



# THE ROC CAIRN



---

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

Sept. '84

Free  
Introductory  
"No Frills Cover"  
Issue

FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to ROC, or, for returning upperclassmen, grads, and alumni, welcome back to ROC. If all goes well, you will be receiving this issue at the first meeting of the year; if not, that's the breaks of Cairn editing.

This is, first of all, an introduction to the club for prospective members. At the same time, I've included articles of interest to the older members who can hardly remember what a Cairn looks like, there having been so few compiled of late.

Here, then, is the first issue of the thirty-ninth volume of the ROC Cairn. To those who contributed, you have my undying gratitude; the rest of you had better get your acts together if you don't want to see me standing up at every meeting begging for articles.

-Andrew Weiss-

ROC OFFICERS

PRESIDENT	Patricia A. Hunter
VICE-PRESIDENT	J. Davis Chapman
EQUIPMENT CHAIRMAN	Ray Tice
TREASURER	Howard Kalnitz
SECRETARY	Jenifer Barron
MEMBER-AT-LARGE	Dave Sudlik
CAIRN EDITOR	Andrew Weiss

\*\*\*\*\*IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT\*\*\*\*\*

I'm sure none of you were impressed by the lack of cover art for this issue, and neither was I. Therefore, I am announcing the First Quasi-Annual Cairn Cover Contest. If you think you can draw and you have a good idea, get a blank Cairn cover from me and go for it. The winner receives a six-pack of his or her favorite beer that costs less than \$3.00 (soda for lightweights). Black and white submissions only, and no obscenity (unless it's tasteful).

\*\*\*\*\*

This first piece is a reprint of the club description that was written for the Transit.

### THE RENSSELAER OUTING CLUB

For those who want to climb mountains, ride rivers, explore caves, or engage in numerous other outdoor activities, there is the Rensselaer Outing Club. ROC offers students, faculty, and members of the RPI community the opportunity to go caving, rock climbing, backpacking, canoeing, rafting, kayaking, ice climbing, winter-mountaineering, and cross-country skiing. Those without experience can acquire the basic skills in any of these activities, and those with experience can improve their expertise, learn new skills, and gain leadership abilities.

All trips are led by club members who have been trained in Advanced First Aid and/or Advanced Life Saving in addition to meeting the skill requirements of leadership. The club provides all equipment beyond clothing needed for the trips. Trips going out for the week are announced at weekly Tuesday meetings at 7 pm in CC 330. Dues are \$8.00 per year and entitle members to full equipment privileges.

In addition to the regular day-trips, there are numerous special programs and events throughout the year. During the first weekend in October, ROC sponsors Fall Lake George. This weekend on an island in Lake George gathers college outing clubs from across the east for camping, dancing, hiking, canoeing, and caving.

Later in the fall, after a number of Friday night caving trips, Vertical Techniques School begins. Methods of ascending and descending ropes are taught in the Armory preparation for the vertical caving season and a week-long trip over Thanksgiving to the deeper caves of West Virginia.

The next big event is Winter School. Before the spring semester begins in January, ROC members go to the Adirondack or White Mountains for a week of intense winter activity where survival skills and training are stressed.

Spring break brings the opportunity for a variety of trips. In the past there have been week-long kayaking trips, backpacking trips along the Appalachian Trail, and caving trips to the big pits of Alabama and Georgia.

Even as the year winds down, the Outing Club remains active. ROC sponsors square dancing during GM Week and holds an annual banquet for members at the end of April. Finals don't stop ROC, either. For summer students and others in the area, there is plenty to do outdoors with the Rensselaer Outing Club.

-Andrew Weiss-

## HOW TO MAKE A ROC FLOAT

### Ingredients:

- 2 large madmen
- 1 medium canoe (preferably with broken seat)
- substantial quantity of brown water, chilled
- numerous rocks of various sizes

### Instructions:

- 1) place rocks in large container (such as a riverbed)
- 2) pour water over rocks
- 3) place ROCs in canoe
- 4) add ROCs and canoe to water.
- 5) roll thoroughly

note: if ROCs will not float, add life vests

-Ray Tice-

## THE FIRST CLIMB

My mind races through thoughts of the approaching climb. My stomach churns at the idea of clinging fifty feet in the air to the side of a mountain. My goal: to get to the summit. I am destined to fight against the force of gravity and ascend the mountain face in front of me.

