



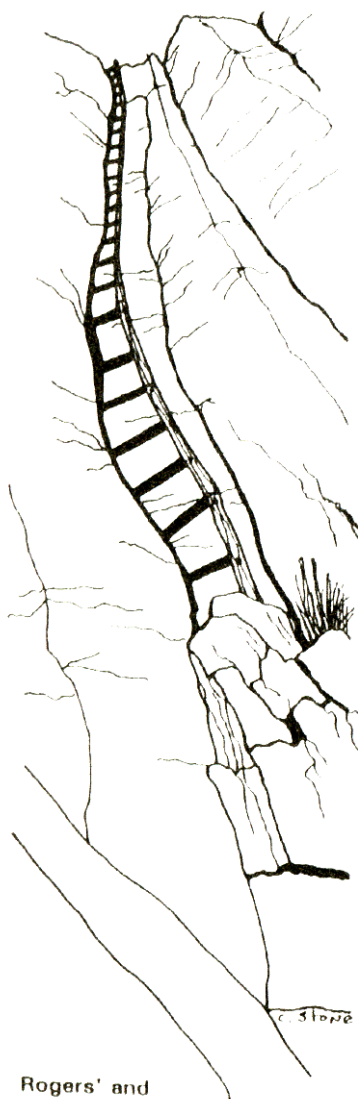
How Do They Get Up There?

For over a hundred years, climbers have tested their skills on the vertical faces of Devils Tower. Using various techniques and specialized equipment, climbers have inched their way up - and down - the steep walls. As you gaze at the Tower, you will very likely see climbers clinging to the precipitous rock.

A SACRED TOWER

American Indians have regarded the Tower as a sacred site long before climbers found their way to the area. Today, Northern Plains tribes still view the Tower and surrounding area as a place for spiritual renewal. Some people from all walks of life would like to see climbing banned. As a compromise, the Climbing Management Plan, implemented in 1995, allows for management of Devils Tower as a cultural resource as well as a natural and recreational resource. Out of respect for American Indian beliefs, climbers are asked to voluntarily refrain from climbing during the month of June.

BRAVE SOULS AND FOOLISH



Rogers' and
Ripley's Ladder

In 1875, geologist Henry Newton recorded the first detailed description of Devils Tower as “inaccessible to anything without wings”. There are those, however, who are eager to take on any challenge, no matter how impossible it may at first seem. William Rogers and Willard Ripley, two local ranchers, were determined to climb Devils Tower!

The two ranchers made elaborate preparations for the climb. They built a 350-foot wooden ladder to the summit by driving wooden stakes into a continuous vertical crack running between two columns on the southeast side of the Tower. The stakes were braced and secured to each other by a continuous wooden strip

On July 4, 1893, a thousand spectators watched in awe as Rogers made the first ascent of the Tower. To the wild cheers of the crowd, William Rogers ascended the ladder and ran an American flag up a flagpole. Devils Tower had officially been climbed!

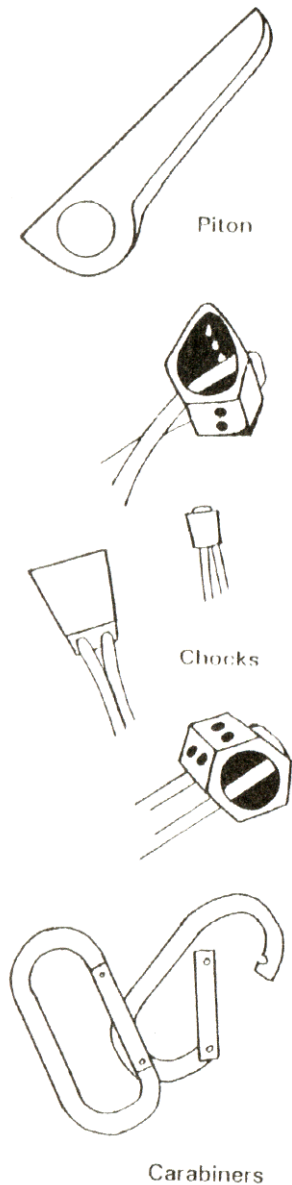
Others quickly followed in Roger's footsteps, utilizing the ladder to ascend to the summit. (Portions of the ladder can still be seen from the south side of the Tower Trail.) On July 4, 1895, William's wife Linnie Rogers, wearing knee-high leather boots and navy-blue bloomers, became the first woman to climb the ladder to the top of the Tower.

