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ISSUE : [Issue 71](#)

Published by Ronald Caplan on 1996/12/1

So How Do You Get the Rope Up? • Rock Climbing in Northern Cape Breton • by Clarence

WARNING: Under the National Parks Act, in order to preserve the rare plants that grow on the cliff face, climbing is now prohibited on the Grande Falaise in the Cape Breton Highlands National Park. We share the following, trusting that everyone will continue to protect and respect this element of the Cape Breton treasure. We had pulled in somewhere to a roadside picnic table for lunch and struck up a conversation with a traveler from Quebec named Marcel. He asked about places to hike on the Island and the conversation turned to hiking and climbing in Quebec. I had made a couple of climbing trips there and was impressed by the quality and extent of the granite walls and slabs. Marcel was eager to do some climbing on his visit to Nova Scotia so we arranged to meet next day at the Grande Falaise, a cliff located near the highway a few kilometers north of the Petit Etang entrance to the Cape Breton Highlands National Park. It was one of my favourite climbing areas and I had often spent days exploring its gullies and buttresses, sometimes lingering just below the summit on summer evenings to watch the sun set over the Gulf of St. Lawrence. According to geologists this rock formation was once on the other side of the highlands but has been thrust across the plateau by tectonic events on a lubricating base of gypsum, veins of which are visible on the cliff. Continual weathering has loosened tonnes of material from the cliff face which, under the influence of gravity, has formed an extensive scree slope leading up to the base of the cliff. The rocky slopes are home to a little creature known as the Gaspé shrew. It's been found in a few similar habitats in Cape Breton but the only other places in the world where it is known to exist are in the Gaspé and at a locality in northern New Brunswick. Making me wonder how much of the cliff is buried under the scree and if removing the rock would expose hidden routes and add another couple of hundred feet of good climbing. Until the next glacier scours the valley we would have to be content with what was belayed there, which meant going through the take-two-steps-up-and-slide-one-step-back routine up the loose slope to get to the bottom of the climbs. After hauling a load of rope, hardware, food and water up to the base of the cliff you usually felt you could levitate up the first pitch. I should explain at this point the basic climbing procedure and try to answer a frequently asked question: "How do you get the rope up?" One way, of course, is to walk up the back side of the hill to the top of the cliff and lower one end of the rope to a climber on the ground. But apart from the ethical problem that this creates for some purists, not all peaks are accessible in this way or, like the Falaise, are too high for the rope to reach the ground. So other means have been developed. Let's say Marcel decides to climb first. He ties one end of the rope to his harness and gets ready to climb. I tie the other end of the rope to a solid anchor (a big boulder or tree) near the start of the climb. After looping the rope around the boulder and tying it, I take something called a carabiner and fasten it to the end of the rope that's anchored to the boulder. A carabiner is an oval metal



device that looks like a very big chain link except that it has a spring-loaded hinged gate along one side that can be opened and closed. The rest of the rope between the anchor and Marcel is laid in a loose pile on the ground, free of knots. Marcel is ready to go but before he starts, a runner portion of the rope that he will be dragging off the top of the pile is clipped into the carabiner that's been secured to the anchor. The rope is wrapped around the carabiner (by me) in such a way that the carabiner can function as a braking device. By holding the rope in a certain way I can allow the rope to run through the braking carabiner freely or I can easily stop it. "Everyone's switching to oil. An oil furnace saves you money" Dan MacDougall, Heating Specialist Let us convert your electric heat to oil. Then watch your heat bills go down. Call us today to find out more. ?fww 1 -,t' i-M-ijUi u JMMU "Mi'r'mfij &??i'r'=jrr': i gf Automatic Fuel Delivery ' Water Heaters St Burners gf Financing Plans af Qualified Technicians t'Hi".MJ HomEnergy Sydney-. 539-7580 Gmce Bay: 849-4626 North Sydney: 794-2010