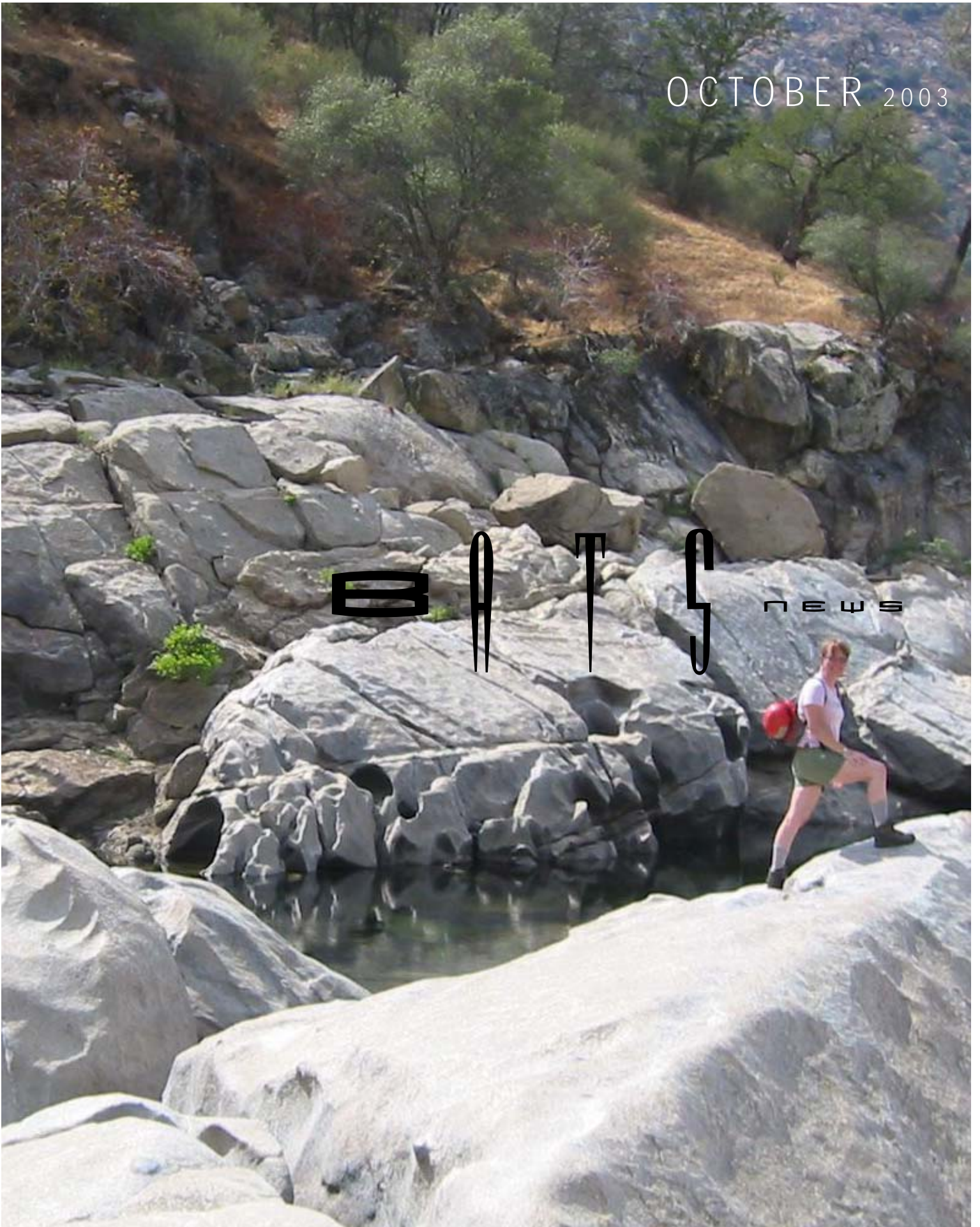


OCTOBER 2003

B **A** **T** **S** **NEWS**



Features

BATS News Oct. 2003

Editor,
Allan Weberg
14776 Arizona Avenue
Woodbridge, VA 22191
703-490-4882 (H)
aweberg@comcast.net

Art Director,
Michael Young

Proofreading,
Meredith Hall-Johnson

BATS EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

President,
Mike "TinY" Manke
300 Happy Creek Rd
Locust Grove, VA 22508
540-972-9034
NBR33FANS@aol.com