Until 1927, climbers used William Rogers' ladder. In 1937, Fritz Weissner and two other mountaineers from the American Alpine Club of New York City climbed to the summit using technical rock-climbing techniques. Their ascent took 4 hours and 46 minutes, a respectable time even by today's standards. Jack Durrance pioneered the classic and easiest route to the summit the following year. This climb annually sees about a thousand ascents. It has been climbed by a variety of people including a six-year-old boy, seven-year-old girl and an eighty-one-year-old man! It is, however, a technical climb that requires rock climbing skills and specialized safety equipment.

In 1941, as a publicity stunt, George Hopkins parachuted onto the summit of Devils Tower. Unfortunately, his untried preparations for an easy descent did not work. Food and supplies were dropped by plane to the stranded man. For six days, George waited, while attempts were made to locate climbers with the expertise to rescue him. George was eventually successfully rescued, becoming the only person to reach the top of the Tower without first climbing up.

Today, modern rock climbers use a variety of techniques and equipment to scale the nearly vertical walls of Devils Tower.

SCALING THE HEIGHTS



Most climbers **free climb** Devils Tower, utilizing naturally occurring ledges, cracks, and projections to inch their way up the Tower. Ropes and equipment are used only as safety precautions - to catch climbers if they should fall. Some climbers **aid climb**, using equipment for holds and upward movement. Climbers are NOT allowed to place new permanent anchors, chip holds in the rock or modify Devils Tower in any way.

Climbers usually wear **climbing shoes** that are very tight-fitting and have a special “sticky” rubber sole to help them gain a foothold on the rock. Many climbers wear **helmets** to protect themselves from possible rock falls. On harder climbing routes, climbers may wear **chalkbags** filled with gymnasts' chalk to keep fingers and hands from perspiring while clinging to small holds. A **harness** enables a climber to be roped to their partner and to attach themselves to safety equipment on the rock. The **climbing rope** is the most important piece of safety equipment. These ropes are 165 to 200 feet (50 to 60 meters) long and are made of nylon covered with a braided protective sheath. They are very strong, withstanding an impact force of approximately 5,000 lbs. They are dynamic, stretching almost 7% over their length. Most ropes last for only two or three years.

Pitons are steel wedges that are hammered into cracks. Climbers are no longer allowed to permanently place pitons into cracks at Devils Tower, nor are they allowed to use them on routes that have been climbed “clean”. Today, most climbers use **clean climbing**, which means that their safety equipment does not damage the rock in any way. Most climbers use **chocks** and **spring loaded camming devices** (“cams”) for protection rather than pitons. Tapered chocks come in various sizes and shapes and are easily placed in and removed from rock cracks without damaging the rock. Camming devices are spring loaded and expand in cracks when a force is applied. A **carabiner** is clipped to the chock or cam, and the climbing rope is clipped through the carabiner.

Climbers usually climb with partners. The **leader** ascends the rock first while their partner, who is anchored to the wall, **belays** them, feeding out or taking in the rope and catching them with the rope should they fall. When the leader reaches the end of the rope, they secure themselves to the rock and belay their partner up. The second climber then ascends, taking out whatever gear has been placed in the cracks.

Most climbers **rappel** to descend from the Tower. With a rope well anchored, a climber can literally walk down the face of the rock, slowing the descent by braking on the rope with a friction device. There are several standard rappel routes on the Tower. These have fixed anchors so that climbers do not have to leave any of their own equipment. The ropes pass through **rappel rings** and one end can be pulled down after the rappel in order to retrieve the rope.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

These publications are available through Devils Tower Natural History Association, PO Box 37, Devils Tower, Wyoming 82714.

Gunderson, Mary Alice; Devils Tower Stories in Stone; High Plains Press, 1988.

History of Devils Tower; Devils Tower Natural History Assn.

How Do They Get Their Ropes Up There?; Poorpersons' Guidebooks, 1995.

Loughman, Michael; Learning to Rock Climb; Sierra Club Books.

Visit the Devils Tower website: www.nps.gov/deto