"Yes, your ropes are secure, and you are safe to climb," my friends say to encourage my start.

I'm not sure whether my decision to attack the mountain was a sane one or not, but I have begun my climb, and there is no turning back. Moving from one ledge to the next, I come to the realization that my body can do much more than I had ever expected. With each step of my climb, I am amazed by the pieces of rock that are able to support a good foot or hand hold. I slowly realize that, yes, I can trust my hands to support me as my feet and eyes search for something to use for stability. My eyes are constantly searching up the face of the mountain for a bucket in the rock that I can grab onto and hang from for a couple of seconds of rest.

My left foot, hanging onto a little crack in the rock, suddenly slips. My arms leap into action and stop my body from falling. I'm again searching for a foot hold. There's one way off to the right. Stretch. Stretch. There it is. After pulling my body back above my feet, I realize how much I appreciate that bucket my hand was in.

I proceed up the face another five feet, with the rim only five more feet away. There is a nice horizontal crack here, but it's upside down. The people below urge me to try an undercling, and they explain the procedure. Personally, I think they are crazy, but they tell me it will work. How can they expect me to walk up the face of the mountain while my hands are pointing

upward in a crack barely big enough for my fingers to fit into? Well, I cannot see another way up, so I decide to give their method a shot. Even though I have ropes secured to my waist, it is not that great a comfort when trying something so new.

While my feet are on a seemingly stable platform, all of an inch wide, I place my fingers between the rocks near my face. As I use my arms to pull me toward the mountain, my feet fight against the pull by pushing out from the mountain. Before my eyes, my feet magically cling to the rock as they walk up toward my hands. When my feet are a few inches below my hands, I spot what seems to be a good hand hold. To get to it I have to let go with my right hand and reach up.

I ponder this idea and then realize that I don't have much of a choice. I can either do it or head back down the mountainside. I give it a shot and discover that it is a better hold than I had expected. With this hold, I pull myself up high enough to reach the topmost ledge.

I quickly mantle onto the ledge and pick myself up. As I rise to my feet, my eyes absorb the beauty and serenity of the surrounding countryside. My body writhes with the pain of the climb, while my soul is encompassed by the euphoric splendor of today's accomplishments.

-Richard Marsan-

#### QUOTABLE QUOTES

"Can I have a sip of your frozen insides?"

-DT

"I'm not afraid to kiss boys, but you are."

-Anon.

"My glands got confused."

-DT

"My chest doesn't move, but my legs do."

-JB

"That's not the wind; that's a truck full of hicks."

-AW

"Patty, take your pants back off."

-JB

Everyone in the club is encouraged to keep his or her ears open for quips such as these. Write them down and submit them with the initials of the speaker. That way we can try to guess who said the really good ones..."frozen insides?"

In the coming weeks you will be hearing a great deal about Fall Lake George. ROCs will tell you all kinds of strange and wondrous things (many of them true) about the weekend. But what was it like back in the good old days...back in, say, 1949...

The ROC played host to 30 colleges over the weekend of Oct. 7,8,9 when Big Turtle Island was again the scene of the Outing Club's annual Lake George IOCA...Len Nelson sparkplugged Saturday evening's entertainment by putting fireworks in the fire. Would be late risers Sunday morning awoke quite abruptly to find themselves staring down the smoking muzzles of .45 calibre water pistols. The artillery had been requisitioned for the trip the night before in a vain attempt to the scheduled trips started on time.

For some vague reason the Vassar contingent found themselves being thrown in the lake around 3 am Sunday morning. In appreciation of the gesture the ROC later received through the mail a devilishly clever "present"--a home-made bomb, its charge consisting of perfume, powder, and other endearing accouterments of the fair sex. Our Bomb Detonating Division was up to the task, however, and defused the thing before it managed to spread its pleasant odors around our sanctum sanctorum. In all fairness it should be admitted that the construction of the gift represented engineering skill of a high order!

Now, let's go even farther back in time. Here is a letter written 45 years ago to a Smith College student by her mother...

