

## JOHN SALATHÉ

1899–1993

Here are a few facts to piece out the excellent obituary below. John Salathé was born in Niederschöntal, near Basel, Switzerland on June 14, 1899. He studied blacksmithing in his home town for three years. He then went to Paris, but he had such a bad experience with bedbugs that he left at two A.M. for Le Havre, where he found work on a coastal steamer as a fireman. Later, he shipped on a bigger ship as an oiler and occasional deckhand. He was at sea for four years, going as far as Africa and Brazil. He finally arrived in Montreal where he met his wife-to-be. They were married in 1929 and emigrated to San Mateo, California, where he founded his famous Peninsula Wrought Iron Works.

ALLEN STECK

The magnificent first ascents that made John Salathé a legend moved rock climbing to a new level. To the current generation of climbers he is a god-like figure. Rather than spend time on his major accomplishments, I will take you back to the day of his first climb. It was a month or so after the end of World War II and Fritz Lippmann and I had abandoned the cockpits of B-17s and P-38s to return to rock climbing. We were planning an ascent of the Eagle's Nest on Hunter's Hill, a local piton climb in the San Francisco Bay Area during an outing of the Sierra Club's now extinct Rock Climbing Section. John appeared at a local climb for the first time on that day. We tied him into our rope as middleman because the section expected the more experienced to help the newcomers. He was a contrast to the two of us. At 47, he was old enough to have been our father.

The most difficult pitch of the Eagle's Nest is a traverse secured by pitons 100 feet above the base of the rock. The exposure is made more spectacular because the ground below the base slopes downward for a half mile or so. I led the pitch and John was out of sight to both of us. After securing my belay position, I called for John to climb and emphasized that he should "climb freely." This was our way of saying that neither the rope nor the pitons should be used for assistance. I felt no activity on the rope for two or three minutes and suddenly John appeared around the corner *unroped!* He thought I had meant to climb free of the rope. Height had no meaning to John and to him fear was a stranger.

Let me now move to Yosemite a few month later when he and Phil Bettler were attempting a climb of Washington Column Direct during one of the Rock Climbing Section's trips to the Valley. To set the stage, you must understand that Phil was severely hard of hearing. It was approaching dusk. All the rest of us had completed our climbs, but Phil and John had not returned. A group journeyed to a site that allowed us to survey Washington Column. When we spotted them, the sight was terrifying. They were off route and directly over the overhang at the nose of the Column that drops 1000 feet into the valley floor. They were coming down. John was rappelling and was just short of the

overhang, belayed by Phil. At that point he must have realized what lay below. Remember that Phil was hard of hearing and so John could not communicate with him. Dusk turned into darkness. John and Phil appeared at Camp Four late that night and filled us in on the details. John had tied himself into the rappel and cut off just enough to make two slings. The slings were then tied to the rappel in Prusik knots and he worked his way to Phil's position. Anyone who has used Prusik slings on a rappel that was not secured at the bottom will realize how difficult it is to raise the lower sling. To fearlessness, I add unbelievable strength and resolve.

Since John was an ornamental blacksmith by trade, we would design special pitons, provide the designs to him and the new pitons would appear at the next climb and be given to us. He would not take a penny for the material. As he gained more climbing experience, he designed and forged his own. Next to Chuck Wilts, he was responsible for the greatest piton innovations of those times. To fearlessness, strength and resolve, I add generosity.

John Salathé first became a member of the American Alpine Club in 1950. He was elected to Honorary Membership in 1976.

In his post-climbing years, he divided his time between the east side of the Sierra in the summer and areas near the Salton Sea in the winter. He was in a nursing home during the last few years of his life where he assisted fellow residents and tended to the gardens when he was over ninety.

ROBIN HANSEN

RICHARD MANNING LEONARD  
1908–1993

Richard Manning Leonard, a member of the American Alpine Club since 1936, was elected to Honorary Membership in 1981. He was born in Elyria, Ohio. He was a former president of both the Sierra Club and the Save-the-Redwoods League. He was active in the Wilderness Society, the Conservation Law Society of America, the Trustees for Conservation, the Varian Foundation and the Forest Genetics Research Foundation.

After graduating from the University of California at Berkeley and the University of California's School of Law, he was admitted to the State Bar of California in 1933. After serving as chief attorney for the Regional Agricultural Credit Corporation, he entered private practice in San Francisco in 1938. He retired in the early 1980s. During World War II, he was an officer in the Office of the Quartermaster General in Washington on the development of Army clothing and equipment and then served in the Asian theater.

Dick is survived by his wife Doris, whom he married in 1934, two daughters and two grandchildren.

Aside from his life-long work for conservation, Dick was an early pioneer in Western mountaineering. His *Belaying the Leader*, written in 1946, became the bible of rock climbers during the rapid development of the sport.