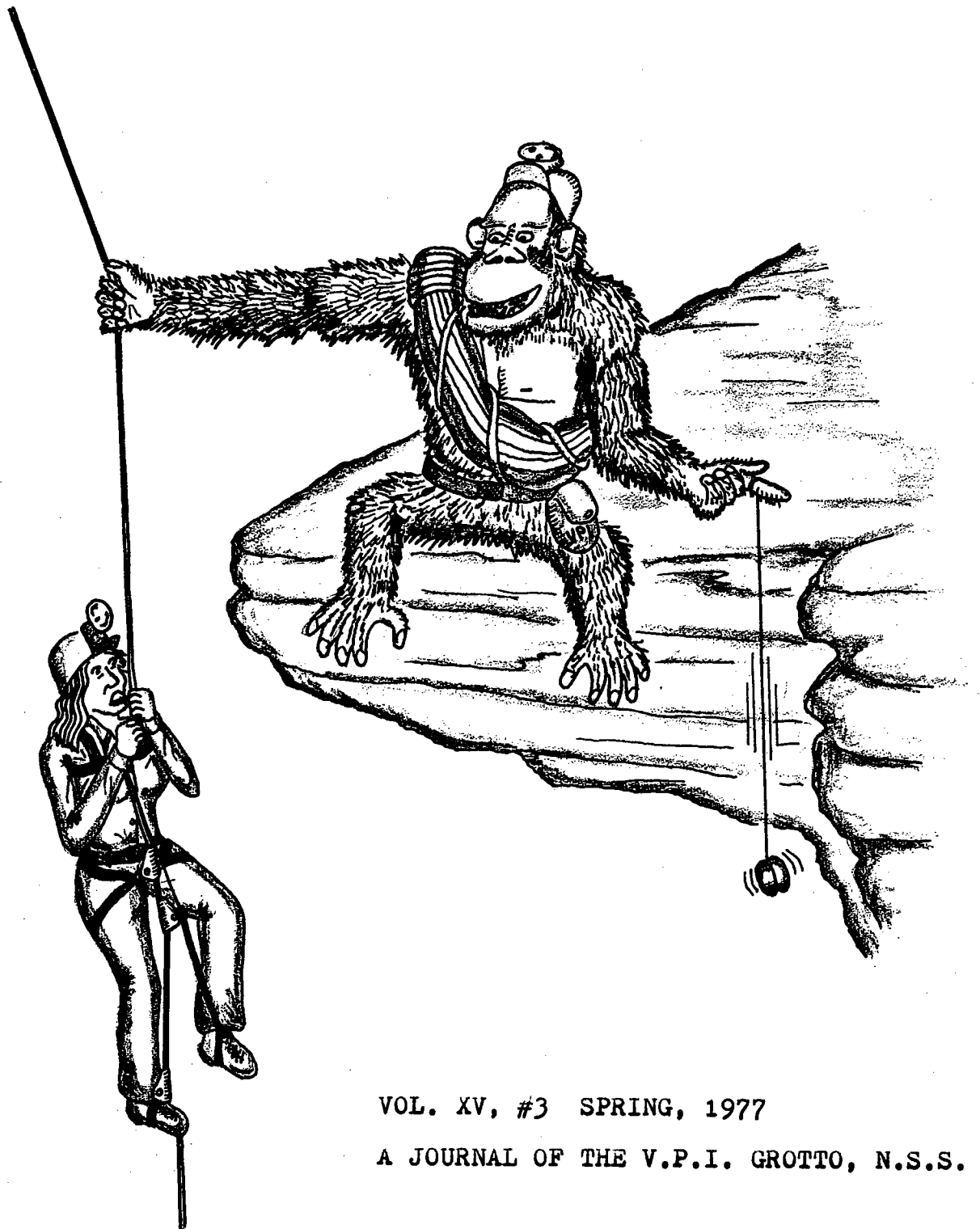


YO-YO-ING WITH

# THE TECH TROGLODYTE



VOL. XV, #3 SPRING, 1977

A JOURNAL OF THE V.P.I. GROTTTO, N.S.S.

# LOOK WHAT WE FOUND



Donald E. Carter



"Explicative Deleted"

President

Lor M. Windle

"Tiffany Tiger"



Vice President



David Bell



"Tinkerbelle"

Treasurer

Phil Sica

"Scarecrow"



Secretary

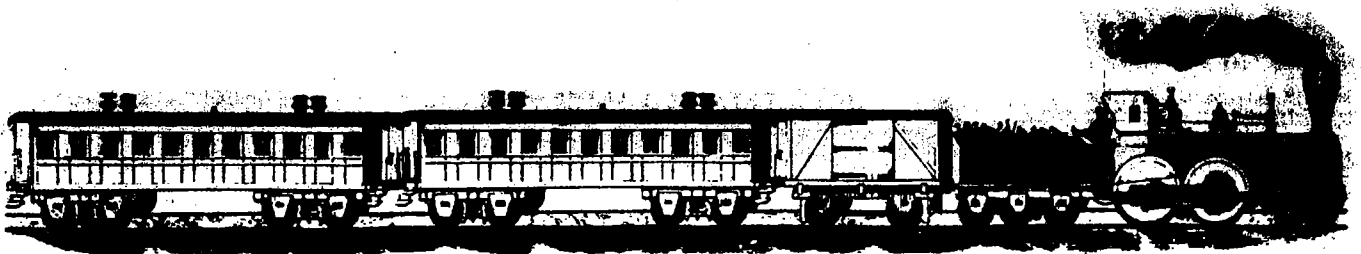


editor---Lor M. Windle

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The little man at the top of this page last issue was taken off the bathroom toilet paper dispenser in the E.L.M.T. in Pritchard.