My Darling Daughter:

We just received your last letter, not a very long one. Your father and I both feel that you might write more often and not just when you need money.

What is this about the "Going-out Club?" Was that what you called it? I do think that you might be able to find something more interesting to do than cooking meals and washing dishes. But if you feel that you must belong to this club, you might as well be as warm as possible. You spoke of being cold at night--so I am sending you some warmer blankets. I remember when I was in school we used to walk out into the country, picnic and go wading--not where anyone could see us, of course.

Don't you think that some of the older girls might carry the axe and hatchets? I know that you are old enough to take care of yourself, but you have had very little experience in this sort of thing. Your father says to remind you to be very careful when you are lighting a fire because it's rather dangerous.

You mentioned mud and a brook; I hope you didn't wear your new saddle shoes.

I'm sure you were exaggerating when you said you had to use Bon Ami for your bath.

Write us soon,

Lovingly,

Your Mother

This Cairn will end on a serious note. The last article is taken from a letter written by Patty concerning her summer caving experiences. This letter is important not only to cavers, but to all members of ROC. It shows that while a difficult, highly technical trip can go off virtually without a hitch, a simple, non-technical trip can be dangerous if trip members do not listen to their leaders and if the leaders do not fully control the group. I am very grateful to Patty for allowing me to print this. She has learned a great deal from these experiences, and I hope others can as well.

Howie called last week and told me one of his friends and some members of the Central Connecticut Grotto were going on a trip to Ellison's Cave in Georgia. (It has the biggest drop in a cave in the country, I believe.) He gave me the guy's name and number, and I gave him a call, and after a lot of trouble working out a ride to Georgia and back, we arranged to meet in Lafayette, GA late Saturday night. We camped out and headed up Pigeon Mountain (1000' to the entrance) late Sunday morning. It was myself and four experienced guys who had been preparing for this trip for a while. I think the 12 mile hike I made here in Alabama was the only thing that saved me from dying when we went up that mountain. It was a fast pace with two brief rests (about one minute and five minutes), but I kept up.

Finally we arrived at the entrance. We put on harnesses and went in, prepared to descend the 130' first drop. (I was excited and not too nervous. I knew I could rappel down down easily, and I love rappelling!) I went down slowly, and it was a comfort to be able to see the ground below me. (Two had gone down before me, and their lamps lit up the bottom.)

We moved on through a small crawl or two and arrived at the second drop, 18 feet; an annoying jump, as they called it. I was down quickly and with no problems, and we all moved onto "the balcony." This was where we were to descend 510 feet into nothingness! To get to the balcony we had to crawl a few feet on a ledge that was a little scary. After getting by it, I then realized that the drop on the other side of the ledge was the 510 foot one!

We rigged up again and went down one by one. It took each person five to ten minutes to get down. I was second to last. I hooked the rack into the rope and approached the edge. My fear of falling grasped at my emotions momentarily, and I started to pull back. Then, thinking, "I've come this far; no turning back," I turned my back to the hole and walked down into the drop.

The rope held, as I knew it would. (Somewhere in the back of my mind this sure knowledge was really not so sure.) I descended slowly at first, having to feed the rope through the rack with my hands just to move, but then the walls started slipping by faster and faster. I was braking now and then to slow down, being careful not to stop completely (lest the rack melt the nylon rope.)

Fantastic (the name of the drop) is a good word for it. Although it doesn't encompass the experience completely, it touches on the feeling as one descends, controlling and experiencing life. Magnificent. Beautiful. Exciting!

Once we were all down, we explored for about an hour and then prepared for our ascent. I knew that the hardest part of the trip was before me. More difficult than getting to the cave, more difficult than the 1000 foot elevation hike, more difficult than that step toward and off the edge into nothingness. There was more incentive, however. Out was up!

One hour. I had my sweater on now, as the cold was getting to me during the wait. Two had climbed out and the third was preparing to do so. I would be next. Taking my time (I had about another half-hour), I refilled my carbide lamp. I didn't want it to go out on me while I was climbing. It wouldn't make much difference if it did, except that I don't think I would feel as safe, especially when I reached the top and had to unhook! Next, I took off the sweater and put on my climbing gear. It was a well-designed three gibbon system. One gibbon on the right foot, one at the left knee, and one above a roller on my chest harness. Putting my sweater and other loose gear into my cave pack, I secured it and hooked it into the leg of my harness.

