



# THE ROC CAIRN



— RENSSELAER OUTING CLUB, INC. — 15TH ST. LOUNGE, R. P. I., TROY, NEW YORK —

February 1977



" Climbing at Chapel Pond "

\*\*\*\*\* CLUB NEWS\*\*\*\*\*

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----- Outing Club Banquet -----

The tenative date for the banquet is April 30th. Hopefully all the snow will be off the ground. The usual bill of fare will be there, lots of food, drink, fun and slides. The price will probably be the same as last year, \$6.00 . For the alumni, you can make reservations through Rich Tocher, 81 14th St., Troy. There will be more information coming in the next Cairn.

On January 22, 1977, while on a cross country skiing trip to North Lake in the Catskills, Pat Dillon's beloved "Mexico" hat was lost in a tragic accident. Pat was standing next to a cliff when a gust of wind snatched his hat from his head and carried it over the safety fence to the depths of the gorge below. This hat, famed in story and song, will be missed by all those who knew it and each member of the trip shares Pat's grief.

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For those people that haven't heard yet Fall lake George has been cancelled. The ROC will no longer run FLG. There were several reasons for this, mainly the bad weather last year which kept many people away, but not expenses.

The next issue of the Cairn will be on election night, March 15th. More articles are needed for the issue. How about writing an article about your latest adventure. And of course if anyone is interested we need a Cairn editor for next year.

It was like being in another world; the mountains seemed less a part of this planet than an entirely independent kingdom, unique and mysterious, where, to venture forth, all that was needed was the will and the love.

---- Gaston Rebuffat

## Alabama Caving

The caves of Alabama make an interesting excursion for the winter months. There are many books which describe each of the better caves in detail but nevertheless I feel compelled to write about just a few that impressed me so much when I was there.

First of course there is Neversink. Often called one of the most scenic pits in the United States Neversink has a total depth of about 180 ft all of it freefall with a large (depending on the season) waterfall dropping into the pit from the opposite side, the walls are covered with moss and the large open space at the bottom with a higher elevation over to one side makes an excellent 180 ft swing. I can remember the last time that I gave Dan a push holding onto his harness. We had gotten about 50 ft away from where the rope had hit when we lowered it into the pit on a nice graded slope. As I was just about to let go of Dan I became unbalanced and held onto his harness for a second or two, the next thing I knew I was floating through the air about thirty ft off the ground gliding along in a smooth arc. It was about 15 sec before I again touched ground.

Others ones that should be mentioned are; Natural Well a 180 ft pit narrower than Neversink but a damn nice rappel with cave at the bottom, Valhalla, a 220 ft open air drop with large rooms and some very interesting mud slides that you can slide along for about 50 ft or so. (by the way, these happen to be off the entrance room in a crack about 2 ft wide where the wall intersects with the floor on the downhill side)

Old blowing is another good one although it is not much on vertical passage it does have to be one of the nicest horizontal caves I've been to with cave pearls and the like. Just make sure that you ask permission to enter and if you come out the lower entrance remind Tom that the lights he sees are on the other side of the river. Telly Hayes is the man to ask and he's not too hard to find as he works as a school bus driver in the area (Oh sweet memories of Mary Martin in that cave)(MM for GM).

And then of course there is Fern. Without distinction between New Fern, Fern, this entrance or that entrance (the cave does have a few you know! actually it's one of the few caves that I know that has one entrance for bats and another one for humans, although they have been known to mix. While New Fern is definitely a hot cave, you'll probably roast a bit unless you dress a little lighter than usual. (Middleton never could find that crawlway with the entrance to bottom cave), Fern rather than being warm is just the opposite (unless of course your climbing rope) which is probably what you will be doing 404 ft freefall! (that includes bodies). The ledges in that cave are somewhat interesting, when was the last time that you walked across the step-over? now they don't even have the cable going around the top of the pit. When it used to be there at least it was a means of psychological support even if it wouldn't have held a dead Bat.

A well, there's not much more to talk about except; Shelta, Doodlebug blowing, Talucha, Anvil (master of the maze), Tumbling Rock, Hughes, Varnadoes --- and then of course there's Skyline Caverns right Chief.....

