first 5.13d in the world, *Kanal im Rucken*, seven months later in 1984.

The most efficient approach to training comes from this fundamental principle of the weakest link, whether you are a World Cup climber or beginner.

Unfortunately, we aren't objective judges of our own weaknesses. We're practiced at some techniques and bad at others. Sometimes it's hard to believe that techniques we're bad at are even worth learning. Consider the muscular climber who has poor

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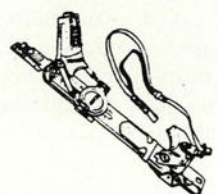
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foot technique. When others suggest that he improve his footwork, he scoffs, saying, "Why should I? When I take time to place my feet carefully, my arms pump out faster than if I just power through."

It's true: that climber really is less efficient when he concentrates on footwork — at first. When he concentrates on footwork he slows down, tightens up, and tires out. But with practice, good footwork will come more naturally and will require less time and thought. The lesson: you can't judge the relative effectiveness of a technique or style of climbing until you have developed some ability in that technique.

How do you develop it? Technique is derived from your body's control of physical movement, from your coordination abilities. Learn about coordination and you'll have a powerful tool for developing technique. Apply it smartly and you'll transform your climbing.

In sports that involve repeating the same moves — running and biking, for instance — fewer abilities contribute to performance, and choosing the one to work on is easy. The breadth of abilities involved in climbing makes the choice more difficult, and you simply don't have time to work on all of them at once. Identifying, learning about, and monitoring your weak areas constitute half the battle in training. Rapid improvement can come only when you focus your attention on one or two genuine priorities.

Many climbers erroneously assume that the best way to train is to copy what the best climbers are doing. After all, these climbers have tried many different approaches and have presumably chosen the methods that produce the greatest results. But because weaknesses vary with individuals, the specifics of an effective training program also vary.

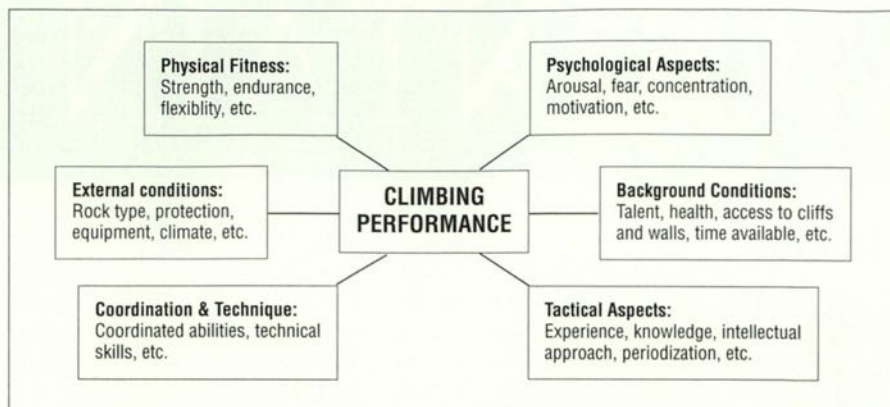
Improving as a climber compares with any project of craftsmanship: desire, ambition, and hard work will be wasted if they are not directed intelligently.

Climbing performance is an expression of the whole person and must be regarded as the sum of many different conditions and abilities. The factors that affect climbing performance fall into six categories (see diagram).

The boundaries between these categories intermingle, and the different categories influence each other. Motivation affects physical strength; protection affects fear; fear affects coordination; and flexibility affects technique.

Coordination

On a good day a climber can report, "It just happened. I didn't really think about what I was doing." In times like that your



body makes clean, crisp moves in ways the rock demands, and it's not a battle. You climb with technique.

On a bad day, climbing can feel like your mind is working excessively and your technique is out to lunch. Paralyzing consideration replaces instinctive action.

Climbing pits your physical resources against gravity. Some climbers use their power and endurance wisely, expending the minimum necessary to accomplish the moves. Others squander twice as much energy as the situation requires.

Foundations of coordination

When a child is learning to ride a bicycle, every aspect of the process engages him mentally, and his movements are rough and jerky. The wobbling child is so mentally involved in just staying balanced that he can barely spare any attention for where he is going or what's happening around him.

After two weeks, however, an incredible change has occurred. The movements are wired and no longer require overpowering mental focus. The child's consciousness is free, and he not only rides smoothly, he negotiates obstacles, plans for upcoming terrain, or even converses while riding. The same task that formerly demanded full mental focus he now performs with awareness to spare.

As climbers, we, too, start out having difficulty moving and an almost overwhelming mental engagement. We spend more time hesitating between jerky moves than we do actually climbing. But transformations like the bicyclist's occur for us too. They allow us not only to move more efficiently, but also to have more free awareness for planning and strategy on a pitch. To understand how such changes occur, we must look at the hidden operators responsible for them: *motor engrams*.

Engrams

At every instant, whether we are moving or not, our brains receive sensory feedback from our limbs. These signals come from nerves in our muscles, tendons,

joints, and skin. They tell the brain about muscle contractions, body positions, and forces acting upon us.

This constant stream of kinesthetic information is the source of our body awareness. The information it conveys, especially that from muscle spindles, allows the brain to oversee and control movement.

Governing every movement involving the body is an extremely complex process. Each of our 425 skeletal muscles needs constantly adjusted instructions from the brain. In first-time-ever movements, the brain does this by monitoring kinesthetic signals, analyzing them, and feeding responses back to the muscles. Because of the amount of information exchange involved, this process pushes the motor area of the brain to its limit. As a result, first-time movements are often stiff and jerky, and the mind feels fully absorbed by the task. Fortunately, the brain learns from experience and has alternatives in controlling movement.

Engrams record and replay

When a climber executes a move, the motion causes a particular sequence of nerve impulses, unique to that specific movement, to occur in the brain. When he repeats the move several times (whether in reality or through accurate mental imagery), the repetition of that pattern of nerve impulses ingrains the movement in memory and causes it to be stored as an "engram."

Since an engram can replace thousands of conscious signals, it frees the brain to work on other issues, and makes more complex movements possible. For example, many dynamic climbing moves require a precise sequential involvement of different muscle groups. Thrust too early with your feet and you won't push in the right direction; thrust too late and the holds will be out of range. In such cases, there's no time for the brain to monitor and give feedback in midcourse. As a result, such moves can be impossible until your body has "learned" an engram for the move and can

do it without thinking along the way.

A climbing route or boulder problem therefore feels much easier after you have done it several times. Each repetition strengthens the engram for that sequence of moves, reducing the conscious monitoring necessary. After extensive practice your body "knows" how to do it. This is why peak performances are characterized by a quiet mind and a sensation that things are accomplished "without thinking." Research confirms that the brain is most active while learning a new skill; using engram control, it does a better job with less work.

Engrams' effectiveness at reproducing the moves they record depends on how recently and frequently they have been used. The more use an engram receives, the better it reproduces its pattern into real movement. The longer it has been since its last use, the rustier it will be.

The inner theater

Shifting to engram control is not a conscious process. Instead, the brain compares kinesthetic information it takes in while climbing to the patterns stored in its engrams. When faced with a crux move, your brain searches for an engram to fit the arrangement of holds before you. Playing different sequence possibilities on its inner stage, the brain compares their kinesthetic "feel" to those of engrams stored in memory. If the sequences are significantly different from the moves stored as engrams, monitoring and constantly adjusted feedback must govern the move.

As long as a route's moves match those in your memory, engram control dominates. Although adjustments to the engrams might be necessary ("sweatier skin today, hold on tighter"), your body runs predominantly on autopilot, and your mind has time for other activities, like thinking of strategies to conserve strength.

Building a repertoire

Few sports demand the variety and precision of movements that climbing does. Running, biking, and rowing all involve the repetition of comparatively few movements. Many sports involving more varied movement don't hinge on their precise execution, so movement training is not of central importance.

In climbing, the summed effect of tiny movement mistakes or inefficiencies adds up fast. The best climber is not necessarily stronger than the rest — he's just the one who makes the fewest movement errors. It's the choice of moves and positions and the speed with which they're chosen that separate climbers.

It nearly always feels like you fall off

because your fingers open or you can't hold the hold. Leaving it at that, however, misses the essence of climbing. Whether your fingers open or not depends on *how* you move and how efficiently you've gotten to where you are on a route.

Like climbing, karate is a sport in which the number of possible moves is nearly unlimited, and strength and precision are critical. Climbers should note that karate practitioners emphasize practicing movement over strength training. In neither sport can one go far by using strength without technique. And in both, a weaker participant with good technique can out-perform a much stronger one.

You can climb nearest to your physical potential when you have the moves down pat. Even when climbing a route for the first time, a vast library of engrams allows you to recognize the moves that a particular arrangement of holds requires, and find an ingrained sequence to match. When proficient on-sight climbers look at a set of holds, their bodies know instantly what to do with them. This skill requires a lot of experience because of the nearly infinite variety of possible moves. The size of holds, their arrangement and facing directions, their texture and friction, and the angle and shape of the wall they're on all vary.

No climber has become good at on-sighting without developing a broad repertoire of moves. As a result, the average age of successful on-sight climbers is high compared with that of top athletes in other sports. (The few young on-sight experts are typically mature as athletes and started at an early age.) Success at difficult redpoints doesn't require as much experience; it reflects the ability to perfect specific movements, rather than the depth of an engram repertoire.

The importance of a vast storehouse of engrams has parallels in other pursuits. World-class chess players spend most of their "training" time learning combinations and positions played at international tournaments. This helps them respond instantly to combinations they recognize before them.

Psychological aspects and engram control

Although the mechanisms described above govern movement, other factors can come into play. Specifically, psychological arousal affects your ability to use your engrams.

Under conditions of stress and arousal, we lose access to all but our most ingrained engrams. We revert to earlier levels of ability when we're nervous, and we sometimes lose coordination when people are watching us.

When the monitor/feedback control of movement jumps in too often, it sug-

gests two possibilities: either you lack engrams for the types of moves you face, or your engrams are failing you due to conditions of stress.

In the first case, you must simply do your homework and practice the techniques you lack to broaden your engram repertoire. In the second, the solution lies either in stress-proofing the engrams you have (covered in part two of this series) or in learning to lower your arousal level.

Techniques such as relaxation and visualization can help curb excessive conscious involvement in climbing movement when your engrams are strong enough to trust. Once you've acquired a repertoire of moves, on-sighting is about letting go. To use your engrams most effectively, you must get out of your mind and let instinct guide you. Even when moves don't come to you, you solve them best and return to engram reliance fastest when you're in a relaxed, calm, and trusting state of mind.

