



Instructor Brian Gannon 'Hitches' Ed Lovegren

Learning the Ropes

By HENRY SCFAINCK
of the Register-Guard



David Spencer Practices for Mark McLaughlin

"Slack! Sla. . . Ouch! Lemme' down!" cried the would-be mountain climber who dangled ten feet from the ground on the end of a rope.

The teenage climber, one of the 65 students attending this year's Obsidian Club climbing school, had lost his grasp on Whale Rock and was saved from falling only by his friend at the top.

"It's easy to forget that 'new language' when your climbing belt's been yanked up to your chest," said the young man later, commenting on his failure to shout the proper signals when he started to slip.

Nearly 40 of the students spent last Sunday taking part in the club's annual "trail and error" assault up "The Whale"—a weather-beaten, pock-marked 30-foot-high rock near Coburg.

"This is the place for mistakes," said Tom Taylor, director of the school and father of the youngest students, Andrea 6, and Terry 8.

"The school is aimed at novices. We want to get the mistakes out of their systems and let them get a good start at climbing."

Instructed by Eugeneans Mark McLaughlin, Brian Gannon and Gary Kirk, this year's school began with three indoor lectures at the club's new \$35,000 lodge at 29th Avenue and Spring Boulevard. The school is now moving outdoors for three months climbing and "snow school" sessions.

Discussions on basic equipment for camping, climbing and hiking, and a "slide talk" about Northwest climbing and hiking areas, highlighted the indoor meetings.

The second of the three outdoor sessions is being held today



Rope Work Becomes Father-Son Act for Doug and David Spencer

at the Coburg caves, a rocky area especially suitable for climbing practice and training.

An overnight trip to Mt. Jefferson July 11 and practice at snow and ice climbing will end the training period.

The school had its beginnings in the early days of the Obsidian Club, according to Taylor.

The organization, first called the Eugene Outdoor Club, was started in 1927 by four local residents who were part of a party

which conducted an unsuccessful search for two lost climbers in the Three Sisters area.

Soon, the club grew and members began holding sessions for friends, teaching them basic climbing techniques.

After World War II, the club enjoyed its most active period. It was then that organized climbing schools were first held.

"Veterans brought back an interest in the outdoors," commented Taylor. "Also, gasoline was available again and people wanted to travel."

The school became an annual event in 1957. After cooperating with the YMCA and the University Alpine Club for four years, the Obsidians took over the school's operation.

In the past eight years, between 300 and 400 people have attended the school. In addition, many climbers return each year to train and prepare for the coming season.

Some graduates stay with the club and some form smaller groups for more advanced climbing, according to Taylor.

Although, five years ago, most of the students were "around 40," more than half of those attending this year's first meeting were "under 20 and curious."

"For some reason, the people who come to the school as 'curiosity-seekers' turn into our most avid club members," Taylor noted.

For those who stay, the club usually offers 20 or 30 climbs—some easy, some difficult—during the June-to-October season.

Why is the school becoming so popular with Eugene people of all ages? And why does anyone want to face the danger, the training and the skinned shins that go with mountain climbing in the first place?

Taylor thinks "it's instinctive . . . especially with kids . . . being on top . . . and knowing you can depend on others and on yourself."

Some say they like the risk, while others "just don't know."

But they all seem to agree which one member who said, ". . . I love the mountains."

Register-Guard Photos by Mirko Pitner



Rock Wall at Practice Area Is Attacked by Gary Kirk, Left, and David Spencer, Center While Brian Gannon Demonstrates Rappelling