# *Carter Begins*



The club has made great progress in the past year with renewed emphasis on mapping and cave exploration. We are expecting several new members to come in soon and are hoping for another good crop of trainees this fall. The Miller Contest produced its usual revenues this past Fall and is expected to do so again this Spring.

So, things are going fairly well, but there is still room for improvement. We need to re-evaluate our trainee program to see if we can reach a larger percentage of the caving public. It is obvious from the vandalized condition of many caves that a large portion of the caving population is not aware or does not practice proper cave conservation. By expanding the awareness in both conservation and safety we can benefit caving and cavers by helping to preserve the caving environment and by reducing the possibility of accidents which would not occur if proper techniques were used.

I feel we should make a strong effort to educate persons who are unaware of safety and conservation techniques. I would like to see the entire club make a group effort, not just a few members, to introduce new persons to the club and to inform these people of cave conservation and safety so we can have good caving in the future.

Drink Beer, Raise Hell, It's Great!

Best of Caving,

Donnie Carter

# Rants And Raves



here's what they said about the last TROG:

"VPI's mind is in the proverbial gutter again. Aside from a declaration of war (in the guise of partying) on the D.C. Grotto...they manage to make themselves look silly. Who else would brag about drowning Toyotas? Also in this issue is a funny parody of the Safety and Techniques Committee column in the NSS News."

## D.C. Speleograph

"Witty humor, satirical spoofs, songs are intertwined around serious articles on caving. Their 'Drinking Problems Solved' spoofs the NSS New's S&T column. A song commemorates the great Thorn Creek Campground flood this past year. For those of you who have never tried a rappel spool, here's the plans for making one and how it works."

## Subterranean Sun

"Whitt and I laughed, rolled on the floor, cackled for hours over your issue. Very fine job. In a rare state afterwards, Whitt said he'd even like to camp near VPI at the next convention. He was more sober next day..."

Annie Whittemore

Vice-Chairperson, Virginia Region

"My hard-hat is off to you. My only hope is that people might sometimes get as good a laugh from the Baltimore Grotto News as I got last night reading the Trogloodyte. "Combat" by Mike Wolf had me falling off my chair. The stuff about rolling "those lousy DCGers into the gutter" was the best part. I had hardly recovered from that article when I turned the page and saw 'Pukes and Near Pisses'. I died. Although I hardly know any of you VPIers, I think it might be safe to say that any grotto who prints such nasty things about the STC (Dave Donison?) and the D.C. Grotto has got to be all right! If you continue publishing newsletters of the same caliber as this one, you will make me very happy. Then possible, Evelyn Bradshaw will be too busy getting on your case to bother with me. Keep up the good work. It sure is nice picking up a newsletter and not having to see the same old bullshit!

Nancy deman

Editor, Baltimore Grotto News

Awe...Wonder...Amazement...NO!! None of these words can really explain it. There are no words that can really be an adequate definition of that which is indescribable. Truly there can be no other word for it than just saying

## The Grotto Grapevine

The grotto has been quiet this year. The general consensus agrees that VPI Grotto is waiting, like a coiled snake, to spring at any moment. Indeed, though comparatively low key, we are still very active.

As has become traditional, I shall relate the amorous adventures of our grotto first. Past president Mike Wolf fell before the awesome aura of (S)Pam Foiles; the only highlight being the grand party given by the Petersons that weekend. Past troublemaker Don Davison also yielded to a greater power and wedded Cheryl Jones. Dennis Vaders has advanced his rendezvous with romance and will wed this June. Skip Whitehurst will get the law laid down to him in August as he marries Francis.

In the realm of the not-specifically-permanent type of romantic activity there is much to discuss (but most of it is still rumor and we will let sleeping dogs lie-so to speak). All I can say is that there are several recognized encounters. Pat Loudon snagged Chuck Shorten's affection late last year. Jim Denton has also made a move (see following banquet article). Tuna Johnson, as always, is still looking. Doug Thompson has found something. Donnie Carter has found nothing. Ed Devine is not looking.

In the world of important caving there is much to say. We held our election for officers in April and came up with: A president named Carter (Donald E.), a re-elected V.P. named Windle (Lor M.), a treasurer who rings like a bell (David), and a secretary called Sica (Phil). The latter is member #196 and there are three or four other trainees getting ready to claim their number at the time of this writing. With land owner relations in mind, VPI Grotto voted to buy a metal gate for Buddy Penley and then convinced the Virginia Region to match funds for a second gate. Excellent team work! Mapping projects continue in several caves across the state (the state of South-west Virginia that is).

Of miscellaneous note; Frame and Suzanne have returned to Alaska. Ed Richardson and Nancy will move up this Summer. Jim Bearden, Lor Windle and a mess of other people have rented a house in Christiansburg for next year's parties. It will probably be called The Zoo (for it surely will be).

