

3035 Farris Avenue
Fresno 5

Monday
25 Nov 57

To: Harding & Feuerer; Steck.

Made an eminently successful run to the Valley today. The following items are stashed in a duffel bag at Don Gilfillan's place: 5/16 x ? (Powell's rappel)

$\frac{1}{4}$ x 240 (in two equal lengths of 120 each)

7/16 x $\frac{1}{4}$ x 101 (ends dyed slightly blue)

7 ea - assorted wood wedges

2 ea - large aluminum T's

2 ea - " " angles

2 ea - " steel T's

2 ea - small " T's

2 ea - genuine stove legs (good condition) (prop of Powell)

1 ea - genuine climbing machine complete with set of wrenches

1 ea - heavy duty hammer (unused--quality undetermined)

the lot in 1 ea duffel bag and 1 ea climbing pack

Comment:

- Gilfillan is an employee of YP&CCo. He works at the main desk in the Lodge. If he is not there, inquire as to his whereabouts there and/or of the appropriate individuals in the cafeteria. If you arrive in the middle of the night, wake him up at his room - #/2029 in the employee dorms directly across the road from the Camp 4 service station. He was amply forewarned that he might be awakened at 3 am or so, so don't hesitate.
- ropes: no comment
- wood wedges: recommended for sixth class only because of the rings. I have not tried these, so your guess is as good as mine.
- lge aluminum angles: I have no idea in the world how much the rings are good for. They are standard fittings of the hammer-closed variety.
- T type pitons: these tested out beautifully in the jam crack back of C 4. Although the aluminum is much cheaper, far easier to make, and many times lighter, it probably will not take too much repeated use. I suggest using them/PRIMARY AS TIERS--(the in conjunction with one of the steel T's (back to back). aluminums) I placed an aluminum and steel together, driving both simultaneously, spanning about a 5 inch crack. Very sound. In removing, I beat only on the steel half--the hammer did less damage to the hardware, and the $\frac{1}{4}$ x $\frac{1}{4}$ steel eroded the rock much more effectively than the aluminum would have. As soon as the steel loosened, of course the whole works dropped out. The edges of the back of the T have been tapered at such an angle that they lie in the same plane as the edge of the leg of the T; thus the piton could be rotated 45 degrees from its originally intended position, giving three edge contact instead of one edge and the flat back. This

would, of course, permit placing of the same piton in a greater size range of cracks by giving a different basic span. I have not actually tried this, so it is purely conjecture, but I see no reason why it shouldn't work. The two small steel ~~Ex~~ T's were not designed-they just happened; I was utilizing scrap. Although quite heavy for their size, they should be very durable. They actually fall in the category of three-cornered spikes rather than T's. Something to bear in mind while rating the T's: average cost on the steels was around \$3.20 apiece (the torch work was done at cost at that!), so I guess the largest one is worth around \$5.00. The aluminums I can turn out for less than \$1.00 apiece. HOWEVER, now that I know what I am doing, I can probably cut the cost of the steels considerably by more judicious shopping--know of any suitable back road bridges?

- stove legs: no comment
- climbing machine: surpassed all expectations in the C 4 jam crack. Placed against two smooth surfaces so it was entirely dependent on ~~friction~~ friction, it held my full weight while I jounced up and down. On surfaces with slight irregularities for it to fit into, it would be bomb proof. Although the present model is quite crude and awkward to manipulate, it has tremendous possibilities. Already I can visualize a complete party bivouacing in a chimney, very comfortably ensconced in hammocks suspended from man-size climbing machines. Truly heroic. As for the pilot model, you will find that the large flats ground on the casting are useless, as that part can be held by hand quite easily. The flats you will need, on the screw near the ball joint, are not large enough and may wear round with use. Also, the casting and tubing do not rotate independently, although they could; ~~I suggest the two nuts~~ therefore on the tube be cinched up on the wire to avoid the possibility of losing half the machine.
- heavy duty hammer: I ~~haven't~~ have cut down a surplus item considerably. Please use it in order to evaluate it, if for no other reason. Primarily, I am wondering whether the pick will hold an edge after breaking up rock, driving and removing, etc. If it will, I will buy one or two more of these, as nothing of the sort is available through normal commercial channels, at least in Fresno.

As for disposal of the gear, use your own judgment. If circumstances warrant leaving the lot on the climb, it is OK by me. I would like the duffel bag back, though. As for Powell's rope and stove legs, I cannot say. One reason for bringing the stuff down might be to refer to ~~for~~ developing improved models.

Sedergren was in a foul mood at first, then it turned out he had not received the signed agreements. Ashley ran it down and brought it in to him, and Sedergren softened right up. He turned out to be in a very agreeable mood. He seemed quite tolerant, and had no objections whatsoever to the Thanksgiving climb. Apparently it is OK to list the Bay Area Rescue group as the support party. You can also list me. I said that the climb had been coordinated with the Bay group and that support was assured. Al: He seemed a bit unhappy over not being kept fully ~~fix~~ informed of the current status of the Rescue Group, such as up to date lists, the fact that you had replaced Baxter, etc. Apparently all these guys want is to know what is going on, and then they become much more reasonable. Perhaps a letter re the Rescue Grp would be in order.

Shall be watching you all on Friday and Saturday, so put on a good show.
Whitmore

Box 2645
Stanford, Calif.
Jan. 29, 1959

Conrad L. Wirth, Director
National Park Service
Dept. of the Interior
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Wirth:

In our experience with National Park Service personnel in Yosemite we have been impressed by their sensible attitude toward climbing in the national parks. Policies have been designed to create pleasant and mutually beneficial relations with experienced mountaineers.

