

Equipment Notes

edited by Dave Pearce

Berghaus Sacs and Frames

In the Berghaus range of sacs, the models of most interest to the climber are the 172, which is a day sac, and the 272, which is larger and more suitable for packing the full requirements for a weekend or more in the mountains. Both sacs are available in several versions, made of different materials and with different 'extras'. The most durable of the materials is "Topsan", which is a nylon mesh sandwiched and laminated between two layers of PVC. Although heavier than more conventional rucksack materials, it is extremely strong and completely waterproof. Also available are a conventional polyurethane-coated nylon and a double PU nylon which is coated with polyurethane on both sides. The Standard 172 has an ice-axe loop and is made of Topsan. It can therefore be used continually in wet conditions, without risk of leaking or rotting. It will thus no doubt appeal to Outdoor Activity Centres, although climbers will probably need the crampon attachments that are fitted to the 172 Special and 172 Super. The Special is available in Topsan, the Super in double PU nylon. Both have pockets inside the top flap and sewn-on hammer holsters, but one needs to be double-jointed to prefer these to a conventional holster on the waist. It is unfortunate that the sewn-in bivi sheet on the Super is not made the full length of the sac, as this mars what is otherwise an excellent, well-made, lightweight day sac. The 272 is available in both Topsan and PU nylon, and has internal lacing to reduce it in size for day expeditions. The sac has loops for attachment to a pack-frame, as well as padded shoulder straps. Berghaus pack-frames fall into two categories – the all-welded Mach 1 and 2 frames, and the competitively-priced, screwed construction Mach 3 and 4. The most interesting feature of the frames is the load-bearing hip harness, which can be adjusted even when carrying heavy loads to alter the proportion of the weight taken on the hips and shoulders. These hip harnesses really do work and allow very heavy loads to be carried without restriction of breathing. Of the sacs purpose-designed for fitting on the pack-frames, the 772 will no doubt be the most popular as it is the lowest priced and has the highest capacity.

Self-Protecting Solo Climbs

A fatal accident at Gordale has revealed that one of the well-known methods of self-protecting solo climbing is unsafe. The climber was attached to a prusik loop tied around a fixed backrope. It appears, however, that a prusik knot cannot absorb the energy of a fall without slipping. Once it starts slipping, if sufficient force is exerted to stop the climber, the loop is almost certain to melt through. As mechanical prusiking devices (e.g. Jumars, Clog Ascendeurs, etc.) are not designed to withstand the impact of a fall, these should not be relied on for this purpose either. Devotees of roped soloing should avoid any form of weak link between themselves and the rope, by tying directly into the rope.

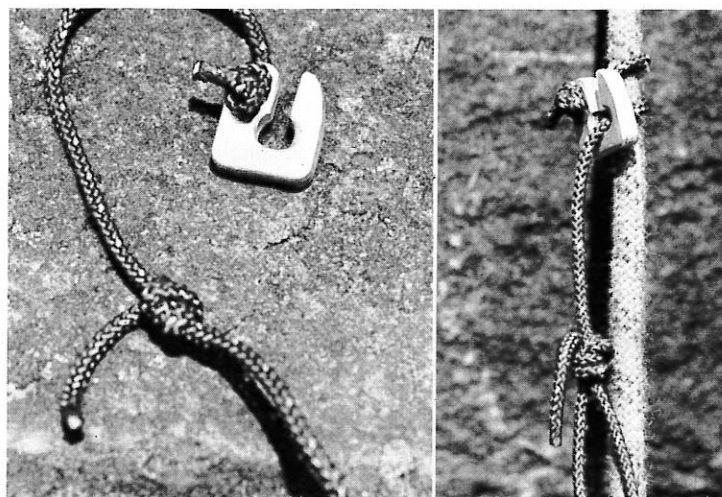
New Karabiner from Clog

The alloy karabiner from Clog Climbing Gear is now available (price: £1.05). Formed by bending 11mm. alloy wire, it has a breaking strain of 2,500kg. and weighs 3oz. A good general purpose karabiner, it has all the desirable features for use in aid climbing. It is large enough to wrap a fist through, and the gate may be opened with two etriers clipped in and supporting the climber's weight. There is then still enough room to clip the rope through the gate. The body of the karabiner also stands slightly proud of the opening end of the gate, making it easy to open the gate while racking pegs.

Sticht Belay Plate

The Sticht belay plate has gained greater acceptance on the Continent than in the U.K. Salewa are now to introduce a new design. The main failing of the old design was that if one tried to feed the rope quickly, the plate slid up against the karabiner and jammed the rope. The new device incorporates a spring to prevent this happening, and the rope can now be threaded at any speed without jamming. When a load is put on the rope, the spring compresses and the plate works in the normal way. A small hook allows the spring to be compressed to save space when carrying. The new plates will cost about twice as much as the old ones, which is unlikely to commend them except to those who doubt the ability of their seconds to hold them. However, the plates do double as abseil devices.