Vice President,
Jacque Miley

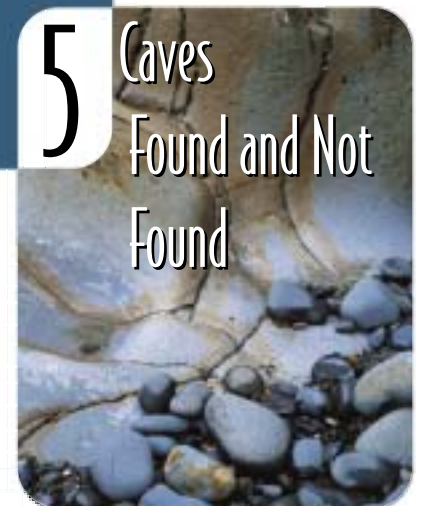
Treasurer,
Raymond Herlong

Secretary,
Nicole Bennett
Edenton Rd
Partlow, VA
540-895-5719 (H)
703-784-4030 (W)
roccapia@hotmail.com

Delegate-at-large,
Lee Rodrigue
Cover photo by:
Meredith Hall-Johnson



4 Oct. Minutes



8 Don't Feed the
Micro-rack!

F rom the Editor

Now, listen here BATS! I find myself in a quandery with only one article to publish this month (well, last month really!) We've had a few events that have gone unreported because no one has written them up! Consider this a call for articles. Share some of your expertise with everyone else!

Thanks to Meredith for a fun read—more fun from California. If you haven't figured it out already, NSS Conventions are fun because there are a bunch of great folks that attend Convention! You need to consider going to Michigan. Thanks to Carroll Bassett and Scott McRea for permission to reprint their thought provoking warnings about the micro-rack.
Allan

C alendar

November 11

BATS Monthly business meeting, Salem Church Library, 7:00 PM

November 15

Nov 15 Endless Caverns above ground site survey, see Mike "TinY" Manke for info

January 13

Jan 13, 2004 BATS Holiday Party @ Carlos O'Kellys in Fredericksburg

July 12-17


2004 NSS Convention, Marquette, MI

September 3-6

2004 Old Timers Reunion, Dailey, WV

Ongoing Events

Vertical Practice at TinY's house every Tuesday evening except the 2nd Tuesday when practice will be held the Thursday following the 2nd Tuesday



BATS October Meeting Minutes,

Present: Nikki Bennett, Evelyn Bradshaw, Debbie Frazier, Raymond Herlong, Ken Hornung, Meredith Johnson, Kelsea Johnson, Russell Loynes, Mike Manke, Joe Shepherd,

Treasurer's Report: (Raymond) We have \$ in the bank, and have renewed the P.O. Box.

Trip Reports: Joe talked about the Starn's Cave trip at VAR, Meredith gave a rundown on the Robert's Cave trip at VAR.

Trip Coordinator: Joe Shepherd is our new trip coordinator! If you have a trip you'd like to lead get with him so he can put it on the schedule.

Elections: Elections are in December, so we need to appoint volunteers for the Nominating Committee. The Executive Committee will appoint the Committee, and they will report in November. Meredith suggested that we get the new bylaws on the website. Raymond will get bylaws to Kelly. Evelyn suggested that it might be worth considering having 2-year overlapping terms, will discuss next meeting.

Holiday Party/Fundraiser: Unless anyone has any other ideas by next meeting, the holiday party will be at Carlos O'Kelly's like last year, in replacement of the January meeting (so Tuesday, January 13, 2004). If anyone has any items they want to donate to the silent auction (all proceeds go to BATS Grotto!) then let Nikki know what they are so she can put them on the list.

Trip Planning: The Endless Caverns Site survey will be November 15, if this date is OK with the owners. Get with TinY if you're interested in going. This will be a surface survey project. In preparation, next meeting TinY will give a presentation on how to read the survey instruments.

V-BATS: Practice is every Tuesday at TinY's, except BATS meeting weeks, on Thursday instead. VBATS had a trip to Whitesides, everyone did great.

