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THE BOWLES ROCKS — A WELCOME OPPORTUNITY TO MOUNTAINEERS

This is not the first time that we have mentioned the Bowles Rocks and Mountaineering Gymnasium near Crowborough in Sussex (A 26 from Tunbridge Wells or Eridge Station, Southern Region). Early in August 1965, we published an illustrated report after the inauguration of the little Chapel, a replica of the Schwarzseekapelle near Zermatt. And last year, in our issue of 9th September, we showed a picture of the wood carving of the Madonna with Child, presented to Bowles Chapel by the people of St. Moritz.

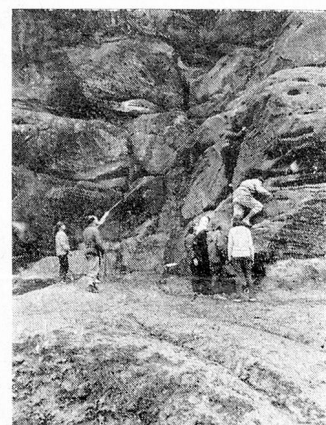
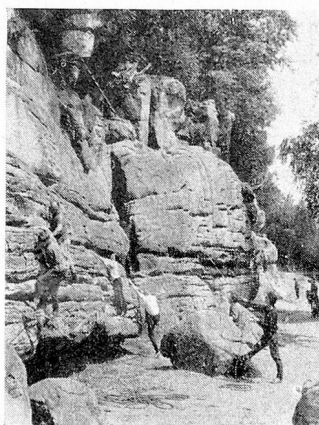
A few years ago, an English engineer, John C. Walters, set out to create a centre in this country where men and women could be trained as mountaineers. This 47 year-old engineer, John Walters, succeeded, and today, the mountaineering centre at Bowles in Sussex is a well-established training ground under the patronage of H.R.H. the Duke of Edinburgh.



On the border of Kent and Sussex are four outcrops, one of them, Bowles Rocks, was taken over by Mr. Walters, and by sheer hard work and never-ending enthusiasm, the seven acres of swamp-like meadows — the site had been used as a pig farm — were cleared and the rocky wall along the Northern border cleaned and prepared for action. Today, the grounds comprise meadows, a car park, camping grounds, a large swimming pool, a clubhouse and above all 600 feet of sandstone rocks, some rising to nearly 100 feet. Every technical mountaineering problem can be studied, and seventy varied climbing routes have been made in every grade from beginner's climbs to expert's ascents. The buttresses are separated by gullies, and various aids have been installed to provide every possible opportunity for learning to tackle the real thing.

It is called the Bowles Mountaineering Gymnasium, for every kind of physical training is provided, and gymnastic and camping equipment, as well as a children's climbing nursery are available. Expert qualified instructors are supervising the training.

A special feature is the small chapel which was built to provide the spiritual uplift that goes hand-in-hand with the strenuous physical exertion of climbing. The building of the chapel was inspired by the joy derived from seeing visitors of all creeds going into the little chapels dotted amongst the Swiss Alps.



It seems almost a miracle that this idea, too, should have become a reality. With the encouragement of the Bishop of Chichester, drawings and plans were made, and two craftsmen, a stonemason and a carpenter, took over and built a Swiss chapel in the peaceful Sussex countryside. Brick and local sandstone, Sussex oak beams and rafters, Swiss cantonal crests in stained glass, a bell from Meiringen and the undaunted spirit and proud skill of John Walters and his craftsmen brought to life this lovely little House of God. Remarkably it fits into the Bowles Rocks landscape as if it had been there for centuries, and a few yards away, the Swiss flag has pride of place.

If we mention Bowles again it is because we feel sure that many more of our readers could find enjoyment in being initiated in the art of mountaineering or in keeping fit during periods when they are unable to indulge in the sport in Switzerland. A great deal of money and effort has already gone into the venture, and in order to help it grow and expand, 5,000 FRIENDS OF BOWLES" are being enrolled who enjoy giving about 9d. a week (£2 p.a.) for seven years. This would enable the Bowles Rocks Trust Ltd. of which Lord Rupert Nevill, D.L., J.P., is President, to carry out improvements and go on providing splendid outdoor activities, especially for the young.

MM.



For information please apply to Bowles Rocks Trust Ltd., c/o Morven, Crowborough, Sussex.

(Photographs by courtesy of Swiss National Tourist Office.)