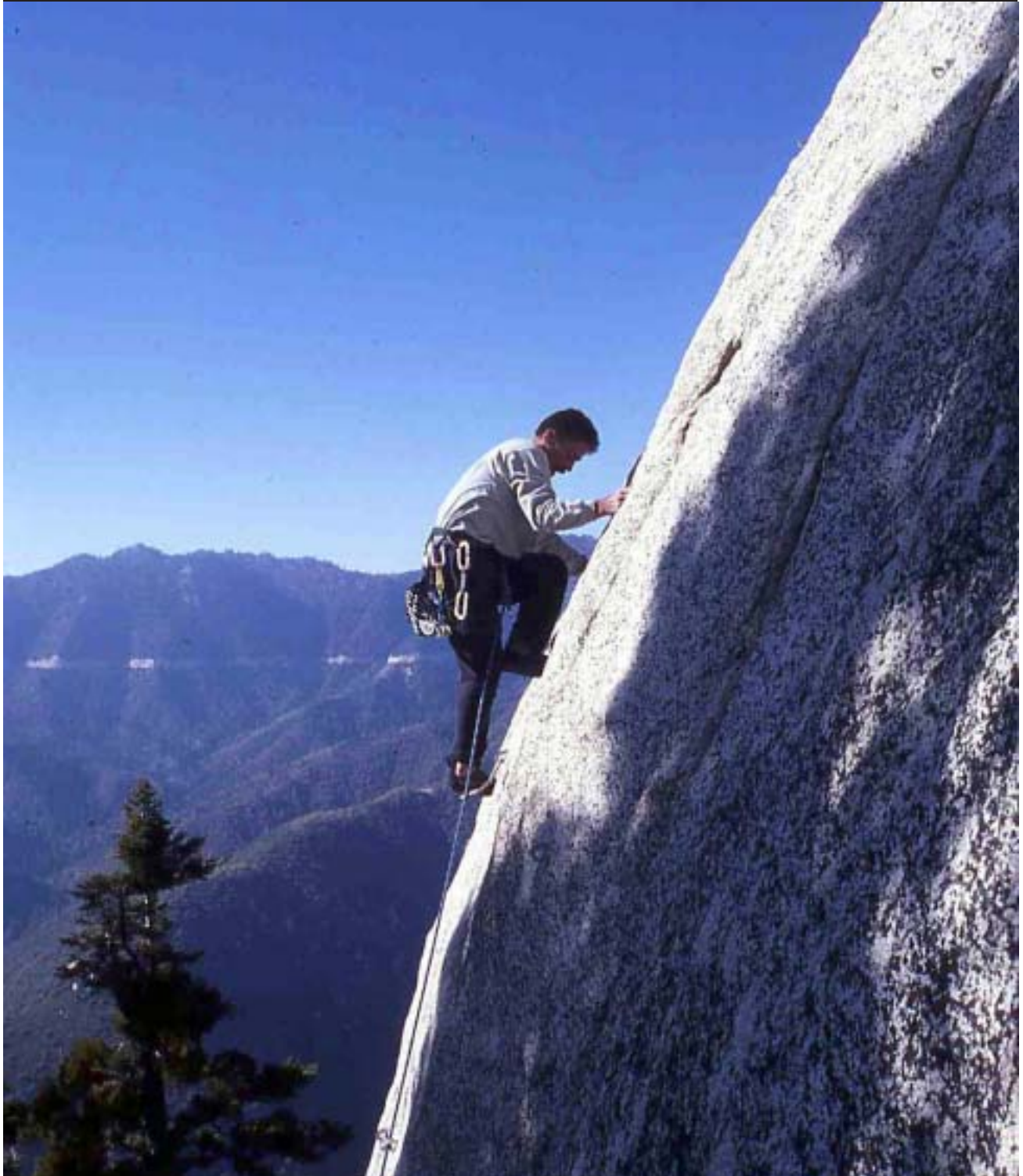


WHAT'S THE BETA?

RENDEZVOUS ISSUE

JUNE 2008



**18TH ANNUAL ROWCC RENDEZVOUS @ BLACK BLUFF JUNE
6,7,8 BLUFF MESA CAMPGROUND**



PRESIDENT'S LEDGE

Once again, it's time for our annual rendezvous and, as always, your family and friends are encouraged to come along. We'll be at the Bluff Mesa group site on June 6 through the 8th. The slide show will be held Friday night. Whoever wants to show off some photos please bring them, either digital or the old slides will work. Saturday you're welcome to just hang out at camp, go hike, climb at Black Bluff, or do whatever you want until the main event, Dinner. Dave "Melon" Honeywell is going to start things off with dinner, followed by the awards ceremony, and then dancing to the music of the Cactus Pricks!! On Sunday, more climbing! Bring your own drinks, beer, soda, whisky, etc, and bring lots of money. We need to collect dues, there will be T-shirts and sweat shirts for sale, and we'll be passing the hat to collect donations for the Access Fund. I look forward to seeing everyone there!