Survey Activities: The Front Royal Grotto has monthly surveying trips, Janet Tinkham is the POC. Also, Gangsta Mappers for Breathing Cave (3rd weekend every other month). A resurvey of Grand Caverns is scheduled for the 1st weekend in November. Carol Tideman is POC. Omega Cave needs help surveying. You need to be an experienced vertical caver. Get with TinY if you're interested. There is a letter writing campaign in KY to get letters of interest about projects slated for karst land (airfield, etc.) Get with Meredith for more info.

VAR Pancake Breakfast: (Gordon Birkhimer in charge) Was a complete success!! Estimate gain: about \$232, less propane costs.

Presentation: Whiteside Mountain Video

Found Caves and Found Not



by Meredith Hall Johnson
photos by Meredith Hall-Johnson

Millerton Lake
Caves

Monday of Convention Week found the BATS grotto out scouting for a suitable cave for the upcoming Randy Gandy Club trip. After looking through the long drive times and hike times on many of the caves' descriptions in the Convention Guidebook, TinY settled on Millerton Lake Caves, which looked like one cave with three entrances. It was only a two and a half hour drive away.

We had directions provided by the Convention staff and set off. It was me, Susi Pearce, Nikki Bennett, and Mike "TinY" Manke. TinY drove our rented Astro van that we later found out can hold at least 12 cavers. We all sang merrily up the highway until we got to Fresno. There we made a short stop at a liquor store to inquire about the Drink Nude Beer billboard we had seen. We thought it would be great fun to drink later.



Bad Directions?!

We found the next highway only because we looked for it. The directions were not accurate. Nor were there many landmarks listed. Like, wouldn't you put a town as a landmark? There was one turn just past a town but the town was not mentioned. Anyhow, we found the right road and blissfully drove down it, with TinY measuring the mileage. At four miles we did not find a "Y" intersection, so we drove on. Maybe that was it back there. Maybe California cavers don't define Y like we do. Maybe... well, let's just turn around and look again. So we did. And we did again. Finally we drove almost to the end of this road and stopped at a little store. We sent Nikki and Susi in.

"You want the next road down," the guy said. "Auberry Turnoff, not Auberry Road." Oh, well, that explained it. We found that quite easily but were now very frustrated with the bad directions. We came to a Y and turned. It became obvious that that was not the correct Y. But why should we believe that the direction writers actually meant the first Y? So we backtracked yet again and found another Y. We drove down that road a ways and found a big sign that said "San Joaquin River Gorge" on Smalley Road. That was not the name of the road in the directions. So we backtracked one more time and found another Y in the road.

Nice Local

This road led into the Sequoia National Forest. That was neat. But the road quickly narrowed down to barely a one-laner. We drove for a while; all the while Nikki and Susi were starting to mildly freak out because TinY was driving and the road just fell away at the cliff's edge. We saw an oncoming truck. We waited, he waited. Since he was the polite local, we finally decided to go on. We stopped at his truck and asked if he knew where the cave was. Even after he read the directions, he had no idea. So he drove on and we turned around.

There he was, waiting for us around a curve. He had thought about it and figured out where it might be. Susi ended up sweet-talking him into driving us

there as it wasn't really too far out of his way. He did, but declined the offer to go caving with us since he was still on the clock. We drove down Smalley Road.

It was another barely one-laner with long drop-offs right next to it. But the scenery was spectacular. We drove down into this beautiful gorge with high mountains on all sides. The trees were different; the rocks were different. We finally began to see a couple of identifying landmarks so we knew we were in the right place. We were glad when we found the parking area across from the power plant. It had only taken us four hours to get there. One other car was there. A caver car with Steve Ormroid's Convention nametag hanging from the mirror. Oh good, someone I know. Things were looking up.

Almost There

At least until we started following the hike-to-the-cave directions. After carefully measuring 250 feet, we quickly determined that the hiking directions were as bad as the driving directions. So we went back and started again, trying to think how bad-direction writers would think. We finally came to a path which seemed correct. We followed it a ways and met up with Steve and a friend, Janet.

Steve's wife, Judy, and another caver were still up on the mountainside looking for the cave. They had already been there, looking in the 90+-degree heat, for 4 hours. After talking with them for a bit, we decided we would look for the cave somewhere else, like down by the river that beckoned us. We said good-bye and continued walking down the road. It was paved and an easy hike. Coming up later would be a chore, but at least we weren't bushwhacking in the woods.

