

Country EXTRA Country EXTRA

Windmills, Silos Are Nebraskans' 'Mountains'

What do you do when you're a young flatlands farmer whose hobby is mountain climbing? You practice your technique on the tallest things you can find!

MOTORISTS driving north out of Aurora, Nebraska are no longer startled to see young people walking

By Gary Hansen

backward off the tops of silos.

Has Nebraska gone mad, you ask? Nope, it's just a group of young farmers practicing their hobby of mountaineering, according to an article in *Farm & Ranch Living*, a national magazine that features the life styles of American farmers and ranchers.



Since the Cornhusker State has no Everests or Matterhorns to conquer, the young folks north of Aurora make do with what they have—they practice climbing and rappelling off high silos and an occasional windmill.

They do travel to mountainous areas when time allows between field-work and raising cattle and hogs. Understanding families fill in while the "mountaineers" head for the high ground.

In addition to the beauty of mountain areas, the Nebraskans enjoy the

"You see the ground straight down as you lean away from the silo..."

challenge and exhilaration of making their way to the tops of the cliffs or lofty peaks. They've climbed Devil's Tower in Wyoming more than once, and some have even climbed Mount Rainier in Washington. But most of the climbing is closer to home—in the canyons around Boulder, Colorado.

To keep in shape and to practice climbing techniques for these challenging peaks, they are more often found rappelling off Dad's silo. (For you non-climbers, "rappelling" is the fast way down, once you've reached the top.)

First Step Hardest

Some special equipment is required, and there are certain methods for using it safely. With the equipment set up properly, rappelling



down the side of a silo isn't really as hazardous as it looks. (Editor's Note: Without proper instruction and accurate setup, rappelling *can* be dangerous, and we would strongly warn against it for any inexperienced climber.)

The most difficult—scary is a better term—part of descending from

the top of a silo is getting yourself over the edge—backward. First, the nylon rope stretches considerably to make one uneasy. Second, you see the ground between your legs—straight down—as you lean away from the silo. Veteran climbers will tell you that the height seems to be at least *four times* what it was when you were on the ground, looking up!

Like a Rubber Band

Once the technique is mastered, downward progress can be made one step at a time... or 30 ft. at a single drop. As the rope stretches, you feel as though you're on the end of a giant rubber band! That's part of the exhilaration the young "mountaineers" talk about.

So, if you're driving through south-central Nebraska and spot someone leaping backward off a silo, don't panic. More than likely it's only a budding mountain climber doing his homework.



HANGING AROUND. These young Nebraskans climb real mountains during vacations or holidays. In between times, however, they sharpen their skills around the farm on just about anything they can scale. In top photo, Dennis Elge pulls self up an old windmill, then joins friends "rappelling" on the silo. At left, Dennis practices with Kevin Williams while, above, Kathy Friesen reaches the top on her own.

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