J. Cardmon

P.S. Bring lots of money!

Ordeal in the Sun by Tom Evans

In a moment of irrational decision making I decided to take my friend Dave Turner's offer to take me up the Cap. My fate was sealed and others started to conspire to make this happen, in the hope no doubt that I would be bitch slapped hard by the Captain himself. Unfortunately Dave had his C rack here, the better one being down south. So we had to borrow some stuff and thanks to SAR Andy I got to use his double ledge. Thanks Andy! I dragged out my "old climbing gear" to make up the difference in hardware. As we sorted gear in the parking lot an assortment of friends came up to watch the sort out. Amazement soon spread as people got to see stuff not used in years and barely modern. Some even photographed the proceedings! By noon Thursday we were down at the Cap hiking to be base of Lurking Fear. Brazilian Nick and Dave did the heavy lifting as phase one was to get our stuff to the base of the climb. The odds of me even making it to the base were running 3 to 2 against by the bridge rats hoping to get a chance to slander the slanderer! However the hike went well and I did indeed make the base.

Unfortunately, we arrived to find a conga line with a party of three a party of two and a solo just starting ahead of us. Not good for us. The sun had reached the face by then and the heat was intense. So much so that we decided to wait until the sun went over the rim to start fixing a couple of pitches. We immediately realized that our 9.5 gallons of water was not going to do the job and considered sending Nick down to get three more gallons.... but Nick was scrounging around and low and behold scored 5 gallons of "bailer water" which is the best kind as no work is required to get it up to the base. We also found a serviceable butt board to replace the ancient Chouinard two point fabric one that I had gotten in 1966. However the water was marked by its leaver as 10/07 and his name was Peter I think.... fortunately it was bought water in those plastic jugs you get at the store! I opened one and it was ok. So Nick could stay until the sun went away and we all lounged on the water passing the afternoon.

The sun did indeed depart and we racked up to start fixing pitches. Dave is so fast that he soon had the first done and I juggled up cleaning it. I immediately noticed that, at almost 64 years and 70 pounds overweight, the steep jugging was not so easy as it once was. But I got the hang of it after a time and after fixing two it was getting toward dark so we came down. At the base was our friend John O'Connor who had hiked a load of stuff to the Lost Arrow earlier for a photographer, had come up in the evening to spend some time with us. He told me to close my eyes and pulled out a 6 of Cobras! Now that is a friend! Thanks John!! We talked the rest of the evening away and settled in for the night. The party of 2 above had climbed in the heat hauling a huge bag up to the third. The party of three was higher. The solo had merged with the party of two and was to hitch hike the route keeping a pitch away but not leading at all... he would have made Chongo proud. We figured he would bail as he wasn't lead climbing but the lad hung on and kept going.

I noticed a rattling noise around 4:30 a.m. and thought that a squirrel was in the suspended haul bag..so I jumped up and opened the top and there was a ring tailed cat working its way through our food! Dave and John jumped up and investigated too. Dave took a flash pic of it in the bottom of the bag which startled the creature before we dumped it out... Bagels were eaten and other things warranted a dump on them to mark their "new owner". We got up reasonably early and started the route in earnest.

I had to go up first as Dave got the bags ready to go. Jugging 300ft off the deck was not easy for me and I huffed and puffed up the fixed line to the start of the third pitch. Bobo was right behind me and we soon were set for the haul from the ground. Dave, who is a hauler with vast experience, set the protraction (a pulley device) and started the bags up. About 35ft up they jammed under a large flake and there was nothing to be done save go down and clear them. Dave went down and dealt with the situation and soon they were moving right along. The protraction was an old one and soon started to make some bad sounds like bearing grinding. It wouldn't lock the load off and then it started to shred my new 220ft static line! Not good. We had no reserve pulley... in fact we had no reserve anything on this low budget climb. After a time he got the thing to work in a crude way and the bags arrived shortly thereafter. So we were on the route and ready to get it done. The team of two and its solo hitch hiker were clear of the next belay so Dave lead off on the Window Pane flake that rose above us. The plan was for Dave to do most of the leading and if things went right I would get selected pitches probably in the morning or evening after the portaledges were out.

I remembered this pitch from 22 years ago when Charley Honsinger, a bump skier from Colorado, and I were over here to do it at this same time of year. Charley was new to walls and I was the man with the plan. We did well but by the 5th pitch it was so cold that we were shaking uncontrollably and couldn't get warm. We came down in the coldest conditions I had experienced on the Cap. I wanted to avenge the bail but never came back. So I guess that was another reason for wanting to do this climb.