Not a Total Waste

TinY made a small show of actually looking for the cave entrances near where we stopped. He did not find any. We all decided that at least the day would not be wasted because here was a spectacular swimming hole with no one around—until the two ex-Marines and their dog showed up. Oh well, they did not mind that we were about to go swimming.

So we did. The water was cold and wonderful. The granite rocks were hot and wonderful. It felt so good to swim and



then get out and lay on a hot rock. We stayed until the sun had moved quite a ways in the sky. We knew we had a long drive so reluctantly we left.

The hike up was a pain, but more so because I kept stopping to pick up rocks. I have decided that now my favorite rock is granite. It just feels so good! The granite around here was full of small mica chips that sparkled in the sun. We finally all got in the van and drove back to Porterville. Funny, it only took about two and a half hours!

We got to the Howdy Party in time to get in the now-short food line. We were starving. Later that night Susi and I were serving beer with the Zoo crew (Yep, the East Coasters had to save the day again!) and met a guy who gave us good directions to a much closer cave. At least he knew what side of the road the cave was on! He said you could not miss it.

Moorehouse Spring Cave

Sooooo, the next day we set off again. This time Kelsea and Sarah joined us for the fun. We made it to Springville in seven minutes; TinY was driving again. Not too far past this small town, the road started climbing into the mountains. Once again we found ourselves driving on a road next to a sheer drop-off. But the scenery here was also spectacular. Many huge bare rock faces reminded me of the much larger Half Dome up at Yosemite National Park.

We had been dutifully checking the time and mileage, just in case we actually got lucky and found a cave today. Today's directions were right on the money! We found the cave! Yay!! We actually found another low shelter cave that we planned to explore on the way back. We drove just past the cave on the left, just like Will had said, and found one of two smallish parking pull-outs. We parked and geared up. This did not take much more than switching from Texas to cave boots and grabbing our helmets. We were caving in shorts and t-shirts today; after all, the Randy Gandy Club caves in far less than that.

California Underground

We walked up the side of the road, on the other side of huge guardrails whose function TinY explained. We crossed the road and there we were, in the cave entrance. It was, literally, right by the side of the road. We all entered and pretty much "did the cave" in about 10 minutes. There was a bit of climbing to do and we did. There were some formations and flowstone. We even poked our heads down a couple of crawlways. We did double our time underground, though, by me trying to figure out how to set the timer on my digital camera. I finally succeeded and we headed out. TinY had found his Randy Gandy cave and we had finally gotten underground in California.

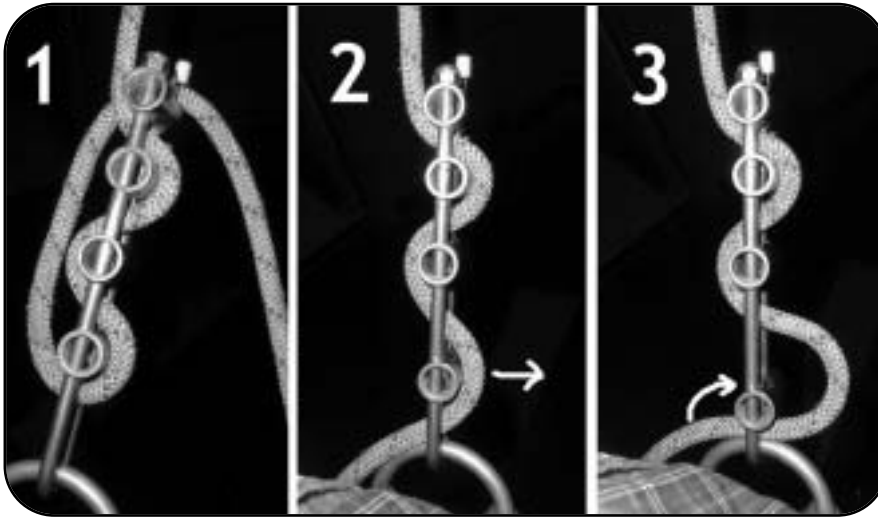
Danger! Don't feed the micro-rack! by Scott McCrea

To republish this Page 1 of this article either via print or electronic means contact Scott McCrea at mccrea@att.net
To republish Page 2 of this document via print or electronic means contact Carroll Bassett

Note from the editor: Scott McCrea is the moderator of the Caves.com Vertical Discussion Group which you can join online at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/cavescomverticalcaving/>
I began vertical caving in 1993 with the Cleveland Grotto. I have been vertical in TAG, NC, VA, WV, OH and KY. Through this group, I hope to learn more and hopefully help others learn some stuff too.

