



THE OREGON STORY



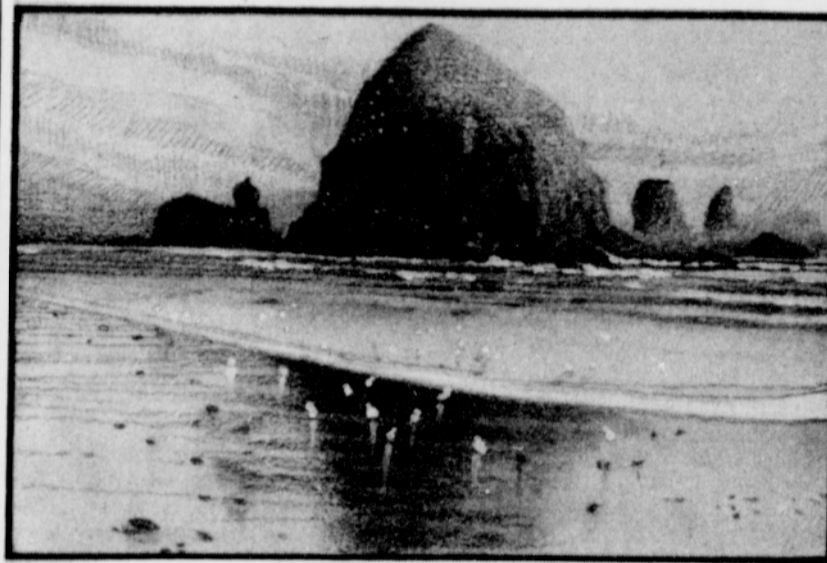
UP SPASTIC ROCK

by Arthur Honeyman

The rock several short yards east and a fraction north of Haystack Rock at Cannon Beach on the north coast of Oregon may already have a name, but its jags jutting out everywhere have caused me to call it Spastic Rock. This name may or may not be anathema to the sensibilities of local residents and historians. This is the story of how, on the twenty-first of May, 1982, I was backpacked to the top of that precipitous structure of nature. It was a short but meaningful and exhilarating brush with danger; a single slip, a wrong step, could plummet us to death, below, where the earth merges with the sea.

Steven, a friend and ex-student of mine, and I left Osburn's Grocery with a bag of purchases and headed for the beach. I usually generate subtle side glances no matter where I am or what I do because I have cerebral palsy. This time was no exception; inadvertently, I was again in the limelight as Steven balanced my wheelchair back onto its rear wheels, bag of groceries in my lap, and manipulated us onto the beach via a path from a carved whale gazebo at the northend of the downtown area. It must have presented quite a spectacle for the average inexperienced eye to behold a man in a wheelchair being hurtled through the loose sand at a speed which boggles the mind. The undeniable prowess of Steven enabled us to make a rapid transition from soft dry beach to hard waterladen and packed surface, allowing him to whip (rather than to drag) me along the edge of the Pacific Ocean with a velocity hitherto unknown to me. Needless to mention to those who thrive on adventure, I exulted in this fast-moving action along the western edge of the American frontier.

Within minutes after our departure from the town of Cannon Beach itself, we made tracks along Oregon's publicly owned coastal sands approximately one-fourth of a mile south of the above mentioned whale-gazebo beneath partly sunny skies. The incoming tides were still a long way out and the beach was littered with tiny fragments of washed and disinherited sea shells which, had the sun been shining, would have glittered a shining mosaic of divers and variegated colors. Space, thought and time merged; the notion that I really ought to collect a few of these glittering beauties for my beloved wife passed through my mind, but the thought was as fleeting as the moment while we skimmed over the soft surface of the fast transforming ocean floor. Steven's feet were pounding into the sand; my heart pounded while my mind beat an exultant race with, against, and for time. The cool air rushed against my face. Still



HAYSTACK ROCK

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grasping my bag of groceries, I felt, in contrast, the warmth of the recently acquired container of Willie's Chili soothing a single spot on the inside of my left thigh.

Similar adventures by me have been influenced by the partaking of drugs upon my cerebral process; not so with this one, however. I say this, also, because all of my senses were heightened to an unusual proportion by means of adrenalin pumping through my system, thus enhancing and sharpening my perceptions to a seemingly well-honed edge. I say this, also, because, however strange it may seem, Steven and I were drawn as if predestined to that rock with full knowledge that we would climb it. It was in the wind that we do so, for, just as the wind does not speak to communicate, we also had not verbalized our intentions or desire to grapple with the sheer sides of that stone at the edge of the ocean; they were communicated without language. Nonetheless, as we approach-



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ed the base of the rock, displaying a writer's lack of faith in non-verbal communication, I stupidly embarrassed myself by asking Steven to backpack me up that symbolic mountain. He responded slightly disappointed that he had already planned that course of action. When we came upon a myriad of small boulders surrounding the base of our proposed climbing structure, the small front wheels of my vehicle were gently allowed to touch the softly packed beach, and vaguely reminiscent of an airplane lowering its landing gear onto a runway, slid to a stop. Although Steven had exerted tremendous amounts of energy, he was not breathless; I was.

In writing this essay, I am realizing the wisdom of explaining that I would not be so trusting or reckless with just anyone. I value my life far too much for that. Every risk that I take is more or less calculated. By nature I am cautious, almost cowardly, especially with regard to my physical well-being. I constantly chastise or goad myself into action in lieu of waiting for the action to come to me. I first met Steven, then age fourteen, some seven and a half years ago when I taught at a high school in Portland. A few months later, on a school field trip, his skinny and extremely wiry frame backpacked me with agility over numerous coastal obstacles of several kinds and shapes, including: driftwood, undergrowth in the forests, and cliffs overlooking the Pacific, etc. Naturally, I tested him first. Gradually, as time passed, I came to trust Steven and to rely on his ever increasing muscular strength, stamina and mountain goat climbing agility. I don't trust just anybody, no matter how strong or well-meaning. On the other hand, because of my disability, I am forced to depend on different people for different needs, including adventure.

Steven left me behind to scout the lay of the land. He virtually ran up the almost perpendicular side of the rock, stood at the top for an instant and gazed in the direction of the ocean, pivoted, and ran back down the wall to me. Back facing me, he squatted on his haunches, within reach of my knees. I reached my spastic, bony arms around his torso right beneath his neck and pulled myself forward onto his back in a sudden lurch. I was mounted on his shoulders in a piggyback position; my thighs squeezed him in a gentle but firm scissors grip. At the risk of seeming like an authority on the subject, Steven has the perfect physique and shape with which to piggyback me, extremely strong and slender. I am comfortable on his back. He bounced me into proper position.

After we (we were welded as one structure in motion) leapt from boulder to boulder, we began our ascent. Excitement bubbled over inside me, in strained anticipation. The climb



THE BRASS LANTERN RESTAURANT WILL CLOSE DECEMBER 19, 1982 AND REOPEN JANUARY 22, 1983



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