Dave lead upward in his rapid style of placing and backcleaning gear. With his reach he just flew up the pitch. He left just a few pieces of gear in and hopefully they would be within reach of my much shorter arms. He disappeared past the flake, did a pendulum out to the left and quickly climbed to the belay. I let out the bags and proceeded to clean the pitch of its skimpy gear. The temperature was perfect for climbing in a t-shirt and I was starting to have some fun. It was kind of strange being back on the wall again after so long, as the last time I climbed to the top was on Zodiac in 1995. I got to where the flake curved over to the horizontal and quickly realized that the lad had backcleaned too much and I was not going to be able to reach from one piece to the next. I had no gear on me to put between the pieces as I used to do in this situation. The gear couldn't be left there as we needed it higher and of course it was expensive. So I kicked out a few steps to the left and turned running right so I could get back to the piece in the crack. A little short... so I kicked it again and raced over in a nice pendulum and at the max reach I jammed a hand the the crack and stabbed a foot down low and grabbed the piece, a medium cam and yanked it out. As I did I let go and just wheeled out of there flying out from under the roof. Dave saw me flying and let out a monkey call and yelled down that I was getting dangerous up here!! I did that in a smaller way a couple more times and was soon lowering over to the crack and climbing to the belay. This was fun!

As you get older it is not uncommon to want to feel again the feelings of wonder and anticipation that you felt toward things in your younger days. One reason I was doing this climb was to visit my past and feel again the feelings I had when I climbed the walls so long ago. I could close my eyes and for a moment sense the cool air, smell the granite, and feel the warmth of the sun on my body. I could once again look down the sweep of granite and feel those old feelings again. I could imagine that it was 30 years ago and my life lie ahead instead of behind me. Nostalgia is a powerful feeling when you have so much to remember. This was going to be just what I needed to close out this part of my life. Part of growing old is graciously giving up things you can no longer partake of and being on ElCap is one of those things. So I am here for a drive down memory lane if you will... a last long look.. trying to see if I can capture for the last time, if only for a moment, that person that I used to be then and will never be again. When I see the old slides of me climbing I feel like I am not that person but he is like a brother I had long ago... familiar in many ways but no longer existing. I expected to be dealing with fear now, as I am not hardened to these conditions, but that is not the case. I am enjoying all of it and am completely comfortable.

At the belay Dave had things set up in his usual way. Of course Dave's usual was not my usual way. So I thought I should ask a few questions to learn the "why" of his way. Well that seemed to produce a little friction between us right off. Probably because I asked questions in a slightly confrontational way. Like: "Yo Dave, The next pitch goes out right and you hauled the bag up on the left side of the belay and tied it in there, so that it will drag over me when I lower it out. I always thought that you looked at the next section and hauled it on the side that it was going to be released on? Why didn't you do that?" MMMmmm. Dave thought about that one for a second and replied... "Ah... it doesn't make any difference". MMMmm ok Dave. Then I went into how the belay was set up and pretty soon my very good friend, whom I consider to be like the brother I never had, had a change in tone and a little frown on his face. But that passed and soon he was off on the next pitch, one I had led so long ago. I worked the ropes and tried to keep the belay in order while he climbed. Unfortunately, our low budget ascent didn't include rope bags, and the ropes were full on 11mm and 65 and 70 meters in length. That was a lot of rope weight to deal with and I certainly didn't want it hanging off Dave's harness. So I had to pull it up and just let out what he needed. Dave has never heard of the words, "slack" or "up rope", instead jerking the rope frantically when he needs it. Amazingly, he always seemed to do that just as I was trying to bring up more rope and set it up to be fed to him. Plus, I was new to the Grigri belay and with my arthritic hands had trouble pulling the rope through the device. In short, we were new to the partnership and like all others in similar situations we had to adjust to each other. But since Dave is "the man" I was sort of expected to adapt to him and not the other way around! Still all things considered, we were starting to get things smoothed out and I certainly enjoyed watching him do his work on lead. The sun was on us now and the temperature was rising.

Dave finished the lead and I got the bag sent out, tore down the belay and was off cleaning in a fair time, if not fast, steady. I juggled and cleaned and remembered when I was there on that lead in the freezing wind and cold in deep shadows. It was different now. Angle had steepened and I was hanging from my harness a lot of the time. Dave had viciously backcleaned and most of the pieces were gone from the pitch, a practice he did throughout the climb. If he fell there would be hell to pay... but of course he didn't ever fall! So cleaning was easy due to his consideration. But the one thing he couldn't do was make the juggling easier for me. One of the bad, bad things about being overweight, or fat if you will, is that my old harness didn't exactly fit anymore. So when I weighted it, it would push up into my diaphragm and restrict my ability to breathe. So, what was strenuous due to my extra pounds was made more so by my reduced lung capacity. Thus, I made a series of grunts and moans that must have sounded like I was in the throes of death to Dave. He did have a somewhat alarmed look on his face when I finally arrived at the belay.