I love my micro-rack. It's great for most drops and works great with a frog system. However, there is a potential hazard with them. It is possible to accidentally drop to two of the four bars. This happens when there is too much friction and a rappeller resorts to feeding rope causing the bottom bar to pop off. It is possible to pop bars off of any rack while feeding, but since a micro-rack only has four bars, the margin for error is slight. The micro-rack is unique among racks in that very little variation in friction is available. Bars cannot be added or dropped like on a regular

rack. There is only a small amount of space to spread the bars (there are long micro-racks available which increase the spreading space, but the feeding issue is still there). So, often the only option is to feed rope. Imagine a caver rigs his trusty but stiff and dirty rope to a tree about 20 feet from the lip. The approach to the lip is sloped but not steep. The rappeller rigs his micro-rack a safe distance from the lip, but as he begins to back down towards the edge there is too much friction. He struggles to inch down the rope. Even without the hyper-bar and the bars spread, it's tough going. Feeding some rope into the rack speeds things up. At the lip, he turns around to look down the pit and plan his next move. Still feeding rope, he removes his hand from the rack, maybe to adjust a pad,



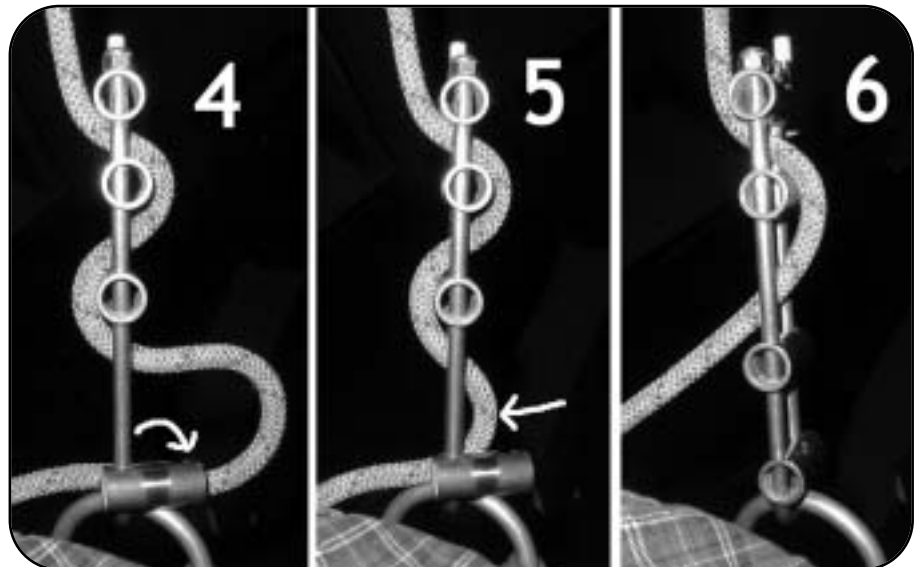
1. Micro-rack rigged with all bars including the hyper-bar.
2. Hyper-bar disengaged, rope being fed creating a loop.
3. The rope outside the rack will push up and in on the bar and pop it off.

swat a bee or to help balance. A loop of rope gets fed into the rack and all of a sudden, he's on two bars and going a lot faster.

So, how can this be prevented?

Simple, pay attention. Ok, that's a little obvious. The best way to prevent this is to follow a simple but often broken rule that applies to any and all unlocked racks—ALWAYS keep a hand, finger, thumb, or something on the last engaged bar. A bar that you are holding will not come off. Please note, there is nothing wrong with these racks. This can happen with any four bar, U-shaped rack. They all work just fine, as long as they are used correctly. I am definitely not giving up my micro-rack and neither should you. Just be aware of the hazards, be prepared, practice, simplify and think.

