

THE

# VALLEY

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## THE TOWERING INFERNO DON'S INSANE WALL

With a tedious year of school teaching and endless hours of physical conditioning behind them, Neil Montgomery and Donna Mroczkowski joined the intrepid Spanish climber, Miguel Rodriguez, for the start of a month of climbing in Yosemite. Upon their arrival, they found the Valley climbing community was a sad group of degenerates more interested in drugs than climbing. CLIME

The trio avoided participation in the Camp 4 hang-out scene and racked up an incredible list of climbs in only their first six days in the area. Routes in Tuolumne and the Valley included the North Face of Fairview Dome, the Dike, West Crack, Coonyard Pinnacle, the Steck on Higher Cathedral Spire, and the East Buttress of Middle Cathedral Rock. In contrast to my activity during the same week, they had climbed about an equal number of 5.8 and 5.9 pitches as I had made ascents of the stairs at my office. These feats did not necessarily surprise me after I observed their performance on tune-up ascents of The Consolation and The Flakes at Tahquitz in which I had also participated a couple weeks prior.

I arrived in the Valley during the evening of their only rest day with an early morning departure for the West Face of the Leaning Tower scheduled. This grand route is about the only sustained class 6 big wall in the Valley that is neither on Half Dome or El Capitan. By breaking the foursome into two parties, equipment logistics would be minimized at the many hanging belays and each person could take more leads. Our biggest culprit would be the heat since temperatures had consistently reached the mid-90's all week. An abundance of water (6 quarts total per person), bivouac paraphernalia, and 50 lbs of technical climbing gear per party was adequate ballast against the afternoon winds.

A nearby Camp 4 party which lasted until 3 a.m. delayed our early start and put us on the rock at 10 a.m. Our approach (cont. page 3)

## SABRINA BASIN SKI TOUR May 16-17

Following a blustery Friday night, 6 skiers hiked in from the Sabrina Lake roadhead for a SMS tour of the still snowy slopes above Blue Lake. Trip participants included Ralph Johnson, Jackie VanDalsem, June Lane, Mark Goebel, and the French Connection--Jean Francois and Jean Philippe.

A thick cloud cover prevented the snow from softening, so once in camp alongside still frozen Blue Lake, we napped upon the clean granite slabs which were just emerging from their winter cover. Sometime after lunch, we finally ventured out onto the slopes and made our way to an overlook above Baboon Lakes. The view was nice, but much of the descent was a real bone jarring affair.

In contrast, Sunday was a perfect springtime day in the Sierra. The dark blue sky was offset by the gleaming snowfields which were coming into condition as the sun rose in the sky. A perfect day for climbing a mountain, so off we headed past Baboon Lakes, Sunset Lake, and up the Thompson Glacier to Mt. Powell. There are two low saddles between Thompson and Powell, and the right one leads to an easy couloir and the summit plateau. From the summit one is truly in the heart of the Sierra backcountry for the views are endless. (cont. page 2)

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 NEXT ISSUE: AUGUST 18, 1981  
 DEADLINE: AUGUST 12, 1981

MUGELNOOS MEETINGS: THIRD TUESDAY OF EACH MONTH, 7:30 PM, L.A. DEPT. OF WATER AND POWER, 111 N. HOPE ST., DOWNTOWN L.A. PROGRAM, REFRESHMENTS. CLIMBERS, SKIERS, GUESTS WELCOME.

CALENDAR

1-3 AUG ROCK CREEK, Ripley  
 8-9 AUG TAHQUITZ, Russ  
 15 AUG SAFETY TEST, Pies  
 22-23 AUG SUICIDE, Lees  
 5-7 SEP TUOLUMNE, Wing

SAFETY TEST DATE CHANGED

-- LAST WARNING --

The test originally scheduled for Sept. 19 has been changed to Sat, Aug. 15. This is the last chance to take the test before next spring. Call Don Pies for reservations (213) 675-5139.

(DP)

ALASKA NEWS

On June 12, Glenn Kaplan, Steve Smith from Ridgecrest, and Arne Stemsrude from Steamboat Springs, Colo., made the summit of DENALI (Mt. McKinley-20,320') via the West Buttress, after a 12 day ascent.

(GK)

FOR SALE

Propane lantern (double mantle)  
 MSR Helmet  
 (Contact LeRoy Russ 213-258-1546)

LOWE EXPEDITION PACK --\$35  
 (Call Glenn Kaplan eves.  
 213-664-5071)

RCS MEMBERSHIP PENDING

The Safety Committee has received an application for membership from Kent Withers. Anyone wishing to comment on this applicant's safety should contact Don Pies by August 1 (4619 130th St., Hawthorne 90250).

