

Easter Bunny on the Campanile

An alternate account by Ray Lucas.



A few days before Easter in 1955 Norm Turner entered the UCHC office in Eshleman Hall with a toy stuffed rabbit and announced that hiking club members were going to place it on top of the Campanile (Sather Tower), a 307 feet tall clock and bell tower that is the third tallest such tower in the world.

The first step was to obtain, from a fellow student who had discovered that his room key would work on the campanile entry door, the means of entry. We purchased a light line with which to hoist the bunny and some wire with which to secure it once it was in place. We already had a climbing rope, of course.

One week after Easter (the first attempt on Easter is another story) the climbing team (Dick Armstrong, Lloyd Curtiss, ~~Keith Howard~~*, Howard Morrow, Ray Lucas, Dick McCracken, and Norm Turner) entered the tower and took the elevator to the observation deck. Using the key, we then took the spiral staircase to the bell deck. Turner and Armstrong continued up internal ladders to the light at the top of the pyramid. Inside the light, Turner pushed the climbing rope through a ventilation hole in the light housing and Armstrong took up a position just below him to handle the rope. Howard, McCracken, and Curtiss managed the rabbit and attendant lines and maintained a lookout for campus police.

From the bell deck Lucas chimneyed between a corner column and the bell deck housing to the base of the pyramid. There he tied into the climbing rope which was not used for direct aid, only safety. The corners of the pyramid were offset about two inches at one foot from the corner allowing a shimmy of 20-30 feet to the base of the light. He then climbed over the light housing to its top where, using a light line he had tied to his belt, he pulled up the bunny. Standing at the base of the six foot spire he shoved the bunny down over it and untied the light line. The retaining wires had become tangled and were less effective than they might have been so the bunny was not attached as tightly as planned. After attaching the bunny Lucas climbed down to the base of the light. From there Turner used the belaying rope to lower him to the bell deck.

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED!

Note from Ray Lucas: On the Tuesday following the placement of the stuffed rabbit on the Campanile, I was alone in the Hiking Club office when the phone rang. I answered it

and the caller identified himself as Captain Woodard, the campus police chief. He said that he had heard rumors that the Hiking Club was responsible for the rabbit on the Campanile. If so, he would like to talk with us. There would be no arrests or other repercussions. He said he only wanted to know how it was accomplished. I told him that I would check around and get back to him. I then contacted the team members, and they agreed that advising the Captain, given his conditions, was permissible.

The next day, McCracken and I went to the chief's office. We told him the details of the incident. Except: We did not reveal the existence of the key--per the condition of its owner. Instead, we told him that one of us had entered the tower during daylight hours and hid in the storage area until letting the rest of us in after dark.

The Chief did not ask us for names. He thanked us for the information. His only comment: "We seriously considered it having been done by helicopter".

A bit of perspective: The next morning after placement of the bunny a group of us were viewing it from the ground. Dot Ellis joined us, and after ascertaining what we were looking at, she asked, "What is it, a glove?". The bunny was actually two and a half feet tall.

The bunny was removed by campus maintenance. They removed a pane of glass from the light enclosure and pushed the bunny off the spire with a long pole. This was fairly easy because of the loose attachment of the retaining wires.

Upon retroflection, I must make two admissions:

One. It may have been someone other than McCracken who accompanied me on the visit to Captain Woodard.

Two. I am not absolutely certain of the identity of two of the named participants. If in your investigation you are able to clarify these two matters, I would appreciate being so advised.

Ray Lucas
November 2014

*11/26/14 – Keith Howard writes that he did not come to Berkeley until 1957, and did not participate in this caper "though I would have been proud."