# BANQUET

On February 19th the VPI Grotto held its annual banquet. The speaker R.E. Whittemore was excellent what with his narrative and slide presentation. The awards committee was headed by Lor Windle and assisted by Jackie Redder who replaced the wounded Mike Wolf (more about that later). Pat Loudon won the Sex award for her work with cupid. She was awarded a leash to take care of the animals she dates. Jim Denton was given the Heartthrob award for continued efforts (sort of a booby prize). He recieved a do-it-yourself sex kit. Denton was also a co-recipient with Jim Hixson and Linda for the mange award. They were each given a bar of soap to take care of themselves. Lynn Wright earned the Flame Out award for her state of mind at almost every party. She was given a box of personalized barf bags (half-gallon size). Tuna Johnson earned the Armchair Caver for his lack of speleoing. He was given a seat cushion made from Mike Wolf's shredded coveralls (that's pretty low). Tuna also recieved a set of earplugs for the I-Don't Want-To-Hear-It award for his martyrdom as club advisor. Doug Thompson won a foot-high rubber duckie (but never collected it) for sinking his Toyota in the Potomac River at Old Timer's. Alan Armstrong won the Wreckless Driver Award for having his Renault in the shop for half a year. He won a French translation book with all the necessary terms he would need. Mike Wolf won the Brain Bucket for his dedication. The night before Banquet we had no people worthy of the Brainbucket. Mike Wolf, made a kamikaze assault on an ice patch and busted out his front teeth. Guano Clusters were given to Bill Stringfellow for his work behind the bar and at picnic, Ed Loud for his driving force with the Miller Contest, and Buddy Penley for being a great land owner. Ed Richardson was going to have been given the PW (Pussy-Whipped) award, but it was given later when Ed was removed from office. He was upset.

Banquet party was another wonderful success as usual. By an amazing act of the great cave god, Chernobog, the Banquet was prophetic. Jim Denton, winner of the heartthrob, found a sweet young girl named Carol-Ann for his heart to throb about. Lor Windle will surely be remembered for his plea at the end of the awards ceremony. He said "If you don't like these awards, then go earn some yourself. Get wildly drunk tonight and win yourself the flame-out; or leave the party and wreck your car and get the Reckless Driver award. Now go out and win it!!" The next morning Lor totalled his Subaru in a barrel-roll just outside of Blacksburg. Mike Wolf sustained some injuries. The police were impressed with Wolf holding the Brainbucket and grinning his toothless grin while a foot-high rubber duckie quacked in the back of the car. But all's well that end's well.

**Lor Windle**

## THE NIGHT THEY DROVE THE REGION DOWN

sung to the tune of  
"The night they drove old dixie down"

(for explanation see the D.T.C.)



Joe Caver is my name and I drove to V.A.N.,  
till those from DCG came (we hoped they wouldn't drive this far),  
at the party on Saturday, we were thirsty and ready to play,  
I took the beer and drank it like nelly,  
it was a time I remember not so well.

The night they drove the region down,  
and all the beer was pouring,  
the night they drove the region down,  
and all the people were soaring,  
They went ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha,  
ha-na-na ha-na-na-ha-na.

Back with my friends from Tennessee and in comes the enemy,  
"Cavers, listen to me, here's a film that you have to see,"  
now I don't mind them showing the flick, and I don't care  
if I feel kinda sick,  
just show the film to those who request,  
but they should never have shown it to all the rest.

The night they drove the region down,  
now the beer wasn't flowing,  
the night they drove the region down,  
'Cause the movie they were showing,  
They went na-na-na-na-na-na-na,  
na-na-na na-na-na-na-na.

Like my grotto around me, I'm a partyin' man,  
and like the cavers beside me, I need to drink to stand,  
well, we were rowdy, both loud and drunk, but a movie  
laid us in the bunk,  
I swear by my puke and the tears I weep,  
You can't raise the party back up when it's fast asleep.

The night they drove the region down,  
and the beer had stopped pouring,  
The night they drove the region down,  
For all the people were snoring,  
They went z-z-z-z-z-z-z-z,  
z-z-z z-z-z-z-z-z.

**L. M. Windle**



# Polish Caving Techniques

In February a crack team of Polish cavers undertook an unprecedented challenge; to earn the Vertical Eight patch in one day. To normal cavers this seems an impossible feat, but to the intrepid cavers from the Polish People's Republic such tasks are child's play. I considered myself quite fortunate to have the opportunity to accompany the team as it went for broke. Mortimer Ski, the leader of the Polish People's Republic Caving Contingent (PPRCC) confided to me before the trip "yes, my friend; it is for to laugh...only eight vertical shafts. Why, in my country it is not unusual for me to abseil (rappel) into a dozen vertical shafts in a day." Only later did I learn that Mortimer is a chimney-sweep. The country is full of smoke stacks which do not conduct smoke through the top, but rather have a hole at ground level so that the smoke can be used in the smoked-fish industry, leaving the chimney unused and ideal for rappelling (abseiling). No wonder Poland produces so many vertical cavers. I would like to point out that the trick is not to rappel (abseil) all the way to the bottom of the chimney.

