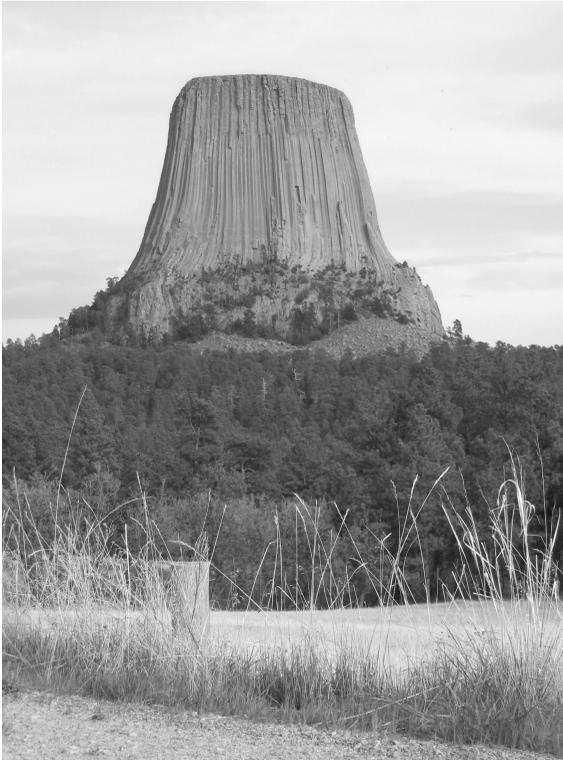


Devil's Tower – Place of Power

Liz Klobusicky

According to Indian legend, the first ascent of Devils Tower was made when seven Indian maidens jumped onto a low rock to escape the grizzly bear and prayed. The rock heard them and began to push itself up out of the ground, raising the children upward in the sky and left them there as seven little stars – the Pleiades. The bear clawed at the rock trying to reach its prey.



The Devil's Tower

The bear's claw marks left a formation of vertical cracks that caters to a multitude of interests:

- The volcanic formation is of interest to geologists;
- The Tower remains sacred to Native Americans;

- Climbers and other recreationalists have discovered the beauty and challenge Devils Tower offers.

In spite of the diversity of the interests that draw people to the monolith, Devils Tower is a very special place to all visitors:

Geologists: In 1875, Colonel RICHARD DODGE led an expedition to the Black Hills to survey the area. When he saw the cliff, he assumed it to be the core of an ancient volcano. He erroneously thought he had heard some tribe call it "Bad Gods' Tower" and named it Devils Tower. The Indians opposed the name, but unfortunately, it stuck.

Indians: Several Indian nations living in the vicinity of Devils Tower share like-sounding legends about the mountain. They almost all include bears, including Bear Lodge, the old name for the cliff. In the late 1800s after the ranchers and the U.S. Army arrived, the Native Americans lost their homelands around the Tower. Today several tribes reclaim Devils Tower as sacred ground. Especially during the summer solstice, the Lakotas come there to celebrate their annual sun dance.

Climbers: The name is not the only problem the Indians have with the Tower. They also have problems with the more recent enthusiasts, the climbers who throng to celebrate their sport there. Climbing on Devils Tower started on July 4, 1893, when, two ranchers made the first ascent of Devils Tower using a wooden ladder, cheered by the over 1000 spectators. The Tower became a 4th of July meeting place for the ranchers and their families. At an annual picnic in 1895, the wife of one of the first ascensionists, using her husband's ladder, became the first woman to reach the summit.

Using the wooden ladder was the standard way to climb the Tower until the first rock climbers ascended the Wiessner Crack in 1937. Its 5.7 squeeze chimney was then one of the hardest climbs in the country.

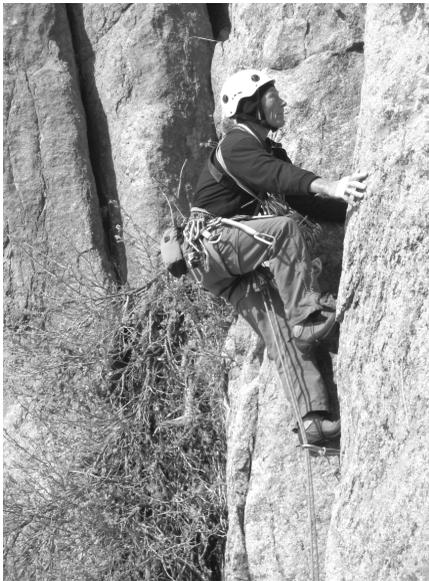


Our Tower: Naturally Devils Tower was on our list of musts for a climbing holiday in the Northwest. My three Bavarian friends wanted to follow in the steps of their compatriot FRITZ WIESSNER, who did the first ascent using “modern” climbing techniques (today called “trad” climbing).

On the road to Devils Tower, we’d had a chance to warm up to cracks and trad climbing techniques in Wyoming’s Veedauwoos and the Needles of South Dakota. But when we stood under the yawning gaps left by the bear’s claws on the Tower, we realized we weren’t equipped to do even the simplest routes there.

In search of a few pieces of four inch pro for the Durrance route, my companions discover the face of America that rarely gets mention in the German media. For the next two days we experience nothing but open hearts and genuine kindness.

