

With field mice to keep them company, sleeping bags for warmth and their trusty 1960 SAAB over their heads to stay dry, the two fearless young mountain climbers fell asleep, later awakening to a cool, brisk and clear Wyoming sunrise. Above them stood the 875 foot Devils Tower, their challenge and dream of climbing that very few others had attempted prior to that summer of 1960.

Since becoming a Literary Club of Indianapolis member I have had the privilege of listening and learning from essays presented by men of wide backgrounds and interest. Subjects have ranged from Socrates, sunken ocean treasures, history of sterilization and H.T. Barnum perking new interest to all members in attendance.

Tonight I would like for you to lean back, take a deep breath and hear the adventure of an Indianapolis flat lander. You will learn how this adventure and Devils Tower eventually became book ends for my passion of climbing both rocks and mountains worldwide and collecting artifacts and studying of our 26th President, Theodore Roosevelt.

The cast of characters in this story are many but first let's look at the two featured young climbers mentioned in the introduction. Who would have thought that 60 years ago when Fritz and Fred met in Jackson Hole,

Wyoming one of them would one day be sharing their story of climbing Devils Tower National Monument before such a group of learned gentlemen, and back then not knowing its connection to Teddy Roosevelt. This would not only be the exclamation point of their two summers of work, play and adventure in The Grand Teton National Park and the west but also a literal high point in their lives.

Fred Weiss, tall, strong, handsome, enthusiastic and persuasive 21-year old, grew up on the shore of Atlantic Beach, Florida. Then yours truly, 20-year old, born and raised in Indianapolis, smaller, strong yet less of a dynamic personality as was Fred's. The two found themselves as cabin mates while employed as laborers for the National Park Service. Having been a varsity wrestler at Shortridge High School probably helped me feel I could hold my own in that setting. We spent those initial evenings in our cabin getting to know each other.. Fred, being the Beta Theta Pi Fraternity president at University of Florida and a first alternate at the Air Force Academy and I telling about wrestling victories and the marching band performances at Shortridge and Culver then on to Hanover and Phi Gamma Delta seemed to initiate a new friendship.

The rest of the infamous Gettings Trail Crew consisted of young guys from across the country. We soon adapted to the luxury of our summer home, especially the Spartan cold water, one bar of soap, in the one man shower provided to use at the end of a hot and hard days work. Our labors were to build and maintain the high country foot and horse trail system of the park to be completed by 1966, thus the official name of the project was titled Mission 66. As the summer and sometimes long days rolled by, someone applied a limerick to the tune in the popular film at that time, *River Qui*. Something like this: Elk Scat - it makes the grass grow green, elk S - purifies the stream, elk S - the park really needs it; that's why they started... Mission 66.

The equipment provided for our work and the experiences we encountered mastering these old tools created indelible memories to accompany our work requirements. Early each morning the crew left their cabins and scrambled onto our two and a half ton open bed truck for a ride to the Jackson Lake Lodge employee mess hall. After gorging ourselves with a hearty breakfast we were joined by our recently retired Coast Guard trail boss. Piling out at the trail head with equipment, canvas water bags, saws, shovels and famous mattock pics marked CCC , remains of the Civil

Conservation Corps, off to work we'd go. To the tourist a replay of years past WPA crew.

Occasionally, the tourists we encountered consisted of families with teenage girls. With our sleeves rolled up we welcomed these interruptions and it naturally raised our spirits and possibly caught the attention of the girls-----so we hoped. Either on horseback or those just hiking, we were often approached with a variety of academic inquiries such as what are the canvas bags for, or why such large piles of rocks. I remember one answer, the glaciers brought them. Then their follow up, where did they go, then, and yes, we answered, back to get more rocks. Yet on a more serious note once a startled horse threw its rider off and down the steep mountain side. Some of the crew immediately jumped over the edge and assisted in the riders rescue.

One early morning we were startled by the thumping of hooves charging down the trail above our position. At first the sound just startled us but as the moose came into sight it really got our attention. Since a few of the guys were feeling the effects of one too many the night before it may have appeared like a scene of man over board from the movie Titanic. Late night effects were neutralized! Soon personalities were understood, and as

friendships took hold, it became evident Fritz and Fred were a twosome to deal with—good or bad.

The first week end Fred invited the crew to join him for a demonstration of a dare devil skill he had learned his previous summer in the Tetons. We went rappelling off of a 100 ft. granite rock face know as Black Tail Butte visible from the main highway. This taste of adventure would lead Fritz and Fred to weekend mountain climbing in the Tetons and climbing became a great sport for me.

After the first summer of work and much play we returned to our respective schools. Academic maturity or direction might not have paralled each other. With Fred in his junior year and I my sophomore they were different. To the dismay of my parents,I found theatre and acting, intramurals, and baseball team student manager much more appealing than studying. Yet when I began to share the tales of the Tetons my friends realized my immediate priorities. As an example it was more important to illustrate and instruct my Fiji fraternity brothers how to rappel off the roof and down the white columns of the front porch of the house.