We quickly reached our destination in Alabama. While the transport teams were gearing up, Igor, one of the main assault group, was demonstrating the renowned Polish Thumb Rappel (abseil) (see Figure 1). As Igor explained, break bars wear out, but not the thumb. After a month the thumb hardens and can be used again and again. I was especially interested in the carabiners Igor showed me. The gates on the mark 1 opened outward at the end, the mark 11 featured a side gate which swung both in and out. It was easier to derig, Igor explained. (see Figure 2).

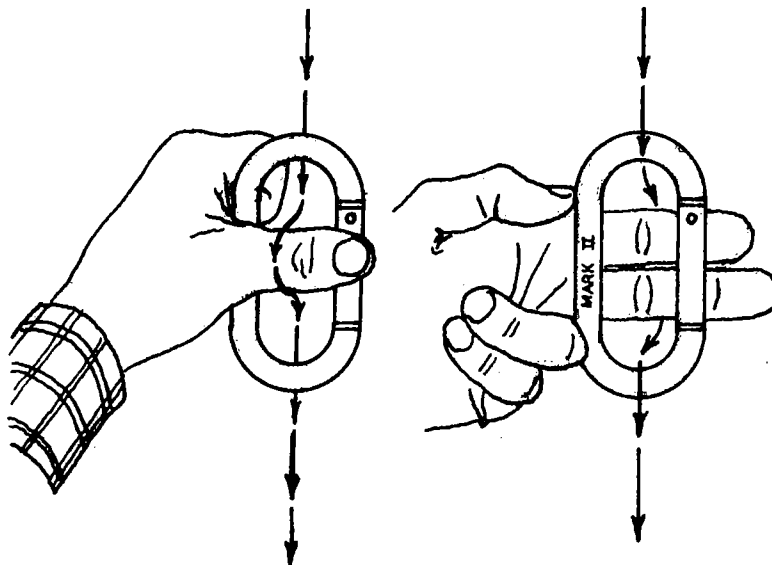


fig. 1 Polish Thumb Rappel (abseil) and Doubles.

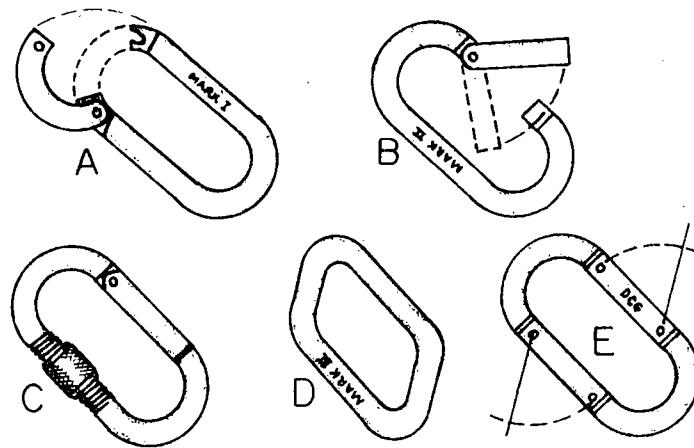


fig. 2 A-mark I, B-mark II, C-Locking mark II,  
D-mark III, E-Double Carabiner Gate (DCG)

By this time the drops were rigged so Mortimer, Igor, Tadeusz, and myself got into a sedan chair designed for the climb ahead. The bearers grabbed the handles and hauled us up the hill. At the lip of the drop the rope test team rappelled (abseiled) down the pit. Once down, the five cavers pulled the rope to test it (see Figure 3). Satisfied that it would hold, they signaled to Mortimer that all was ready. Snapping his thumb into place, Ski started into the misty chasm. I asked Igor if the thumb gets hot and he explained that the blood circulates and dissipates the heat. The only danger, he explained while offering me some kielbasa, was to rig backwards.

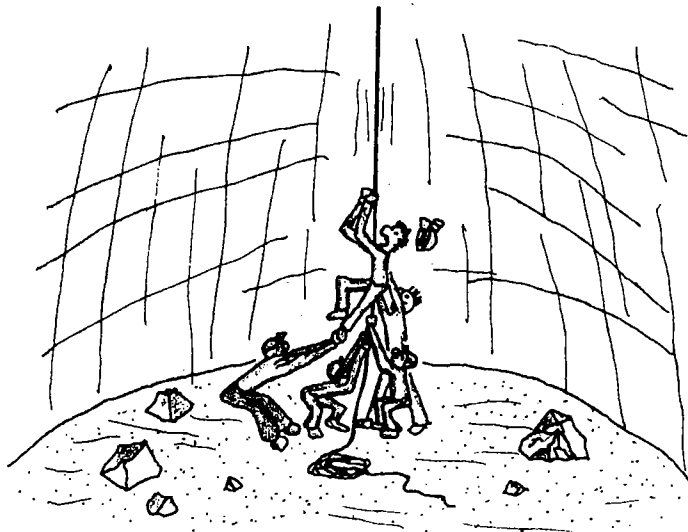
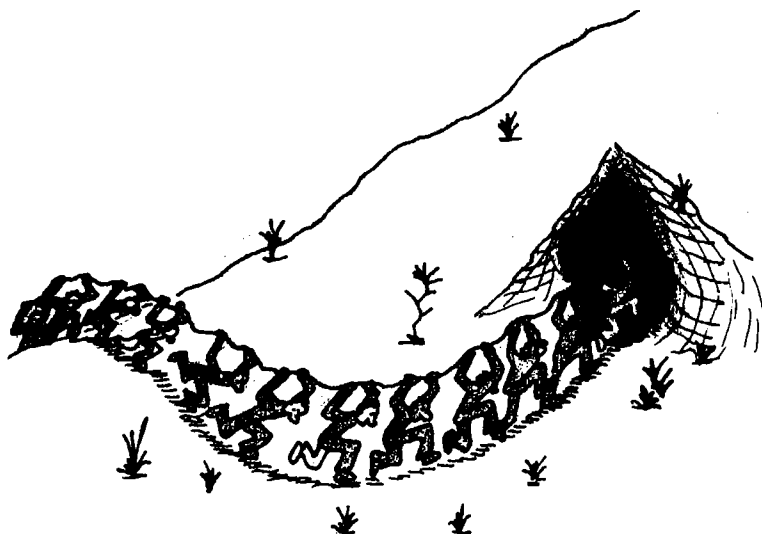