The sun now pounded down on us and the temperature soared as the wind died out. The sky was hazy with heat and the once fresh air quickly turned stale. I was dying for water and had some at the belay with the admonishment to go easy as we would need it higher. The climbers above us were moving off and the hitch hiker had cleared the next belay. I was panting but Dave was fine and he led off on a really sweet left leaning crack. The afternoon was dragging on and the heat continued to do its work on both of us. The glare was horrendous. I tried to watch Dave above me but the sun was burning down in my face and I just couldn't keep looking up. Another nice lead for Dave. We got the cleaning and hauling done and were at the top of the 5th pitch by around 5 in the afternoon.

The teams above were not off the belay yet so we waited. By now the heat and glare were almost unbearable and we went to the water to get some relief but even after a drink we would soon be just as thirsty as before. The sun was scorchingly hot and it must have been even hotter for Dave as he had black synthetic pants and an olive drab synthetic shirt. We were stuck at that hanging belay, completely exposed to the sun, and soon were just falling asleep from the heat. The teams above cleared the belay but we were so weak that it was now impossible for us to climb. So we decided to wait until the sun dropped down below the rim at 7p.m. The minutes dragged on and on and we were really suffering, while trying to conserve water. I have never been so miserable on a climb. How the climbers above continued in this heat I could not imagine. We stopped talking to each other and just moaned and groaned about how hot it was.... the time passed slowly but it passed and the shade line crept up the wall and soon passed over us. The relief was instantaneous and Dave was soon ready to get the next pitch done. The crack rose beautifully to the left and then straight up to the belay. Dave took off and was backcleaning like a MF and after a time I just said... "hey enough of this Dave" and he left a piece in saying "this ones for you Tom"! He disappeared over a bulge and soon came the "off belay" I was waiting for. I got off that belay in record time and cleaned the pitch. But the heat had done its damage and I was not really recovered. I cleaned the few pieces Dave had left on the lower part and just jugged and jugged. But I could only do a few sweeps at a time and had to hang on the rope and rest, gasping for air. Soon Dave and the belay came into view and he was fast at work getting the PLs set up. I dragged up the last few feet to the belay and dove onto the PL. Dave tossed me some water and I was saved!!

The bivy was a clusterfck with Dave resorting to what Coiler calls "clipity clipity" a condition where things are just clipped into anything without any organization. I soon succumbed to the clipities myself and my side was a mess as well. I didn't care and we could deal with it later. Dave busted out the tunes and we were soon recovering from the worst afternoon I had ever spent climbing. We were relaxed now and could joke about our "differences" over the day. Whenever Dave would be a little short with me I would tell him that he was my "geid" (pronounced like a frenchmen would say "guide") and as such was to maintain a respectful attitude toward me at all times. Otherwise I would deduct \$50 from his supposed bonus for every infraction. From then on whenever he would yell at me to not touch anything, or to do what I was told, I would respond with "Ok geid, that will cost you \$100!" We enjoyed the coolness of the evening and kind of let the suffering of the afternoon fall from the conversation so that we felt confident again and started looking forward to another day of great climbing on the Captain. The route was much nicer than I had imagined it would be with some really nice crack systems and interesting features. But all that said, we were tired and by dark had stopped talking and went to bed for the night. I awoke occasionally and enjoyed the nearly full moon and the views of the Ribbon Falls amphitheater whose roar was our constant companion on the route. I thought about the other nights I had spent on the wall over the years. Some nights were spent in fear, awaiting the upcoming battle at dawn and others in quiet reflection of this unique place. This night passed pleasantly enough even though I was aching from exertions I had not trained to do. My ego was writing checks that my body couldn't cash!

Dawn came and the other teams above stayed in bed a long time thus delaying our start. Secretly I didn't mind as I could use the time to get organized and rest even more. We were to do a traverse with a couple of big lower outs first thing and I reviewed how I was going to do all that. Dave was lounging, listening to tunes. After a time we just had to get the bivy broken down so we went to work. I must say I was amazed, and would be throughout the climb, at how quickly he could reorganize the belay! It didn't matter how cluttered things were as it was just 10 minutes and things were ready to go. By then I had stopped complaining and spent my time trying to catch him disrespecting me... "AHa Geid! That will be a \$50 deduction from your bonus, soon you will be paying me!" We were having fun for sure and this was the climb I was hoping for when I signed on!