Lactic acid also affects coordination. Although endurance athletes achieve concentrations as high as 20 millimoles per liter of lactic acid in their blood during events, lactic acid begins to impair coordination at just 6 millimoles per liter. As a result, climbers rarely achieve levels significantly above this.

In activities that don't require technical precision (like running), high lactic acid levels don't incapacitate performance until they're sky-high. But for climbing, a small loss of balance, aim, or accuracy can cripple performance. We all experience this loss of coordination when we're pumped. We become clumsy in our movements and fumble with simple tasks.

Keeping this in mind can help you distinguish between shortcomings that are due to engram weaknesses and those that result from lactic acid build up in the blood.

What does all this mean for your training? The physiology behind movement suggests that if you want to improve your technique on rock, you should aim to develop a large inventory of solid engrams.

Remember, climbing is movement dependent and also don't forget to focus your training on your weaknesses. The vast majority of climbers overlook these points and improve slowly if at all. Don't be one of those climbers.

Udo Neumann is a former German national kayaking champion, and a climber of 12 years. He has a masters degree in Training and Movement Science, and coaches world-champion athletes.

Dale Goddard has climbed over a dozen 5.13ds and 5.14as, with his most recent being fast ascents of Blackout (5.14a) and Tweek (5.14a).

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Trading Places

continued from page 69

Siula Grande (6356 meters), big by alpine but not Himalayan standards, attempted but unclimbed. It was 1985. Joe was 25 and Simon 21.

The two pulled off the difficult first ascent, which remains unrepeated. (There have been some attempts, but not lately because of danger from Shining Path terrorists.)

Descending, still high on the north ridge, Simpson found a weakness in an ice cliff and began downclimbing. A seemingly solid axe placement popped on him. Though Yates held his fall, which could have pulled both men off, Simpson hit a slope below, shattering his right knee and ankle. Yates looked down at him pityingly, thinking, "You're fucked, matey. You're dead." It was a bad place for an accident.

But Simpson kept going, and he and Yates fashioned a lowering and following system that got them 3000 feet down the mountain, in a storm, exhausted, Simpson screaming with pain. They were almost to the base when, in the dark, Simpson was lowered over an overhanging ice cliff. The rope ran out with him in midair. He tried to prussik, but his frostbitten hands seized up.

Yates held him for about an hour or an hour and a half but, without anchors, began getting pulled off his snow seat. He couldn't help Simpson anymore. There was no sense in both of them dying.

He cut the rope. The act may be practically unheard-of, but it turned out to be the only way he and Joe ever could have survived.

Simpson plummeted 120 feet, 60 feet of it into an immense crevasse. He landed on a snow bridge. Had he fallen two feet to the side, he'd have sailed on a long way to the bottom. Yates, the next day, shouted into the crevasse, got no answer, and left saddened.

Simpson woke to the realization that he had been left alone, and made a decision. Unable to go up out of the crevasse, he took his rope and rappelled — purposely not tying a knot in the end of the rope, so that if he reached nothing, his finish would be mercifully quick.

The rest of the story is how Simpson

got himself out and then dragged himself over miles of jagged glacial moraine. All the while a dreadful tension plagued him: he knew he might miss his friends, but was unable to speed up. A "lapsed Catholic," he was relieved to find that he didn't pray for help.

When he reached the camp, he had lost some 45 pounds — 40 percent of his total weight of about 140.

"By the time Peru happened I was a pretty experienced accident happenner," he comments now. "If it had happened when I was 21 I'd have probably died."

At home again, he suffered endless complications with his knee. His leg would hardly bend, and the doctors wanted to fuse it. "We recommend you live a sedentary life," they said.

The home grapevine, meanwhile, was jumping. Simpson felt that Yates had *saved* his life by getting him down the mountain in the first place. But Yates's further actions are only understandable in the context of the whole story, and various versions were circulating.

One day, Simpson and Yates were sitting in the cafe at the crag Stony Middleton when they heard a table of climbers talking. "They started slaughtering Simon," says Simpson. "Did you hear about those idiots down in Peru? Can you believe he cut the rope?" Simpson was furious, ready to fight. Yates just laughed, but weakly.

At that time, Simpson was also depressed, though he gets a little edgy being pressed about it. He'd started out to be a climber; he'd longed to be a great one. "I wanted to do so many things in climbing," he says. "Now I think I probably wouldn't have been capable of them, but I wouldn't have minded finding out."

Finally, three years after the accident, Simpson wrote *Touching the Void*, after Stephenson came up with the idea of a book one night in a pub. Simpson hoped both that it would be a release and that he could vindicate Yates. He wrote it while living at Stephenson's, in a space he hacked out in the crozzly walled, slope-ceilinged attic.

Simpson finished the book in a blazing seven weeks. He talked to Yates and

wrote the sections that appear in the latter's voice, though most readers don't realize that. It is explained briefly in the foreword.

Writing the book wasn't, though, a relief, because it made him remember in great detail things he'd shelved. "I freaked out, not scared of the idea of being dead, just remembering what it was like," he says. "If you think it would be awful, that wouldn't be half as bad as it was."

Asked now about insights gained from the experience, he clams up. "There are no insights except crawling on a broken leg is terribly painful," Simpson says. Then, "Perhaps I don't want to share my insights because they terrify me. There are a lot of *what ifs*. If I follow those questions down the line, it scares the shit out of me, it takes me back to that." At another time, though, he talks about his amazement at the unknown strength of the human body, of what it can do when pushed.

Touching the Void, published by Jonathan Cape, came out in the summer of 1988 and took flight. Hundreds of thousands of copies have now sold, 20,000 hardback copies and 80,000 paperbacks in the U.K. alone.

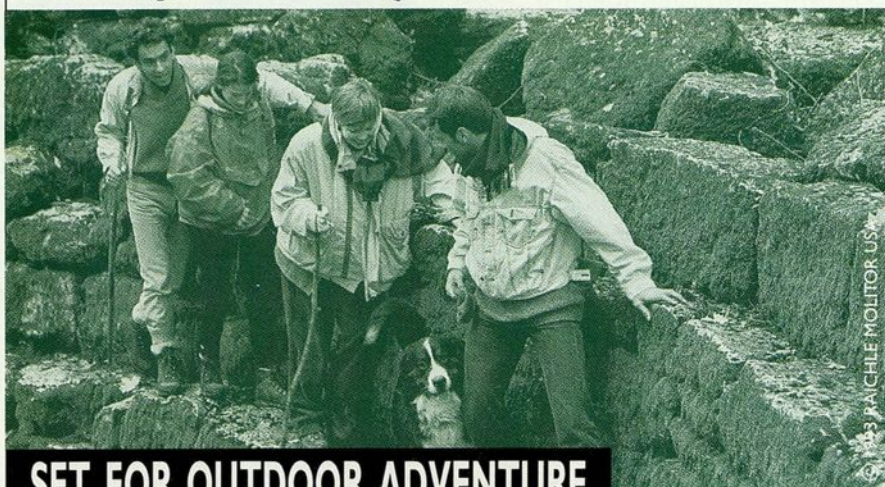
The book won the Boardman Tasker Award for Mountaineering Literature in 1989, and in 1990, the biggest book award in the U.K., the NCR award for the best new non-fiction book. The NCR (National Cash Register) award was worth some \$37,000 tax-free. Harper and Row gave Simpson a \$75,000 advance for rights in America.

The book has been translated into 13 languages; it's the only book Cape has ever had come out in Korean. At present it is on its eighth reprint in Holland, where it has sold 40,000 copies.

People were able to take something from the book they could put back into their own lives. Vivian Smith, a teacher in Sheffield, read it the night before entering surgery for breast cancer. She says, "I went into surgery knowing I could withstand it."

Simpson, though, thinks her ordeal was worse than his, because she had to contemplate it, whereas his accident just happened to him.

"The funny thing is when [something bad] happens to you, it's very matter-of-fact," he muses. "[Then when] it's in the past, it doesn't exist for you anymore."



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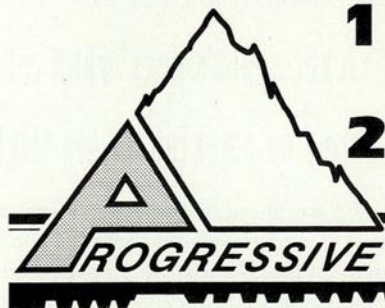
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The terror, the emotion, is gone. If we maintained it we'd all be bloody mad. The weird thing is I've created this bloody book that keeps it alive."

After several days of talks, Simpson offers the notion that the memory of pain seems to fade quickly, but not that of loneliness. He explicates the most painful effect of the Peru experience. "I've never been lonely like that," he says. "I never ever want to be like that again."

People often ask him why, since he was pretty much convinced he was going to die, he went through so much pain by dragging himself off the mountain. He usually flips off, "It takes a pretty long time to die of a broken leg — it'd be pretty boring."

"The reality," he says now at his table, his face set and voice measured, "was the loneliness was making me do it. I was crawling to meet someone. If I was going to die, I'd do anything to die with someone. Basically, I crawled all that way for a hand hold."

The traces remain, psychic vestiges. No matter what he might ever earn, Simpson has no interest in moving from Sheffield to, say, some country home: "What? On me own?"

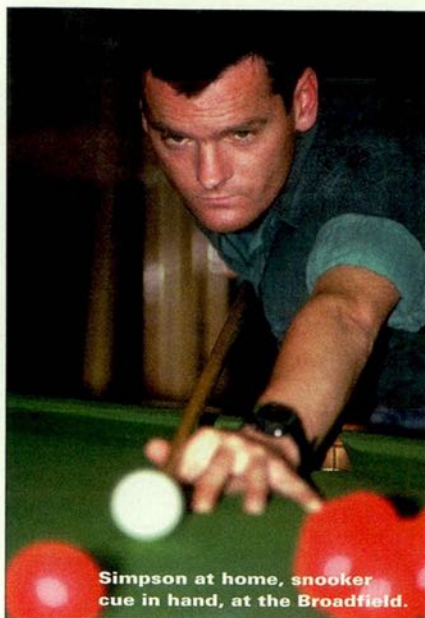
Writers have a solitary profession, with little attendant feedback, and Simpson in particular requires his evenings out. Traveling for a slide-show tour, he'll be haunting cafes during the day. He's his own worst company: "I don't like being lonely," he says.