fig. 3 Polish five-man Rope Test



Polish Rope-Carrying Team

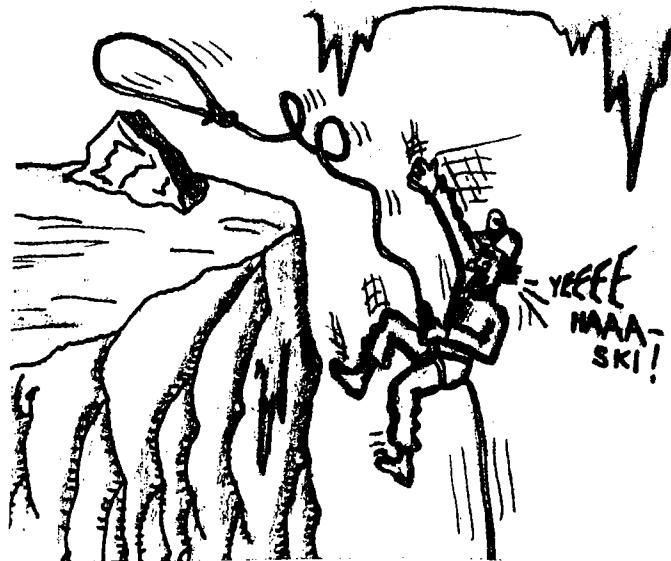


Fig. 4 Polish Rodeo Rig

Doubles, he went on was simply using two fingers instead of the thumb. Already Ski was prussiking back up the rope. I noted that he was using the goose-step system. Apparently the German occupation of Poland was not totally wasted on the Poles.

And so it went, cave after cave. All eight pits, and it was only possible through teamwork, pre-rigging teams, rope testers, derigging teams, and those stalwart sedan bearers. I was a little disappointed because I could not witness the famous Polish Rodeo Rig (See Figure 4). I asked Ski for a demonstration and he agreed. Selecting a suitable rigging point, Ski poised himself on the lip of a 100 foot pit, carefully coiled his lasso-rope, and took a few wind up swings with the loop. Taking careful aim, he tossed the loop toward the rig point, a 2 inch thick stalagmite 8 inches long, and leaped into the pit at the same time. To my amazement, the lasso found its mark and the stalagmite held. Stanislas, another member of the contingent, shook his head and let me in on the fact that in his province it was customary to leap before throwing the lasso.

On the way back to base camp we compared caving techniques and equipment. The most interesting innovation was the solar-powered caving lamp that the PPRCC is currently testing. This could be the wave of the future as carbide supplies dwindle and energy conservation becomes more pervasive in the caving community.

I would like to conclude this tale by expressing my admiration of the PPRCC. They are nothing if not resourceful, competitive, and innovative. Vertical techniques flourish among the polacks of the Polish People's Republic but not among polacks in the United States due to the preponderance of basement apartments. It seems that polish cavers from the People's Republic and their emigres are truly poles apart.

**Bob Mead-Donaldson**

Andrej Wnuk, Consultant

# Drinking, Techniques

Dave Donison  
P.O. Box 471  
Blacksburg, Va. 24060

"It is the standard every-day party to which we must try to learn the mistakes of the special party situation."

## KNOT TRICKS THE DRINKING CUP BELAY



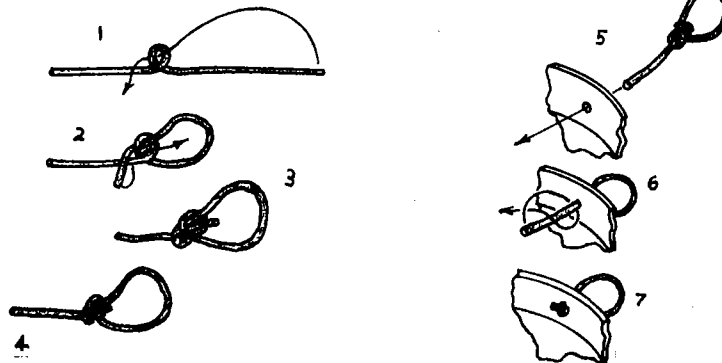
It has become readily apparent that in extended party situations even the most ardent of partiers will face the brink of exhaustion. At this point, even the greatest die-hard may lose his grip and drop his cup. It was with this problem in mind that the DTC developed the finger bowline belay. (See diagram above) This has been extensively tested by members of the DTC in many party situations and proven to be effective in limiting spillage.