Results were shoe marks on the columns and attracting small crowds of students in the front yard to gawk and let out cheers for this entertainment.

Meanwhile Fred was studying his Geology lessons learning of an interesting looking igneous rock formation in the Northeast corner of Wyoming and west of the Black Hills. Immediately the idea to climb Devils Tower struck and it would eventually top off our list of climbed peaks in Wyoming.

Unique as Devils Tower National Monument, legends begin to surface regarding its origin or meaning. With human eyes first seeing or feet that first trod near it such a legend began. The following legend is told in the story book of the Kiowa Indian Nation occurring centuries ago.

As the story unfolds I quote:

“Eight children were there at play, seven sisters and their brother. Suddenly the boy was struck dumb; he trembled and began to run upon his hands and feet. His fingers became claws and his body was covered with fur. There was a bear where the boy had been. The sisters were terrified. They ran and the bear after them. They came to the stump of a great tree and the tree spoke to them. It bade them climb upon it, and as they did so,

it began to rise into the air. The bear came to kill them, but they were just beyond its reach. It reared against the tree and scored the bark all around with its claws. The seven sisters were borne home into the sky, and they became the stars of the Big Dipper.” End quote

Sharing this legend, N. Scott Momaday, author of “House of Dawn”, a selection of the Eiteljorg Book Club, feels quote “ from that moment, and long as the legend lives, the Kiowas have kinsman in the night sky. Whatever they were in the mountains they would be no more. However tenuous their well-being, however much they had suffered and would suffer again, they had found a way out of the wilderness”. End quote.

As a side note N. Scott was born in the Indian Hospital in Lawton, Oklahoma in 1939. Because of the Depression he was taken to live on his paternal grandfather’s farm on the Kiowa Reservation. There they honored him in the first year with the name –“Rock Tree Boy” from the Kiowa name for the rock tower.

Not only in literature and legend do we find references of Devils Tower but also in collectable western art. In 1979, a Thomas Moran 20x16 oil on canvas, a desired work of his, sold for \$382,400. Its name, “Devils Tower,

Green River.” And then who hasn’t heard of or seen the film Close Encounters of the 3rd Kind which was filmed at the Tower?

Prior to the era of explorers, fur-trappers and mountain-men, few, if any, made references to Devils Tower in their journals.

Yet most of us today make the effort on family road trips to drive through the Black Hills of South Dakota taking a photo or buying a post card all due to being awakened, if not startled and amazed, to see a great column of igneous rock towering 1280 feet above the Belle Fourche River. Through studies of others, it is learned this area must be measured in millions of years, not centuries.

The question now arises where and how did this plug of rock come to be? Looking through my Indiana University Geology text book I shall briefly describe the process.

During those years volcanic formations formed in the earth through heating and cooling. Eventually erosion destroyed the volcanic mountain and left the central tower called a volcanic neck. The neck is roughly circular and an intrusive igneous rock body remains. Thus today we have Devils Tower.

I must confess this information was not a prerequisite in our decision to make the climb. The mutual and probable desire was just -- lets do it!

Even though that had been our common mantra every climb, unfortunately Niki got all the credit and fame!

There was some activity on Devils Tower before us. One of the first white men to cast eyes upon the Tower was a member of a Geological Survey Party exploring the Black Hills in 1875. Awestruck as Henry Newton was when they came upon it, he wrote: "its remarkable structure, its symmetry, and its prominence make it an unfailing of wonder. It is a great remarkable obelisk...and it rises 625 feet almost perpendicular from its base. Its summit is so entirely inaccessible that the energetic explore, to whom the ascent of an ordinary difficult crag is but a pleasant pastime, standing at its base could only look upward in despair of ever planting his feet on the top!" End quote. Little did he know that these very qualities would one day make it one of the most respected rock climbing locations in the world. Seventy five years later is when your essayist entered the scene.

Soon after the discovery, men were already making plans to make the climb. In 1893, two local ranchers, William Rogers and Willard Ripley, made that first successful effort. They cut stakes of oak and ash, pounded them into a vertical crack on the southeast face, and braced the outer ends with more strips of wood - only in America would the following take place. Hand bills advertising their feat, slated for the Annual Fourth of July picnic, proclaimed that "The rarest sight of a lifetime will be observed, and this 4th of July will better spent at the Devils Tower than at the World's Fair." On the 4th, William Rogers went up the ladder to the applause of the picnic crowd and unfurled the American flag. Later the men cut it up and sold the pieces as souvenirs. Just two years later, Linnie Rogers, William's wife, became the first woman to stand on the top.

That was just the beginning of the desire to place oneself on the top. In 1937 Fritz Weissner, I like that name, led a three man party from the American Alpine Club to successfully make the first technical ascent. Soon Jack Durrance, a Dartmouth student and their climbing club founder, established a strenuous route, the Durrance Route which eventually was to be the most popular to climb, and was the route we chose in 1960.

