

## Climb Every Mountain— or anything else that's handy

Caltech's climbers keep proving that mountains are where you find them.

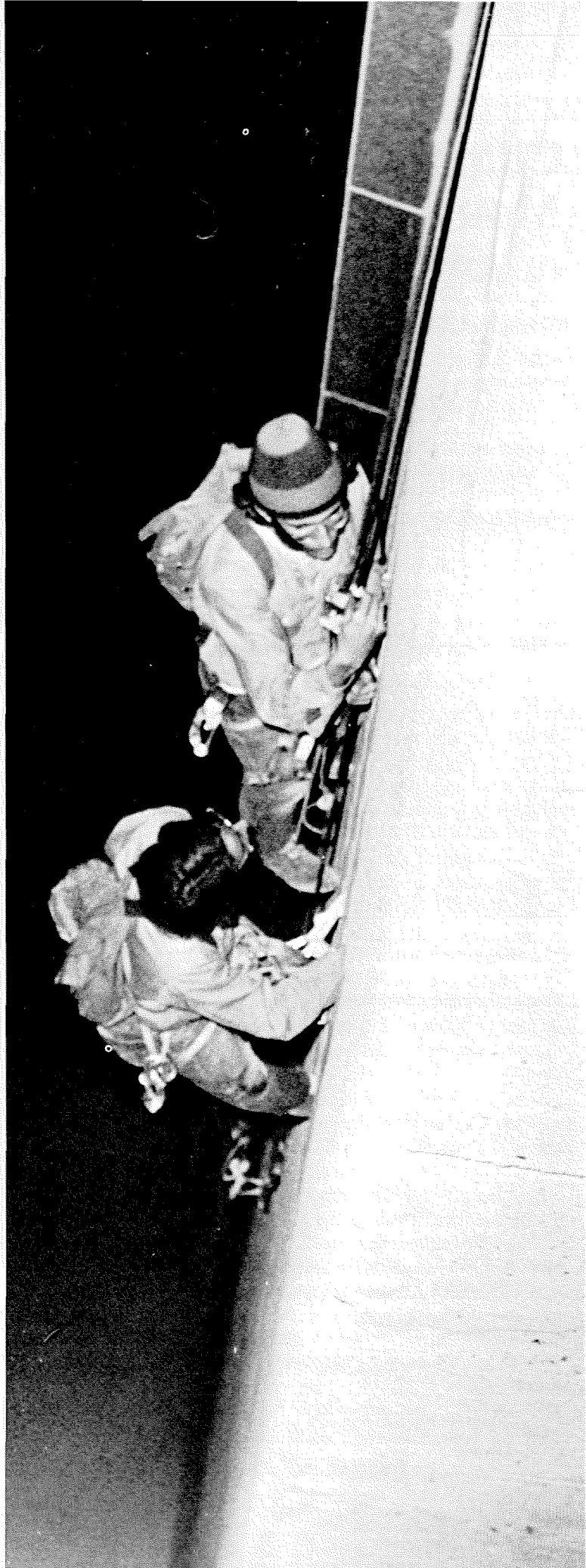
On the night of February 5, 1971, Dwight Carey, a Caltech junior, and Bob Durst, a freshman, added an important chapter to the long, shadowy history of building climbing at Caltech. They became the first to scale the nine-story Millikan Library.

There is a widely held—and erroneous—impression that students do this kind of thing as some kind of daredevil prank. Actually, campus building climbers are generally accomplished mountaineers and rockclimbers who are just marking time until they can get out to the real thing again.

There must have been building climbers on campus as far back as the day the scaffolding for Throop Hall went up in 1910. But it was only a couple of years ago that the Alpine Club—the long-time haven of Caltech climbers—published the first *Climber's Guide to Caltech*. The guidebook doesn't claim to be complete, and it doesn't record anything that happened before the 1940's, but it is full of information on the 1950's—a time of prodigious climbing activity at Caltech.