HELP WANTED

Typist needed for training manual typing. Contact LeRoy Russ (213) 258-1546.

SABRINA BASIN SKI TOUR (cont.)

Descending from the summit, we returned to our awaiting skis at the top edge of the glacier, and pushed off for a 3000ft. run back to camp. Jean Philippe deciding on a little higher start, climbed a steep couloir on the N.E. face of Powell, and left an impressive set of tracks leading out across the top of the glacier. From there it was just one good turn after another until our legs almost began to crumble.

Everyone agreed that the Sabrina Basin deserves further attention in the future. There is unlimited skiing terrain, suitable for both alpine or nordic mountaineering gear, and it's a short and easy backpack to camp. We shall return!  
 (MG)

BALDY HUT GETS GREEN LIGHT

Approval was received for commencing our rebuilding of the outhouse destroyed by the fire last Nov at the San Antonio Ski Hut. Supplies were purchased and trailered to the roadhead on June 20. Several members of the Mt. Baldy Group from Claremont, including one of the original hut builders from the 1930's Bob Frampton, plus an occasional locker holder or Committee member showed up on June 20 and 21st to pack most of the lumber up the trail. Joining us for the climb was a troop of Claremont Boy Scouts, under the leadership of Larry Oglesby, on their way to an overnight campout above the Big Bowl. Several of the adults took part in our mule train. Other Sierra Club members who were staying at Harwood Lodge for a Square Dance Party also made the climb with loads before returning to the Lodge for dancing. There still remains some lumber and cement to haul up there; it is now stored downstairs at Harwood Lodge. Anyone wishing to participate in this task should (cont. page 3)

BALDY HUT GETS GREEN LIGHT (cont.)

John Wedberg (213) 472-6768.

Unfortunately our notice sent for publication in the June Mugelnoos didn't hit. The Mt. Baldy Group "Eagle" carried the only published notice of our intent to commence the project, although the Angeles Chapter Schedule indicated there was a Hut work party that weekend. Jim Powers intends to do the construction as soon as he finishes recovering from a stay in the hospital.

(JW)

RUSS LOSES MORE GROUND!

In a spurt of climbing that reminds one of a speeding turtle, Paul Harris extended his lead in climbing days over LeRoy Russ. Paul presently has 27 days of climbing with the RCS. This includes the recent Palisades climb. The next six places are as follows:

Second - LeRoy Russ, 22 days      Fifth - John Peters, 14 days  
Third - Virgil Shields, 16 days      Sixth - Richard Mundwiler, Larry  
Fourth - Ruth Carter, Mike Mulry, 15 days      Tidball, 13 days

Eighteen of fifty-six members have not as yet completed the required four days of climbing.

(VS)

THE TOWERING INFERNO (cont.)

was also in poor form. Miguel broke loose a pile of rocks that sent Neil running. They missed Neil but one hit the heel of his shoe and knocked it off his foot! This was the overhanging wall's omen indirectly warning us of the margin of security to be found in aid placements above.

As we roped-up on the ledge system leading to the first pitch, a squirrel scampered between rock and tree, 20 feet above in his natural environment. Suddenly he lost his hold and fell to the ledge only to stop short of going over the edge and dropping several hundred more feet--omen number two cautioned of strenuous climbing ahead (the squirrel was only stunned and soon was off on his own again).

This section of the Leaning Tower is a geology lesson in itself. Below a spectacular diagonal fracture that runs across the entire face, the granite is exfoliated and forms a near vertical drop for 400 feet beneath the climb's first pitch. Above, 1000 feet of overhanging hard rock looms down like a vulture. The diagonal fracture is actually a discontinuous broken ledge system for the entire length. I felt sentimental remembering my first multi-pitch climb as a RCS student when I had crossed this length of rock six years earlier (first ascent of the diagonal fracture was by RCS members George Harr and Chuck and Ellen Wilts, 1957).

Our original prediction of the leader protection required on the first two pitches included only a ladder of fixed bolt hangers with one or two A3 placements. These dreams quickly became fantasy. Neil was forced to make a nylon cord tie-off on an old hangerless expansion bolt only a few feet above the ledge. Climbing up a series of bashies (soft metal hammered into shallow pockets in the rock) with tattered slings, several delicate RP placements, and many 20 year old bolts with loose or missing hangers made this a humbling lead. RP's are miniature brass nuts 1/16 to 3/8 inch in width and proved their worthiness along the route by eliminating many piton placements.

