

Minutes of the  
2012 NSS Vertical Section Meeting  
June 27, 2012

The 2012 NSS Vertical Section meeting was held Wednesday, June 27, 2012 at the High School in Lewisburg, West Virginia. Executive Board members present were Chair Dick Mitchell, Secretary-Treasurer Bill Boehle, At-Large Executive Members Miriam Cuddington, Terry Mitchell (Vice Chairman), and Ray Sira, Vertical Techniques Workshop Coordinator Terry Clark, Education/Training Coordinator Bruce Smith, and Contest Coordinator Bill Cuddington. Nylon Highway Editor Tim White could not attend the convention. Approximately 24 additional Vertical Section members were in attendance.

I. Meeting opened at 2:06 PM by Chair Dick Mitchell.

A. Announcements - Welcome to everyone who came. Agenda, minutes, and other information available in packet. Membership/Attendance roster circulated. Introduced EC members present.

II. Minutes of the Last Meeting - Minutes of the 2011 VS business meeting were published on the website and there were no amendments or changes. A motion was made and seconded and the minutes were accepted as published.

III. Officer's Reports:

A. Secretary's Report - Bill Boehle. See attached. Our membership numbers have been very slowly growing, but we would hope to do better. Efforts to grow the membership will be addressed by the new Outreach Committee later in the meeting. Accepted as presented.

B. Treasurer's Report - Bill Boehle. See attached. No further discussion. Accepted as presented.

C. VS Symbolic Items - Bill Boehle. See Treasurer's Report for sales numbers. We will be doing a restocking of clothing items before next year. We will also need to have more of the section pins made since we are totally out of stock. Both of these will be a major expense that will show on next years report.

D. Nylon Highway Editor's Report - Tim White could not attend convention and no report was submitted. Gary Bush reported that he had been in email contact with Tim and that Tim had submitted to him the cover art and an article for Nylon Highway #57 which has been posted on the website. Tim is in need of more articles for the Nylon Highway.

The regular meeting was paused for a side issue:

The meeting was interrupted by Geary Schindel who is the Administrative Vice President (AVP) of the NSS. He stated that he wants the help of the Section to address a couple of issues that he is concerned about. He was passing by the gym and saw some kids vertical training in there without wearing helmets. His concern with the safety issues is that if anyone got hurt that it might be the end of vertical section training. It was pointed out to Geary that the training he saw was a JSS activity, not a Vertical Section activity. While some of our members assist the JSS with this, it is not our activity. Not everyone participating brought a helmet and there were not enough to go around. Existing

helmets were used by anyone rappelling but not by all ascending. Geary acknowledged this, but still had a concern since we are all under the general liability umbrella of the NSS. What Geary would like to see is some training safety standards written by the Vertical Section for the JSS, possibly involving a safety officer and a safety plan. This could address issues such as requiring a helmet to be worn by all participants. Geary acknowledged the safety record of the Vertical Section during workshops and the climbing contest, but points out that we would only get one shot at this. If there was an accident involving the kids, the NSS would probably not be able to get any insurance in the future for NSS activities. Geary (acting for the NSS) would like for the Vertical Section to come up with a safety plan for JSS vertical activities, hopefully before next convention. This would set criteria and safety standards for participation in these activities and would assist and guide the JSS chairperson (who may not be vertically experienced). More discussion ensued and Chairman Dick Mitchell (with the concurrence of the EC) concluded that this is something that needs to be carefully considered by the EC to determine an appropriate course of action. Dick committed to stay in contact with Geary as we proceed.

Geary left at this point and some additional discussion followed. Gene Harrison suggested that both students and instructors should use appropriate safety gear at all times. We need to build a culture, image, and tradition of safety so that a student can't get hurt and later claim that "I was trained that way"! Terry Mitchell asked for some volunteers from the membership to work with the EC and take the lead in compiling existing information and guidance into a safety plan for JSS vertical activities. Jim Wade and Ken Alwin volunteered.

End of side issue and back to the regular meeting.

#### IV. Committee Reports:

A. Contest Committee - Bill Cuddington. Thanks to the convention for the nice facilities for this year's contest. The room was cool and restrooms were nearby. Thanks to all who help during the vertical contest, especially Ernie Coffman and the other racketeers who helped run the racks. We appreciate any help from section members and others with timing, pulling rope, running the rack, etc. An hour here and there really helps spread the work out. Regarding the use of helmets during the climbing contest, it was noted that they have been optional. People tend to overheat during long climbs and don't have the opportunity to rest to cool off during the timed climb as they would in a cave situation. Since we are climbing in a controlled environment, with mats and the ability to lower a climber down, we consider allowing optional helmet use to be an acceptable risk.