---

*Making history in one of the more unusual ways, Dwight Carey and Bob Durst near the end of the first ascent of the nine-story Millikan Library. Most of the distance was covered by inserting a grappling hook device in the ventilation grille holes.*



One of the great climbers of the fifties was Dave Rearick, a mathematics graduate student. He is immortalized in the *Climber's Guide* through his exploits on the "Rearick mantles"—the 1½-inch-wide ledges, seven feet above ground, which form a decorative motif on the walkway arches along the older campus buildings. Rearick is still the only man who has ever been able to pull himself up by them and make it to a standing position. He was also the first man to assail the south and east faces of Robinson and to climb Spalding. His conquest of Spalding is still considered noteworthy because he ascended the building's layback in almost one fell up-swoop. He rested only once, halfway up, on the belay rope, which was handled by Howard Sturgis, '58, an active climbing enthusiast even though he had a severe problem with acrophobia.

Rearick scaled the east face of Gates once—but only once. When he reached the roof, he found that the trap door was locked. There was no suitable anchor for a rappel so he had to down-climb the route, a dangerous operation which involved lying on a sloping ledge just below the top and groping with one foot for a small horn on the top of the ornamental stonework. On another memorable night he took along a friend, Bill Woodruff, MS '60, for a climb up Arms by the south door pillars. Woodruff got stranded on the balcony and had to be rescued from inside by some expert lock pickers. Rearick kept in shape for all this activity by going over to the gym regularly, several times a week—to practice barefoot friction ascents.

Dave Rearick is now on the faculty at the University of Colorado, where the buildings are all the same, with sandstone faces—presenting few aesthetic features to a climber. "The only thing the students think they're good for," he says, "is to build up their fingers."

After a hiatus in which climbing was mostly limited to such steeplejackery as the Fleming House Mickey Mouse Club putting seasonal folderol on the Throop cupola, climbing came into another golden age in the late sixties. In those days Dave Rossum, Bob Jackson, Neil Erickson, and Keith Edwards were the nucleus of the Alpine Club.

---

*A slight miscalculation marred the success of the first Millikan climb, forcing Carey and Durst to pull themselves up the last few feet by rope. Next time, they swore, they'd do it right.*

They published the *Climber's Guide*, which they dedicated to Charles Wilts, professor of electrical engineering who is a well-known climber. Also, since he got his BS at Caltech (1940), stayed on for an MS and a PhD, and then became a member of the faculty, Wilts is probably more knowledgeable about every toe hold, finger space, and ledge on campus than any other man at the Institute.

Lacking transportation to rock country and anxious to exercise their mountaineering muscles, these climbers of the sixties concentrated on becoming the first to conquer the newer buildings of the north campus. Beginning in February of 1967, they mastered the south chimneys of Booth Computing Center and the south-southeast chimney of Steele. Then they drifted south a little and followed Rearick's trail up Arms and the east face of Gates.

Climbs followed each other in rapid succession for the next three months—barefoot friction ascents of the gym, free and rope ascents of the west face of Kerckhoff, a direct climb to the RA's balcony on the west side of Dabney House, the north chimneys of Booth, the Winnett chimney, a second-story traverse of Booth, and the north face of the Gates Library. The season was polished off in May with a neat little climb to the second-story door of Steele.