In essence, the bowline is attached to the finger in such a manner that if the cup slips out of the hand it won't fall beyond the length of the tether. There will be a minimal spillage due to the jolt and the cup finding its own center of gravity.

To make a finger bowline belay, start with a piece of avalanche cord or similar substance. Make a bowline by following the diagrams #1 through 4. Be sure to snug down the knot and melt the cord end to prevent untying. Next, poke a hole near the top of your cup. Pass the standing-line end of the cord through the hole. Tie an overhand knot in the end and snug it down as shown in diagrams #5 through 7. Be sure that the hole in the cup is

not so large as to allow excessive spillage from the hole itself. If the hole is small, the cord itself will virtually plug up the hole. Besides, you won't be drinking from that point on the cup.

During the testing, the DTC came to the conclusion that the bowline must be of a sufficiently large enough size to slip off of the finger without too much problem. Otherwise, the cup is too difficult to disengage during such events as dancing or going to the bathroom.



## Pukes and Near Pisses

### SPECIAL REPORT: DRINKING ACCIDENT AT SPRING VAR!!

On April 2, 1977 the Virginia Region of the National Speleological Society experienced one of the most massive drinking and partying accidents ever witnessed. By extreme good fortune, members of the DTC were present at the attempted rescue and survivors have been interviewed to determine the cause of this massive devastating catastrophe.

The weekend of April 2-3 was bright and brisk down in Abingdon, Virginia where the Virginia Region was holding its annual Spring meeting. On Saturday, the 2nd, a party was to follow the meeting and dinner. The party started badly

when it was found that the party conditions were improperly rigged. Fortunately, members from VPI had brought their own gear and the audio was re-rigged. Everything was fine until 11:00 P.M. when a member of RASS cut the music to announce the presentation of a movie, "Castleguard", in another room. The party quickly returned to normal, but was interrupted at midnight to show the film once again; this time in the only party room! There were no alternatives. The film was shown (50 minutes of good caving, but not real action). By the time the film was over, the party was dead. There were

tired bodies all over. Virtually no one was still in shape to continue the party. Nearly everyone went to crash. Those that remained were very drunk and unable to party or quickly discovered that their partner was no longer among those present. By 1:30 the party had been destroyed. A few brave souls remained awake and helped clean-up. All was still by 5:00 A.M. Sunday morning.

#### ANALYSIS:

This accident is an obvious example of the time lag involved in drinking and partying. When people drink hard, they have to exercise to work off the alcohol. In this situation, the alcohol was given an hour to work over the body without any rejuvenating effects of exercise through partying (dancing, singing, etc.). All of the people interviewed agreed that they

were injured by the lack of activity caused by the showing of the film. Minds four hours drunk cannot fathom any movie. Bodies fall similar prey. An informed source told us that the decision to show the film at midnight was made because the Virginia Region, and VPI in particular, had partied enough at their banquet, etc. Such malice cannot be excused when it leads to an accident like this one!

## 'Dear DTC'

1N. AT A PARTY I DRANK RUM SO I WOULDN'T GET SICK. I PUKED ON PURPOSE AND FELT GOOD THE NEXT MORNING. DID I DO THE RIGHT THING?

Yes. As long as you do not plan to drink anything more that night, puking is an excellent way to purge the system. Unfortunately, many people feel really sick after puking and can not drink anymore so I would recommend puking only at the end of a party or if you have learned your limitations. Everyone should learn this technique for extended partying situations.

2N. IS IT SAFE TO SMOKE DOPE AND DRINK?

Personally, I would have to say no. In most states you can be arrested for dope, but you have to be in a rare state (in public, driving, or such) to be arrested for consuming alcoholic beverages. So why take the chance?

3N. OCCASIONALLY AFTER 4 OR 5 BEERS OVER A LONG PERIOD (6 Hrs) I WAKE UP WITH A HEADACHE WHICH LASTS ALL DAY THAT IS SO PAINFUL THAT I CAN ONLY EXIST LATERALLY. HOW DO I ALLEVIATE THIS FEELING POORLY?

It would appear that you may have a dysfunctioning system that does not act

as it should. The kidney should have no problem bringing all of the alcohol out of the blood stream in that time. I would recommend an extensive program of testing yourself to find how much you can drink of what how quickly to determine what is best suited for you. Everyone should know their limitations and preferences and should try to achieve or excel as the situation demands. This will help to reduce rescue needs in party situations.

4N. ARE THERE MANY SITUATIONS WHEN A PASSED OUT DRUNK SHOULD BE LEFT ALONE RATHER THAN BEING MOVED TO A MORE COMFORTABLE POSITION?

Yes. There are many times when it will be a wiser thing to leave well enough alone and let a drunk lie. There will be many an unpleasant discovery that an inebriated sot will have a violent reaction if moved. Many people will tend to become ill if moved while they are feeling poorly. So I would not recommend any excessive motion or tampering lest you find that your aid is not totally appreciated.

5N. WHAT WOULD YOU CONSIDER AS ESSENTIAL PARTYING EQUIPMENT FOR ANY EXTENDED PARTY SITUATION?