Soon Dave was on the traverse out to the right and made short work of it... I even lowered out without any problem and was soon at the belay. The cool shade was refreshing and we were again making good time. Above rose a long wide crack that was 10c or something like that but we had little gear for it so Dave decided to aid it. I pleaded with him to take some of my perfectly good but admittedly museum quality gear. I sang its virtues and he succumbed to my song. Off he went and about 30ft up came over a little roof where the running out would begin. "Ok Tom, I am going to use one of your pieces of shitty gear to start this runout." In went in a green 3 inch cam and off to the races went Bobo.

He stopped about 10 ft higher and set up the two pieces he would be rotating up the long pitch. Just as he resumed climbing I heard a scraping sound and out fell that piece of gear I had him take up!! Dave looked down and let out a string of slanderous remarks about my gear and person in particular. I pointed at him and said "you can't afford to make such remarks Geid!" At about 50 ft above his last piece he let out a whoop and said that this was really cool and for me to look out for the 100 footer that was coming my way! We were having a good time and were still in the cool shade. He ended the pitch and by the time I cleaned it he had run it out over 100 ft above his last piece. I shutter to think what would have been the results if he had come off and gone for a 200 footer. But he didn't and that was all that mattered. Well something else did matter and it was now with us. As I topped the bulge about 100 ft below him, cleaning, the sun came over the edge and hit us for the first time. We had a breeze and it was early so we didn't think much of it.

The view upward and downward was impressive and the other teams came into my view as they readied to start the so called "Grand Traverse". The hitch hiker was in his place at the rear of the line too. I finished cleaning and arrived at the belay in better condition than at the others yesterday afternoon. The next pitch was up a lower angle area to the Pillar of Despair some 110 ft higher. I was looking forward to the lower angle as it would take the strain off my waist as I wouldn't have to hang off the rope. Dave got organized and moved off quickly. I was doing pretty well now at managing the ropes and the systems in general and we were enjoying ourselves. This was probably going to be my last climb on El Cap and it was going to be a nice farewell for me. Dave moved along in his usual manner. We had the minimum rack but Bobo is an improviser and managed to make weird stuff work. I think it actually make the climbing more fun for him as it was not technical enough with full gear. Toward the end of the pitch the conditions changed for the worse. The breeze stopped and the suns angle increased its intensity and suddenly the temperature soared. It just kept climbing and climbing higher in the sky. I could feel the rays on my back getting stronger and stronger, burning right through my shirt. The water was in the bag and not available to me now so I would have to wait until I reached the belay to get another drink.

Dave finished the lead and hauled the bag as I cleaned in the stifling heat. The bag was stuck in the slings of some protection and I had to get up there to clean up the mess and clear it out. I was sweating and my face felt on fire and I was huffing and puffing for air. My optimism was fading rapidly as it was just after noon and already it was as hot as the worst part of yesterday and could only get hotter. It was soon a struggle just to clean the few pieces he had left as pro. By the time I was nearing the belay I was down to my last expendable energy and it was all I could do to make the few feet up to the Pillar of Despair. The belay was on top of this aptly named pillar which was not a ledge really but an uneven and pointed ramp offering little comfort. The sun had us now... there was no place to hide for 1000 ft. up or down. The teams above were slowly moving out on the traverse and would take most of the afternoon to get everyone across. Once established on the pillar we took a break for some water. Food was out of the question in this heat. After 20 minutes it became clear that we were not going to be able to climb the next pitch in the present conditions so we tried the best we could to present a minimal surface area to the sun which was relentlessly bombarding us with brutal radiation. We were trapped again and a feeling of near panic and dread spread over me. I cursed myself "Stupid, how could you be so stupid? You knew the weather was going to be even hotter the next days... why didn't you bail yesterday evening? Foolish pride and now look at you Stupid, Stupid!" Dave rigged the butt board and sat down on it and hunched down with his head between his legs to keep the sun off it. His clothing was soaking up the heat even worse than mine and although he is younger, stronger, in better shape than I, he too was unable to do much of anything. All we had the energy to do was sit there and moan about how hot it was... and it was only a little after 1 in the afternoon with a full 6 hours until the sun went down. I went for the water and promised myself I would only take one pull on it... it was 4 pulls until I could stop myself. Dave once again said to go easy and he was drinking even less than I was. It was a catch 22 situation. If we drank the water we needed to keep from heat exhaustion and possible death then we would not have water day after tomorrow when we would be in just as bad a shape. If we didn't drink then we might never get to the day after tomorrow. I had an idea and suggested to Dave, who was semiconscious and completely withdrawn to himself, meditating to try to keep his mind off the heat, that we put up the portaledge and use it as a shade to keep the rays off us. He murmured something about it being too much trouble but after I kept insisting he finally came around and opened his BD one and hung it above us. It covered him pretty well and the upper part of me. We felt immediate relief and were no longer increasing in body temperature. He slumped back down into his chair and lapsed onto his own little world, we were silent. I had to stand on the point of the ramp and shift from one foot to the other and then hang in my seat and after a time do it all again, over and over. I looked out and up and watched the teams above slowly make their way upward. How could they even move in this heat? I couldn't believe it. Choppers were flying by and I thought that someone had called them for us and we would be saved shortly. Not the case, as there was a rescue of a fallen climber on the Nose route. We had no cell phone and our little radio was not reaching anyone.

