

Above: Ed Webster on the fourth pitch of the VMC Direct on Cannon Cliff. Photo: Bryan Becker. Below: Jane Wilson on the second ascent of "AbraKadabra." Photo: Ed Webster. Right: Jim Dunn on the crux of "Grim Reaper." Photo: Ed Webster.



The Endless Summer

(recent New Hampshire rock climbs)

by Ed Webster

Arrival. Good ole' North Cornflake, New Hampshire. Twenty dollars left in my pocket. Will I be able to guide this summer? Hope so. Man, I don't want to wash dishes! And no place to live either. Standing on the pavement below Cathedral it's the second week of June, hotter than hell, and so humid that already this morning my T-shirt is soaked through. Paul Ross drives up; Jesus, I've been waiting for this moment.

"Hi Paul! Boy, it's good to see you, great to be home."

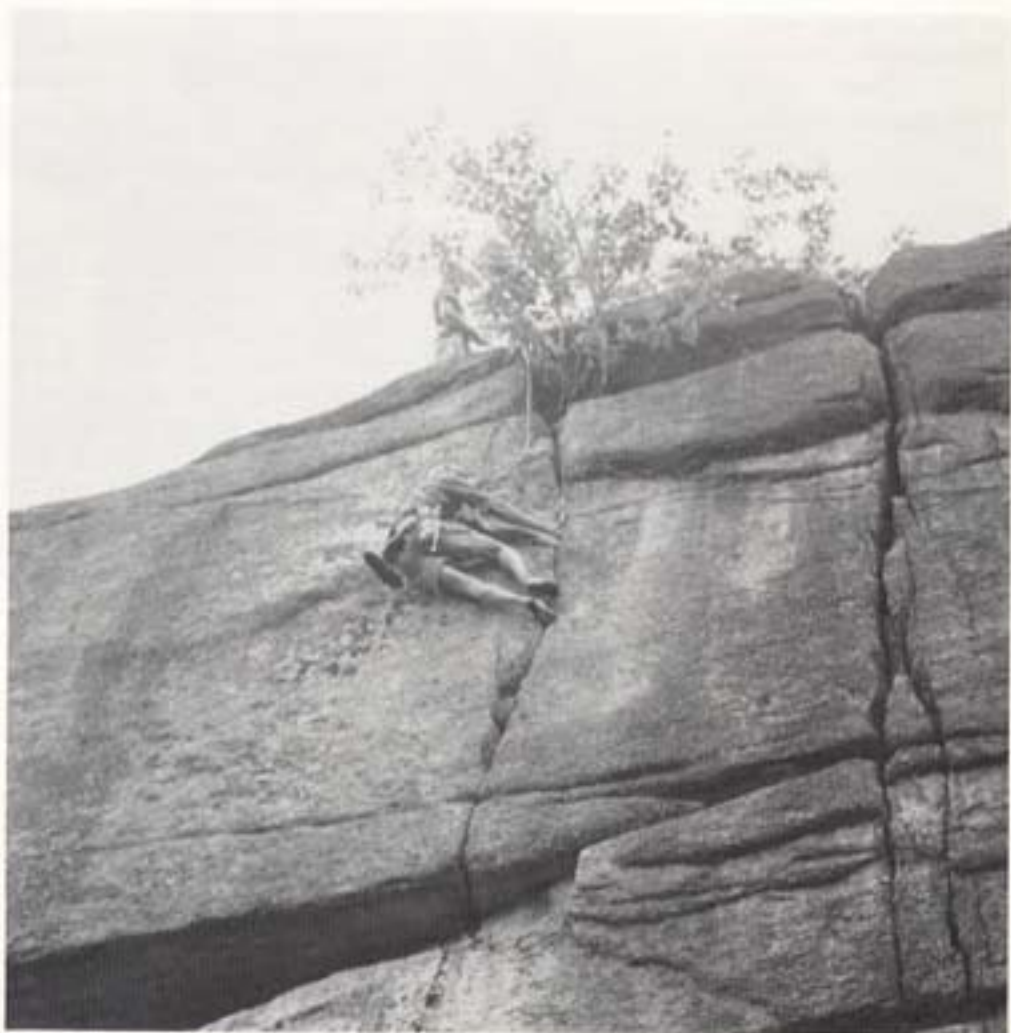
"I was wondering when you'd be arriving—Good trip?" he asks.