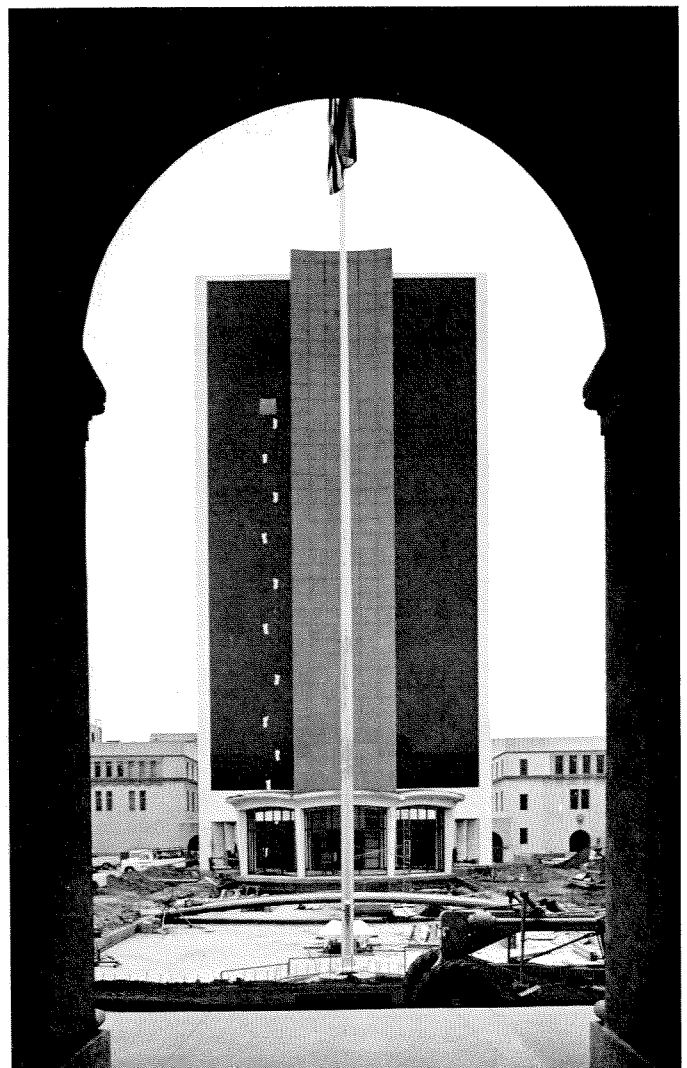
These were the great days when there were giant footprints up the east face of Millikan, and Alpine Club meeting notices were plastered 20 feet down from the top—all of which gave the climbers excellent rappel practice.

Last year Rossum, Edwards, and company figured out a way for Caltech students to climb for PE credit. They deftly assured athletic director Warren Emery that Charles Wilts would be glad to teach such a course. Simultaneously they informed Wilts that the PE department was in favor of such a course and would furnish ropes and climbing hardware. So last spring Wilts started teaching more than a dozen students the elements of climbing—for credit.

From last year's beginners' course, a number of the students went on to an advanced class this year. If interest keeps up, this is the way the progression will continue.

Wilts starts his classes with skull practice on a blackboard. He outlines the physics of climbing and gets students to appreciate its hazards—the failure of equipment and/or falling. Weather permitting, the class makes

These were the great days when there were giant footprints up the east face of Millikan, and Alpine Club meeting notices were plastered 20 feet down from the top.



field trips one afternoon a week, the first time heading for Stony Point, an area of sandstone cliffs near San Fernando, where the climbs can begin from level ground. There, the first thing the beginners do is to get the feel of another person's weight at the end of a rope. Students pair off into teams and take turns at this.