I noticed I had trouble focusing on the team above no matter how hard I worked my eyes and I found it difficult to do even the simplest task and just gave up and went as blank as I could. Dave had stopped sweating and was unresponsive. The experts will tell you that we were already passing into heat exhaustion and that we would be lucky to get out of this one. One has to be aware of the symptoms even before they are manifested so corrective action can be taken. But we were so feeble that we couldn't think clearly enough to see it coming on before it was too late!! I was able to stay in the situation only because I had to stand the entire time and kept shifting around. I thought about how foolish we were to be suckered into this trap. We should have gone down immediately but of course that was impossible as we were not able to do anything more complicated than breathing and resting, and rappelling is dangerous even when you are in control of your faculties. The afternoon dragged on and on. We even made a little "farewell loved ones video" as sort of gallows humor, but it had an element of truth we both recognized. Time moves no matter what and finally the time came when the shadow slowly crept our way. By around 7 p.m. our salvation arrived and we finished our penance. The shade brought immediate relief, and we stirred again. I looked over at Dave and said "It's my call Dave, we are going down in the morning and are going to bivvy here." I told him I had worked all my life and had a family and was reaping the rewards of a life well spent and that I was not willing to risk it any further just to get to the top of some rock. My family and his would never forgive us if we kept foolishly going on. He looked at me with his bloodshot eyes and replied "Are you sure?" "yes" I said. He said "then pass me that 3 liter bottle of water, we can drink all we want now!"

So it was that we settled in for the night and tomorrow I would get my life back, a wonderful life that I had foolishly let myself get suckered into almost giving up, just to say I climbed another route on El Cap. We had a quiet evening on the portaledges, drinking and eating all we wanted. The night passed in a deep sleep for me and in the morning we went down and reached the ground without any particular difficulty. Coming across the El Cap bridge I did the "walk of shame" as others had done but I was happy because for me it was the "walk of life".



Editors Note: Tom Evans is a long-time member of the club and is known world-wide for his outstanding photos of climbers on El Capitan in Yosemite Valley. A retired physics teacher, Tom started climbing in the 1960's along with legendary climbers Warren Harding, Tom Frost and Yvonne Chouinard. He has scaled El Cap numerous times but is now content to relax in El Cap Meadow with his tripod and camera. His attempt on El Cap has to be extremely commended, as most people in their 60's are content with sitting on the couch and drinking beer. I hope you enjoyed his story as much as I did!

Dan, Dad, and the Martian by Mike Rigney

It may seem odd to dedicate a story that might be read by twenty people but...This is dedicated to our good friend Steve Untch who would have had a great time educating my boys on some of the things it can be awkward for a Dad to cover and who thought "The Hitch hikers Guide to the Galaxy" was a classic. And my family, Connie, Cody and Dan who each in their own way have helped me pull my head out of my ass and gotten that same ass off the couch and back on the rock and into the back country. And everything you are about to read about really happened. Swear to God.

When it comes to my boys I am a lucky guy. They are as different as can be but for the most part, still like each other and I have things in common with both of them. With the older one Cody I share a love of books and we spend time back packing and fly fishing together. If you ask Cody he'll tell you, we are the unluckiest fishermen you have ever met but it gives us time together that we both enjoy. Dan can't sit still long enough to read a caption under a picture. Loves snow boarding, extreme mountain biking and has recently gotten into climbing. I can't keep up with him on a board. I meet him at the van at the end of the day. On a bike as long as I go around the big drops and jumps he fly's over I can keep him in my sights but when it comes to climbing I still have a few tricks under my tighter then it used to be climbing harness. This is a story about one of my trips to the East Side last summer with Dan.