The Simpson compound, though, contains a robust infusion of independence. He seems quite content living on his own, and sees Jackie Newbold, who lives in another town, on weekends.

Newbold is warm, frank, and jokey, a mother of two, with blonde hair piled in deliberate disarray and beautiful eyes the color of sun-bleached denim. When she and Simpson are together they always laugh. She also has her fiery side, and says pertly that when she feels like it, "I tell Joe to shut up."

He plans never to have children, though, as Newbold has said, "He was thrilled" when asked to be godfather to his sister Sarah's newborn.

"I'm terrified of the responsibility," he says. "If I had a child I would love it to death and change my life." He doesn't want to find himself thinking



Simpson at home, snooker cue in hand, at the Broadfield.

When he digs in on a point of view or in any kind of acrimonious exchange, you can virtually see the steel trap come down over his face. It's no problem to imagine Simpson doing the kinds of things he has: cussing a prospective employer out, stomping off; slamming down a phone, intending never to speak to someone again; or banging his fist down on a ticket agent's desk when told there's no smoking on his flight.

some day about all the things, especially climbs and travel, he could have done otherwise. "I think I'm probably wrong," he adds unexpectedly. "I sort of hope I'm wrong."

After *Touching the Void*, Simpson didn't write for four years. He didn't know what to write. He could certainly never write *that* book again.

He began to feel a fraud, at both writing and climbing. It was odd to become well known not for climbing accomplishments, as he'd dreamed of, but "a big cock-up." He still saw himself as a climber, not a writer, but now he couldn't climb. He also couldn't understand why he had survived, when many of his friends hadn't. "I was absolutely guilty and absolutely livid," he sums it up.

In the end, it wasn't the experience he'd undergone that changed him deeply, but writing. Before *Touching the Void*, Simpson was a punk. He was on the dole. He'd never had a real job, never had a mortgage, never filled out a tax form.

The book's success terrified him. It also forced him to be responsible in ways he never had before. Two other things happened, the first being that his friend Richard Haszko got him to go on an expedition to the mountain Tupodam in Pakistan.

Haszko says he talked Joe into seeing that it was "stupid" to stay away from the mountains. "He was stressed, drinking too much, and getting very grumpy. I thought it'd be a good idea for him to go back." The two have now been on three expeditions together.

On the emancipating initial journey, Simpson was joyful and relieved to find he still loved the mountains. If they had seemed only dangerous to him, then all his experiences, from bad to wonderful, and the deaths of so many friends, would have lost their meaning.

"On the first trip I didn't know how to handle him," Haszko continues. "I wasn't used to people so open and up front about feelings and things. It's not generally done in Britain. I got used to it. It might cause a bit of a fight but it does clear the air."

One person has described Simpson as a "cold fish," and he certainly can be formidable, but the first thing Haszko says is, "He has a deep, deep kindness and humanity. He's very caring. If there's something wrong, he'll really try

to find out what it is and do something about it. If you're a friend, you know he'll do anything for you."

Haszko adds quite willingly that on another trip, to Gangchempo in March, Simpson "drove everybody mad, [with his] terrible frustration. He was so terribly unrelaxed." The cartilage in Simpson's "good" (left) knee had become damaged from walking on the weakened ankle, but he wouldn't use ski poles to help him walk until his friends bullied him into it.

The second good thing that happened was that Simpson dared to follow *Touching the Void*, which had come to seem a burden, with another book, a novel. He hoped a novel would be less subject to comparisons. He felt better as soon as he decided to write it.

The Water People, which came out last year and has sold 4000 hardback copies so far, is a densely written, metaphor-laced tale of spiritual quest and the mystic power of water. It is centered around two climbers visiting the Garwhal Himalaya, although there's actually little climbing in it.

Some scenes Simpson wrote from his recollections of bazaars, mountains, and rivers. His visual memory is superb, though he calls his memory in general "appalling" — he writes appointments down in his diary, but then forgets to read it. Details from some of the 18 "direct actions" he and Stephenson have done for Greenpeace found their way into the pages. So did the avalanche in the Alps.

He took long walks with his friend Tom Richardson, talking about ideas, many of which ended up on the pages. He started taking notes, thinking about images, and doing character studies. In order to set his opening scene in a cemetery, an idea he got from a climber who had worked as a gravedigger (he thinks it was Simon, but can't remember), he spent time in nearby Norton Cemetery talking to gravediggers about details. He was looking at his whole world as differently as a tourist and a climber would each see a mountain. One would appreciate the sight; the other would do that, but also see routes and lines.

Simpson thought about the book for 18 months and wrote it in 11 weeks. Midway, though, he went to Nepal and got smashed up.

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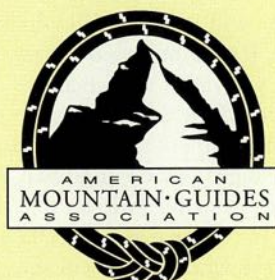
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Though he had been quite convinced he'd never again attempt a two-man ascent as hard as Siula Grande, in early 1991 Simpson and Mal Duff finished the first ascent of the East Face of Pachermo (6200 meters) in Nepal. Descending a steep nevé slope to a col 2000 feet below, Duff fell when the defective toe bar of his crampon (from a batch recalled after the men left for Nepal) came apart. Simpson was yanked off from above.

Hitting ramps and flying over seracs, Duff and Simpson passed each other, then passed each other again. Simpson thought for sure he'd had it: after Peru he had always told himself, "If you have another do, you're *stuffed*."

He tried to self-arrest, knowing it probably wouldn't work. The axe banged back out into his face, knocking him cold. Duff thunked to the base of a 15-foot cliff. In that pause, he dug in his axe, lay on it, and put an end to his friend's 500-foot fall.

Simpson woke, bloody face frozen to the snow slope, the ankle bones of his left leg rasping; his concussed brain at first thought he was back in Peru. Then he stood, set his face in a grimace he knew, and kicked his good foot into the ice. Struggling up the slope, he lay down and was nearly lost. He doesn't remember what happened next, but he either became angry or his pre-conditioned mind hung on to a familiar idea: don't give up.

He reached Duff, who saw his ripped nose and the gaping hole above his eye, and thought he'd lost the eye. Said the Scotsman, "You've had a wee knock."

Simpson almost died in the storm that night, but Duff put up a tent and kept him hydrated, warm, and alive. Later, in camp, Simpson took a teaspoon and scraped out the contact lenses he'd been wearing for four days, looked in a mirror and saw his milky-looking eye. "Malc, it's blind!" he said. Answered Duff, "Ah, you've got the other."

In Kathmandu, Simpson went to a clinic for preliminary medical attention, and had a big night on the town with an Irish friend, Con Moriarty, who happened by. It culminated in a 3:00 a.m. rickshaw race with two Americans. The teams were hub to hub when Simpson

clipped the nearest American in the noggin with a crutch, zooming away as the man howled, fell out, and was run over by his rickshaw. One night with Moriarty washed away Simpson's post-accident depression.

He arrived (hung over) back in England, six days after his accident, and was met at the airport by Newbold. They hugged and cried. Then they dodged the waiting ambulance so that Simpson, in his crusty stitches and bandages, could go to a party. The hospital could wait one more night.

Although Pachermo didn't affect the ending of *The Water People*, a trip to Pumori in Nepal later that same year changed things.

Simpson's ankle turned out to be too unstable to climb on, though he reached 20,500 feet on crutches. But while he was on the mountain, an Icelandic friend, climbing as a memorial to two other friends who had died there, was killed. "That actually really fucked me up," Simpson says. He came home thinking what he never would have believed he'd feel: "This is a waste."

He finally decided he couldn't believe that — there had to be more to it all. The result, after nine months of writing, was a book celebrating climbers and their brilliant climbs.

These days Simpson is a busy man. In the week I'm there, he's wrapping up *This Game of Ghosts*, he gets a request for a lecture (he still does four or five a year, for about \$1200 each); he tracks down a photo credit; he sells the rights to a film on *Touching the Void* (for the third time; he expects it to come to nothing); he gets, and accepts, an invitation from Duff to go to Cho Oyu next spring.

When he's writing a book, he is very disciplined. His rule is to do 2000 words a day. Afterwards, a good rock climber, he also might go out to the crags for a couple of hours.

Also while I'm there, three injuries act up — his eye, from Pachermo; his neck, which requires physical therapy (Pachermo again); the bad "good" knee. "Ow! Christ!" he yells while running up the stairs to get the phone. He generally

goes to the gym several times a week to try to build up his legs' connections.

People think Simpson has made more money than he has, and note that he could have flashed it around more but didn't. Actually, as he points out, if you divvy his take over time spent writing and years, it comes out to a moderate yearly salary.

His attitude toward being an author seems more street-smart than high-minded. Though Simpson didn't expect *Touching the Void* to make any money, he says he now writes for that reason. "I'm just talking about making a living. I have a mortgage to pay and a dog to feed and a very expensive beer habit."

Writing got him a house; it takes him to do climbs. Though he expects never to climb the way he used to — "I climb in a blue funk half the time now" — he has tentatively planned many trips, aside from Cho Oyu, for the next two years: to Huascaran and Alpamayo, Peru; Cotapaxi and Chimborazi, Ecuador; Khan Tengri, Tien Shan; and the Diamond Couloir, Mount Kenya. He spends up to five months a year away climbing. Over the years he has made 10 expeditions to the greater ranges.

Driving in his car on the way to the Brincliff one day for his midday lunch, pints, and pinball, he says that before he became a writer, he thought the craft meant starving in a garret, committing suicide because one can't get published, etc. — ideas he finds ridiculous. "A book is only a book," he says. "It's not as important as having a baby or surviving to live the rest of your life."

Richard Haszko says that these days Joe Simpson is "mellower, quieter. There's still a degree of anger about what's happened, at the bad luck. You can understand one thing going wrong, but so many things?"

Simpson's not plagued by the old guilt, though, because he's finally accepted that he *is* a writer, even before a climber. He likes writing, likes trying to do his best at it; he has also gotten used to doing something, and gets pissed off when he isn't. And though he could keep on writing climbing books, he wants to do the harder thing, trying to write mainstream fiction. His next novel is to be about a street kid in Peru, and to contain no climbing. He's practical, of course. Though he supports

Amnesty International, the novel is not meant to be a social crusade: "I just think it's a good story."