Scott McCrea Asheville, NC, USA
NSS 40839 scott@flittermouse.org

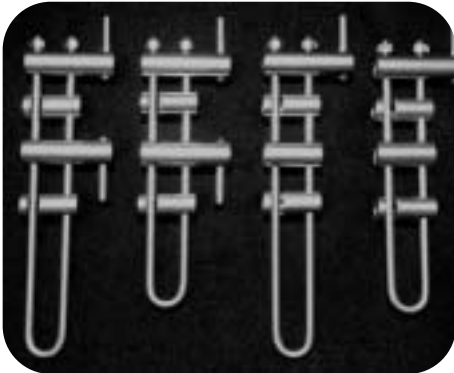


4. Bar swings open.
5. Rope slips out of the rack.
6. Rack is now rigged with only two bars.

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Rack Safety

by Carroll Bassett



Pictured above: Long frame and short frame micro-racks.

Scott's point is well taken and his advice to use your other hand (aka balance hand, not your brake hand) to not only spread the bars but to hold the fourth bar closed when feeding stiff rope makes good sense. If you routinely find yourself feeding rope (either because your rope is very stiff, you are a light person, or the rope weight acts to create too much friction) we strongly suggest that you switch frames to the longer version (BMS will be happy to switch your frame for \$20US plus \$6US shipping). This adds only about an ounce and just over an inch in length to your Micro-Rack and seems to solve most feeding issues our customers have had in the past.

If your problem persists and you are still uncomfortable with either a mini-rack or Micro-Rack a bobbin type device or a full sized rack may well suit your needs better.

Another approach to solving this possible problem is to make the fourth bar latch harder. This will increase the force that it takes to open and close the fourth bar with

the result of making it less likely to open inadvertently. This adjustment is quite easily made to your Micro-Rack without disassembly. Essentially all that is required to increase the latching force is a tap to the slotted end of the 4th bar thereby closing the slot a small amount. If you find after tapping the bar it is too hard to engage with the frame properly you have probably closed the slot a bit too much and will need to open it a little. A rod slightly larger than the slot can be lightly tapped into it with the effect of opening the slot slightly. Check the latching action after each adjustment to make sure of the bar's proper functioning. Older racks should be checked periodically as wear from use can lessen this latching force. Anyone who feels uncomfortable with making these adjustments themselves is welcome to return their Micro-Racks to BMS along with the return shipping (see above) for a free tune up.

Mini-racks made by other manufacturers with aluminum bars may have some issues with cracking so the manufacturers should be consulted first before any adjustments are made. Using a QAS (quick attachment safety) is highly recommended when approaching an edge especially before one has fully loaded the rope. For those of you unfamiliar with this technique I will briefly describe its components and their use. A QAS generally consists of a personal ascender or rope grab which has the ability to be attached to a rope quickly with one hand and a tether that securely connects it to the users harness. The length of the tether should allow attachment above your descender but not be so long as to not allow easy reach when fully loaded on rope. It is generally clipped to the balance hand side of the rappellers harness to make it easy and fast to attach to the rope when on rappel. As one moves down the rope towards the lip the cam is held slightly open with the balance hand to allow progress. To stop progress the cam is allowed to engage the rope. This adds somewhat to the complexity of a system

but is easily mastered with a minimum of practice and adds another level of safety when negotiating a lip, generally accepted to be the riskiest part of a rappel. After passing the lip the QAS can be removed and the rappel completed. This is especially good for beginners to gain confidence and can be taught on steep slopes for gaining experience before a real drop.

The auto-block is another rappel safety technique worth knowing and simply puts the ascender below the rappel device. Rather than a mechanical ascender a small prussic (6-7mm acc. cord) is tied onto the rope below the descender and then attached to the leg loop on the rappellers brakehand side usually with an oval or triangular quick link . Be sure to tie your prussik carefully and dress it properly. This should be rigged as short as possible so not to allow the prussik to ride up into your descender when loaded. To move down the rope the prussik is broken with the brakehand and rope allowed to slide through. To stop simply let go of the prussic and it will grab the rope stopping progress. Since the prussic only receives a small proportion of the users total weight (most of the users weight is on the descender above) it is relatively easy to continue a rappel after stopping by breaking the grip of the prussic. Again, practice with this technique on a steep slope to gain expertise and confidence. This is especially useful for the first person into a pit to use as there will be no one to bottom belay you in the event of an emergency.

Readers should be careful to understand these concepts fully before using them and always practice the highest standards of safety when on rope. Whenever in doubt seek out competent training and advice. Be safe and enjoy.

Carroll Bassett for BMS

BMS HC 68 Box 64B
Friars Hill, W.V. 24938
(304) 497-4311
omc01207@mail.wvnet.edu