Consequently, we were shocked to read the Associated Press release of your recent statements concerning "trick" and "stunt" climbing in the national parks. Even allowing for journalistic exaggeration, these statements indicate that correct, first-hand information is not available to you. It seems probable that most of the information you now possess on the El Capitan climb originated with misleading news items and with letters from eloquent but misinformed individuals.

In the interests of continued fairness in park policies, we feel that you should be in possession of all the facts pertaining to the climb of El Capitan last year. To that end, we hope that the members of your committee will come and observe the situation in Yosemite.

The alleged "defacement" will be found to be nonexistent. We removed the equipment from El Capitan ten days after we finished the climb. Its removal did not concern Park Service personnel, nor were park rangers ever endangered in any way. Rangers have since examined the monolith and report that there is no sign that it has ever been climbed.

The so-called "spike system" of climbing is a standard technique used whenever natural holds are not available, or when safety demands. No "tricks" are involved.

The pitons, which were driven into already existing cracks in the rock, have been removed--leaving no trace. Holes drilled for expansion bolts are 1/4 to 3/8 inches in diameter and an inch deep. If all of the bolt holes which now "deface" the 3000 foot wall of El Capitan were placed together, they could be covered by a man's two hands.

There never was any intention of creating publicity. Publicity grew out of the unfortunately conspicuous location of the mountain. Despite the fact the attempts began in July of 1957, it was not until September of 1958 that the press, on their own initiative, gave headline coverage to the climb. It was only after this that we furnished statements and photos to hometown papers.

The modest income from these photos was trifling compared to the cost of nylon rope alone. After the successful ascent, pictures were sold to a news magazine in order to defray expenses. One article has been written for an adventure magazine. Income from this article, when received, will perhaps allow us to "break even". The only personal appearances to date have been before service clubs and school groups. One member, taking advantage of favorable public opinion, allowed his name to be used to endorse a local charity drive. None of these appearances was paid.

We do not ask you to take our word for all of this. We invite your committee to come and see for themselves, and we will be happy cooperate with them in any way that will insure a thorough investigation.

Yours truly,

Warren Harding

P.S. To make our position clear to those who may be influenced by the press releases, we are circulating this as an open letter.

Wayne Merry

George Whitmore

Ellen Searby

3035 Farris Avenue
Fresno 5, California

16 March 1959

Conrad L. Wirth, Director
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington 25, D.C.

Dear Mr. Wirth:

In our letter of 20 January 1959, we expressed concern over a number of false and misleading statements attributed to you by the Associated Press. Since then, I have been aware that numerous individuals have contacted your office to protest your charges regarding the El Capitan climb in Yosemite. In a few cases (telegram to David R. Brower, Executive Director of the Sierra Club, 1-29-59; letter to Warren J. Harding, 2-12-59, L3423-RA; letter to Mrs. R.S. Whitmore, no date, L3423-RA) copies of acknowledgments from your office have reached me. I do not consider any of these to be answers to the protests.

In every case, I am impressed by your failure to meet the issues openly. I know that you are aware of the manner in which the Associated Press quoted you, for a verbatim copy of the AP wire was sent to you in our original letter. Through your failure to deny these statements, I can only assume that you were quoted correctly. This being the case, I feel that I have every right to expect a public apology from you.

Perhaps because of the moderate tone of our first letter, you did not understand the seriousness of your unsupported charges against us. Let me state the facts more clearly for you.

Essentially, your statements to the Associated Press were nothing more nor less than a series of lies. We had not (nor had we stated that we had) "planned for some time to attract attention and gain notoriety". The climb was not made (nor did we say it was made) because we "hoped to capitalize through writing about what (we) had done and sell stories and be paid for personal appearances". Our objective was not (nor did we say it had been) "to capitalize on (our) stunt commercially".

In view of your vacillating stand on the "improvement" of the Tioga road in Yosemite, which resulted in massive destruction of virgin wilderness in the back country, your charge of "defacement" of El Capitan does not ring true. Your implication that Park Service personnel will have to remove the climbing gear which "defaces" El Capitan is ridiculous. We removed this gear ourselves ten days after the climb was completed, and Superintendent Preston has reported that he could find no evidence that we had ever set foot upon the rock.

Your implication that "tricks" and "stunts" were used in

a carnival-like spectacle again indicates a complete disregard for the truth. If you had taken the trouble to inquire into this matter before issuing these statements to the press, you would have found that we used standard climbing techniques which have been commonly accepted and practiced in Europe and this country for years.

If you had inquired of your own people in Yosemite, I believe you would have found that they had our complete cooperation throughout this climb. Superintendent Preston has issued statements to this effect when contacted by the local press.

Your associate, Mr. E.T. Scoven, has said to us, "Please be assured that no one in the National Park Service places any discredit upon any of your group. The climb did not violate Park Service regulations or policy and the Superintendent's action in permitting the climb was entirely proper and in accord with usual procedures". He also has stated that "this sport has always been considered an entirely proper use of the National Parks".

In view of these facts, I do not appreciate being subjected to a vicious and unfounded personal attack such as yours via a nationwide wire service. Although I appreciate Mr. Scoven's position, I do not feel that form letters constitute a satisfactory explanation for public defamation of character. Furthermore, I fail to agree that you, by virtue of the position you hold, have any right to make irresponsible charges and insinuations which amount to a public attack upon my personal character.

I feel that I have every right to ask of you a public accounting for your irresponsible statements and an apology for your unwarranted personal attack; I also feel that such an apology would be meaningless unless it is publicised over the wire services in the same manner the attack was promulgated.

Yours truly,

George W. Whitmore