This summer I indulged my younger son Dan with as many trips to Mammoth and the East Side as I could. They centered around riding bikes down Mammoth Mountain but in the evenings and often on the way home we would check out a different bouldering spot. Our first adventure was a spur of the moment affair after one particularly frustrating morning of broken bikes parts and flats. Dan brought it up, suggesting we go bouldering. I love exploring the volcanic tablelands around Mammoth so we bought a copy of "Bishop Bouldering" and were off. We decided to check some of the "new" areas on the East side of the upper Owen's Gorge but as it was still early in the afternoon and hot we stopped at Tom's Place for food and to wait for the cooler afternoon temps.

When you hang with a 14 year old you are constantly laying down money for food. They are eating machines. We ordered cheese burgers, with extra fries, a chocolate shake and a large milk for Dan and sat at one of the tables on the front porch. Dan could not sit still and went to check out a little fishing pond nearby. The front porch of Tom's Place is a great place to people watch in the summer. The majority of the folks are fishermen of all shapes and sizes but there are also backpackers in from the high country.. bikers, climbers and the occasional sun burnt tourist. I let my ears roam from table to table picking out the usual "no shit, there I was" stories, the most interesting from a biker explaining how he almost ate it on one of those long tar patches they use to patch the cracks in the road. I guess they get a little soft in the summer and can be a hazard to bikers. They call them "tar snakes". But my attention focused on a lone occupant of the table next to me who was reading the local Mammoth newspaper which hid his features but not the tendrils of smoke that occasionally wafted above his paper or his hands which wear scruffy and dirty with a dusting of chalk.

The burgers came but they were dry and there was no ketchup or mustard at our table. "Hey partner" I addressed the newspaper to my right, "Have you got any ketchup to spare?" Without a word he passed a bottle over and as our hands briefly made contact I got a brief jolt of electricity and I could have sworn his arm was green. I was wearing a full face helmet on that crash this morning but it still rung my bell a bit so I shrugged it off and said "thanks". "No problem Dad dude". As I prepped my burger he lowered his paper and I found myself looking at a pair of mirror shades and dreads on a slightly larger than normal head, macramé choker with interwoven blue crystals, a back and set of arms that looked like the wing span of a condor, a totally engaging smile and I swear he looked an earthy shade of green or maybe he was just really tan. I was surprised but not really that concerned as some of these youngsters that send V14's do tend to look a bit like mutants.

He pointed to Dan's pile of food and said "Young male offspring consume much fuel, do they not?" "Yeah, they do" I replied. "What are you eating, Pixie Sticks?" I asked, pointing to the pile of brightly colored straws on his plate. "No, these are Martian smokes, I consume them during my travels. They are a great source of energy, repair the micro trauma the body accumulates during hard bouldering sessions, keep mosquito's at bay and curtail the appetite" he said with a glance at my cheese burger and then my mature waistline. Did he say "Martian"? Great, a spaced out mattress person. Brennan would love this. But the one he was smoking did smell good. "Would you like to try one?"

What could I say? I did go to college in the seventies after all. "Sure." He lit up a blue one, my favorite color, passed it over and went back to reading his paper. The first puff was amazing. Smoother and tastier than any blaster from my past and as the smoke worked it's way from my lungs through my blood stream an incredible sense of well being worked it's way through my whole body. Aches and pains went away. I felt strong, at peace...youthful. "Oh this is too good. It can't be legal". I said to myself. A brief pulse of paranoia entered my head and I quickly looked around to see if anyone was giving me the stink eye but no one seemed to notice and so, cheeseburger completely forgotten, I relaxed, sat back and proceeded to enjoy my, what ever it was.

After what seemed like a few minutes and my "Pixie Stick" was almost burned down to my fingers, my new friend put down his paper and asked "how do you feel?" "How do I feel? Freaking fantastic! It's like a shot of creatine, testosterone, synthetic HGH (human growth hormone), Ibuprofen with a hint of herb to take the edge off mixed with a Grande nonfat triple shot 2 pump mocha washed down with a Dr. Pepper!" "Yes, the blue one's are my favorite also. Here comes your offspring. Enjoy your day together on the rocks. The bouldering in this area is some of the best in the Galaxy" "Thank You". Did he say Galaxy?

As Dan walked up to the table I turned to him and said "Dan, I want you to meet...hey. I didn't get your name," I said as I turned to the table where my friend was sitting only to find it empty except for an old, well-worn copy of the Mammoth newspaper rippling in the light afternoon breeze. "Dad, what are you talking about, when did you start smoking those nasty old cigars and why didn't you call me? My shake is melting!"

So when Dan finished the last of his fries and me still slightly confused but still feeling really, really good, we crossed 395, passed through the houses across the way from Tom's Place and crossed the Crowley Lake Dam. We were looking for a place called Pocketopia. Using the odometer and the guidebook we navigated on dirt roads through pinyon trees and outcroppings. A couple of times Dan had to climb onto the roof to lift low hanging tree branches over the bikes. When we pulled onto a smaller dirt road, the Sportsmobile got its first decent scratches from buckthorn and manzanita. Normally I would have been stressing about the damage to the paint job but trips like this is what this vehicle was made for so I likened the van and its new scratches to me and my scars. Every new one told another story.