Good Luck, P.P.#2

The lost passage or  
The Underground Swimming Team Meet #2

As our hardy entourage of ROC cavers prepared to leave Troy early (?) one snowy Saturday we discovered that one of our party was incapacitated with a domestic version of Montezuma's revenge. The remaining three made their way to Gage caverns and finally arrived, but not before going past the first turn, then past the second turn, turning around to buy a \$50lb bag of carrots for \$2.00.

As we neared Gage Caverns the snow began to fly, and at the urgings of a heretofore respected ROC president, Eric deftly guided his vehicle through the half frozen quagmire on route to the entrance only to discover that the road was gated. Upon turning around, another bright member of the party was heard to remark, 'Well, at least we know that we can make it through.' (Good going, Vicki). WE GOT STUCK! After having unsuccessfully tried several different methods of extraction, Eric succeeded in rocking the car out. He also succeeded in spraying the inside of his open doors with mud. After parking the car in a more reasonable location, it was decided that no one in their right mind would want to put on their wet suits in a blizzard. Therefore, these three people who obviously are not in their right mind put their wet suits on in the car. Three people with three wet suits in one car is an interesting squeeze. After time out to visit a friendly tree we made our way to the entrance, and descended into the cave.

Quickly swimming through the upper passage and past the 14 tufa dams we arrived at the entrance of the lost passage. After playing in the mud for a short while we prepared to enter the siphon leading to the lost passage. Tom, our valient leader, was selected to go first. A few minutes later a resounding 'SHIT' was heard and Tom reappeared only to remove his glasses and plunge in again. He was rapidly followed by Vicki and Stork. The next ten minutes were spent cleaning glasses and trying to relight carbide lamps. This accomplished, we set out to explore the passage. From this point on the passage was easily walking and well decorated as all of ~~gaid was~~ Gage once was. Several large clusters of soda straws were seen along the way, and many very nice draperies were seen on the walls of the narrow passage. One of the most spectacular formations was a canopy about 2 feet wide, with the underside covered with popcorn, soda straws, helictites, and other exotic formations, instead of the usual mud-breakdown matrix. Very nice! A nearby crawl contained a large selection of flowstone curtains and stalactites (so many that crawling under them was difficult!). Other nicities seen were soda straw columns and a possible ~~XXXXX~~ shield.

After pausing to recharge carbide lamps and recharge ourselves with carrots (good cave food - it doesn't matter if they get wet), we splashed back thru the the passage on our way to the siphon, stopping along the way to check out a side passage. Kazork! The siphon was traversed in reverse order, and Eric discovered the importance of going very slowly when there is only 4 inches of airspace. We then spent the next ten minutes trying to trying to get matches out of a repair kit with or without wet suit gloves on when the metal match didn't work and Eric's matches had no striker. After deciding to go out with flashlights the carbide lamps promptly lit. (of course!) We stumbled out over the tufa dams and held a rapid meeting of the underground swimming team while scubbing each others bodies. Minutes of the meeting: 'This water is damned cold. Sorry you couldn't be here Andy.' (continued on another page)

... and out of the cave to a six inches of ice...  
... which we did eventually...  
... our team will decide to do...

## The Wonders of the Wichitas

Willie & I left Houston at 5 AM on Thanksgiving morning and drove for 10 hours, arriving at the base of the Wichita Mountains after crossing the plains of East & Central Texas. Never thought I'd want to get to Oklahoma so much, but times have changed. It was a change to have the ~~area~~ horizon broken by something other than skyscrapers; hills are a rare sight for an East-Texan!

We drove to the Charon Gardens Wilderness area directly, and my inborn instinct headed me straight for the top of Elk Mountain. All around us stretched the Wichita Mountain Wildlife Refuge. A rolling grass covered hills surrounded steeper granite faced hills not too dissimilar to the Mt. Desert Island Mountains of Acadia National Park. Oak trees had scattered their leaves in blankets in the forests nestled in the notches and fringes of the higher hills. Cactus grew in the cracks in the granite, an obstacle that southern climbers must be aware of! The sun had set before I'd got my fill of bouldering up the numerous granite blocks near the summit. At dusk we noted a herd of buffalo down by French Lake and a herd of elk in the Special Use Area, the area which is fenced off for the animals only. Cooking dinner back near the car was difficult in the dark due to a strong wind. The stars disappeared and we were in for a change in the weather.