After Durrance did that historical climb he was called back to help rescue the first and only dare devil to parachute and land on the top. This was to be the highlight for that year's July 4th. Only one problem ,the jumper got stuck on the top!

As Bob Bonner mentioned in his essay on Robert Roosevelt a few years ago, TR our 26th President elevated the awareness to Americans that conservation was to be one of his priorities for America's future. Devils Tower was the firsts to be selected as a National Monument on Sept. 8, 1905. Using the Antiquity Act, approved just a few days before, he set aside several national sites to be, I quote "enjoyed by his children, then their children's children," end quote. Although he probably never saw Devils Tower himself his Bully actions preserved one of many locations not to be disturbed and always be available for sightseeing, study and recreation---and climbing!

On August 28 1960 Fritz and Fred packed what they needed, left camp and wound their way through fallen chunks of the columns from above. Probably less important to us that morning , surrounding us were the magnificent red cedars, Rocky Mountain Junipers, hairy wood peckers

along with 20 others species and 30 varieties of flowers because soon we found ourselves at the first pitch of the Durrance Route. Looking up at the challenge I am sure we just gave our mantra ---do it.

Climbs back then required that you have a permit. So our friend, the head climbing guide in the Tetons, provided such a letter of recommendation to the tower Ranger for Fred and me. Permission was granted. Unbeknownst to us at the evening camp fire that evening they announced that two young men would be climbing the Tower the next morning. But we were off to ourselves getting ready for the climb.

Gathering our limited gear of 2 120-ft. ropes, rappel slings, carabiners and an assortment of pitons and each a hammer we were on our way. Unfortunately no campfire folks had arrived so they missed seeing our high style cut off pants, fraternity t-shirts and of course our clutter soled shoes. One last check was made by Fred to make sure he had his pack of Life Savers candy he always insisted on carrying!

On our previous climbs, out of my respect for Fred's ability and my trusting of his technical skills, he always led. But that morning we alternated on each pitch or the section of rock to be climbed. The first pitch, called the Leaning Column, Fred had honors. With me setting a good belay and

informing him of such, and he, saying climbing, I answered by saying climb. Like a human spider up he went. Reaching his destination Fred prepared an appropriate belay and announced such to me. I advised I was climbing and he shouted down to me to climb.

What appeared to me on the next pitch seemed quite demanding although once into my moves the sixty feet was below me and Fred would follow with my belay set for him. I must say we both at times let go with some pretty colorful language.

Be assured in no way is this essay an attempt to instruct any of you on how to climb. That is something you just have in your DNA or Bully Spirit. What I do want to make clear is that equipment is to assist, you do the rest. So the rope is not to pull your partner up but to keep him from falling after a slip. Judging when to hammer a piton into an opening or a crack is important. A carabiner or snap link is inserted into the piton to allow the rope to slide easily through the carabiner. As the leader advances he might need to advise his partner of a tense upcoming move so he will shout “ tension” and a tight hold by the man below is necessary. Preparing for a possible slip or fall the lower partner tightens the grip to the rope. Once all is well you allow the rope to move again.

Although Devils Tower is 1200 ft above the Belle Fouche River the actual climb is only 875 ft.. There was no need to rush or hurry your moves. Searching for that knob to stand on or grab or a crack for the same we mostly used the technique of Jamming. This means inserting a knee, elbow, hand or foot into an available crack. That's right don't get stuck! There never was a time when either of us considered stopping and trying again another day. How fun it would have been to have brought a movie camera for those moments!

Half way up we noticed, and then heard, a family who had been at the campfire shouting up to us questions such as good view?, tired?, hot or having fun? Never did it keep us from moving on or mincing our words.

Approaching the top we chose to leave the Durrance route and take a more direct line to the top. Fred summited and with a tired but big smile he greeted me and we shook hands. Usually a cairn would appear, assembled by a previous party. But to our surprise we found a NPS sign placed there in jest by a ranger saying "no climbing above this point." Following traditional summit photos of satisfied and happy friends we began the rapid rappel off the summit.

In conclusion, this adventure of Aug. 28th 1960 prompted a photo to appear on the cover of the Sunday Indianapolis STAR Magazine and also

an article titled “In His Own Words” appeared in the Theodore Roosevelt Association Journal (Fall 2019) and reads as follows:

“Back at the base of the Tower we saw the same family that had been watching our launch. Fred and I looked at each other and then asked a bit sheepishly if they could hear us during the ascent? The father looked at us and nodded his head affirmatively.

It was time to go. We packed up, thanked the Ranger and left. About a mile from Devils Tower we pulled over into a viewing area for one last look. There was a father and son standing next to us. We overheard the little boy ask his father---“Dad, where are the climbers?” The father pointed to the Tower and said “there they are”. The climbers smiled to each other. Our adventure was over.”

Bully Bully

Questions or Comments

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The Literary Club of Indianapolis

“Bear and Bull”

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