



Climbs with My Son

By JOE SHERMAN

OUR first climb was in October of 1988. I picked Burnt Mountain in Montgomery, which is close to home. We scouted it out from the Bayley-Hazen Road. Though we usually stick to trails, it had none. So, armed with compass and knife and matches, warmly dressed, with lunch in my pack, we headed up.

Three and a half hours later, after several plateaus, a couple scrambles around huge boulders gloved in ice, and a section of mossy, channeled rocks, we reached the top. A grove of twisted white birch lent some magic to the height, which was about even with nearby Hazen's Notch. After resting, I strapped on my knee brace and we came down. It was quite a day for a six-year-old and his 43-year-old semi-gimp Dad. I was proud of us.

Since then, Andrew and I have climbed one or two of the Green Mountains each year. Usually, we go just before the leaves pop out, or after they drop — but before deer season. The views are clearer then, the lay of the land easier to read, the bugs lethargic — if around at all.

Each climb has been unique, yet all share one similarity: You're going up. Mount Pisgah was a steady, steep climb all the way. Elmore Mountain



Charlotte Potter, Raul Irizarry, Joe and Andrew Sherman on their Blue Ridge Mountain climb.

Sparky Potter

west of Killington Peak. But before we even hit the trail we got a little lost.

One thing I have learned while hiking with my son is to remain flexible. My guide book, which admittedly is out of date, advised me to turn off Route 4, go so far, and turn onto a road leading to Tall Timber Camping Area.

"Are you sure this is right?" Charlotte Potter,

13, asked.

There was a gate over the road, a sign: "No Vehicles." Thankfully, I spotted a blue blaze on the far side of the gate.

"Are you sure?" Charlotte repeated.

"Don't worry," I said confidently. "I'm the adult."

Packs on, we immediately came upon an abandoned old camping area, one of those finds that brightens any hike. The kids scouted around the buildings, excited.

"Do butterflies bite?" Raul asked.

Now that would be a funny question if it came from a Vermont kid. But Raul Irizarry, 13, is from the Bronx. He's here courtesy of the Fresh Air Fund. Before I have a chance to explain that the Monarch has a straw-like tube, called a proboscis, but no teeth, Charlotte is swinging both hands wildly around her head.

became steep at the top, as did Camel's Hump. A short hike up Hazen's Notch over loose shale left us facing a vertical cliff.

The weather winds through my memories of our climbs with a binding unity: clear and breezy, cloudy and still, crusty snow and mossy rocks bearded with fringes of ice. A hawk rising in thermals, glimpsed from an outcrop, connects to another hawk rising over another valley a year before, two years before. And always there is the gradual ebb of energy, inversely related to how close we are to the summit. Then the burst of fulfillment, of satisfaction and joy, which almost seems to lift up through the rock when you stand on the top.

One year, however, so two other kids could join us, we picked a day in July. A hot, sticky day as it turned out, to climb Blue Ridge Mountain north-

Discover why our residents have expanded their expectations on how retirement living ought to be the first life care retirement community in New York.

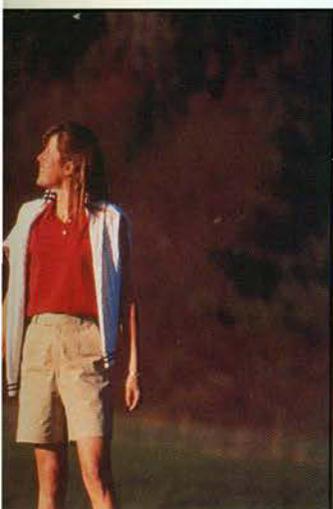
Kendal at Ithaca offers an outstanding lifestyle full of cultural, educational and recreational advantages, including numerous opportunities at Cornell University and Ithaca College; luxurious residences; exceptional services and amenities and the security of retirement living only with true life care living. Call or write today for more information.

Kendal at Ithaca

230 N. Triphammer Road
Ithaca, NY 14850
(607) 266-5300 or
toll-free 1-800-253-6325



r 252



GET OUTS OF VERMONT.

Working out in our indoor Health Center. Stroll through the shops and gardens of our picturesque village. Then enjoy dining and all the comforts of the Inn. For more information on our affordable retirement getaways, call your travel agent or 800-448-7900 for information and reservations.



802-457-1100
WORLD

r 286

VERMONT VIEW

"Kill that bug in my hair!" she shouts.

Andrew, now 12, comes to the rescue. He assures Raul, "Butterflies are okay, dude." He peels a small branch off a low-hanging tree and shows Charlotte how to use it as a switch to ward off bottle-green flies.