B. Vertical Workshop - Terry Clark. This year we have 22 to 25 people signed up. Terry pointed out that we require helmets for participants in the vertical workshop. He also noted that he sometimes uses his discretion and relaxes this rule for some instructors who might fly in to a convention and are unable to bring their helmet with them. It also depends upon the job assigned to an instructor. Some jobs (such as knot tying, harness and equipment checks, or running a rack) do not expose the instructor to falls or overhead risk. After some discussion of what should be required, Dick Mitchell stated that the Section might want to consider purchasing a few helmets to be available for any instructors who might be unable to bring their equipment to convention. Terry noted we are continuing to cut up the contest ropes for use in the workshop. This way we are getting more use out of the donated ropes and have less gear to haul to the convention. It was also suggested that we need to add long pants to the list of items participants need to bring to the workshop. In recent years

some people have been getting scraped up and bruised by the ropes and equipment due to wearing shorts during the training.

#### C. Training/Education - Bruce Smith.

Bruce stated that he has finished the series of updates to the Basic Training Course (the first since 2008). There are updates to the information on harness hang syndrome, on rappelling errors made when changing the number of bars used during a descent, and the adding of a section on blowout training scenarios. In testing this revised course, the blowout scenario training has proved very enlightening to students. It reinforces their training in dealing with unexpected problems while on rope. Bruce stated that we need to encourage local grottoes to use the full course to provide comprehensive vertical training to its members. While some "regionalization" of training occurs, grottoes should not short change the training. To roll out this updated training, and as a way to give back to the NSS, we have printed a limited supply of the new manuals to be distributed during the convention to those present in this meeting, to workshop participants on Thursday, and to grotto chairmen or training officers upon request. The updated manual will continue to be distributed in PDF form via the website.

It has been three years since we completed the Intermediate Course and made it available via download for no charge on the website. We have 10 students registered (from 2009) that they have started the course. All are still working on the course at their own pace. This is not an overwhelming response to the training course, but we applaud their perseverance in pursuing their quest for knowledge. The Intermediate Course is not about knowing just your own system, but knowing about many types of systems so you can assist other people.

#### D. Re-Belay Course / "Dial In Your Gear" Session - Gary Bush and John Woods.

This year a steady stream of people showed up from 10:30 to 5:00 for the rebelay training. Gary reported that there were about 15-16 climbers and it was well received by all who participated. John spent most of the time with people setting up and adjusting their systems. This continues to be a very educational and productive session.

#### E. Awards Committee - Dick Mitchell/Bruce Smith.

Due to his recent election to the NSS Board of Governors, and his commitments thereto, Dick Mitchell stepped down as Chairman of the Awards Committee. He has recently appointed Awards Committee member Bruce Smith as the new Chairman, consistent with the Vertical Section By-Laws Section 5), (F). Bruce took over the meeting to present a Lifetime Achievement Award to a most deserving individual. In a moving presentaion, Bruce noted that it was 60 years ago (1952) that a caver descended a pit in Monroe County not far from the convention site and then climbed out of that pit on hemp rope using prussiks. This was the first time this had ever been done and established the start of single rope techniques which have changed the way the world climbs rope. There is an iconic photo of a caver carrying a coil of rope and bent over near an old encrusted saltpeter vat. That photo memorialized this historic occasion. That caver was Bill Cuddington. Bill was presented with a plaque that recognized him as a pioneer, teacher, and innovator of single rope technique that revolutionized vertical caving. A loud standing ovation followed the presentation.

#### F. Bylaws Committee - Bill Boehle and Terry Mitchell.

Terry Mitchell reported that there were no new changes this year. There are a few minor housekeeping items that we will probably address next year.

G. Web Page - Gary Bush webmaster. Gary reported that we are up-to-date, although the basic look of the website has not changed since the late 1990s. If anyone has any suggestions as to any content or links they would like to see on the site, they should contact him. Gary also reported that he has received many photos for the photo gallery on the website where we can display photos from past events. The most recent photos are from 2009. If anyone has photos of past meetings, contests, or other events, they should send them to Gary Bush to be included. Please identify dates, locations and people, if possible. Photos should be in 800x600 or 600x800 size format.