My turn to climb arrived, and climb I did. I started out taking twenty steps at a time, resting briefly between each group. I soon tired at this pace and cut it down to ten steps between rests. After a long time of ten steps at a time, I had to cut it down to five. Then, there was what seemed to be an eternity of climbing during which I kept turning over a phrase in my mind, a phrase one of the guys had told me--"ONWARD, UPWARD, and OUTWARD," and I was out.

I clipped into the other end of the rope for safety and proceeded to undo the gibbons. My hands were shaking as I undid one, then the next, and finally worked at the remaining one on my ankle. My hands were shaking, my foot was hanging over a 510 foot cliff, and my gibbon was stuck! I pulled and tugged and finally slipped my foot out of my shoe. I then pulled my shoe, the strap, and the gibbon over to myself and worked at it some more, finally getting it loose. I was free! I hollered down that I was "off belay" and crawled back away from the cliff, unclipping my safety.

Because I was second to last, I had to wait for the last person. I was still sweating and gasping for breath, so the cool air and rest felt really good. Time passed, and I began to whistle. The sound echoed and was very pretty. Bob, who was the last, made it to the top, and after quenching my thirst with some of the water he was carrying and requesting my time (28 minutes from start to "off belay"), we headed out.

Things were going well until we got to a fifteen foot climb. I got halfway up and couldn't find a hand hold. Panic set in, and I had to fight my way up. Funny how you can get yourself to step off a 600 foot cliff and then get nervous and tense over a fifteen foot drop!



As we approached the entrance, a steady beat of cricket noises got louder and louder and louder. The sound seemed deafening. Only when I heard all those crickets did I realize just how quiet it had been in that cave.

Next Sunday was again caving day. After church, Shirley, Linda, Billy, Alan, and I packed our gear, donned some old and dirty clothes, piled into Alan's car, and headed for Paint Rock. Seventy-two to 65, a right at the burnt tree stump, onto 20, past a cliff on the left and the "blue hole" water hole on the right, into a dirt parking area on the left. Up a path, into a large entrance, we followed the leader, one by one.

The entrance room was large, much like Hugh's Cave (another cave, another story), and we climbed up some loose rocks into a low ceiling crawl. Billy and Alan, who had been in the cave before, proceeded to show us the entrance to "the mazes," Devil's Den, and the stream. When we got to the stream, they were very excited because it was much lower than they had ever seen. This was odd because we had had rain all week long. I decided the water must have broken through somewhere and drained into a lower portion of the cave.

We followed the river upstream, and I came across a hole. Billy and I pushed it one way, Linda and Alan the other, and Shirley waited outside. After about fifteen minutes we decided it was a dead end. By the time I got out, Shirley, Linda, and Alan had already started pushing further upstream. Billy and I followed. Shirley found holes to crawl through, over, and around so that we didn't have to get wet. Billy didn't care about staying dry and proceeded to take the "easy" way, tramping through the water upstream (only about six inches deep). We arrived in a large room that slanted upward. None of us had ever been here, and from my brother's description of how high the water used to be, I suspected no one without a wetsuit had ever been back there.

There was a column formation up the slope about 25 feet, and I got everyone to get in front so I could get a picture. After the picture, Billy and Alan had the great idea of climbing the steeper part to see what was up there. I advised against it, but did not stop them. A few minutes later I realized how high they were getting and told them they should come down. My brother, being his normal "little brother ignoring advice" type, told me "no" in not so nice terms. I knew if I pressed the issue I could at least get Alan down since I was in charge of the trip, and without Alan, Billy would have to descend. However, I told myself they were smart enough to know when they wouldn't be able to handle it anymore and would then come down.

I waited, and suddenly Billy did a little hollering and swearing and then exclaimed he couldn't get back down! We got the lights all shined up at them and were able to talk Alan, who was below Billy, down. After making sure Billy was safe for the time being, I found out what had happened. Billy had started to slip and so he jumped up for a grip, but in doing so, he went over a small overhang which he then pulled himself on top of.