Neil's exhilarating belay location hung 25 feet further out than the beginning of the pitch, in perfect view of the extra 400 feet of exposure below the route. My lead continued at the same altitude up more questionable bolts, many needing cord tie-offs. The pitch was peppered with numerous broken off bolts that told the history of the climb. One 1/4 inch bolt was split in two along the entire length from corrosion while a nearby hole from a missing bolt was filled with a copperhead converted into a bashie. These anchors were generous and supported the party's passing. I engineered a new style of placement. A partially driven lost arrow behind a flake was made more secure by placing a RP between the piton and rock close to the flake. The RP wedged the lost arrow and reduced leverage.

I then participated in the ultimate act of decadent aid placements -- the use of a cheater-stick to increase arm reach. Although such a tool is considered standard hardware on the Leaning Tower due to the numerous broken bolts, a purist would certainly spend an extra (cont. page 4)

THE TOWERING INFERNO (cont.)

day on the wall rebolting the blank sections. On the other hand, we rejuvenated the alpine spirit by pushing the limits of difficult nut placements to minimize piton usage.

This pitch had gained another 25 feet of overhang. Watching our ropes wave aimlessly in the wind and viewing Donna and Miguel suspended from the first dangling belay point below was certainly an awesome sight. The beginning of the route was now tucked too far into the rock beneath us to see anymore. Re-establishing a sense of the vertical became difficult. The angle of the next pitch appeared to be less than 90 degrees. The wall deceived us many times in this fashion but the strain on the arms and the free drop of the trailing rope told the truth.

The route began to follow a continuous crack system that enabled us to place secure protection with the exception of one partially inserted lost arrow driven straight up. The crack became a seam along my next lead and another piton placement looked inevitable. In tinkering with a 3/16 inch RP, I was able to get half of it behind a slight fold in the rock. Gently placing weight onto the RP caused small plumes of granite dust to bellow as crystals shattered. Time stood still; I realized my entire weight was supported by this A4 plus placement. The unknown origin of the initials RP was now revealed--Ridiculous Placement. Leading continued up; sky hook placements, more bolt tie-offs and another cheat stick reach.

The week long heat wave was now at its peak with valley temperatures hovering around 100 degrees. Then the winds stopped and the sun became nearly perpendicular to the massive wall. With no place to hide, we were trapped in a sea of burning granite like the ship on the windless ocean in The Rhymer of the Ancient Mariner. Watching the cool waters of the Merced River below was of no relief (water, water over there, but not a drop to reach).

Exhausted, Neil and I reached a large sloping ledge in late afternoon and rigged a life line to nearby Ahwahnee ledge. This outcropping, previously named after Yosemite's plush hotel, was long enough and flat enough to provide a comfortable night's sleep for all four of us. Miguel and Donna joined us shortly, also fatigued by the heat and strenuous climbing. Our spirits began to restore as sunset brought a pleasant breeze while we devoured my wife's homemade fruitcake. The night passed in perfect weather.

Much of the fixed protection had been spaced far apart which forced 6 foot tall Neil to make several long stretches. Donna's exceptionally short reach handicapped her leading to the point of making some moves difficult if not impossible. It was felt best to combine both parties into one and divide the leads between Neil, Miguel, and myself. Climbing logistics were now such that those who neither lead or removed protection served penance by ascending a free dangling rope over the trees.

Miguel started the day with a delicate lead up a spectacular diagonal crack. His unfamiliarity to Yosemite big wall climbing techniques began to show because he had to remove several of his own pieces of protection to cut down rope drag. This made Neil's traversing follow his most technically intricate and frightening section on the climb. Neil concluded the next lead by using the full 5 foot length of the cheat stick to reach the belay point. A more deserving name for this tool was the Wonder Wand.

Several hundred feet above Ahwahnee Ledge, I lucked into taking the Leaning Tower's only non-overhanging lead (to the disgust of the others). The wall's price for such relaxed activity was to continue climbing under and over a giant roof. Neil's lead over the roof remained overhanging until reaching the next belay station. Donna then performed the strenuous job of cleaning protection in good style. Miguel and I watched the rope we would soon ascend as it slowly worked its way further into space each time Donna plucked out a piece of protection. I clipped onto this rope with my Jumar ascender and Miguel lowered me out to the plumb line, 30 feet in front of him. I found the spin in the rope and bounce from moving up the rope good cures for wasting time by looking down. Although Miguel spoke little English, his face made up for words when he told the story of the flight of the haul bag after releasing it. Not being a dedicated Tarzan fan, he rigged a rope to also lower himself out. (cont. page 5)

THE TOWERING INFERNO (cont.)