There are many formations and piles of rocks on this side of the Owens Gorge and just when we thought we were totally lost we found the pull-out. The valley we were in started to match the descriptions in the book. Our destination was the "Maximum Joy" boulder. Seemed fitting after lunch with my strange new friend at Tom's Place. The boulder was obvious at the base of a small cliff band. The heat of the afternoon was fading, the smell of sage and dust was in the air. A faint wind was in the trees and not a soul was in sight. Perfect.

We shoed up in the shade of the Maximum Joy boulder. It was pocketed with shallow 2 and 3 finger pockets and looked so climbable. 4 to 5 tries of a V2 on the right side, I think the actual Maximum Joy problem, and I realized, once again, looks can be deceiving. There was no way I was ever going to top out on this thing. Whatever good mojo was in those Martian smokes was gone and reality was back. But Dan was getting close. He was having a hard time with his feet on the left leaning problem. He couldn't hold the pockets when his feet cut loose. I showed him how to lead with his hips, keeping his body weight centered and the next thing I knew he was shaking through a scary mantle and standing on top. Holy cow. First day on real boulders and the kid had just smoked me. At that moment Dan suddenly turned into a climber.

On the cliff band above us I had noticed a couple of corners with cracks that I thought would be more my style. Dan was pumped with his success and was throwing himself at a Vwayharder. I was pretty sure he wouldn't get close so I wasn't worried about spotting him. I told him I was headed up and he should join me when he was ready. I loved the corners. 20 feet tall, maybe 5.7ish. A little flaky cause who would want to hand jam when you could pimp such perfectpockets down below but to me they were perfect. I did a couple of laps on each and evidently I made them look so easy that Dan, who had joined me, started up the one to my left as I was topping out. I hunkered down on top to watch. Even this early in his climbing career Dan is a joy to watch. Yep, reminded me of me. Until he calmly looked up just below the top and said "Dad, I'm stuck" "Can you hold on?" I answered. For a while" he said. As I dashed around the back side to spot I realized he had no idea how to hand jam.

I wasn't too worried about Dan falling. I figured my 195 pounds could handle most of his 125 pounds. With the security of Dad the Crash Pad below, Dan managed to top out. As he sat on the top winded and pumped and amazed at how much harder this crack was than the pocket face he had just climbed, I felt a little smug. I still had a couple of tricks up my sleeve. But then I felt a little ashamed. This was my son. This was a promising young climber I was supposed to be his mentor. But hand jams and finger tip mantles were about all I had left. If I gave away my secrets how could I compete? How could I keep up? You aren't supposed to, dumb ass. How could one guy have so many voices in his head? Heavy sigh. "Come on down Dan and let me show you something"

Five minutes later Dan is again near the top only this time he is hanging off a locked-in hand jam with a "who ate the canary" kind of grin babbling on about how cool the clouds looked from up there. "OK young buck, come on down and meet me over at the slab around the corner." "You mean the one with no hand holds?" "Yeah, I want to show you something..."

We spent the next hour or so exploring the area, occasionally topping out on something but mostly going up a few moves and then coming down. Pointing out holds to each other. Visualizing lines. For a short time we were more like a couple of buds rather than a father and son. Many of the problems we down-climbed kept going for another 30 feet or more. You could see the moves all the way up. No harder than those we had just done but the skills were rusty, and the strength I always had in reserve wasn't there. If I spent a summer here doing just this, I could imagine myself floating way off the deck, confident on those golden faces and shallow pockets. So close.

We ended up back at the base of the "Maximum Joy" boulder, sitting in companionable silence, watching the evening shadows grow, sharing a canteen. Taking off my shoes I noticed something shiny and out of place in the dirt. It was an obsidian arrowhead. Scattered here and there were other pieces of obsidian that we had failed to notice in our earlier rush to feel the rock. Nothing as substantial as the arrowhead I held in my hand but evidence that people long ago had sat here. Maybe another father and son had watched the shadows grow long in the evening as Dan and I were doing, now after a day of teaching and sharing. I put the arrowhead back where I had found it and covered it with a little dirt. Looking up I saw Dan watching me with a faint smile on his face. "Long drive Dad, ready to go?" "Yeah". "Pretty good day, huh?" "Really good day son."



Editors Note: Mike Rigney is one of the founding members and former president of the ROWCC. When not injured, he is an outstanding climber with many years experience and most of all, a great partner to climb with and even better friend to sit around the campfire and tell lies with.

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