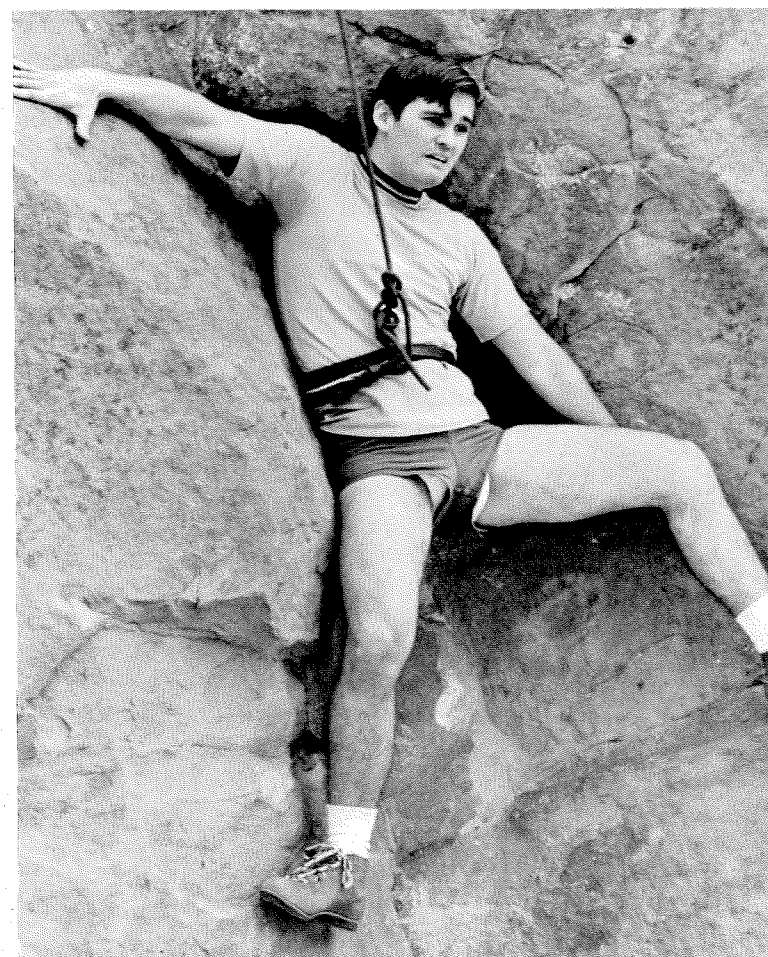
Climbing rocks by all possible routes is the second step. At Stony Point there are two rocks about 20 feet high which present different types of routes. Such short climbing is known as "bouldering." And although the climbs are short, they offer some of the tough and basic aspects—how to find and assess small niches, ledges, and rough spots, and what different kinds of weight distribution feel like.

From instruction at Stony Point, the class moves to granite rock at Mt. Pacifico, which is reached by going up Angeles Crest Highway and striking inland on a rutty dirt road. The Pacifico climbs vary from 10 to 100 feet. The final examination for the course takes place on a weekend at Tahquitz Peak, near Hemet. There, the climbs are long (several hundred feet) and some are hair-raisers. Wilts is an authority on Tahquitz climbs, being the author of *A Climber's Guide to Tahquitz*, which is now in its fourth edition.

Caltech's climbers worry a little about the reckless oddball who may try to scale campus buildings as a workout for some sort of ego-salving. The use-your-brains-and-live boys have carefully researched hazards like chemical fans on top of laboratories, and ledges made slippery by years of chemical solvent deposits from vents.

All in all, the climbers have so far acted in a pretty responsible way, and no one has been hurt—which makes it possible for the administration to maintain its delicate, unspoken agreement not to interfere with the activity. And that's the way *everyone* wants to keep it.