One day I ask whether, if he had it all to do again, he would let things happen the same. What I'm really asking is whether he would have stayed home from Peru, which brought both disaster and vast success.

He's pulling his car, a Cavalier convertible he bought since *Touching the Void* came out, out of a parking area near Abbeydale Wood. He inclines his head slowly to look in the rearview mirror. "Two years ago, I'd have said no," he answers. "I can't say for sure now. I can't say for sure a-tall." It's a crazy question, he says, since no one is given such choices. He struggles, kind of wanting to say yes. "I wouldn't want to go through that again," he finally says. "No, I wouldn't want to."

He's frowning, distracted, unsatisfied. But then, it is a crazy question.

A few years ago a big morning talk show contacted Simpson for a prime-time interview about *Touching the Void*. He would get to talk about his book; he would get to sit on the couch next to the randy-looking female rock star Kim Wilde. The show sent a taxi at dawn from London, three hours away, to fetch him.

Simpson, though, had been up until three. The taxi driver couldn't rouse him, and left.

The phone rang.

"May I speak to Mr. Simpson?"

Foggy with the night's recreation, he said, "This is Mr. Simpson."

"This is [name] at the BBC. You're supposed to be here."

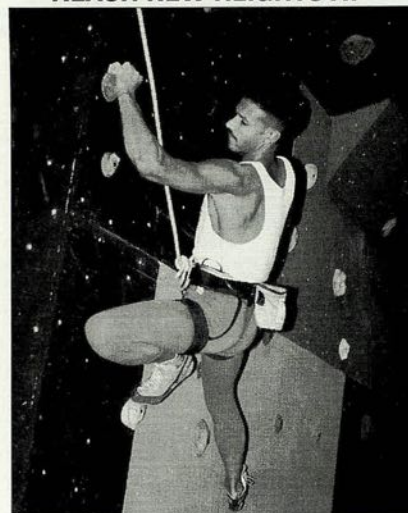
"Oh, shit!"

"Yes. Quite."

He'd missed the prime-time slot, but the station arranged for him to go instead to Manchester and do an interview in an empty room with a monitor. He appeared on TV sets across the land green-faced, unshaven, his long hair mashed to one side of his head. He did not meet Kim. "I hadn't yet decided to be a writer," he explains the situation. "I wouldn't do that today. Well, yes I would. But I'd set the alarm."

Alison Osius is the senior editor of Climbing.

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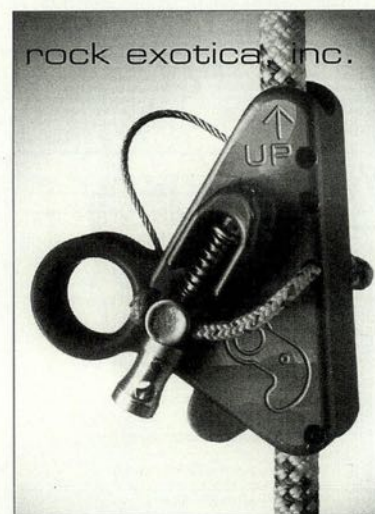
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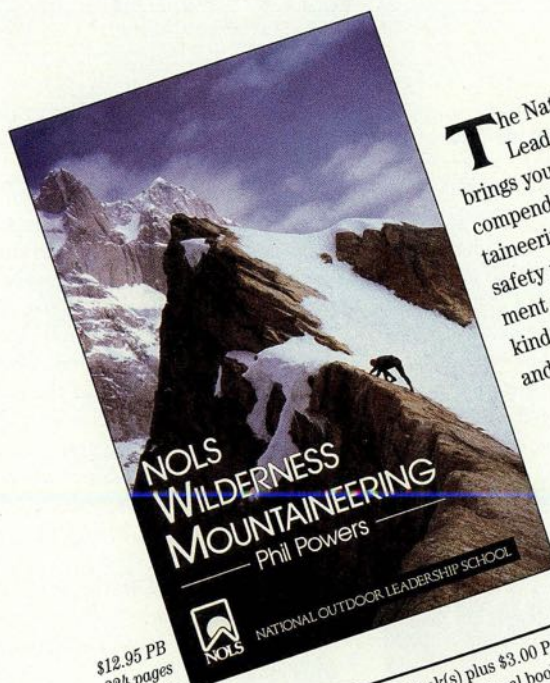
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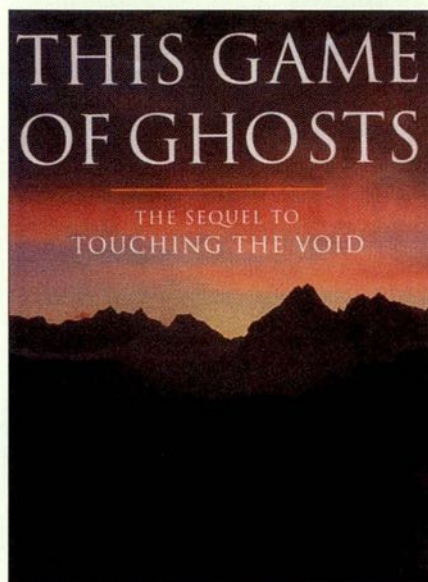
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This Game of Ghosts: The Sequel to Touching the Void

Joe Simpson
Jonathan Cape, London
Hardcover, £16.99, 319 pp.

I was cordless, fooled by a moderate rating into thinking this would be an enjoyable solo, on a greasy mantel 300 feet off the ground. It would be so easy to slip. My mind wasn't focused on the move; instead it fed me images of Derek crumpled at the base of Sentinel, and of myself slipping off, accelerating, and taking one big bounce on



my way to the deck. "Would I be conscious when I hit," I asked myself. I struggled through the move in poor style, and for the rest of the day was plagued by thoughts of how stupid I had been: I should have backed off, I should never have gone up, just what the hell was I trying to prove ...

Experiences like these make one question the risks he takes while pursuing the sport of climbing. *This Game of Ghosts*, the autobiography of Joe Simpson, is a book about such thoughts and the intense experiences that brought them on. The book is not so much about why we climb — Simpson can't answer that for himself, much less the rest of us — but why we take such risks for such fleeting rewards. Simpson's friends and acquaintances drop one by one throughout the book, each time making Simpson wonder why. The death toll includes not just his friends, but his heroes too. Nobody seems immune as a generation of great British mountaineers is decimated: Peter Tasker, Peter Boardman, Al Rouse, Roger Baxter Jones, Alex MacIntyre, the list goes

on and on. Simpson ponders all the deaths, analyzes the mistakes, and catalogs the lessons learned.

Joe Simpson was an unknown name to most of the climbing world until he wrote *Touching the Void*. In it he told the story of this accident on Peru's Suila Grande; his partner being forced to cut the rope; Simpson disappearing into a crevasse, doubtless to his death, then crawling into camp days later more dead than alive. The book was an instant classic, and if you haven't read it yet, I suggest you do before reading *This Game of Ghosts*. *Touching the Void* gave Simpson immediate celebrity in climbing circles and beyond. Nevertheless, the Suila Grande epic is only one of many he has survived. Were he a cat, Simpson would be long dead.

This Game of Ghosts starts with Simpson's childhood. When he shoves his sister's nose into a burning lightbulb, one's reminded of the famous American Simpson, Bart. And like Bart, Joe gets banged up a lot (one tricycle ride teaches him why they call them a *flight* of stairs). Simpson seeks adventure, and as long as he chooses his own risks he can control his fears. Sometimes the situation gets out of control, as when he's cornered in the men's room by a stranger bent on abuse, and for the first time becomes deeply scared. It's not the last time he will experience such fear.

At age 14, Simpson takes up climbing. Never big enough to excel at team sports, he falls in love with climbing. When he gets into college, his cockiness and over-ambition get him in trouble, e.g. a big leader fall while attempting his first Grade IV ice lead, beginning Simpson's rash of climbing injuries.

Next Simpson takes on the Alps, and starts building up a respectable resume of ticks. He begins to question his motivation: "The truth seemed uncomfortably egotistical. I wanted to do only hard climbs, great north faces, impressive and daunting rock routes. I wanted a 'tick list' of hard routes under my belt. I wanted to be a great climber, craved the false glory that I thought went with being a 'hardman' ... I persuaded myself I climbed because the routes were good, so aesthetically beautiful, and so fine ... it cozily covered the real reasons ..."

In the Alps, Simpson survives two harrowing accidents: a 3200-foot fall while descending the Courtes; and the collapse of a bivy ledge on the Dru, which left his ropes slashed and him and his partner

stranded on a manky anchor, waiting overnight for a helicopter rescue.

Also in the Alps, Simpson is introduced to death. "I didn't know it then," Simpson writes, "but the attrition had begun ... I was saddened by Pete's death and shocked by how quickly I accepted it. Once I knew how he had died it seemed I could accept it and shelve the memory away as a lesson learned. 'Always wear a helmet.'"

Once the attrition begins, it doesn't stop.

After the Alps, Simpson goes to Peru, intent on doing his first first ascent. He glosses over the *Touching the Void* story, having written it before. The book's success makes Simpson an instant celebrity. Life is out of control: TV appearances, radio interviews, awards ceremonies, jetlag, and hangovers — even his new income makes him uncomfortable. (He no longer qualifies for the dole, "Her Majesty's Climbing Grant," the time-honored means of support for his generation of climbers.)

He finds solace back in the mountains, this time the Himalaya. But soon the itch to do another first ascent returns. Again another huge fall, this one pulverizing the ankle on his good leg, and another epic rescue. More thoughts and doubts.

Simpson's blow-by-blow account of each climb is well-written, can't-put-the-book-down stuff. After each death and near miss — there's no shortage of either in this book — he philosophizes about why. Why do we climb? Why do we take such risks? Why me? He keeps each discussion concise, and even if he continually brings up the same unanswerable questions, it never gets boring. Simpson has had more occasion to think about such matters than most climbers.

This Game of Ghosts is honest. Simpson doesn't portray himself as a hero, but admits to feelings that most of us have, but few would confess to. When threatened by thugs at a party, he's presented with a chance to coldcock the bully, but flinches. "I lacked that hardness, the vicious killer instinct, that made a fighter win. Don't imagine the consequences, don't care or even think about them, only be hard and fast and ferocious. I couldn't be like that. Instead I stood helplessly and watched the little man terrorize Nick. I felt relieved, almost glad, that it was Nick who would get stabbed and not me." In another passage, after his fall on Pachermo has dashed his hopes of climbing Pumori, he writes: "I was seething with frustration and anger ... It was yet another cruel unfair blow. *Why hadn't it been Mal* [Simpson's partner]

who had been hurt on Pachermo?"