H. Outreach Committee - Marty Reames. Terry Mitchell presented the report for Marty who could not make it to convention this year. Terry reflected that at last years convention we discussed the need to increase our membership numbers, to address the aging of our membership by recruiting younger members, and to better involve those younger members to provide for future leadership of the organization. Following the convention, the Executive Committee (EC) established the Outreach Committee to pursue a series of goals to achieve our objectives. Marty was appointed Chairperson of the committee and empowered to recruit other members to serve on the committee. This was done and included Dave Schmidt, Jon Schow, Paul Ryan, and Ray Sira who is also member of the EC. The committee finally got started and a report was presented to the EC last week. This report outlined 5 courses of action that they would like to implement: 1. Enhance Online Communication; 2. Reach out to the Grottos; 3. Educate New Vertical Section Members; 4. Coordinate Fun Events; and 5. Submit Articles to the NSS News about vertical activity. The EC approved the Plan of Action and provided some further guidance. Further details can be found in the EC meeting minutes. Ray Sira provided some additional comments as an Outreach Committee member. Ray stated that it took some time to get the committee formed and for them to begin meeting. Most of the work was done in the last two months before convention. They made some good progress in a short period of time and will now move forward with implementation.

#### V. Old Business:

A. None.

#### VI. New Business:

A. The NSS has recently purchased a new building in the Huntsville area for it's expanded headquarters. Dave Hughes, who is the NSS Archivist for the HQ, spoke to the need for people to consider during their estate planning to get any historic vertical equipment to the NSS so that it can be preserved as part of the NSS Museum that will have expanded space as part of the NSS HQ complex.

B. The new NSS HQ in Huntsville is the focus of fundraising efforts to pay down the mortgage as soon as possible. There are many options available to contribute to this effort and Dick Mitchell (who is also on the BOG) briefly went over them. A plea was also made for the Vertical Section to consider making a donation to the new headquarters mortgage fund. A discussion followed on if the section would like to make a donation, and, if so, for how much. A motion was made (Ernie Coffman) and seconded (Ed Sira) to make a donation of \$2000. More discussion followed. It was suggested that we should get some of the "buy a bricks" (\$100 each) with the Vertical Section name inscribed on them that are one of the fundraising options. Gary Bush (also on the NSS BOG) explained some of the other donation options that are available. One of the options is to be a "benefactor" for an amount of \$1000 or more, where your name would be inscribed

in the entry hall of the new building. Dick Mitchell pointed out that there will be accommodations made in the entryway atrium for rigging points for vertical activities. It was suggested that the Vertical Section could be a "benefactor" for these vertical facilities. Bill Cuddington commented that the Vertical Section should have some input on the design of any vertical facilities to ensure that they are adequate for their purpose. Both Dick and Gary (for the BOG) assured us that Section input would be part of the final design of any vertical rigging points. Bill Boehle (VS Treasurer) stated that he believed the \$2000 donation suggested was too large a portion of our cash reserves. He felt that a \$1000 donation was more reasonable and still qualified as a "benefactor" donation. Gary Bush also explained that we could do the donation in a matching challenge format with our members. Discussion continued. Gary Storrick made a motion that was seconded by Bill Boehle to amend the original motion to change the donation to \$1000. After discussion the motion to amend carried. A motion was also made, seconded, and carried to amend the motion to designate that the \$1000 donation to the building fund would be a "benefactor" donation as discussed previously. The final amended motion was voted on and carried.

Gary Bush made a motion (seconded by Ed Sira) that the Vertical Section issue a matching challenge that it will donate up to \$250 (dollar-for-dollar) for all donations made to the NSS Headquarters Fund by VS members by 7/31/2012. Donations so marked will be tallied by the NSS Office who will notify us at the end of the challenge period. The motion carried.

The hat was passed for the "buy a brick" program and \$200 was raised to buy two bricks to be inscribed for the Vertical Section. NOTE: Money for this and for our "benefactor" donation was paid to the NSS Bookstore later in the day after the business meeting.

#### VII. Elections:

A. Secretary/Treasurer (1 year term) - Bill Boehle was nominated and reelected by acclamation.

B. At-Large Board Members (2 year term, 2 to be elected) - Dick Mitchell, Terry Mitchell, and Mike Rusin were nominated. A ballot of the section members present was conducted. Terry Mitchell and Mike Rusin were elected by a majority of the votes cast. [Note: Current At-Large members Miriam Cuddington and Ray Sira have 1 year remaining in their terms.]

VIII. Adjournment - Motion to adjourn was made and carried. Time of adjournment was approximately 4:05 PM.

[Additional note: Subsequent to the Meeting, the Board Members elected Terry Mitchell as Chair and Ray Sira as Vice Chair. The four appointed members were re-appointed to serve for another year. They are:

- \* Contest Committee - Bill Cuddington
- \* Vertical Techniques Workshop Committee - Terry Clark (Assistant: Lynn Fielding)
- \* Education Committee - Bruce Smith
- \* Nylon Highway Editor - Tim White

Respectfully submitted,  
Bill Boehle

(Rev. 1)

To be approved at 2013 Convention meeting