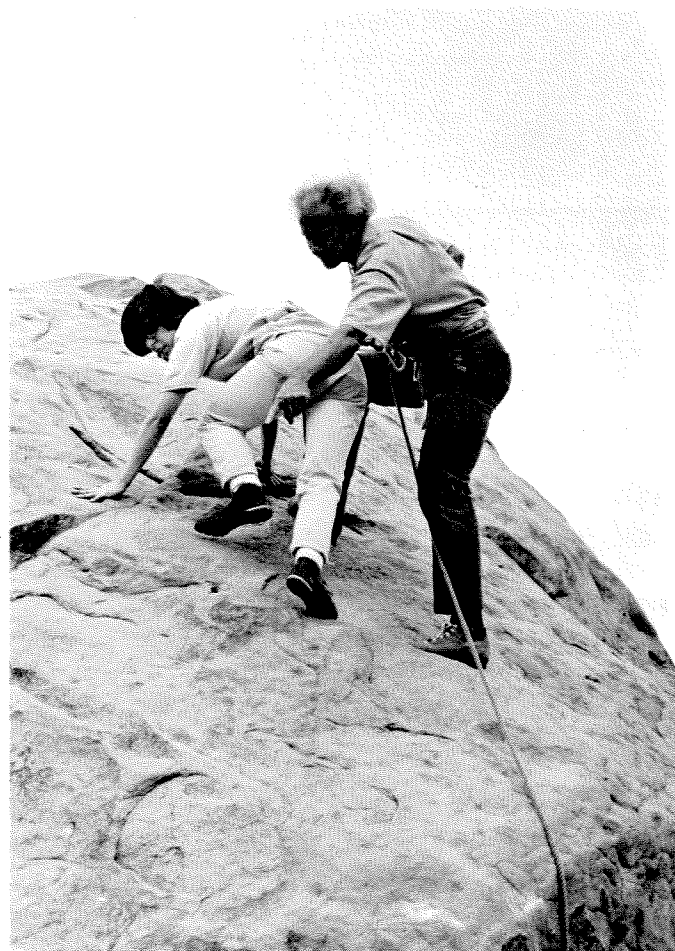
—Janet Lansburgh





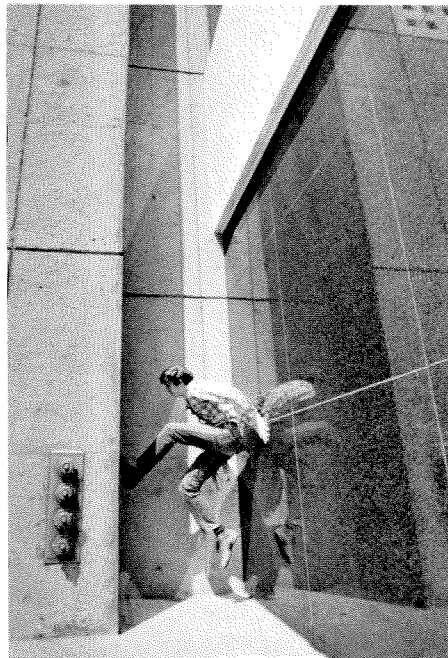
### ***Beginners' Rock***

*The first time Charles Wilts (right) takes his students to the beginners' rock at Stony Point in Chatsworth, they see what appears to be a benign backyard boulder. Within minutes they know it for a mocking monster that hides each finger ledge and toehold, and frustrates all comers. Even Wilts, who knows every square inch, treats it with respect because it is a great climbing teacher.*

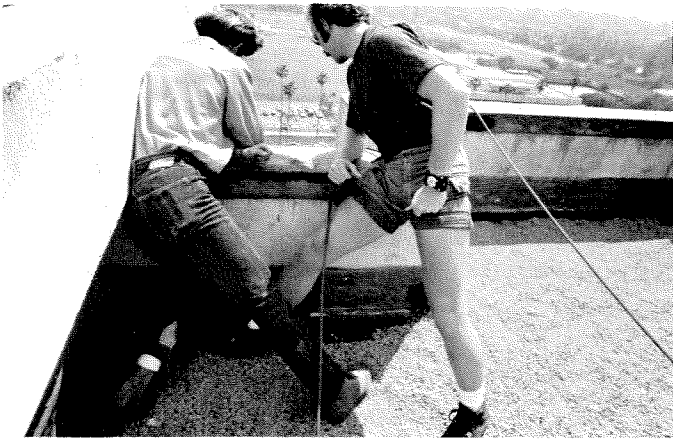


# We only asked him to pose for a picture—

*Tom Weaver, a freshman mathematics student, agreed to climb a little way up a Millikan Library "chimney" in broad daylight in the interests of illustrating this story. But since Weaver is a dedicated climber, when he reached the point of no return, there really was no doubt about his decision to go all the way. To follow his upward course, start here and read down each column.*



# We didn't say: "Shoot the works."



*Dwight Carey and Lary Andrews, a sophomore, were on the belay on the Millikan roof. Weaver had inched his way up using his back and legs, so he had plenty of arm strength to make it handily over the top—and demonstrate that climbers tend to look most unhappy when they are pleased.*