But Friday dawned clear and cool and after a quick breakfast we headed for the center of the wilderness area. Several walls greeted us, but we went out of our way to chose the worst. As so often is true, north facing granite is crumbly and after an attempt at two routes we retreated, stashed our gear in a thicket and headed up the steep side of Elk Mountain. Soloing up moderately open friction slabs was delightful and more superb bouldering followed near the summit.

After lunch we headed for the western half of the wilderness area to track the buffalo we had spotted that morning. We soon encountered a small herd of longhorns. I haven't been in Texas long enough to pick up cowpunching skills so we left these mavericks unbranded. They got sharp horns! About an hour later we met our ~~to~~ first buffalo face to face.. Alone bull, cast out from the herd, was quite belligerent and at one point headed toward us in a rather unfriendly way. Our fearless leader (-S. Phifer, 1971) turned tail and managed a 5.10 boulder in an incredibly short time, but upon looking back over my shoulder, I found the bull had retreated down the valley with Willie in hot pursuit, camera clicking. We were "two drainages over" (-forest ranger, Big Horn Mts., 1973) so it was dark when we arrived back at the car once again. (No Camping is ~~per~~permitted in this small wilderness area). We drove 'round to another campsite as dark clouds rolled in and the steady wind increased. A 20 mph breeze buffeted the tent as we feasted on ~~the~~ burritos and planned our last day ~~in~~ in the park.

That morning we moved quickly. The temperature had dropped well below freezing and we were ill equipped for such weather. I wore 4 shirts under my 60-40 as we set out for the Narrows, a canyon cut by the west Branch of Cach Creek. We agreed with several other climbers there that it was too cold and windy to do and serious climbing, so after a short recon through the valley, Willie and I packed out a load of ~~litter~~ litter and drove to the base of Mt. Scott.

We hiked up the peak, unfortunately crowned with a tourist ~~to~~ road. We ~~renamed~~ renamed the peak Mt. Coors, due to the tens of thousands of beer cans dumped out of passing cars. Our third class route avoided the ~~road~~ road for the most of the way and then detoured

"Wichitas" cont.

out over Mt. Scott's Boy, a pleasant nearby peak. Thirty MPH winds finally drove us off this knife-edge summit and back to a camp near Quannah Parker Lake.

At 5 A.M. when we left the park, we drove over an inch of new snow. The trip home was slow due to Texas drivers' inability to cope with ice and snow. One half inch of ice covered the steps up to my second story apartment. So good to be back in Houston// "The urge....."

- Boulderhead Harris

### A Winter Day in Eldorado Canyon

The sun's rays hadn't touched the walls of Eldorado when Scott Leonard and I stepped out of the car and crossed the ice clogged stream that separates most of the climbing from the canyon road. Significant snowfall had bypassed most of Colorado and, while out of the strong wind, it felt like a Fall day. The sun warmed up the face of the rock as soon as it poked its head over the canyon wall, but inside the corners and cracks it remained icy cold. I requested some moderate climbing so we hiked up a steep slope to the base of a respectable inside corner. My lead lasted about 5 minutes. Scott led the pitch. I also left the next climb to him... a difficult 5.9. Luckily for me he backed off.. never coulda followed that one in good weather. To (literally) warm up, I lead Washington Irving, a more moderate climb which turned out to be quite enjoyable. Climbing on this sandstone was very different from the Gunks. The years of training on horizontal holds did little good. Jamming, laybacks and chimneys more reminiscent of granite climbing was in order here.

After a rappel back to the base, I lead another vertical crack-type pitch, ending on a ledge midway up the cliff. Scott assured me we could walk off this anytime we wanted to; a relief since the sun was moving noticeably lower in the sky. And after he backed off an imposing overhanging crack I was sure glad we could. He headed off across the ledge, down climbing when necessary to avoid treacherously broken and loose rock. I followed to the top of Long John Wall. Here, Scott disclosed to me, he had been mistaken. We could not exit and would have to complete a route. So I lead a short p pitch, following Scott's instructions, "belay behind a large flake." Soon I was nestled behind said flake, legs dangling into a chasm below and Scott followed.