Knowing he had almost slipped going up, he knew he wouldn't make it back down! Well, now I had really done it. I had let one of the people I was in charge of get stuck.

We decided Shirley, Linda, and Alan would head out of the cave. Shirley and Linda would call my Dad, let him know what had happened, and get help. Meanwhile, Alan would get the rope, harness, and descending gear from the car and bring it back in. I waited with Billy, and we talked. Luckily I had brought my wool sweater because the chill started getting to me. I thought about Billy, who had walked through the water and had no sweater. He must have been cold. How did I let this happen?

I had been talking and whistling, and even singing a few songs, with Billy to keep our minds off the situation and away from panic. After what was approaching an hour, Alan returned, lugging with him the rope, gear, and some twine. We untangled the twine and balled it up around a small rock, hoping we could throw it up to Billy. Alan threw it up and it went only about 3/4 of the way and came back down, landing on a ledge.

Now Billy was starting to panic. I told him to calm down and sit still. Alan would climb up part-way and see if he could get the twine. I got out the harness and attached it to Alan. Tying the end of the rope in an eight-knot, I attached this to a D-ring which was clipped into the harness. With me belaying from where I was, if he fell it would be about the same as a lead fall in climbing. At least he wouldn't fall all the way back to the stream.

Alan climbed up the rock for the second time that day and reached a point where he could see the twine. To get it, however, would mean he would have to do a difficult traverse, and I told him to forget it. He began climbing higher, and I told him I thought he should come down. He said he thought he could make it to Billy and pass the rope up to him. I let him climb. Soon Billy hollered out in relief. He had the rope and helped Alan up. Now I had two people up there, but they had a rope.

Billy found a large stalagmite and put his bandana in a spot to protect the rope. He then slid the rope around the formation and tied himself in with the end of the rope; Alan tied in above him. At this point, Shirley and Linda returned with Rocky, a friend who also goes climbing and caving. He had an extra rope and gear in case we needed it, but I told them to just sit and wait, things were going fine.

I pulled out my rack and eight-ring and then asked Rocky if he had another rack. He did, and I took that, some webbing, and returned to the rope. Billy and Alan pulled the rope through and sent down the other end. Knowing the rope to be about 150 feet long, I could tell that they were almost 50 feet up from where I was. I attached the rack and webbing to the end of the rope with another D-ring and sent them back up. I knew Billy could make a harness out of the webbing because I had shown him how several times and let him do it himself when we went rappelling the day before.

They had the gear, and Billy got Alan hooked in. I told Billy to double-check everything one more time before he sent

Alan down. I had shown him how to hook a rack in, and hopefully had already gotten him into the habit of double-checking everything, but I wanted to be sure. Alan had never done any rappelling before, and I knew he would be nervous. I told Billy he should put on all the bars because Alan had never done this, and he said he had. We were ready.

Rocky and Shirley had secured one end of the rope around a huge rock, and I was bottom belaying the other end. I had tied a knot in the end just to make sure he didn't try to go too far. Alan came down slowly, and I could hear Billy yelling at him to trust the rope and lean back, as that would make it easier. Alan was soon down, and Billy was next. Coming down a little faster than Alan, he reached the bottom and gave me a hug and said "sorry and thank you."

Shirley, Linda, and Alan headed out to tell my Dad that Billy was down safely and we would be out as soon as we got the rope and gear together. The way out was longer than I remembered, and as I was leaving I pictured trying to get an injured person out of this. I promised myself that I would be more careful about where I let the people I was in charge of go. Billy and Alan would not have gone up there if they had been in the cave alone, but because they knew there was someone else in charge they were counting on that person (me), not their own instincts, to tell them when to stop.

We made it out, and when we were back home we all had BLTs for supper around 11:00 pm. We had been in the cave for about eight hours. Billy had been up there for four of those hours, and I hoped he had a new outlook on life. He had thought he was going to die when he slipped, and he was alive and safe. All we had lost was one bandana and a small flashlight. The flashlight was later recovered; the bandana was not.

-Patricia A. Hunter-