

Climbing- hobby and job

by Thad Kreisher
Entertainment Editor

"Some people think...purists ought to be climbing naked... just him against the rock," commented mountaineering instructor Gary Nelson on climbing ethics. When asked about his personal feelings on this topic, Nelson replied, "It's cold without your clothes on."

Gary Nelson, in addition to teaching mountaineering, also teaches music. He is a man with a great sense of humor and a sense of adventure that far exceeds that of the average weekend warrior.

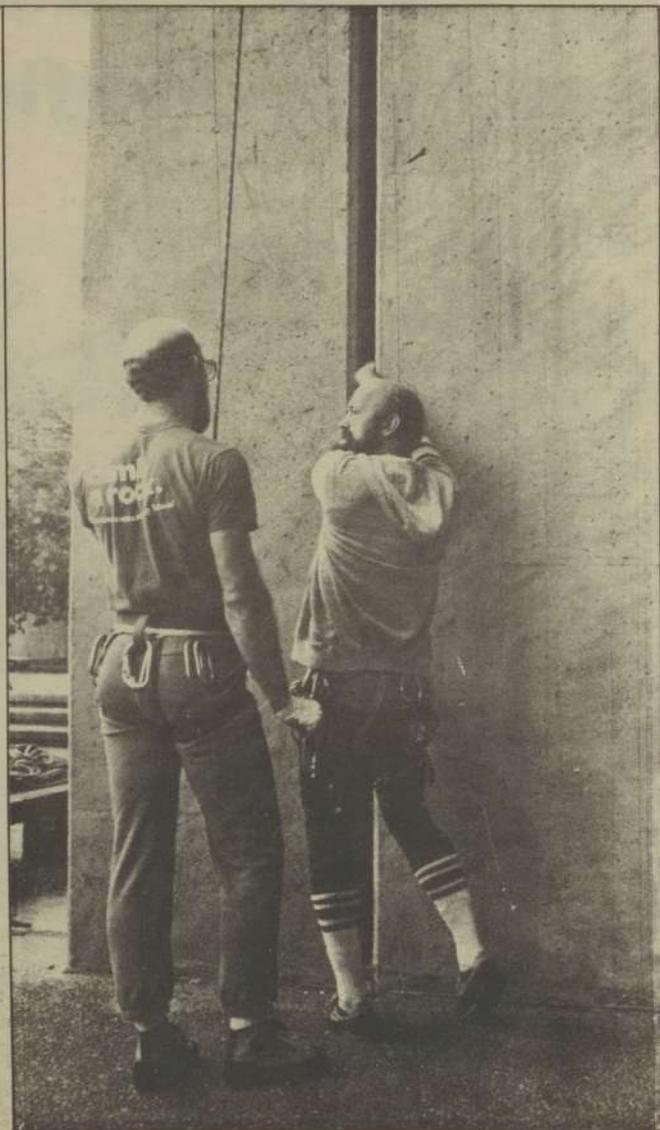
Rock climbing is both hobby and profession to Nelson. It is a hobby he has pursued for over half a decade, and a skill he has taught professionally for five years.

Nelson first became interested in rock climbing in 1975 while in Europe. "A friend of mine wanted to climb the Matterhorn," he recalled. "I had never given much thought to climbing at all, but he was a good friend and he wanted me to go, so I said, 'Sure, I'll go.' As it turned out, we were both saved because the weather was so crappy that we couldn't do it."

"I did a little reading and talking to some people and became fascinated by it. And it's become my hobby, and now, profession."

Nelson's fascination with rock climbing stems from the fact that it is "a totally honest sport."

"You're not worried about what the other guy does, and



you're not worried about politics, ...it's just a problem that you can solve on your own."

He is further intrigued by the intellectual challenge presented by rock climbing. Although viewed by some as mainly a physical sport, rock climbing can offer much in the way of intellectual stimulation, somewhat in the same manner as a game of chess. You look at what you've got and plan your moves and strategy in advance hoping that you don't run into an insurmountable obstacle somewhere along the line.

As Nelson put it, "You only have a certain reservoir of talent, whether that be physical or mental...and you have to get from point A to point B using what you have. Sometimes you can hone those skills down and improve them, and sometimes they're just what God gave you. If your reach is only so far, then that's what your reach is and you have to come up with another way to solve the problem."

"I had never given much thought to climbing..."