The last pitch was an overhanging inside corner. He noted that this was the crux and that we had better get up soon, for the sun had left us. My cave was chilling me even more rapidly, so I urged him on. Seemingly hours later he cried "off belay." A line of nuts disappeared above my head. Thoroughly chilled and shivering like a dried leaf in the breeze, I scrambled up to the base of the corner. What a heroic lead it had been in this chilly weather. I only hoped I could follow without falling. I asked for tension as soon as I entered the crack. Each nut was jammed and took

( continued on next page)

" Eldorado" continued

several minutes to remove. My fingers were numb and my reactions slow. Somehow, with direct aid from the rope I managed to surmount the corner. At any other time it would have been a defeat, but now it was a victory. Mearly being at the top of the climb before dark was a minor triumph.

We drove out of Eldorado soon after..." see ya this summer".... " take care of Houston....."

Boulderhead Harris

" The lost Passage " continued

We climbed out of the cave into six inches of fresh snow. After packing up the iced rope we wandered around trying to find our way back in the snow, which we eventaally did. Upon our arrival at the car our driver foolishly decided to shed his entire wet suit and put on warm dry clothes while the other two members of the party left their wet suit bottoms on. Great fun was had by all as Tom and Vicki pulled Eric ass first through the snow while pulling off his bottoms. Back on the street there was a brief pause while Eric put his mufflers back on the manifold. ( Remember the mud hole?) After that little episode we headed back to civilization, and food. Burger King was chosen as the place to grace with our presence. For some unknown reason, some people thought it odd to see people bouncing around Burger King with muddy hair, wet suit bottoms and Burger King crowns. We were joined by another normal fellow wearing a soccer jersey, a crown and carrying a ballon. We ate. ( The frenh fries were raunchy.) We got lost on the way home ( again ) and finally arrived back at College Ave. where we had one last chorus about Tiggers before calling it a night. It's a night. Tom was smart. He took ~~off~~ his wet caving gear out of Eric's trunk. After dropping Vicki off Eric's car would not start. End of trip.

TMB  
VJM

Appendum- Trip to RSCA garage. One o'clock Sunday.

We fixed (?) Eric's mufflers again and timed his engine. It was 12 degrees off. It starts now.

## The Virtures of Downhill X-C Skiing

Last weekend a group of people, went out to the Petersburg Pass area to try out a cross country trail which supposedly ran from the highest point of the pass down to Williamstown, Mass. The weather was cold, but sunny in Troy when we left full of enthusiasm. Rich, our leader, asked at the ski lodge where the trail began while the rest of us scurried in and then reluctantly back out of the lodge pretending that it really wasn't all that cold. One car was brought down to Williamstown and left there while most of the people waxed skis and kicked back and forth on the trail pretending again that it wasn't really that cold and our feet really weren't numb already. Once we got started, of course, we warmed up and began to enjoy the day. The first 1.5 miles of the trail descend gently through woods, a perfect cross country ski trail although a bit too close to route 2. The trail then drops more steeply through several fields in which most of us (much to the delight of everyone still standing) wound up closer to the snow than necessary. It was here that Bruce broke a ski tip which was fixed by putting the spare tip on (semper paratus hurrah).

Rich decided at this point that going downhill was really too dull for an ROC trip so we reversed direction. (One comfort in this, while going uphill on cross-country skis is more tiring than going down it is also significantly safer). We skied around long enough for Bruce to break the other ski tip (beware of "good Deals" on second hand wood skis) and for us to lose the trail and have to bush-wack down and then up the sides of a ravine to reach it again. Bruce's ski was cleverly repaired with a handkerchief, velcro strips, bits of string and water which froze the whole mess firmly together. (Really amazing what ex-boy scouts can do when given the chance.)

Once on the trail again we skied, flew, slid and quacked all the way down to Williamstown. Those last two miles of the trail have to be seen to be believed; a blind turn to the right followed by a steep 25 ft drop and a left turn across a narrow bridge. This is followed by a log across the trail at just over waist height, its full of gorgeous surprises. I was giving thanks at having arrived in one piece at the bottom when everyone decided how great it would be to run the trail again. So, in a highly unethical move, we drove back up, dropping one car off down below again, and shot the whole lower two-thirds of the trail in what seemed like 15 minutes.

For those interested, the trail starts just a short ways down the Mass. side of the pass. You can't miss the sign for it on the left hand side (going downhill) of Rt. 2. There is even a good parking area a short ways farther down. The trail is definitely a worthwhile experience, though not for the first time on skis.

Jack VanHoff

It probably wouldn't even be such a bad place to ski if you had to walk back up after each run. Oh well, to each his own. Ed.



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