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what's HAPPENING

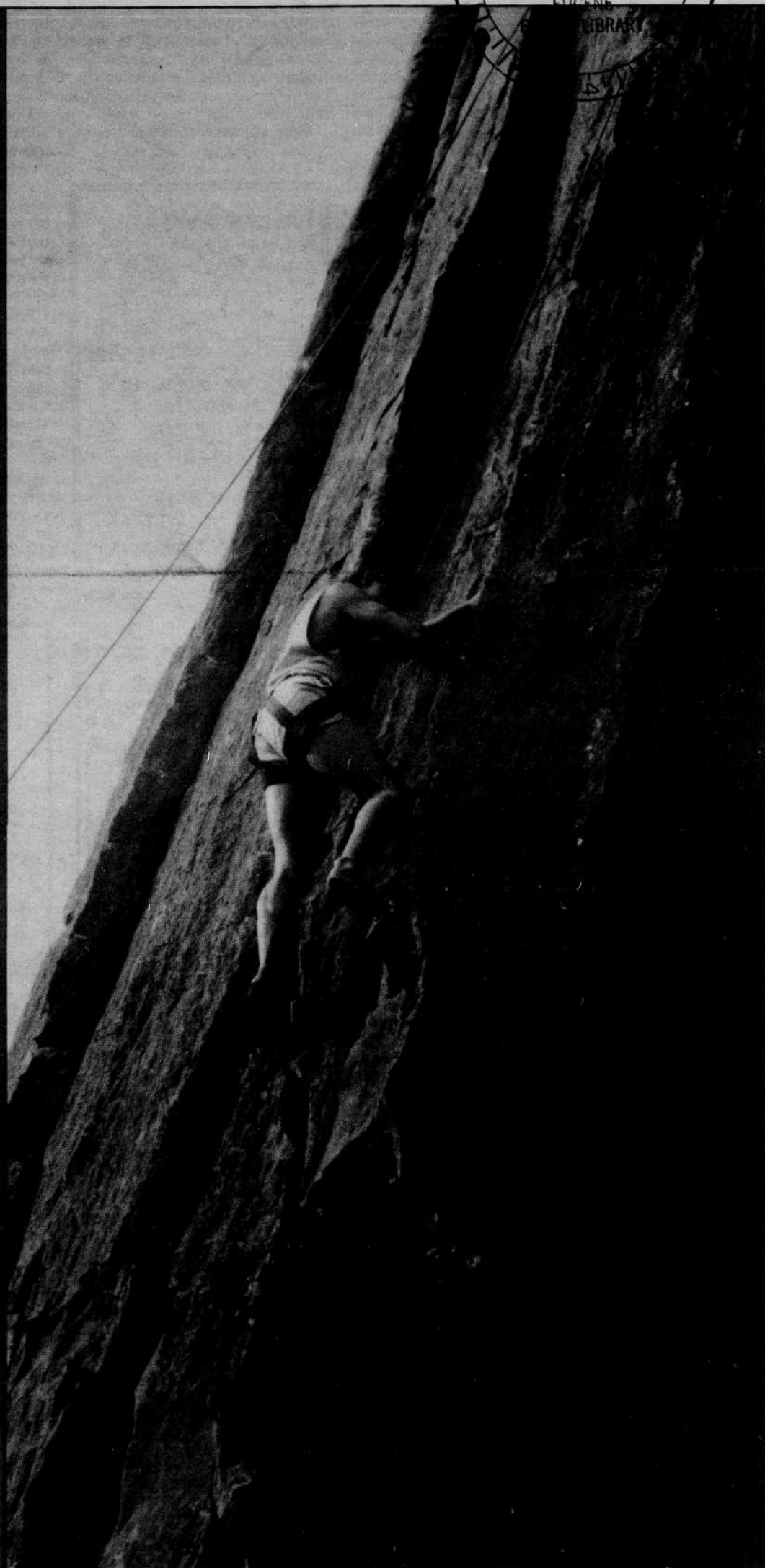
Guide to Local Arts, Entertainment & Events

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Scene of the Crime
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DANCING ON THE EDGE



by Bob Neustadt

Every dry day the columns at Skinner Butte Park beckon a call to Eugene's climbing community. Face the Butte and forget you're in town. It's a 50-foot wall of vertical rock which these days ends in rich blue sky and a few clouds. Patches of poison oak add color to the dark rock. The area is usually fairly crowded with climbers using everything from high tech rock shoes to keds. In the afternoon there is a squandering heat as the Butte's black rock absorbs all of the sunshine. A dog or two keep good company.

Many excellent climbers work out at the columns. Alan Watts, currently a student at the U of O, is considered to be one of the best climbers in the country. He says that he more or less learned to rock climb at the Butte. Although he primarily climbs at Smith Rocks now, he drops by the columns once or twice a week to visit. It is an extremely convenient place for someone to climb during a break from work or school.

"A good climber is a pleasure to watch. As with all physical activities, fitness and skill make what is extremely difficult appear easy."

A good climber is a pleasure to watch. As with all physical activities, fitness and skill make what is extremely difficult appear easy. A climber strives for strength but not bulk. The higher the strength to weight ratio the better. Being able to lift the body with one arm or hang on a finger is a great advantage.

Balance and grace are integral to good climbing technique. The better one's technique the less they are dependent on muscle strength. As technique improves, strength becomes not so much a constant necessity but rather a powerful asset to be used selectively. In its essence, on-site rock climbing is like an improvised dance on cliffs. In the case of the most difficult climbs, these cannot be improvised. Instead, dedicated master climbers (like Watts for example) practice them for weeks at a time until they can "red point," in other words, lead the climb without ever putting tension on the rope. The columns are a great place to practice, train, condition and of course have fun. To make a long story short, climbers climb because climbing is a blast.

Local rock jocks have many of the routes wired from repetition. All of the climbs at the Butte are short (one pitch) ascents which can be safely endeavored with a single climbing rope. (Kids, don't try this at home with

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