Although many climbers cite "the adrenaline rush" as one of their main reasons for rock climbing, Gary Nelson seems to view it more a precise art form rather than as a device used solely for thrill seeking. "There are old

climbers and bold climbers, but no old bold climbers. I'm starting to border on the old.

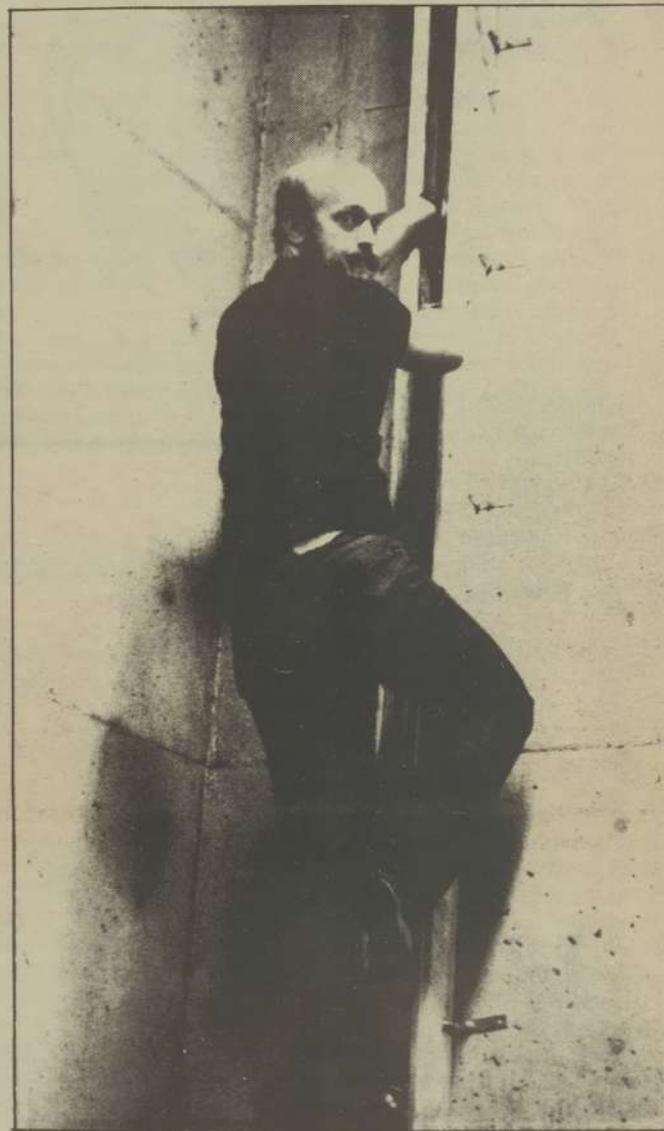
"I don't know put myself in positions where I'm going to be scared, although I end up that way occasionally. More often than I would like to admit. The main thing is that it's fun, and it doesn't really matter why it attracts us as being fun as long as it is fun and it can be done safely, which it can be."

Safety is something that Nelson feels strongly about, and his record proves it. To date, none of Nelson's pupils has ever sustained a serious rock climbing related injury.

"Basically, in rock climbing you can make it as safe or dangerous as you want to. You can't equate danger and difficulty. In all terms we stress rope management. That is, how do you safely extricate from a

situation. What I'm trying to do is stress principles so that people can use a little common sense and as the situation changes, have enough knowledge to pick the best system for the situation." Among his most memorable climbs, Gary remembers the time that he and a friend took another friend from Columbia up Devils Tower.

"This gentleman didn't speak



Lyn Thompson photos

any English and I don't speak any Spanish. We wound up watching the sunset from the top, which meant we were going to come down in the dark. There was a big lightning storm going on and it was interesting doing a series of rapels from the top to the bottom."

It is said that if you make it through the first two years as a rock climber, chances are that you will survive. Taking this into account, it is no surprise that Nelson's most frightening moment came when he had only been climbing six months.

"I wasn't frightened & the way down I found out it wasn't part of the rock, it was just a boulder sitting there, and so it came down right behind me. We both slid down this gully."

"Fortunately, the gully dropped off, I dropped off and the rock slid just over my head. I fell about another ten feet and landed on a pedestal with a cabbage patch growing around on top of it. I bounced off of that and fell another ten or fifteen feet and landed on my feet. Right beside me was this rock."

