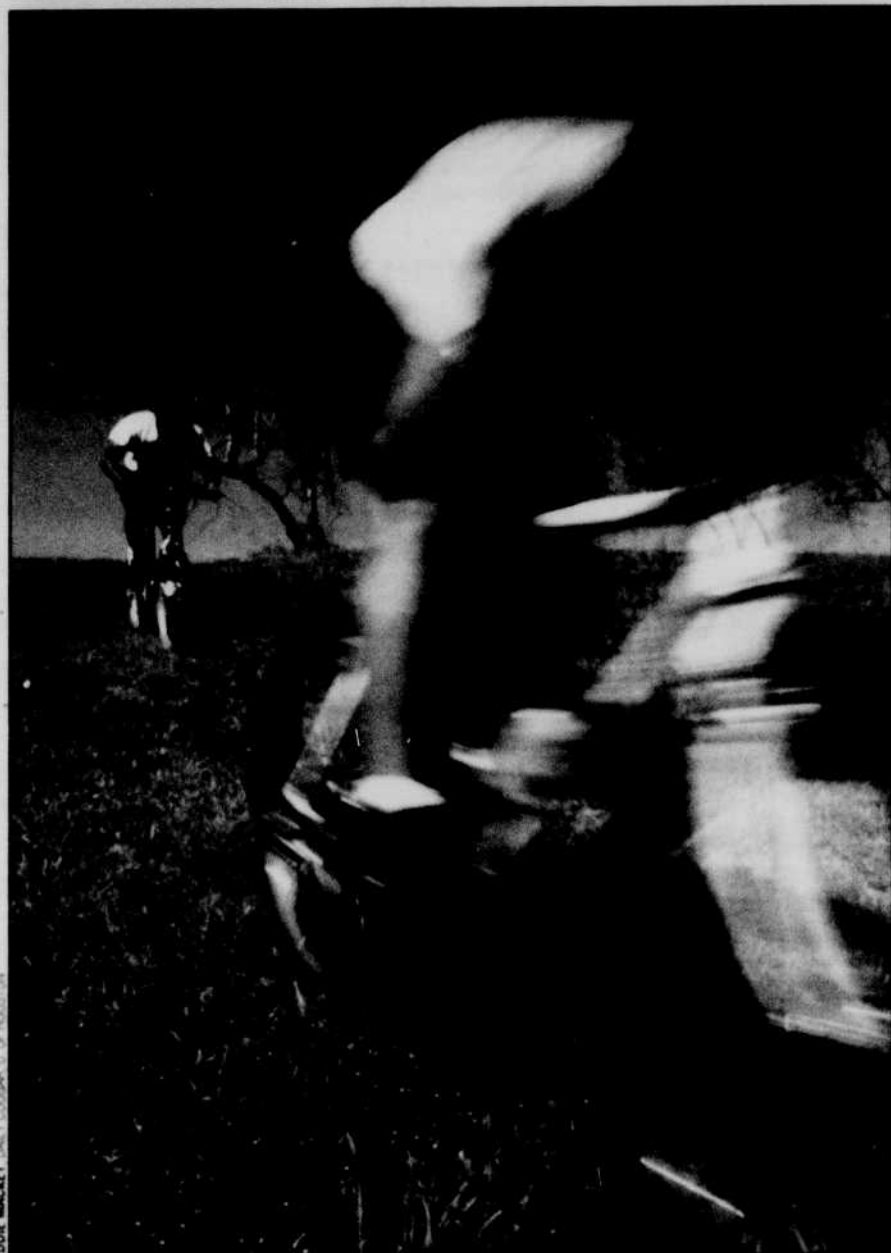


EXTREME



Mountain bikers are just part of a new breed of students striving to push their limits.

SPORTS

By John Beck, *The Clarion Call*, Clarion U.

To the uninitiated, these athletes seem crazy. The risk factor is high, the excitement level feverish. Poor judgment can mean injury — or worse.

They speak in a language all but unintelligible to the layperson. Surfers "get barreled," skydivers make "HALO drops," extreme skiers watch for "decaying cornices," rock climbers "place pro" and yet all of them share a love for gut-wrenching adventure.

"It is only through the direct confrontation... only by staring into the naked face of death that we discover the true nature of self," says Stan Lindemuth, a Clarion U. of Pennsylvania junior.

Lindemuth, a rock climber, is a sports extremist, one of those students who lives for athletic challenges. To him, a win isn't measured in points — it's measured in the pound of his heart, the thrill of skirting death.

When "the strength of your fingertips is all that separates you from a 120-foot fall,

you start to get rather deliberate," Lindemuth says. Climbing has begun to move into mainstream America with exposure through movies like *K-2* and the intensive, forthcoming Sylvester Stallone movie, *Cliffhanger*.

Indeed the entire extreme sports movement — from rock climbing to skydiving to in-line skating — is moving out of the realm of the select few and beginning to gain legitimacy.

Extremist sports, Lindemuth says, are "a healthy and socially responsible way of getting high." A growing number of universities throughout the United States have started adventure-based clubs and organizations. Pennsylvania State U.'s outing club sponsors trips spelunking (cave explorations), skydiving and rock climbing in nearby Bellefonte, Pa.

Clarion U. professor Brian Dunn refers to rock climbing and other extreme sports "as testing the limits of mortality." He says he can understand the appeal some of his students feel toward the extreme.

"This sort of activity, in a very real sense, gives someone membership in a community — in much the same way that joining a fraternity or sorority does. And it is a healthy community with positive energy and commitment to living." After all, when you are down at the bottom of a dark and vast cave, you need all the friends you can get.

Thomas Craver, a sophomore at Florida State U., is a cave enthusiast extraordinaire.

He says spelunking, more so than any other extremist recreational activity, is a "real study in panic management." He goes on to warn that this is not a sport for the inexperienced to try alone. "Losing your way and starving to death in the pitch black depths of the earth is a very real danger unless a great deal of caution and forethought is exercised."

Alan Vaughn, a Clarion U. junior and cycling enthusiast, says, "When you are into the extreme, you have to be willing to crash and burn a whole lot." Indeed, the extremist sports are not a realm where the timid or reckless safely venture.

"It is all basically a search to find the perfect ride," says senior Dan Arlotto, an extreme skier from Cornell U.

Even popular U.S. culture is beginning to reflect this trend.

In 1991's *Point Break*, bank robbers support their endless summer of riding monolithic waves and skydiving. They are "searchers" and, for them, surfing is the source.

Filmmaker Warren Miller captures the essence of hard-core downhill skiing and snowboarding. His films are popular among enthusiasts and showcase the best in the field.

And *MTV Sports* with its ever-present and mildly annoying Dan Cortese, features events like in-line skating, road luge, skydiving and bungee jumping.

So what does all this craziness mean? Is ours a generation with a death wish? Has grunge music gone to our heads? Or do our kicks just come at a higher price?

As FSU's Craver says, "Rock climbing, mountain biking, land luge, rappelling... extreme sports — they're almost as good as sex and safer these days."

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