In any party, there are essentials and there are essentials. A person could get by with only his beer if he can drink it warm. But for almost all beer drinkers any party will require a cooler apparatus. These coolers can range from a fancy camping cooler (cost \$20+) to a large styrafoam cooler (\$3+) to a small six-pack cooler (\$2+). There are also special coolers designed to snugly fit cans and bottles, but their price is still too exorbitant. Other near-vital accessories include such items as styrafoam can and bottle holders for drinking beer or a drinking glove if drinking cold wine or a mixed drink from a container. If the latter, you must have a drinking vessel for the liquid. Other enjoyable but unnecessary items include things such as chairs, blankets, etc. for when you get tired; food, money, etc. for when you get hungry; and aspirin, Roloids, or Alka Seltzer for when you feel poorly.

## Troglodyte (Revisited) Song

(sung to "Troglodyte" by Don Davison)

Times change. This may be the way things are  
or the way things may become if we are all  
not as careful or caring as we should.



☆      \*      ☆      \*      ☆  
Lyin' in the gutter, lookin' back and forth,  
When this thing crawls at me a smellin' like a horse.  
All at once it pukes its guts, retching by the score,  
must be a Troglodyte feelin' kinda poor.

On they're drunk and rowdy though sober ones are nil,  
They like it fine just to lie there in the swill,  
Where it's dark and dirty and sticky on the floor,  
Places that make normal folk run right out the door.

Flat on his back or on his hip or rear,  
Six-pack he's gurglin', that ain't half his beer.  
Pony bottles full, full of what, you ask.  
beer, wine, or whisky to make the burnin' gas.

Drunk on his ass and beer mug in his hand,  
Patch on his arm of the group he knows is grand.  
Cooler in his car. See the booze they snarf,  
And in the still of a late spring night you can always hear them barf.

Some go to conventions and some to OTRs.  
back and forth and back and forth just drivin' in their cars.  
Jammin' bottles into mouths where rolaid's often go,  
Comin' out a-drinkin' beer at five degrees below.

Crawlin' and a-wallowin' in gooey muck, you know,  
Wonderin' if sclerosis of liver's gonna show.  
rightin' off the mouching bums and punks who'd drink him clean,  
It ain't no wonder he loves to get obscene.

Once an old Troglodyte, he thought he'd take a ride.  
Oh well he totalled it because he did imbibe.  
Now if one drinks they all head for the street,  
'Cause they know that drunkin' drivin' is a rap they can beat.

Their cars are made with four wheel drive, when drunk they drive like hell,  
They love to knock down tree trunks and try to hit them well,  
but if you see one wheelin' by or drinkin' of the pooze,  
keep your distance far away or your soul you will lose.

For many a man, Lord, a-thinkin' he was smart,  
has drifted into beer joints and heard old Troggy fart,  
And then a spell took over as on the floor he fell,  
And ever, ever after his soul dwelled in drinking hell.

Blaah

I'm mad as Hell

and I'm not going to take it anymore!

It is time for a rather poignant editor's column concerning the recent development with the Don Davison STC/Don Martin NSS News/Ian Ellis SuperRack events. I do not know how much anyone at there knows about it, but I have heard enough items to upset me (and I have not been able to find anything to refute my feelings. As I see it, the major problem lies not in who is right or wrong about the value of a chunk of steel and aluminum called the SuperRack, but about the moral attitude taken by some high-standing and important members of the N.S.S. I feel that Don Davison is being screwed by several people in the NSS. Whether Don is right or wrong is irrelevant. What matters is that he is not getting a fair chance and it could happen to anyone of us at anytime.

The whole matter started when Davison did an evaluation of the SuperRack (I have reprinted the original article here). Kyle Isenhardt brought the article before Don Martin (NSS News Editor) in the Feb. 14 letter where he states that the vertical section should get to edit the article because of a motion they passed for themselves. Kyle was allowed to edit the article and Davison tried to add more confirming data to the report (this data included but toned down in the May NSS News). Well, there were still problems. First Larson then Martin complained about the SuperRack article by Davison. Finally, both Ian Ellis and Kyle Isenhardt were allowed to rebut the Davison article. And there you have the May News.

Davison got the poor end of the stick because he never did get to show his real opinions. Don Martin claims in his April 29 letter (reprinted in part here) that he believes in presenting a fair and concise account. But Davison's article was edited twice before publishing while Ellis and Isenhardt were included intact. As an editor myself, I do not consider this to be good editorial practice. I will admit I may be biased, but I will publish any cogent matter that I am sent that can point out the other side of the story.

Even more important than the Davison case in specific is the general concepts of policy that Davison's case has brought out. First, the Vertical Section claims a right to edit all material dealing with vertical techniques, etc. This is an outrageous attitude leading towards total bureaucratic control. Larson makes the statement that ads placed in the News in good faith cannot be criticised in his March 31 letter (reprinted here). Martin, on April 11 makes a similar remark that only proof (underlined in such a manner that it would have to be very convincing) of falsehood will enable an advertisement to be criticised. This means that an item that claims you can stake your life on it can not be criticised until a life is lost on it. This is a sad state when people are censored for trying to help others. And there are so many other, comparatively simpler, problems. Martin will accept Davison's instances of injury with facts and names when Davison from the very outset of the STC's research program has stated that unanimity will be maintained to protect people. Martin also, after receiving a letter of protest, wrote that he would edit out part of that protesting letter to the editor in order to save the writers embarrassment. A letter to the editor is judged such because it is to the editor and not edited by the editor! One final point; Don Martin is not only NSS News editor, but also on the Board of Governors. This is a classic case of conflict of interest. It would not be allowed in American government. It goes against the system of checks and balances that keeps American democracy as functional as it is. It should not be tolerated. I admit that I am Vice-president as well as editor for my grotto, but I will gladly step down from either position if my fellow members want me to. Personally, I think Martin should relinquish one of his positions for the reason that he carries too much power and could be caught in a conflict of interests which could not result in the best interest of the NSS.