It all starts when we register for the route and ask the ranger where we can buy or rent oversized camelots on a Sunday. She immediately proceeds to call

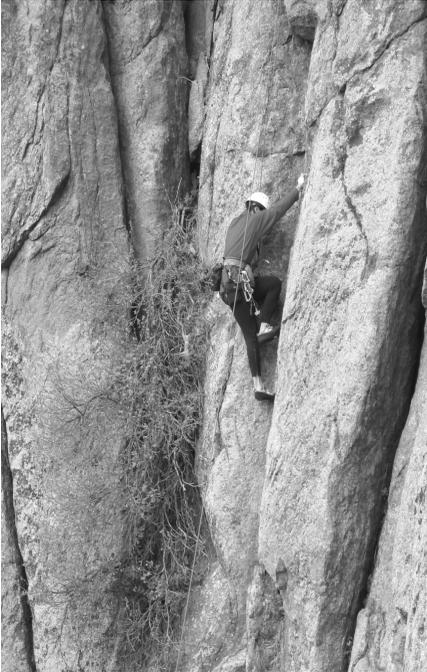


Klaus Bierl leading the Durrance

all the climbing schools and mountains shops in the vicinity. She doesn’t want the Germans to have made the pilgrimage to Devils Tower in vain. CHUCK LINDSAY, one of the rangers she reaches, for a starter, suggests a different route that will go with the pro we have in our packs; whereupon KLAUS and LIZ set off to do the *Soler*. At the foot of the Tower Curt - a local guide - is just coming off the *Durrance* with a client. On hearing us speak German, he asks if we know his hero BERND ARNOLD and offers us the use of his big friends for the next day. He points the way up the ramp leading to the start of the *Soler*.

We get there just in time to watch a young hotshot from Boulder scramble up and out of sight on our route in free solo. KLAUS and I take a bit longer to get the feel of relying on finger, hand and fist jams. We curse the thin soles of our “Anasazis” in the foot jams. But eventually we start

enjoying the trad game and finish the route feeling much better than at the onset. At the top Curt, already there with his client, points out his home below - a windowless little tin hut - where we can collect the for the *Durrance* pro that evening. Back to sign out at the ranger station, we bump into Chuck, who had advised us on the phone to do the Soler. Chuck - climber and ranger - spends lot of time mediating between climbers and Indians. He also offers us his gear for the *Durrance*, which we can now gratefully decline.



Inge Olzowy following

Next morning the Bayerländer, with CURT's oversized friends on their rack, take a stab at the *Durrance*. CHUCK had warned them that it was popular route on weekends, but they were in no way prepared for what was to come. The last of the five parties to start up a couple of hours before them is a group of three barrel-sized fellows from South Carolina. All members of the same pinochle club, they had just driven 27 hours to get there, and show the signs of wear from the drive. From the way they are moving, KLAUS assumes that two of them are playing a hand of pinochle at every belay, while AL, the only leader, inches his way up another move. The first and last of them are carrying walkie-talkies in the event of a communications breakdown.

When our Bayerländer catch up with the last two of the pinochlers, they are greeted by a loud "Welcome to America", a warm extension of hands and proclamations of "proud to be sharing a belay with visitors from Germany". They had been tempted to rap off and try another route, but now there is no retreating. At every rest, AL braids and unbraids his daisy chain, resorts his rack and starts creeping up the next pitch. His buddies heave and groan their way up the crack behind him, leaving my friends wondering whatever moves two-tonners with very little climbing experience to attempt such a serious route.

With six parties rappelling off the same set of bolts, the descent is as tedious an undertaking as the climb itself was. I approach some of the climbers who are back on the ground to about my buddies. When they finally reach camp at 8:00 p.m., there is an uncanny glow in the eyes and hearts of all. In unison, they declare it to be the highlight of the trip. It is obvious that they've been imbued by the power of a very special place.



Cracks

While our heroes are up battling the *Durrance*, LIZ reads up on the history of the national monument in the ranger station and interviews CHUCK about on the ongoing conflict between climbers and Native Americans. CHUCK is happy to share what he knows about the locals. Here is his story:

After a revival of Indian interest in their native rituals, at present some 20 tribes – mostly the Lakotas - perform religious ceremonies at Devils Tower all year round. Ceremonies reach a peak in the month of June during the summer solstice. Despite the religious revival, not all Native Americans oppose the presence of climbers on their sacred grounds. One chieftain even hires a mountain guide to go to the top for ceremonies. Others say they have nothing at all against climbing, only against rude behaviour, cursing, shouting and unwitting faults like circumambulating the tower counterclockwise. The conflict is exaggerated by lack of communication and misunderstanding between climbers and Natives. Some locals, unaware that protection is removed by the second climber complain, “When we see climbers pounding pitons into Devils Tower, it goes straight to our hearts...it’s as sacrilegious as us climbing up your church walls.”

CHUCK has come a long way in mediating and correcting the misconceptions. He explains to the Natives that some climbers consider a climb to be a spiritual encounter. He also pleads with climbers not to behave disrespectfully on sacred ground. The Park rangers, together with the Access Fund and other interest groups, have gathered support for a land management program that caters to the interests of both groups. The cornerstone of the program is a “voluntary closure” to climbing in the month of June. Some 80% adhere to the closures – notable exceptions are the local guides who rely on tourist income. The Park would like to see more compliance with the voluntary closing. Refraining from climbing in June is really a gesture of respect, and the sacrifice could make an impact on further negotiations.

On the other hand, some climbers have initiated legal action against the closures. They argue that in a national park, the law decrees separation of church and state.

The solution to the problem is not in legal battles. Rather, it lies in more dialogue and more cross-cultural communication, such as has been taking place between the Germans and Americans on the Tower these past few days. Then all groups can keep imbibing the power and beauty of this extraordinary spot on earth.

Résumé:

Devils Tower, Wyoming, USA

09.05.2004: Klaus Bierl, Liz Klobusicky, „Soler“, 4 SL 5.9

10.05.2004: Klaus Bierl, Inge and Michael Olzowy, „Durance“, 5 SL 5.7