Below: The Sticht/Salewa prusiking device and the new Clog Karabiner. Photos: Dave Pearce



Incidentally, Sticht plates are designed for use with kernmantel construction ropes and should not be used with hawser-laid ropes. There are four sizes, to cater for both single and double, 9mm. and 11mm. ropes, although the double versions will do the same job as the single and are lighter into the bargain.

Sticht Prusikers

A new prusiking device has been introduced by Salewa. It is intended for use in emergencies and not as a replacement for Jumars or Clog Ascendeurs in situations where a large amount of prusiking is anticipated. Compared to the conventional prusik knot, the device has the advantage of being ready for action extremely quickly. It would therefore obviously be of use in situations such as glacier travel, where the need to prusik can become a sudden and unpleasant necessity. The plates are most conveniently kept threaded with a short length of 4mm. rope, on to which a sling can be clipped via a karabiner when required. The 4mm. rope is simply wrapped round the climbing rope and

slid into the slot to make the prusikers ready for use. Climbers will judge for themselves whether the cost of the new device (40p before the recent currency crisis) and the addition of another item of special purpose equipment are justified by its advantages over the conventional prusik knot.

Ultimate Helmet

The Ultimate Helmet is remarkably like the Joe Brown helmet in appearance. The major difference is in the material used for the inner energy-absorbing lining. This is a lightweight closed cell foam which makes the helmet both light and strong, the total weight being 23 ounces. Being a closed cell foam the lining has the added advantage of not absorbing moisture. The shell construction is also different in that it is machine manufactured rather than hand constructed. As with the Joe Brown, the inner harness is fully adjustable for crown depth and head size. This helmet represents Ultimate Equipment's first product outside the tent and clothing lines and is a very competitive model.

Letters

The New Langdale Guide

from Rob Matheson

Dear Sir,
After studying Austin's and Valentine's new guide, I feel that I ought to bring certain points into the open before too many people are deceived into buying it for the wrong reasons. It is apparent that two processes have occurred: firstly the demolition of new routes to form variations on existing routes; and, secondly, the omission of harder new routes, which the writers either hadn't done or couldn't do, or which they considered used too much aid.

Let us examine sections of the guide in more detail. On Pavey Ark, Barley's and Long's *The Sun* has been omitted, its first two pitches completely forgotten and the final pitch used as a direct finish to Austin's own route *Cascade* (see topo in *Mountain 25*).

Now to a matter of honesty. The writers claim that *Ragman's Trumpet* was put up May 1971, and that *Sally Free and Easy* was completed in the summer of the same year. This vagueness is very convenient for them because the main part of 'Sally' was in fact climbed in March, 1971, before their route. As the two routes are common for their main pitch, Livesey should really be credited with the line.

Furthermore, Livesey returned to his climb in the summer and added a final pitch, which is greatly superior to the Ragman's Trumpet finish. The writers have therefore claimed a route which in fairness should be credited to another – especially as his final line is greatly superior. *Cruel Sister*, on the other hand, has been dismissed as an "attempt", and omitted from the guide. The "attempt" made use of a skyhook and a sling on a peg for aid, to allow a route up one of the most impressive pieces of rock on the cliff. To justify the omission, the guidebook introduction condemns the practice of abseiling down a route to place an aid peg. Why, then, do the writers not exclude *Pendulum*, on Deer Bield Crag, on the same grounds? Austin also states that "one must learn to fail on a line". Well, I can now say that Austin had previously failed on this line (despite the use of tension techniques and pitons), and he appears to be condemning my efforts because he himself failed in the past. Surely two points of aid in a climb of 300ft. are not excessive? In any event, the party making

the second ascent certainly found the climb acceptable. By leaving *Cruel Sister* out of the guide, Austin has deprived climbers of one of the best face climbs in the valley. To justify his action, he told me that it would have been fine if I had used another piton instead of a skyhook – unbelievable! Finally, two recent routes, *Risus* and *Fallen Angel*, have been completely omitted, despite the fact that they were climbed at least eight months before the guide was published. On White Ghyll, there appears to have been an actual reversal of policy in the case of *Paladin*, for the writers have in fact increased the aid in their description.

Also omitted is Barley's fine route, *Swordblade*, on Neckband Crag. This was presumably penalized for using two points of aid on one of the crag's major features. On the other hand, *Aragon*, a route of dubious quality, is included. Perhaps that is as it should be, but surely quality, enjoyment and commitment are as important as aid considerations, as criteria for inclusion, and in this respect *Swordblade* ought to have been included.