Simpson describes shame, self-pity, jealousy, and cowardice. By being honest with himself, he gains the trust, if not the admiration, of the reader.

When I read Diemberger's *Summits and Secrets*, I felt almost guilty going up into the mountains — how could I love them as much as Diemberger? How could I be worthy of them? I was inspired, yet felt overwhelmed and inadequate. When approaching the Dru, Simpson compares his own motivation with Bonatti's and has similar feelings of shame. Most climbers, if they're honest, will relate more to Simpson than to those who present a heroic facade; *This Game of Ghosts* has a veracity rare in mountain writing.

The book has its weak spots. The beginning is slow, chronicling ancestors who died before he was born, and historic events that I doubt had much influence on his life (e.g. JFK being assassinated when Joe was three years old). Simpson's writing from the rescuer's point of view of the Dru accident is merely confusing. As an autobiography *Ghosts* lacks detail on his life outside of climbing and writing, except for the anecdotes about non-climbing accidents or Greenpeace protests. One is left with the conclusion that when he isn't climbing, writing, or having his legs operated on, Joe Simpson is just boozing it up and chain-smoking. Maybe this is the case. If so, say so.

Overall this is a great book — the most thought-provoking piece of climbing writing I've read since *The Endless Knot*, and perhaps the most honest bit of climbing writing I have ever read. If you need inspiration to go climbing, pick up *The White Spider* or *Nanga Parbat Pilgrimage* and feast on the heroics. If you're after the true grit of climbing — the beauty, the horror, and the ugly truth — then pick up *This Game of Ghosts*.

— John Sherman

Editor's note: *This Game of Ghosts* is being considered for the Boardman Tasker award, the third of Simpson's three books to be short-listed for that coveted British mountaineering-literature prize. Among the other finalists is American author Jeff Long's *The Ascent*. Winners will be announced in mid-October.

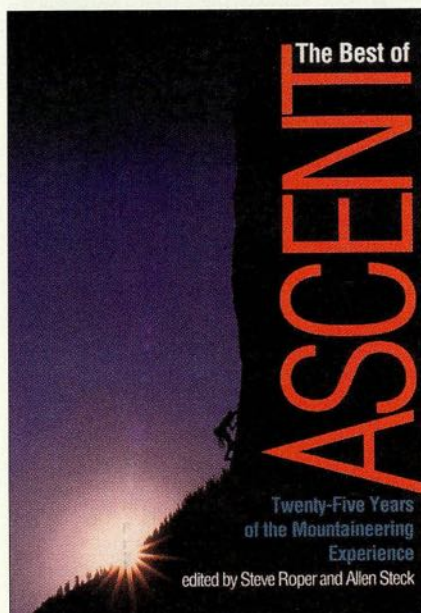
The Best of Ascent: Twenty-Five Years of the Mountaineering Experience

Edited by Steve Roper and Allen Steck
Sierra Club Books
Hardcover, \$25, 384 pp.

Ah, the climber's life. How often have those of us trapped in less mythical

lifestyles fantasized such an existence, in moments of guileless self-absorption imagining ourselves shucking the job, crapping out on the responsibilities and pretensions, and heading for the hills with an open itinerary of desires? Never mind that reality usually plays poor foil to myth; these are persistent dreams.

In the majority of our lucid hours, however, we employ substitutes, and for over 25 years, *Ascent* has proved one grand substitute, managing in its distinctive and evolutionary style to capture "the mountaineering experience in word and image." Its tireless editors, Steve Roper and Allen Steck, have transformed a California periodical into a respected North American quadrennial with a reputation for presenting the best of current mountaineering literature — solid, entertaining, and thought-provoking reads that measure the pulse of our sport. This latest edition,



The Best of Ascent, looks back on all that, intending to recall the best of the best.

As the selections for this edition demonstrate, *Ascent* has never shied away from either the controversial ("Who Needs the A.A.C?" by Chris Jones) or the self-critical ("Patey Agonistes" by Dave Roberts). The visionary element has always been given its due ("Climbing As Art" by Harold Drasdo) and the crazy aunt in climbing literature's attic — fiction — acknowledged ("The Rock Gods" by Joe Kelsey). *The Best of Ascent* reaffirms its station as a respected forum for ideas and experiences.

Twenty-seven reprints and eight new selections (six of them short stories) should provide enough heft and variety for *Ascent* devotees. The articles are thematically and chronologically arranged in

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sections that share either topical or geographical subject matter. The Reflections and Polemics section, for instance, serves up ruminations and harangues on the perennial issues of how we should climb, why we should climb, and what we should say about ourselves climbing. From Warren Harding's "Reflections of a Broken-Down Climber" to Tom Higgins' critical look at contrasting climbing styles, subjects range from the farcical to the impassioned.

Another section, In the Vertical World, focuses on the Yosemite phenomena. Again, a good mix. Two Royal Robbins confessional classics ("The West Wall" and "Tis-sa-ack") are balanced by Eric Sanford's irreverent, stream-of-consciousness jab at the hey-day Valley scene ("Spring Weekend Love Affair") and Dick Shockley's high-wall adventure ("Cruising Up the Salathe Wall") with its memorable laundry list of climbing epigrams, from "cruise or bruise" to "summit or plummet."

In Ninth Highest, the editors suggest an American preoccupation with Dhaulagiri. (I always thought K2 was the "American's mountain.") James Janny's meditation on the tragic 1969 expedition still reads well, as does the Harvard/Thompson report about failure on the southeast ridge. Kitty Calhoun Grissom updates the fascination with a previously unpublished account of an aborted east face attempt.

Ascent's taste in humor has always run more toward the wry and satiric than the ribald or self-deprecating forms popular with American climber/writers. As a result, the collection is weak on humor. A Sense of Whimsey serves up divergent accounts of a Brazilian rock climb ("Dedo de Deus" by Malcolm Slesser and E.J. Henley), a medical officer's encounter with Kathmandu pharmacology ("Drugs in Himalaya" by Drummond Rennie), and some questionable black humor on the underside of the 1970s' outdoor craze. The best is last: Eric Sanford collides with the West Buttress scene ("Roughing It On Denali") in a softly sardonic style reminiscent of Tom Patey.

Forays into Fiction, four short stories, proves there is sometimes truth in advertising. Authors of climbing short fiction have long written as though conducting raids into enemy territory, coming away with various booty from the literary landscape, but seldom capturing its soul. So it is true here, where admittedly well-crafted and well-executed selections ("Rojo's Peon," "Icarus," and "The Rock Gods") are nevertheless limited by formula themes or seduced by futurism. Jeff Long's "The Soloist," an inner tale of passions and curses, manages by polish and vision

to evade the surrealist trap that has snared many other writers.

Truly, the best of *The Best* is contained in Cold Ridges, Warm Sandstone. Four engaging reprints prove that experiential writing is the American climber's forte. We're treated to Allen Steck's impressionistic account of a historic Mount Logan climb ("Ascent of Hummingbird Ridge"), where he discovers what we all suspect is often true of the climbing experience: "One should not probe for deeper meaning." Galen Rowell travels further north in his candid portrayal of fear and doubt on a dangerous route ("Mt. Dickey"), and John Waterman probes near-death, friendship, and an aftermath, in "Aurora," the first winter ascent of the Cassin Ridge. As a counterpoint to snow and altitude, Chuck Pratt's "The View From Deadhorse Point" presents an episodic montage of desert climbing, written with rebel undertones and a touch of melancholy for an era sensed ending. These pieces exemplify what many readers consider *Ascent*.

Fiction, criticism, trip accounts, introspective essays — *The Best of Ascent* offers something for everyone. Two tactical decisions, however, compromise the book's "best" moniker. In the first instance, the editors have chosen to select the majority of articles from "ancient out-of-print issues." This is a well-intentioned and charitable gesture for those of us without either complete *Ascent* sets or the slush fund to purchase used copies (they *are* expensive), but it denies space to pieces otherwise worthy of inclusion. For instance, Giusto Gervasutti's "A Moment of Suspense," a reprint of a reprint that now appears in book form, might have been left out to make room for Jeff Long's intriguing 1980 treatment of building, a historically important article reflecting the beginnings of artificial-wall and sport climbing. In several instances, Steck and Roper's criteria for inclusion — "timeless" and "memorable" — were not rigorously applied.

The editors have also continued a commitment to climbing fiction by devoting an entire section — In Defiance of Reality — to new, unpublished short stories. Laudable, yes, especially given the currently constricted market for this difficult, underdeveloped sub-genre of climbing literature. Still, the section seems oddly out of place in a "best-of" book, and the stories suffer an overemphasis upon the surreal and science fiction. With a few exceptions, writers of climbing fiction have not yet discovered that it is within the ordinariness of human behavior that the extraordinary lies, typically aiming for glamour and

action at the expense of truth and meaning. One exception is Steve Jervis' disturbing story of a climber's gradual alienation in, "Taking Off."

Disagreement over selections remains, of course, the editor's equivalent of death and taxes — inescapable. This is still one of the most inclusive and current statements about the nature of our sport, a must book for any climber's collection. But it does raise several important questions: How have Steck and Roper managed to keep it going all these years? And, how long will these guys continue producing *Ascents* that give us opportunities to celebrate ourselves and rake each other over the coals with equal enthusiasm?

Long enough for *The Best of Ascent II*, let's hope.

— Jim Vermeulen

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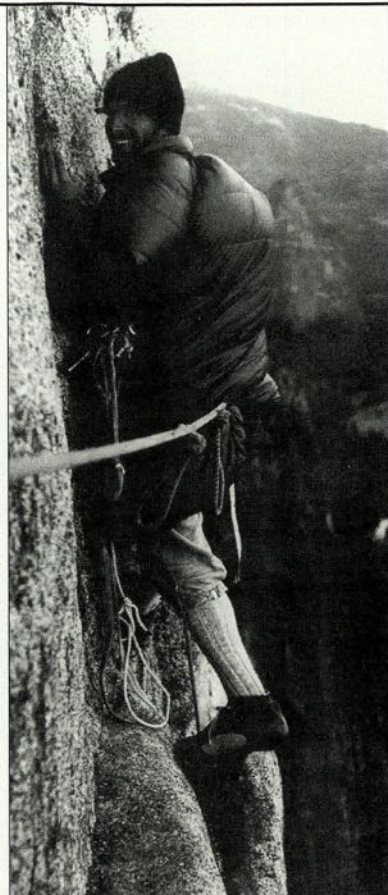
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Tales from the Grippped

continued from page 76

THE POPULARITY OF THE MOAB AREA HAD SPREAD LIKE A CANCER,
AND ONION CREEK HAD BEEN "DISCOVERED" BY THE HOI POLLOI ...