"Yeah, it was ok. The usual two day marathon drive, eating plastic roadside food and drinking lots of coffee. But Paul, do you remember that letter I sent you in the spring, about guiding?" I reply.

"Well, I've been holding the job for you. A few of the other young lads have asked me, and I told them that I'd already given you the option to work since you asked first. Want it still?"

"YES!!"

For the next four months I teach people how to climb, people who had climbed The Matterhorn and requested "advanced" rock-climbing lessons, 11-year-old spidermen who could climb 5.7 their first day and make it look like 5.2, overweight school teachers from Manhattan, undertakers from New Jersey, Navy men who spent unending hours underwater in submarines, teenagers who wanted the ultimate "kick" to round out their summer vacation.



Dunn barefoot on the first ascent of "Dresden."

Dresden (5.10) Cathedral Ledge

Guiding is fun and easy and keeps me out of trouble climbing all day long. I teach 'til three or four in the afternoon, come back to the store, call up Jim Dunn—"Wanna go climbing, James?"

"Sure let's go do "The Crack in the Woods" all right? The river's low enough so we can get across." Jim speculates.

"I was thinking of doing a new route on Cathedral. I cleaned it last week, but then I couldn't lead it. We ought'a do it."

"All right, come down here to EMS in 15 minutes."

We climb the first ascent of "Dresden" today, a short 5.10 finger crack on Cathedral's Upper Left Wall. I finally succeed and James follows in barefeet, EBs dangling uselessly from his swami. I can't help wondering if barefooting will catch on.

Moonraker (5.7) South Buttress of Whitehorse Ledge

Climbing with Paul Ross is always good for laughs, his tongue-in-cheek limey humor, always on the biting side, keeps you smirking. Today Paul tells me of the untapped potential of the 650-foot South Buttress of Whitehorse. He says he has a real plum picked out, asks me to lead it after accusing me of being too lazy to bother walking over to the South Buttress to check it out. A short approach by British standards, he chides.

At Paul's chalet we gather equipment: nuts, a few pegs to leave as residents, a boltkit just in case. Paul's motto, he tells me jokingly, is "The only good route is one with a bolt in it."

"You just like to play 'The Devil's Advocate'," I mutter.

"No, I just think bolts are useful for opening up the best lines," Paul adds.

Bill Aughton on the South Buttress of Whitehorse Ledge. Photo: Ed Webster.



Heading towards Whitehorse, Paul drives towards Echo Lake, not towards the normal Whitehorse parking area. I ask him where the hell we're going—he chuckles and steps on the gas. A dirt road bounces us along through the woods past Echo Lake, the South Buttress suddenly appearing over the tops of the trees. Paul's laughing his head off now as we drive along his secret back road which takes us to within an easy stroll of the base of the cliff. That bugger! In a few hours we climb "Moonraker," a wide open face climb with long runouts, the easiest climb on the entire Buttress.

Women in Love Direct (A-3) Cathedral Lesge

The previous summer Bryan Delaney and I free climbed a large portion of Joe Cote's classic nail-up, "Women in Love," on Cathedral Ledge at hard 5.11. Around the same time Jeff Pheasant soloed an A-3 direct start turning "Women in Love" into a full length climb. While teaching on "Refuse," a 5.6 trade route, I eye the shallow finger cracks on Pheasant's start, trying to see if they'll ever go free.