On East Raven, all the 'fillers in' are included (no aid, you see), and on Raven the writers strangely include *Nadir*, but everything else has been carved up to fit into existing routes. My *Green Groove* finish to *Pluto* is left out, as is Livesey's free ascent of Kaisergerbirge Wall (*Fine Time*). The description reads: "Indeed, with the exception of the first overhang, where pitons are used, it can all be climbed free". Livesey is not even credited, but I am sure that if a Fell and Rock man had performed the feat, it would have received greater emphasis.

The Graduate, on Deer Bield Crag, is virtually ignored; it is dismissed with the derisive remark that it has been climbed with several points of aid. It has, of course, had several ascents, being one of the more enjoyable climbs on the crag, and there is now only one point of aid. Another absentee is *Peccadillo*, a route that employs two points of aid; this seems to have been left out because Valentine and Fearnough couldn't do it. What right have Austin and Valentine to cut out the enjoyment of others through their own selfish and bigoted beliefs? Now, for some general points: none of the new routes are indicated on the diagrams; there

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is hardly anything new below HVS, so more moderate climbers will find little to interest them; and over 30% of the harder new routes have been omitted completely, while many more have been dismembered. In respect of the policy of dismemberment, I feel that many people would rather do a named route than a variation. The idea has some merits, but used to excess I think it becomes tedious. Recently I received a letter from the Fell and Rock, asking me not to give descriptions of my routes to people outside the club. I found this so ridiculous that I ignored it – thankfully, in the light of recent events. If it were not for the climbing magazines (which Austin openly despises), climbers would remain ignorant of new events on rock, unless of course the Fell and Rock, after a suitable period of cautious delay, felt that events were respectable enough to publish. In his preamble the General Editor applauds Austin and Valentine, not only for bringing the guide right up to date, but also for their determination to preserve the true spirit of rock climbing. To that I would say that the Editor 'doesn't know the half of it'.
Yours etc.,
Rob Matheson
(Barrow-in-Furness)

El Capitan and Royal Robbins

from Chris Baxter

Dear Sir,
Robbins has apparently always sought to come over as a prickly customer, but in his recent interesting article on El Capitan (*Mountain 25*) he has excelled himself. He objects, understandably, to routes being called 'walls', but seems inconsistent in naming his own climb *Salathé Wall*. It appears that he wants the whole of the South-West Face of El Cap to be called *Salathé Wall*, but doesn't make it clear how the *face* is to be distinguished from the *route* of the same name. The same applies to his route on the *West Face* – a problem which will become more acute when other routes are put up on this face. His comments on the naming of *Son of Heart* and *The Magic Mushroom* are about as valid as a bolt ladder every ten feet on El Cap. The origin of the name *Magic Mushroom* is not as he suggests. There is a two-pitch, A1 trade route of a similar name on one of the lads' local crags just outside Vancouver.

Two pitches from the rim on their big climb one of them commented that they had only two more, apparently straightforward, leads to go. The other replied: "Yeah, just a Mushroom". The name was born.
Yours etc.,
Chris Baxter (Melborne)

from Bruce Morris

Dear Sir,
I don't see how Mr. Robbins can object to the corruption which results from calling a route a 'wall', when he himself refers to El Capitan as "the Cap". Unfortunately his whole article, with its characteristic emphasis on prescriptive ethics and nostalgic sentimentalism, is symptomatic of exactly that "modern disease" he so deplores: his prose doesn't open up and communicate the values intrinsic to the climbing experience so much as it discourages and humiliates today's climber in the shadow of yesterday's "pure" accomplishment. R.R. would better serve his own purpose as an arbiter of climbing "taste" if he were to cease counting bolts while wallowing in his own verbosity; he should instead try to instill those values necessary to prevent bolting in the first place. Thus he could have written a story about Yosemite which emphasized short, hard, clean climbs – the kind associated in California at least with names like Bridwell and Bates. This would discourage those who tend to equate Yosemite with El Capitan alone and who, upon graduation from Wayne Merry's pseudo-climbing school, purchase sixty one-inch angles and a twenty pound sledge-hammer. But I suppose Mr. Robbins is aware that another El Capitan story makes good copy for your European audience.
Yours etc.,
Bruce Morris (Belmont)

Robbins was commissioned by Mountain to write the El Cap article. The recent spate of routes there called for a 'stock-taking' article, and we therefore invited Robbins, as one of El Capitan's most prolific pioneers, to record his views. Views every bit as provocative as Robbins's are to be found in Gogna's Grandes Jorasses article (Mountain 26); indeed, it has been our policy in this 'Commentary' series to try to get the writers to record their real feelings rather than mouth polite platitudes.