LITTLE TP PRAYER FLAGS FLUTTERED IN THE BUSHES —

SIGNS OF THE REVERENCE JOE SIXPACK PAYS THE WILDERNESS.

hour of pounding wouldn't get it out. Half a year of erosion probably will.

We were keeping the same pace as the first ascent — 100 feet per day. In the guidebook, the Citadel is listed as Grade V, even though it is only 400 feet tall. At the rate we were going, it would be a Grade VI. Every bit of work done by the first-ascent party had to be redone. The old pin scars and bat-hook holes had long since eroded away, and only a handful of original bolts still supported body weight.

Day three on the Citadel. We started up the fixed lines early — the thermometer read a mere 95 degrees. The long summit pitch was mine, the endless belay session Rob's. The first 80 feet was mostly putting in rivets, the only fun coming when I plucked out the old bolts — some in only a quarter inch — with my fingers.

I reached a shoulder on the arete and balanced across a doormat-width mud gangplank to the final headwall. Sheer walls dropped away on either side. If the ridge should crumble, I thought, I have to fling myself over the opposite side, so the rope would catch me. At the base of the headwall, I clipped the old bolt anchor, gratefully. I had plenty of rope left so, after hauling up some water, kept going.

Above, the rock was so decomposed that it was turning into mud in situ. I went to work on a 3/4-inch crack. A few taps sent in a one-inch angle. Fingers pulled it out. Ditto for the inch-and-a-half. Ditto for the two-inch. Ditto for the three-inch bong. Now I had a fist-sized hole in the crack pouring sand. I might as well have been nailing a giant sugar cube.

Twenty-five feet up was a three-bolt ladder to the solid capstone summit crack. The only way up would be to nail the mud curtain. I grabbed the three-

inch Longware bong, a historic borrowed piece of iron, angled it down slightly, and pounded it in until only the sling on the eye poked out through the mud. It went in like a dull knife punched into a jack-o-lantern.

Pounding in the next bong, I could feel the whole curtain shake. I returned to the ridge to test it, a pattern I would keep up as long as my chain of aiders would reach.

The line went straight up, and a fall would certainly intercept the ridge; I would end up either draped and broken over it, or pound onto it then fly down the exposed face on the right or ricochet down the steep flute on the left.

The last 12 feet had taken four hours. I had drained the water bottle at the ridge. We had enough light to make the summit, but I didn't have enough nerves left. In my exhausted and dehydrated state, it would be easy to make a mistake. Day three ended 20 feet shy of the top.

The next day I went back up, shoving a few of the placements back in with my hands. Soon I was grabbing the rappel slings snaking through the crack at the summit. They came free in my hands, rotted through by 23 years of sunshine and wind.

As Rob pulled over the lip, he declared it the coolest summit in the desert. Just like he had with the Doric Column. Just like he had on every spire he'd climbed. We sent the temptingest trundle in celebration.

We had run out of time. The Gothic Nightmare would have to wait for another trip.

Eleven months later it was a race. With the exception of the Titan, the Fisher Towers had been virtually ignored for two decades. Now

they had become trendy among some of the Boulder crowd. Rob had ticked nearly every Fisher Tower in the guide, and in his outspoken way, had declared his intention to be first to top them all. Others soon declared their intention to beat Rob, then begged him for Beta and pin lists. "The race will be over when I finish," was all Rob would tell them, "no sooner."

I just wanted to do the three Mystery Towers and in the process settle my score with the Gothic, preferably with the second ascent.

Rob had been in the Fishers every weekend for four months. Loyal to The Team, he had been saving the Gothic to do with me. Our experience on the Citadel convinced us this would be more than a weekend project, and Rob had a Monday-through-Friday job. Hence we extended honorary Team membership to Mike O'Donnell, Rob's *Sea Of Dreams* partner: a soft-spoken, red-haired brute from Boulder with a list of wild escapades rivaled by few, including a failed attempt at the Gothic in which an expanding flake both he and I had nailed came loose on its own, fell 25 feet, clocked the retreating Mike in the head, and split his helmet from one end to the other. Mike and I would fix up to the summit ridge, then Rob would meet us and triumphantly lead to the top.

The changes a year makes. The popularity of the Moab area had spread like a cancer, and Onion Creek had been "discovered" by the hoi polloi. Tents and campers filled every turnout. Mountain bikes jammed the road. Little TP prayer flags fluttered in the bushes — signs of the reverence Joe Sixpack pays the wilderness.

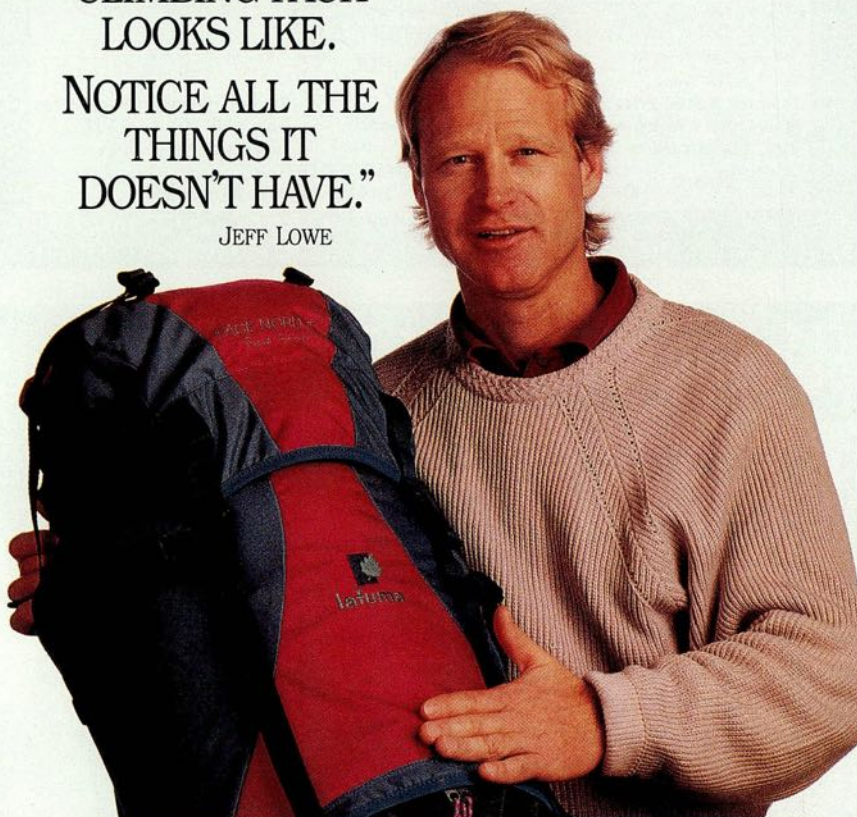
When Cosgriff and I had approached the Mystery Towers two years before, we saw not a single footprint. The canyon was wild, the approach inobvious, the directions in the guidebook poor, the towers hidden from sight until halfway in. It felt as if nobody had walked this wash since Forrest and crew had rolled in the wheelbarrows supporting their ballsacks.

Now Mike and I followed numerous foot and pawprints up the approach. Mike explained that this had become a popular day hike for the Kumbaya-ers, as he refers to the crowd of hippie mountain bikers who now call Moab their

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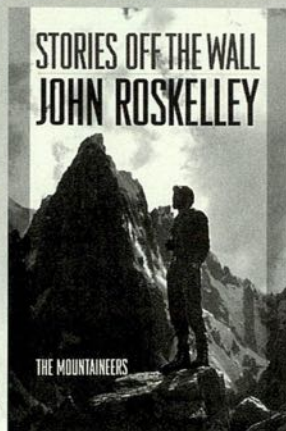
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**AFTER NAILING
 THE EXPANDING
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 THE FIRST-ASCENT PARTY
 HAD BATHOOKED,
 MIKE STARTED
 CHAIN-SMOKING.
 ON THE NEXT LEAD,
 I DID MY BEST
 TO HELP HIM QUIT ...**

own. He started mimicking their behavior, whistling as if calling a dog, and saying, "Dark Star, come here, boy."

We turned the corner where you get the first view of the Doric, and saw a party rappelling down — the fifth ascent in less than a year. The Mystery Towers were a mystery no more.

The rock on the Gothic makes the Titan look like granite. Once again I drew the first pitch, which entailed tied-off knifeblades, expanding blocks, and dirt-dagger free climbing. I hadn't nailed for a year and was pretty spooked. In the South, they'd say I was shaking like a dog shitting peach pits, but this was more like a dog passing sea urchins. Fortunately, it was a short pitch.

Mike methodically worked out the next pitch, knocking off loads of mud and rotten rock. Most fell to the side of me, but one chunk exploded on my belay plate, making me happy I hadn't opted for a hip belay.

After nailing the expanding mud-block traverse the first-ascent party had bathooked, Mike started chain-smoking. Belaying me on the next lead didn't help matters, though I did my best to help him quit; from 20 feet up I dislodged a chunk of rock that whistled down to knock Mike's "twitch stick" from his lips.

I wriggled into a short chimney between two narrow ridges. It was like chimneying between slightly open scissor blades, and I could easily peer down both the north and south faces. O'Donnell was belaying on the north side. The chimney expanded on the south side. I

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said, "Listen to this," planted my left foot on the north face and shoved lightly with my right. A portion of wall the size of my body slowly tipped off like a tree being felled, then traveled 300 feet before creating a thunder that echoed through the valley for minute after satisfying minute. A fine trundle is a rare and beautiful thing. I was reminded of Kor's words when asked why he climbed the desert towers: "Not so much because they're there, but rather because they may not be there much longer."

Even more of the Gothic disappeared when I groveled on top of the knife-edge ridge the next day. I punched and shoved until the ridge was a foot lower, and the medium I would mantel onto resembled rock. A short stroll along the dirt ridge, similar, but wider than the Citadel's gangplank, got me to the anchor and the end of my leading commitment.

