



1960 El Capitan Summit Party

Left to right, back row: Janie Taylor, Royal Robbins, Judy Macfarlane, Chuck Pratt, John Fiske, unknown, Yvonne Chouinard, Julie Verran.

Left to right, front row: unknown, unknown, Jackie McCracken, George Whitmore (probable ID), Wally Reed, Joe Fitschen (inverted sailor's hat), Ann Rumble (in blue, to the rear of Fitschen, near downed tree trunk, just to the left of Chouinard's legs), & Janie Dean? (redhead at right). Tom Frost, one of the four climbers, is not in this image.

Photo taken by Dick Scheible.

See John Fiske's
comments on the
following page.

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(Comments from John Fiske, in response to Kay Loughman's comment about the picture "I assume the climb wasn't an official Hiking Club outing (?); but it looks like at least half the people at the party were Hiking Club people.")

Nothing "official" about the climb, re UCHC. I have incomplete memories about involvement. The annual UCHC High Trip took place when the climb was scheduled to start, and finished while the climb was in progress. Dick Scheible and I joined the High Trip (in the Sawtooth area of northern Yosemite), but left after several days because of commitments (mine, I think) to help with the El Cap climb preparations. Dick came with me to the Valley ... he had the car. So the UCHC folks on the High Trip knew about the Climb, and some came to the Valley to see the end of the climb, and to participate in the party on the top of El Cap.

The nature of my commitments evolved as the start of the climb neared. Besides providing some of the gear and (maybe) some of the food preparation, I agreed to co-lead the support party (with Yvonne Chouinard). The Park Service had no climbing expertise (besides Wayne Merry) at the time, and, therefore, no capabilities of mounting any sort of rescue in case of problems. Probably Yvonne and I had no specific "Plan A" anyway ... after all, the best Yosemite climbers (arguably) were to be doing the climbing. Probably to appease the Park Service, Yvonne and I said "yes" to whatever the Park Service wanted us to do, so the climb could proceed. Hey, I was all of 21 years old, and Yvonne slightly older. I'm sure that we were "making it up" as events unfolded. As to who was "in" the support party, I don't remember. Mostly likely it shifted, depending on which climbers were in the Valley at the time. I remember that Warren Harding showed up to observe for at least several days. Others whom we might have pressed into service included Wally Reed and George Whitmore. Likely other climbers showed up.

The only specific daily obligation I had was to report to the Park Service about the climb progress. This obligation was known before the climb started, and the arrangement was that at the end of each climbing day, a note would be written by the climbers and stuffed into an empty food can, the can would be dropped to the base of the El Cap nose, where I was supposed to find the can, extract the note, and report the contents to the Park Service. Didn't work worth a damn. Couldn't find the cans. So I reported the whereabouts of the climbers relative to the known rock features on the El Cap nose ("Boot" Flake, Dolt and El Cap Towers, the "Texas" flake, the "Great Overhang", etc). The Park Service seemed satisfied.

The summit party was a sort-of-planned happening. When it was apparent that the climbers were going to reach the top of the Nose, the Support Party, groupies, other observers, whomever, agreed in a haphazard way that we should adjourn our slothful observation posts on the Valley floor and have a party at the summit with the climbers.

Like I said ... nothing "official" about any of this, except, perhaps, for my being deputized (or whatever the hell I was) into being co-responsible for rescuing some of the best rock climbers in the World if they got into trouble. I'm sure that Yvonne and I didn't have the foggiest idea about just how we were going to do it, if needed. Ah youth!

Probably much more than you wanted to read ... somehow you "punched my button". -*John*