I am sorry that such a situation as this one has had to develop. As long as it has, though, I think we ought to be able to see all sides of the real issue and to decide on our own what should be done. I hope that we can all make the decision that is best for each of us. By my above article you can tell that I have made my decision.

L Windle

## Superack, et. al.

### WARNING -- Superack

Over the years, vertical cavers have developed mechanical rappel devices which enable more of the friction, necessary to control the sliding rope, to be produced in the rappel device, and require less of the friction to be produced against the body. The standard rappel rack currently allows almost all of the control friction to be produced in the rack itself, with control being maintained by sliding the bars and varying the number of brake bars in contact with the rope. The Superack, as currently supplied by the Speleoshoppe, is not an improvement on the standard rack. This new product does not provide variable control on fast ropes; in these situations the Superack becomes a constant friction device, requiring significant and continuous body friction to maintain control. An example of the lack of friction and control follows.

January, 1977

"We rigged the pit with slightly used mountain-lay Goldline and I started slowly down the 160 foot drop using the Superack. About 150 off the floor, I attempted to stop using the braking force of the rack alone (a typical and easily accomplished task, when a standard rappel rack is used). Only sliding the bars on the Superack upwards with ALL the strength in my left arm achieved this result. About 100 feet off the floor, stopping the slow rappel using the Superack alone required the strength of both arms to jam the bars upward. The bars moved easily and jammed completely, but only great force produced sufficient friction. About 50 feet from the floor, control was lost when my braking hand couldn't be moved rapidly enough to assist the left hand in jamming the Superack brake bars. The safety rappel cam was activated."

The male narrator, a strong and experienced vertical caver, weighs 185 pounds. Less frictional control would have emerged from the Superack if blue water III had been used; how might this affect a 250 pound caver carrying extra gear? Cavers weighing over 300 pounds use the standard rack effectively. With these heavy weights, jamming the bars is especially important. Yet, when a strong 185 pound caver jammed the bars on the Superack in order to stop a slow rappel, sufficient friction was produced only with an extraordinary amount of force - that supplied by two arms - even with 100 feet of rope hanging below him.

It is strongly recommended that cavers NOT abandon the standard rack for the more expensive, and less controllable Superack. The claims and comparisons of the of the advertisements and introductory article are incomplete and misleading. The Superack does run cooler than the standard rack, but at a tremendous sacrifice in friction and control, two important safety factors in rappelling.

**Don Davison**

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Kyle Isenhardt to Charlie Larson, February 14, 1977:

"...in 1976 the Vertical Section at its meeting passed by wide majorities several motions. One of them stated that "All articles pertaining to vertical techniques or equipment to be published in the 'N.S.S. News' or 'Bulletin' should first be reviewed by the board of the Vertical Section of the N.S.S. for accuracy."

Don Martin to Don Davison, March 15, 1977:

"After due consideration of all sides concerned regarding the Superack material--both yours and Kyle's--and after deliberations by the NSS Executive Committee, President Charlie Larson is seriously considering appointing an ad-hoc committee to look into the whole situation before going into print. I have concurred with this decision."



Charlie Larson to James Dawson, March 31, 1977:

"Criticisms of advertisements placed in good faith and considered acceptable for one of the Society's publications (in this case the News), by any other NSS committee would, if published, constitute an intolerable conflict between two NSS committees, not to mention a complete betrayal of the advertiser and the policy under which the advertisement was accepted. The S&T article submitted for the March News (and the only one I've seen) included an evaluation of the advertisements for the Super Rack.

Don Martin to James Dawson, April 7, 1977:

"After due consideration and following a lengthy phone conversation with President Charlie Larson, I have decided to exercise my prerogative as editor and make the changes indicated on the Xeroxed portions of the STC report concerning the SuperRack which will appear in the May issue."

Don Martin to Don Davison, April 11, 1977:

"Incidentally, I will not print any articles detrimental to any paid advertising unless the writer proves that the ad is totally or partially misleading in its claims--and that there is a definite chance of danger by persons using the technique(s) or products advertised. In the case of the SuperRack, I now consider the issue closed except for any "letters" which might come in. I intend to route the letters to either yourself or to Kyle as the case may be for answering. But, if you have just one instance of a caver injured because of the improper functioning of the Superack, please document it with facts and names and it will be printed as a service to the membership."

Don Martin to Don Anderson, April 29, 1977:

"...I am a firm believer that an editor's main job is to present a fair and concise accounting of any controversial material to be printed for the entire membership....I do resent the remarks stating that Ian Ellis used his economic influence to sway my decision...In any case, if your letter is printed, that section will be deleted--more to save your signers from possible embarrassment than to indicate my guilt or lack of it concerning the issue at hand."