In July Roger Briggs and his brother, Bill show up in North Conway, coming all the way from Colorado to sample some up-country climbing. After I suggest a potential first free ascent, the three of us go off to try Pheasant's start, "Women in Love Direct." Roger complains of the stifling heat and humidity, and once he's on the rock, of the lichen, too. He manages to free climb the initial seventy feet making it look not too hard, then descends saying it won't go free. Just when I reach the high point the sky opens up, releasing its nearly tangible burden of moisture by the bucketful. We scamper down to the road, drenched. An omen for the following day. Roger tries to lead "Airation," at 5.11 the prettiest finger crack in the area. He slips on the crux and blood runs freely from painful cuts in his fingers and if that wasn't enough, another deluge puts a final end to his efforts. Early the following morning Bill and Roger leave New Hampshire



Roger Briggs on "WILD." Photo: Bill Briggs.

destined for the Needles of South Dakota, 2,000 miles distant, fed up with the lousy weather here. I apologize for all the rain, but Roger laughs it off, saying, "Looks like my eastern climbing vacation is rapidly turning into a western climbing vacation."

WILD (5.11) Cathedral Ledge

Ajax Greene and I return to give "WILD," our affectionate re-name of "Women In Love Direct," another shot. Ajax is stoked, but runs short of fuel at Roger's previous high point. After rigging some frightening A-4 stoppers I master the final moves, barely mantling up onto a small ledge. When The Greene Machine is set to follow, Jim Dunn rides up on his new bicycle, and upon seeing our success, announces he'll be right on up! Ajax trails a rope and James climbs the new pitch with typical ease. Now the "WILD" is free, we have a unique opportunity to tie up the most sustained and one of the hardest free climbs in the East, starting on "WILD" (5.11) and finishing up "Women In Love" (5.11 Plus).



Jim Dunn contemplates an unprotected move on "Wild Women." Photo: Ed Webster.

Wild Women (III 5.11 Plus) Cathedral Ledge

It's a month later, sometime in August, and James and I fail to link together our new project, due to general malaise, so we pick blueberries all afternoon instead. Later, Doug "Madcap" Madara gives the link-up his best, goes for broke (his trademark) on the crux of "WILD," loses it on the last move, feels his top nut pull, and plunges forty-five feet. Parallel streaks of brushed off lichen mark his falling footsteps like tire rubber on a dragway.

On a cold fall day in October, Jim and I are back at the cliff in a final affectionate gesture, to complete our link-up, which we have named, appropriately, "Wild Women." We are two people at ease with ourselves, very happy about the unbelievable new climbs we have done, happy to see the golden birch leaves fluttering in the chilled October breezes, feeling that after this climb the winds

will blow us away too and we will head west for warmer days and the exhilarating rock of Colorado, the homeland for the wintering sun.

This morning, I am climbing heavily due to a bad cold and find myself lowering off one move from the ledge on "WILD." On the second pitch, an unclimbed groove, a No. 1 copperhead welded into a seam protects me on some hard 5.9 face climbing. As I'm racking up for the hard lead on "Women In Love" Jay Wilson appears and joins us, accepting Jim's morning invitation to come out and climb with us. James throws down a rope for Jay, who spiritedly climbs the groove below us. After I place most of the protection on the next lead, unwittingly playing "the dummy" for Jim, he cruises the 5.11 Plus finger crack, making it look like nothing. Must be all of his one arms! As with "WILD" below, I follow the pitch in control, proving to myself again how much of climbing difficult routes is in my head.

Soon Jay and I are huddled on a narrow stance as the wind picks up into a grey howl, misty clouds gathering about us as they sweep south, off the Presidential Range in the north. Dunn is climbing the last two pitches, up "Women In Love" and over into "The Book of Solemnity," in one to speed our ascent. I shiver watching Jay thrash with the hardest free climbing he's ever seen; one eye on him, the other on the sorcery in the clouds. I come up last, struggling with senseless fingers. In the blustery weather all three of us stand atop the crag for a few moments; Jim with his stoned vampire grin, me with my eyes glazed over, Jay close to us with his down-on-the-farm warmth and soft spoken humor. All around us the fall leaves are airborne, blowing dervishes vishes along the ground, swirling without direction, looking for a comfortable place to rest for the winter.