Soon, all three kids waving switches about their heads, we start off along the trail, guided by the blue blazes. Through gaps in the leaves we see broken clouds. Once we start to climb, though, the chatter stops, displaced by rhythmic breathing. Blue Ridge Mountain has a 3,278-foot summit, a climb of 1,487 vertical feet from where we parked.

The Italian lyric poet, Petrarch, is said to have been the first man to have climbed a mountain for pleasure. He did it in the 1300s. I have little doubt, however, that teenagers in many cultures beat the poet to it. They just never wrote about their climbs. One reason was that people didn't want to hear about mountains. For centuries they were not the magnetic attractions they are nowadays, with their clean air, animal life, streams, bird songs, and sparkling night skies if you stay after dark. Mountains were viewed as evil eruptions of the earth's crust, places that hid brigands and danger. Rather than being refuges from over-civilization, mountains scared most people.

For kids, the scary feel still rings true. Which is why, I think, a climb is both physically intoxicating and emotionally a bit frightening. The weather and light have a lot to do with it.

For instance, Andrew and I climbed Mount Pisgah when he was seven. The combination of low, fast-moving clouds, a view of the horizon southwest of Lake Willoughby where mountains appeared to undulate endlessly toward some dark and foreboding kingdom, and the sheer, dizzying long drops from rock knobs, on which we scuttled on all fours, left indelible and complex memories. Visual magic, the black solidness of the lake, the wind tugging at your collar as you peer down — these are not sensations you share in front of the VCR.

Climbs are also fun. There are sudden discoveries, like the fuselage of the airplane that had crashed decades

ago near the top of Camel's Hump and which we stumbled on with a joyful sense of the marvelous. There are towers, like the one with clanging metal stairs on Elmore Mountain. There is the anticipation of lunch which, on occasion, we have ravenously dug into while tucked in the lee slope of a moss-blanketed boulder so the wind didn't chill us off too rapidly.

On Elmore Mountain, which we climbed on a Sunday, we even held a little religious service. Andrew speculated about God in the trees, in the wind, in the clouds. Kids can get philosophical on a climb, or say the oddest things. Almost to the top of Mount Laraway in Belvidere, Andrew stopped, looked at me, and said, "Dad, how many staircases have we walked up — is this like climbing the stairs in the highest building in the world?"

I still have not figured that one out.

Today, past the halfway mark, we come upon a web of water rushing down a rock race and dumping into wash-basin-sized pools. Raul yelps about how cold the water is. Andrew presses himself flat to the rock, taking an icy nature shower. Charlotte, who likes to strike poses, stretches out on a branch of a yellow birch leaning over the pools. We eat a snack.

Back on the trail, I tell the kids stories. In a great book called *The Long Walk*, half a dozen escapees from a Siberian labor camp traversed the Himalayas to reach safety in northern India. At night, to keep warm, they slept in a circle, arms around each other. They claimed to have encountered the Yeti, a towering, hair-covered man/beast whose American counterpart is the Sasquatch of the Northwest. During Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812, with the Russians steadily retreating and torching everything the French needed to survive, the invaders finally reached Moscow. But it had been razed. The French soldiers slaughtered their horses and cooked them over fires made from elegant furniture scavenged from smoldering mansions.

"Tell us another story," the kids urge, but I'm out of breath. Talking is hard work while hiking.

The summit has no final ascent. It's more of a flat finish over rocks. The bugs come at us with renewed fierce-



50 #7. In
DISCOVER THE EARLY CONTEST

"Our

Based on
fathers'
combine
design &
with
& vision
a mag
together.

Start pl
dream

Call o
\$12 full
Visa

t of Vermont

the Killington - Pico Region



**4 Day/3 Night
Summer
Getaway
\$169-\$189**

per person, dbl. occup.
Breakfast & Dinner incl.

Award-winning dining, 2 Pools, Tennis,
Sauna, Hiking to the Appalachian Trail,
Golf Packages available

1-800-342-2086

Rt 100N, Killington, VT 05751 802-775-2537

alpenhof lodge

**3-4-5 Day
Get Away Packages**

Breakfast-Hot tub

Killington Rd., Killington VT 05751
802-422-9787

800-SIX-MNTS

irrtfelt beauty of Vermont

the Killington and Pico Region.
ele Touring • Mountain Biking
ack Riding • Hiking • Shopping



it will change the way
you look at things

as Association • 800-337-1928
x 114 • Killington, Vermont 05751

mon Fair in this town carried the Rutland
A. SHOREHAM B. CHARLOTTE C. ALBURN
225

Camp Abnaki

Established in 1901 For Boys 6-16

Located in the
Lake Champlain Islands

One, Two, Four or Six Week Sessions

ing, Windsurfing, Kayaking, Canoeing, Tennis,
, Crafts, Soccer, Basketball, Hiking, Backpacking
Special Teen Adventure Trips
ACA Accredited

Program is Centered on the Development of the
Individual Boy in Body, Mind and Spirit

Nelson Bagnardi (Director)

YMCA Camp Abnaki

266 College St., Burlington, VT 05401
(802) 862-8981

Circle Reader Service Number 170

VERMONT VIEW

ness.