Now Rob had joined us, and went to work. After 60 feet, he stopped at a saddle between two gargoyles, midway along what the first ascent dubbed "The Traverse of the Goblins." The saddle was composed entirely of cobbles, a three-foot-thick layer, every one of which you could pull out with your fingers. No way to nail it or drill it, and free climbing would be nuts. Luckily for Rob, a storm was moving in, and his partners called for a retreat.

The weekend was over. We sat in a Mexican restaurant discussing our plight. I wasn't about to leave. O'Donnell felt likewise. Outside, the streets of Moab were flooding. This, and a job commitment, convinced Rob to flee. He drove us out to the Onion Creek road, where my van was parked. It was a moonless night and still raining. He dropped us at the first stream crossing, then left us to die.

The first crossing turned out to be an insignificant tributary we had never seen water in. We didn't know this until we reached the real Onion Creek. We stood on the bank — what was left of the road — and listened to boulders rolling down the torrent. I half-expected to see my van float by. We stood in T-shirts, shorts, and flip-flops, me with a bag of provisions, Mike with a borrowed tent, and Rob long gone with the tent poles.

I wrapped myself in the tent, Mike wrapped himself in the fly, and we hiked back to the highway. No cars. Was it flooded now, too? Closed for the night?

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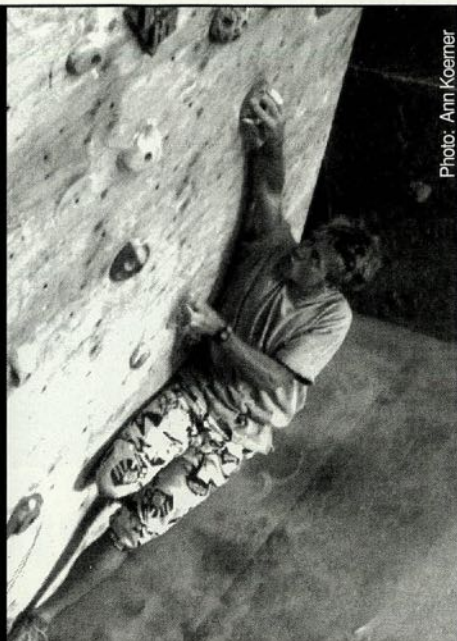
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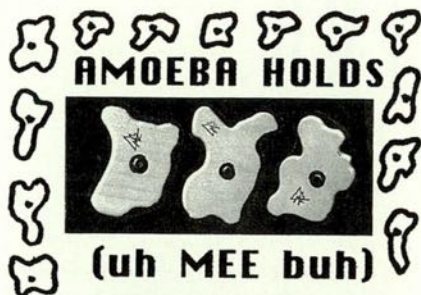
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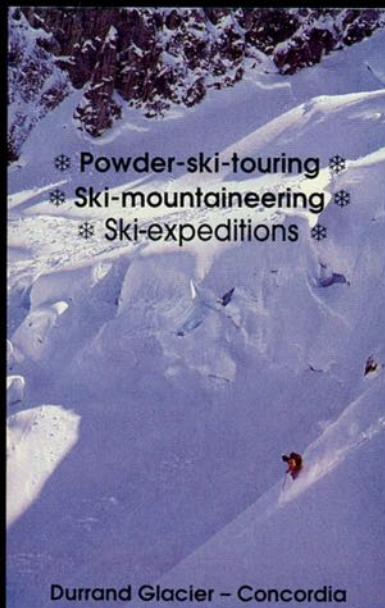
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The Rob-left-us-to-die jokes turned into serious talk about what to do next.

I'm not one to throw away beers, even if they are Utah 3.2 road-pops, but I ditched the sixer, something I would do only in the most dire circumstances. The nearest ranch house was seven miles distant. We started hiking.

Finally, a caravan of rafters drove by and took pity on us, two drowned rats wrapped up like nuns with tents over our heads.

"What are you doing out here?" they asked.

"Rock climbing," we replied.

"Climbers? That explains it."

They dropped us off in Moab, where, once again, we knocked on the door of the patron saint of Moab mud-nailers, Kyle Copeland. If it weren't for his hospitality and gear, we would have never gotten into this mess.

Betrayal. The Team ripped asunder by filthy lucre. Rob knew that next Friday was the only day I could go back. O'Donnell was going to be there. I told Rob he must call in sick, especially since he'd already told his competitors that the second ascent was a done deal.

"You've got to wait until Saturday," Rob pleaded, "I'll lose 6000 dollars if I don't go to work on Friday."

"Don't give me this bullshit about chicken feed. This is the second ascent of the Gothic we're talking about."

O'Donnell and I went back alone. Forrest had told Slater that from the summit ridge up it was all drilling. Indeed, the only pins he placed were lost arrows pounded into bolt holes; the rock was so bad in places that inch-and-a-half long bolts wouldn't cut it. I finished Slater's lead. Mike led to the glorious summit.

The very top is the size of a park bench, and perfect to sit on. It was time to lift a Mount Everest malt liquor, toast the first ascensionists Forrest and Briggs, toast ourselves, toast Rob who would jug up the next day, and toast all those who have sought adventure in these most stupendous of choss heaps.

"Here's mud in your eye."

A well-known boulderer, John Sherman has recently taken a strange interest in rotten desert towers and climbing mountains.

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INFORMATION NEEDED for a comprehensive guidebook to waterfall ice climbs in the Canadian Rockies to be published in 1994. Photos, approach/descent details, objective hazards, and nature of the ice on new and existing routes would be appreciated. Contact: Waterfall Ice, P.O. Box 2777, Canmore, Alberta T0L 0M0, Canada.

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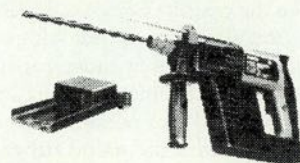
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your weight down. But a pregnant body goes into famine mode, in case it ever needs something to spare. Even when you're throwing up, it's putting on mean little pooches. Plus, when you can eat, you should eat well, considering that things like the creature's *brain* is developing.

You also have to deal with such threatening anecdotes as those a friend told me about how Monique Dalmasso of France only gained *two* pounds during pregnancy (she had a six-pound baby), led 5.11+ in Chamonix at eight months, and "still had ab cubes."

When I first learned I was pregnant, I'd talked to my nurse-midwife, Teresa, and climbing, *sans* leading, seemed all right to her. I got a Choucas harness from Petzl, adjustable from medium to extra large, that has seen me clear through. It seemed safe — they don't call 'em sit harnesses for nothing, the weight really *is* on your legs. Along the way I added a chest harness, and belayed with it, hooking a quickdraw to a leg loop when someone was dogging.

My first climbing trip, to the Utah desert at just under five months, was bliss. I was a prisoner gone free. I had no clue what to expect, and I certainly was whack-and-dangling all over, but to my surprise and all of our amusement, found myself, on things like the splitter finger crack *Jonny Cat* (5.11), shaking and rattling and dynoing. Like old times. The tadpole must have been wondering *what* was going on.

"Get that baby up there!" Mike would gleefully shout.

I newly revelled in the large pleasures of doing a whole pitch, and of just *being there*, in the red spring desert, outside.

It was a little later at Rifle that I really noticed the bads. At five months, I'd gained 15 pounds, and felt like Godzilla. (Most women eventually gain a cool 25-45; most of my sports-minded friends put on 30-35.) This was climbing in a weight belt I could never take off.

Then came another blow: after over 15 years, I was forced back to having to lurk around waiting for people to "take" me climbing.

We did Rifle's warmup route *Primer* (5.11a), which I'd done a hundred times before, which seemed now to be sporting two brand-new cruxes, and then I wanted to do the 5.10 next to it.

"It's a piece-of-s—t climb," Mike said.

"Well, it'll be plenty exciting for me."

"Well, you can," he said.

"Well, you have to *lead it for me*."

That day, climbing felt *so* hard. We

went across the street, to *James Brown's Wild Ride* (5.11d/12a), which I'd done a year or two before. At the crux, I couldn't hang on to the little crinkle and get my legs up from under an overlap. I dropped off several times, then got higher via a hideous fight, to flop on a section above I hadn't even remembered. But the scariest thing, as I lowered, was that not only could I not do the moves, I no longer could see how I'd ever felt OK on them.

*Though this tenant
of mine is a squirmer
and sometimes seems to be
pounding pitons, that day
in the Black Canyon
it was still as stone.
It twitched once,
in a venturing sort of way,
and that was all.
I could imagine it
in there, stemmed out,
thinking, "If I kick now
we could both fall!"*

Entering into denial, I failed on another standard warmup, *Public Service* (5.11d) at the Wasteland, staring up stupidly at the big hold a hundred miles above the little roof.

I really started to wonder if I'd ever be able to climb again.

On a crummy but easier route just to its left, on which I could stand and think, I finally understood. The third component, besides being weak and gigantic, was not being able to use normal body positions anymore. So far, the only handicaps I'd noticed were that in trying to layback, something got in the way, and it was hard to breathe and tie shoes at the same time. But now, try something normal, like a modest high step, and like a teapot, my weight all tipped over the other way, and wouldn't go up over the foot. At least not without my hurling it up there. (Not that I could stand the word *hurl* yet.)

I was still getting it all down when, at six months, we went to the Black Canyon, a secluded and committing place to climb, its walls up to 2000 feet high.

The night we got there, Mike and I walked out to the overlook, and looked down what was obviously a million miles to the river rushing below. I stepped back from the edge. I sat on the steps.

"What are you doing back there?" Mike eventually asked.

"Just sitting."

Was climbing here OK? This was more serious than the usual little crags. It wasn't just myself anymore ... And what about the wanna-be grandparents? What about later — could Mike and I ever do this kind of thing together again? It would be pretty rotten to orphan a kid.

Next day in the sunlight everything looked more user-friendly, though I was still antsy, and got petrified at a hanging belay on a flake, where, except for a sideways Stopper, I couldn't see the anchors.

Though this tenant of mine is a squirmer and sometimes seems to be pounding pitons, that day in the Black, it was still as stone. It twitched once, in a venturing sort of way, and that was all. I could imagine it in there, stemmed out, thinking, "If I kick now we could both fall!"

Before we began our route, the *Checkerboard Wall* (5.10+), I hadn't noticed that my feet, in a common side effect of this condition, had swelled. The bottom of the Black is a really bad place to find out your shoes are too small.

Wasted, hot, and with tortured feet, I reached the last ledge thrilled and excessively proud. It was about 1:00.

"Want to do another?" Mike asked.