I took the next lead and fought a strenuous battle by supporting most of my weight with my arms while pulling on a bulging flake in order to place a nut and avoid driving a piton. This was the final pitch of persistent overhang until I stepped out of my etriers onto the flat summit. Cool air and thunder from a weak storm system greeted the party as we all topped-off the wall shortly before sunset.

As I drove home in a gentle rain the following day (with my convertible top down) I thought of a saying by the famous Scottish climber, Tom Patey; "Good climbing and good company often go together. Each is essential to the enjoyment of the other".

(DP)

CLIMBER'S SCHOOL OF ROUTE-FINDING?

The weekend of June 20-21 saw 34 climbers (including 17 RCSers) sign in at Tahquitz. Sixteen routes were encountered with a range of fortitude and terror. Virgil Shields and Jim Friedburg finally succeeded in getting off the ground on the Open Book after an hour and a half of false starts (Mike Mulry graciously shouted the correct route description to them while they were meekly ascending the Green Arch). Two minor injuries occurred on the first day of climbing. Andre Korbut-Weberg suffered slight damage from rockfall while valiantly ascending what he thought was the N.E. Farce but was really El Wampo. Student climber Emanuel Molina also sustained a bump on the head from a fall after getting lost while leading the N.E. Farce (if he continues to climb 5.3 in such a manner, it is suggested that he invest in a helmet). In relation to Molina's injury, it is noted that although he came to climb with the RCS, he and fellow student climber Kathy Bowman DID NOT SIGN OUT! The fact that they were climbing and had sustained an injury was discovered by rumor, and although his injury was not serious, it was deemed necessary by me to wait until he appeared so this could be determined. All RCS students are reminded that if they wish to continue to climb with the RCS, they MUST SIGN OUT! In light of this it is noted that even RCS members have proved guilty of similar acts. Paul Harris (etal) neglected to sign in after climbing (unforgiveable!).

In conclusion, aside from Sheila Szymanski's ongoing praise of the climbing ability of small persons like herself, one climbing feat of merit is to be noted. Mary Omberg in a demonstration of personal prowess in the face of overwhelming odds succeeded in leading all the pitches of the Trough. In the words of Liberty Elyash, "She has arrived". (VS)

PALISADES

July 3-5

Fourth of July weekend saw 19 climbers including 9 members, and 1 climbing guest spending a warm enjoyable 3 days in the Palisades. This trip was originally scheduled to include Temple Crag; however, with assistant leaders Fried and Jeter unable to attend, the leader concentrated the trip in the Palisades Basin and drafted Bob Lindgren to assist.

On Friday while most of the group was hiking into Sam Mac Meadow, 2 ropes of 2 who had hiked in the day before, climbed the Swiss Arete on Mt. Sill. Arriving on top around noon; Harris, Tidball, Peters, Szymanski watched the tents of arriving climbers blossoming in the meadow below. Early arrivals at camp, Shields and Krause took a quick nap, then bombed up and down Mt. Winchell before dark.

Saturday had early starts for all parties. Al Fowler (past member from Tucson) and son John detoured from the "Gates of Preception" by running water, climbed the N.E. Buttress to meet up with 2 U-Notch parties (Jeff and Horton Johnson; Peters, Orange) on the summit of North Palisade. Kaplan, Klein, and Baker from a camp on the moraine went up and down the V-Notch while bagging Polemonium. Two parties were turned back from routes on Starlight Peak by soft snow at the bergschrund, lack of certainty as to the location of the routes, and some lack of energy. Not finding the "Piper at the Gates of Dawn", Krause and Friedburg climbed the NW Couloir and the face above to the summit of Mt. Sill. Meanwhile, Lindgren, Evans, and Ivy climbed the S.E. Side route on Mt. Winchell.

Early returning climbers sunbathed (translated: sunburned) in the meadow while critiquing the style of returning climbers descending the soft snow into camp. With all parties back before dark (no epics) and since there was no campfire, fireworks, or cold beer, all were forced to retire early.

(LT)