

**TRAPPED ON
WALLFACE**



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By David Glenn

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Most articles in the Home Sweet Home section of the *Lake Champlain Weekly* are about historic houses in the greater Champlain and Richelieu Valley area of New York, Vermont and Quebec, the homes of our early citizens. This story is about a cliff side perch that was home to three boys from Plattsburgh for a night in August 75 years ago and their dramatic rescue.

Wallface Mountain is on the north side of Indian Pass some six miles over rough trails southwest from the Adirondak Loj at Heart Lake in the Adirondack Mountains. Indian pass is a stupendous gorge between Wallface Mountain and the MacIntyre Range. The pass is over a mile in length. Its sheer northwest wall rises nearly 1000 feet which makes it one of the highest cliffs in the East. There are even several places where snow and ice remain year round since the sun rarely penetrates into portions of the gorge.

On Tuesday, August 29, 1933, a group of young people from Plattsburgh decided to make the trek to the high peaks to climb a series of mountains. A smaller party of the larger group set out from Adirondak Loj heading for Indian Pass. This party consisted of; sixteen year old Bill Ladue and his fourteen year old brother Bob, both sons of Physician William Ladue; Tyler Gray the nineteen year old son of Sgt. Elmer Gray of the local Police Department; and, Bob Glenn the seventeen year old son of barber Robert Glenn. Both Gray and Glenn were Eagle Scouts.

Arriving at the base of Wallface Cliff they decided to try to ascend the steep face. The three older boys realized that fourteen year old Bob Ladue was too young to climb with them and he was left at the base of the cliff. Climbing started slowly finding foot-holds and hand-holds, using the occasional small branch growing somehow out of the rock crevices. They gained in ability as they climbed ever upward using nothing but their hands and feet with no rope, fixed points, or climbing equipment and never looking down.

They finally reached a rock ledge at about 10:30 am, some four hundred feet high on the cliff wall. It was only the size of a small desk top and sloped downward at about forty-five degrees. As they rested there some rocks broke off above them and crashing down the face wiped the rock clean of the hand-holds they had used to gain their perch. They were trapped not being able to climb higher or to descend.

Yelling down to Bob Ladue on the ground below, they told him of their predicament and urged him to go for help. Bob ran as fast as he could the long six miles back to Adirondak Loj. Near total exhaustion, he met Jed Rosman, pioneer guide and caretaker saying "Mister, would you help a fellow in trouble." Trouble was an understatement, there was plenty of it. Rescue parties were immediately formed: one by Dr. Graham of Albany at the Loj; a second at the Lake Placid Club; and a third by State Troopers. A plane was requested to locate the boys on the cliff and report their position. Fred McLane flew into the Pass shut off his engine and flew

his open cockpit bi-plane close enough to the wall to yell to the boys that help was on the way.

Assembling the relief parties, getting the plane, and obtaining equipment took time as did the long hike back into the Pass where darkness descends early. Three members of the Club group tried to climb up to the boys but had to abandon it after only 75 feet. After that it was too late to try much of any rescue. The party camped at the base of the cliff for the night where the light of their distant fire provided the only source of comfort for the three boys crouched on the ledge far above.

All three took turns being the one in the middle as they huddled together clad only in light summer hiking clothes trying to stay warm. Bob Glenn tied his belt around a scraggly bush sticking out of the ledge and had Tyler Gray loop his belt through his to prevent them from falling off the ledge as they tried to relax. Glenn and Gray got about an hours intermittent sleep over that long cold night. Bill Ladue kept awake the entire time. Dr. Graham used a birch bark megaphone to reassure the boys throughout the night yelling up to them from down below.

Early Wednesday morning the rescue attempt was to begin in earnest but no word had been received from the camping crew at the base of the cliff if the boys were still there. McLane again flew by them and reported from the air to people on the ground that they had made it safely through their night of solitude on that precarious perch.

The original combined group of 13 was now augmented by more climbers hiking to the top of the cliff by bushwhacking up the steep terrain of the back of Wallace Mountain. Arriving over the boys location, at a spot marked for them by the plane, they dropped the rope they had carried in down to them. One of the boys was tied to the rope and they began lifting him only to find the rope coming apart when he was only ten feet off the ledge. The rope was too small. They quickly lowered him back down the ledge and used that rope to lower water and food to the boys as frantic efforts were made to get a larger rope to the rescue site.

About 2:30 that afternoon Lieut. Lyle Churchill of Plattsburgh flew in with a 250 pound coil of larger rope and dropped it to the rescue party on top of the cliff. The rope was quickly tied off to a tree some distance back from the edge of the face and dropped down to the boys at 2:45. Using their scout skills Glenn and Gray tied the rope around Bill Ladue and after a signal by gun shot from above he was hauled up to the top of the cliff. Next hauled to safety was Tyler Gray followed last by Bob Glenn at 3:55 pm.

Carefully pulling with all their might and heart so as to not chafe the rope or cause a tragic fall were: Paul Steers, Lake Placid Club; Robert Downs, Saranac Lake; and, Sergeant John King, and Troopers Ward, and Lipton, Troop B, State Police. Once on top the pale faced and shaken boys hugged their rescuers not wishing to let go until they could calm themselves. Glenn said "That first pilot was a great guy, we

felt better after he had cheered us up.” Ladue, the spokesman for the group, lamented that they could not bring the rope back out with them saying “Aw, we could use that on our motor boat.” The boys all agreed that what they wished for more than anything during their long night on the sheer cliff face was level ground, a warm fire and food.

Their 32 hour ordeal over, the boys tramped out to the Adirondak Loj to be fed, bundled up and taken home to relieved parents in Plattsburgh. The harrowing story of their climb, overnight stay on the narrow ledge, and dramatic rescue made headlines in many New York papers and was the talk of Plattsburgh for many days thereafter. Most of the details of this article are taken from the *Lake Placid News* edition of September 1, 1933 which Bob Glenn labeled “Truest Story”, and the rest came from other family records.

Epilogue:

Bill Ladue went on to become a doctor in his father’s footsteps, a WWII Army medical corps veteran, and was in General Practice in Plattsburgh for many years. Bill and his wife Emily continued to climb mountains becoming early 46-R’s, enjoyed their camp on Cumberland Head, and rescue old boats until he passed away in 2004. His widow and four children still reside in the area.

His younger brother Bob Ladue became a local surveyor and worked for the City as Building Inspector. He too along with his wife Virginia loved the family camp on the Head, boating, skiing, and seven children. Bob passed away several years ago. His widow and many family members still live in the Plattsburgh area, and those that do not live here come north each summer to spend time at the camp.

Tyler Gray, I believe, worked in the Corrections field and passed away several years ago. A son supposedly still lives out on Cumberland Head. Efforts to contact the family for this article were not successful. Any information about Mr. Gray would be much appreciated by the author at daveglenn@charter.net.

Bob Glenn was my father. He served in the Navy in WWII and came home to work at Pal Razor Blade where he eventually became Plant Manager. He later was the manager of Aranac Ribbon, and with his wife Marjorie loved mountain climbing, horses, boating and their family of four boys. He passed away in 1973. Family members still reside in the area and some of us climb mountains.

Thirteen years ago a group of us hiked in to Indian Pass and paused at the base of the Wallface Cliff to drink a toast to the three intrepid young climbers of 1933 Bill Ladue, Tyler Gray and Bob Glenn but especially to the hero of the day young Bob Ladue.