"Are you," I said in careful, acid tones, "*high*?"

The next weekend, climbing near home, outside Aspen, I found that climbing on routes you know is a huge psychological boost when you're feeling weird. You know the cliffs, and the moves are nice and consoling. The psyche stays with you when you go afield again. That weekend I also newly discovered one of the best things of this whole time — slippers. No laces. Slippers are also kind to fat feet.

As time went by, plodding and panting up an approach, I'd think about quitting. But on a route, the elation was all there. Climbing was still alluring, there were still the problem-solving thrills, it still meant being outside with friends.

Climbing was still fun, except of course when I got so mad I lost my mind. Such as falling off a sidepull, when my mass tilted too far, or battling through the crux of a route only to have my perimeters knock me off an easier move above.

In the Black, I'd been depressed at the sight of all the steep routes (cracks) I wouldn't have a prayer on. But that was before I realized what was still do-able. Yes, cracks are bad, but that's mostly because your feet are in front of you, and can lift just to calf-height. Over time, I learned things.

Like how bad I was on roofs (turning those lips, you know; plus the strain on the midsection made me jittery), overlaps, and anything where there were big holds far apart. Mantels were nightmares. Scrunch moves ... you get the picture.

What you *can* do are climbs with lots of little holds. Corners are great. Steep climbs are good. On slabs you're just lurching around. And if you come off steep rock you only swing out, and you certainly want to avoid any chance of collision. You also should drop back a few years in technique, like to how you climbed in the '70s, and forget about a lot of smartass little moves you've picked up. (No more figure-4s ...)

For those thinking of trying this at home, the main thing was realizing that every route needed about a hundred repetitions of the same footwork: legs out sideways to bend and raise, *demi* and *grand plie* over and over, climbing like a tick. For a high step, turn sideways to the rock so the leg can stay to the side. (Granted, not always possible.) Flag moves work great; inside crossthreads are hopeless. Backstepping works OK, though you only use it when you really need it. Since you pump out so fast, never fudge a move by using the bad part of a hold. Finally, limbo your weight into the rock a lot.

Among the things to beware of are your loosening joints. At Wild Iris, the second route I got on wasn't that hard, but had a key monodoigt. I resisted its allure, swallowed my pride, and said "Take" about 10 times while figuring out a (harder) way around.

People kindly tell me, after watching the struggles, "You'll be so strong afterwards." No. "You'll be in horrible shape," says Julie Kennedy understandingly. She knows. I know. This is still a time out.

I didn't personally know of anyone who'd climbed later than seven months, when at that stage I flew to North Conway for the Women's Rock Day, and met Leslie Brown, head of the Ragged Mountain Foundation in Connecticut. Leslie had continued until eight months, and only stopped then because it was December and cold and time to ski. Her 15-month-old daughter was by her side, in a minute climbing harness. All of which was reassuring. (I also met the very congenial climber Diane Childs, who told me that she and her husband, Geoff, found it was taking

some time to conceive — until they both got struck by lightning. Two weeks later she was pregnant. "I hope we don't have to do that for the second one," she said.)

Then, back in Rifle, I hangdogged, taking some falls on a route that had two maddening high steps. Hitherto I hadn't been falling much — I'd usually "take," and sag onto the rope — but here I got absorbed in trying to figure out a way.

Though I'd been thinking all along about where a harness's pressures go, and felt they were OK, I worried afterwards. Especially now that the creature was right under my skin, protrusions roiling up here and there.

Every checkup, I'd said I still was climbing, and the medical folks were sanguine. Now, I took my harness to the clinic, put it on, and told Teresa where the pressures go and what toprope falls are like. Does the baby react, she asked, do you feel anything, is there cramping, bleeding? No, no, no. "Well, if you're not hurting yourself, you can't possibly be hurting the baby," she said. Two physician-climber friends thought the same. All, of course, used the word "probably," though. I knew I'd taken worse knocks when people bumped into me at a crowded arts fair than ever on the cliffs. Still, I wished I knew more women who had done this, and decided there'd be no more hanging or avoidable falls.

Only weeks later would I hear from even one, Barb Clemes of Alberta, Canada, who'd had the same problem: "I knew others who had climbed 5.7 or so in their sixth or seventh months but I didn't know about harder routes." She ice climbed into five months and rock climbed (5.10 to 5.11a) to seven and a half, wearing a full body harness after five, and never leading.

The other day, I started up a pitch, a kind of hard one, but unexpectedly felt achy and not right, and came down (surly, though). Until then, moving on rock had felt fine. I decided to stop climbing, for now.

But, if all goes well, something's coming soon that I've always wanted. So, it's time to lumber up some more hikes, though these days I feel like the *Jurassic Park* T-Rex — water in a Dixie Cups would vibrate at my approach. Boy, getting on a thoughtful, technical route was the only time I felt light on my feet.

Alison Osius and Mike Benge had an 8-pound boy, Theodore Roy Benge, on September 12.

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Godzilla goes climbing

by Alison Osius

Alison Hargreaves of England did the North Face of the Eiger when she was six months pregnant. She even got a route named after the event, *Fetus on the Eiger* (E1 6a) at Stanage Edge.

England's Brede Arkless did *The Moon*, an E3 5c with a traversing crux pitch at Gogarth, North Wales, and Gill Kent climbed the Old Man of Hoy, an airy 450-foot Scottish sea stack, both at six months. "[Climbing] was very difficult because of the huge bulge" and harness-rigging problems beforehand, Gill wrote me. "I was like a trussed chicken and about as graceful."

Julie Kennedy of Colorado was ski mountaineering through to the end, skinning up Sunlight Mountain two days before delivery.

And these are only the ones I know about. That's one problem — you can read many articles about exercising while pregnant, but there's not much known about the hows and whats of climbing and mountaineering then.

Of course, some people will criticize some of these women, and me as well, as I'm now among their ranks; as I write, delivery looms in under six weeks. But things have come a long way since a couple of decades ago when my climber friend Marjie McCloy, working as a ski instructor until eight and a half months, endured stinging comments from several women. Said one who skied up to her, "Don't you care about your baby? You're a terrible mother."

Each of us has to make our own decisions and evaluate the risks and exertion personally. Lately, I've been trying to find others who've rock climbed to or near term's end. It's easier to find attrition stories, and for reasonable cause. Gill pulled a muscle on The Old Man of Hoy, and stopped

climbing until after delivery. Ann Yardley of North Conway, New Hampshire, climbed ice at four months and on the local indoor wall at five — but when she climbs, she likes to try to climb well, and she lost interest.

Meanwhile, other people's interest at the cliffs has amazed me. They ask many questions; seems a lot of people in our sport are thinking about multiplying.

Sometimes people are probably just nonplussed. Three weeks ago, at Wild Iris, Wyoming, on a cold day, everyone

went silent. (Paranoic, I imagined vibes: "She shouldn't be doing that.")

Funnily, a few months ago, climbing like this seemed harder than I even expected, and mostly god-awful. I'd have figured that at seven months I'd be on *Twin Cracks*, a classic local 5.7. But at seven months, I was climbing better than at five. You adapt. I've figured the techniques out a lot more; at first, I was still wasting time and strength being dazed and indignant at what didn't work.

You lose plenty on the way, of course. A few weeks ago Mike strolled in from an afternoon of bouldering, which I'd given up early because of the impacts. I said, "So how was bouldering, you asshole?" I meant to be funny, but he looked shocked. It wasn't that funny.

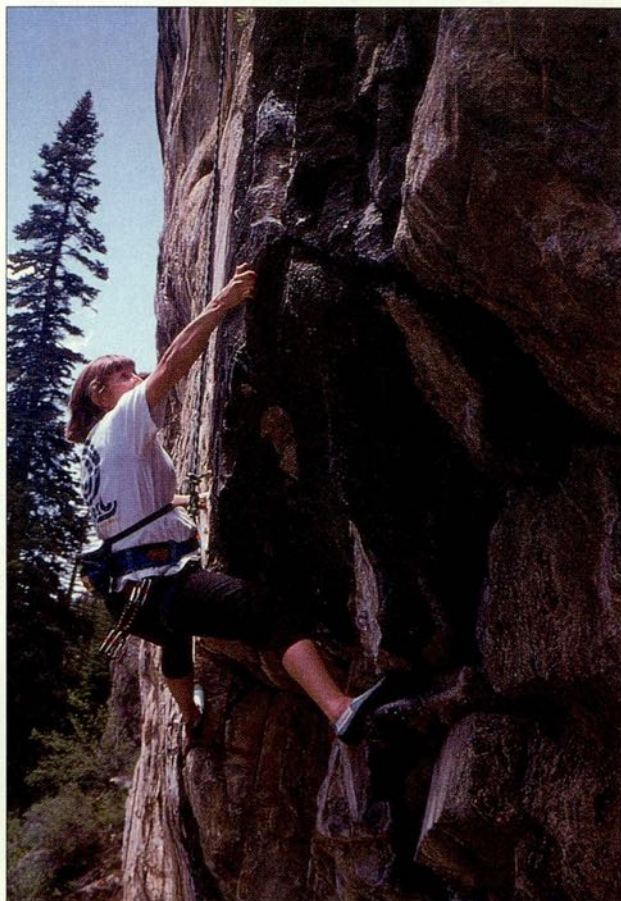
I wish I could say, for vanity's sake, that I've been active throughout all of this. But that phrase "morning sickness" is a lie; try all-day sickness. I was on the couch (or, for variety, the floor or bed) until a week or two past four months.

Meanwhile, I noticed Mike's life hadn't changed. One day, I was prone when he, who'd left at dawn, returned from ice climbing. He checked on me and then thought he'd go off track skiing. When he came back, I said I should return a video to the store, about a mile away. "I'll take it over," he offered. "I wouldn't mind a little jog." He reached around for his Nikes. I hated him.

In March, Mike went winter climbing in Scotland. "Well, it's nice for him to go somewhere," said my mother on the phone. "I bet all this has been hard on him."

"On him?!"

Another thing ... if you're doing sport routes and competing, as I'd been, you've probably toiled trying to keep



Weighing heavy: the author climbs *Standing Eight Count* (5.11c), Olympic Crag, Independence Pass, Colorado, at seven months.

headed to the same sunlit warm-up cliff. I didn't know anyone there. After I belayed Mike Bengel, my husband, I stepped up to second the climb, harness riding low and chalkbag belt high, both meeting in the back. The whole cliff

Continued on page 166

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