"I'm never going to wash my hair again," Charlotte says, since the odor of clean, shampooed hair seems to attract dozens of flies.

"I've never seen this many bugs!" Raul adds, waving at them.

"Dad, can I stand up there?" Andrew points to a rock slab. "I always stand on the very top of every mountain we climb."

We find a stone outcrop where the breeze keeps the bugs away. The scent of balsams is strong, the air hazy. Below, in a distant field, a large construction project is under way; it looks big and sloppy, a scar in the green. The kids start talking about the nature of progress. "I'm so ashamed of being a human," Charlotte confesses. "We wreck everything."

That quiets them briefly. Raul pulls out cards. He and Charlotte play "Spit." I note some graffiti on the rocks: "Howard wuz here. Carol wuz here '57." I tell the kids that I was their age then.

Now that we've reached the summit, calmness prevails. We're over the hump. Mountains are good metaphors for all of us that way. You need to reach the top to go down the other side. If you're pushing a stone, Sisyphus-like, up to the top, you have to get it all the way up there or else it'll roll all the way back down. I'm convinced that these climbs will ingrain that truth in Andrew at an early age.

It's easy to wax poetic up here, with dragonflies hovering over the cards, butterflies veering by. The kids are so into what they're doing that I keep quiet. That's another lesson I've learned from these ascents: to reflect more on the timing of Dad's *bons mots*. I've learned to just say nothing.

I hadn't learned that yet when we climbed Mount Pisgah. We had just crossed the wooden bridges over the beaver dams down low when my 60-pound seven-year-old spied a rock he couldn't live without. He started lugging it and I badgered him until he, angry at me, abandoned it. Why didn't I praise his strength and let him figure out that he didn't want to lug a rock, Sisyphus or not, up Mount Pisgah?

Charlotte strikes another pose, snuggled into a granite scoop, her heels on a higher rock and her toes pointed south.

Raul speculates that if he ever comes back to earth as an animal he wants to be a Yeti. We try to spot Killington Peak, but the compass shows that our vantage point looks northward. Determined to slip in a little history lesson, I tell the kids that Killington's summit is where a Reverend Peters from Connecticut gave our state the name "Vermont" in 1763.

Usually, before Andrew and I pick a climb, we check the location out on a map. If intriguing people or incidents are mentioned in *Fifty Hikes in Vermont*, my guidebook, sometimes we cross reference them in state or town histories, or in the book *Green Mountain Adventure, Vermont's Long Trail*, or even in poems by Robert Frost or Walter Hard. This enriches the experience, I think, but I don't make too much of the educational part.

During climbs, kids get discouraged at times. "It's so long," they gripe. "How much farther?" they ask. But going down, youth has its day: leaping, springing, stopping to browse at whatever catches the eye. "Look, sprouts!" Andrew says on our descent, stopping the others in their tracks. Bending over, he brushes back some grass. The little shoots do look like sprouts. As I stop by the threesome, Andrew asks if I'm okay, then slaps me playfully on the arm and says, "It's all downhill from here, buddy."

I place one foot cautiously in front of the other. Going up might be hard on the kids, but going down is tougher on most adults. The kids bound out of sight as gracefully as fawns. I waste some breath raising my voice and shouting, "Wait up!"

They don't.

I'm not worried. I know Andrew won't go far.

Five minutes later I find him by the lacy waterfall, waiting patiently. I feel a strong bond of love reaching out toward him. That's the greatest joy of these climbs for me. I'm seldom closer to my son than when we're on a trail, free of material comforts, electronic games and gadgets, and both a bit winded. It seems to drop the barriers that sadly distance me from him. I can love him for who he is. That's the best treat these climbs offer.

Writer Joe Sherman lives in Montgomery.

You Post



© T-Peg, Inc. 1996

Timberp

Revolutio TRIM BRU ON V

The DR® TRIM rolls "light as a feather" and "BIG WHEELS" TRIMS far easier to use than other trimmers; MO from whole lawns to tough, waist growth with ea CUTS BRUSH saplings up to thick with optional blade shown below.



"I have never used... and efficient as this... being in the business... - Jack Walden, N