

Area mountaineer recounts tackling Mexican peak

By ED BAS

Emil Hutton talked about being sick for much of his walk up Popocatepetl (po-po-ka-tep-pet-l), the second highest mountain in North America.

"The audience loved it and tried to imagine the whistling wind, the desolate ice and snow, and the feelings of the mountain climber."

Hutton gave his account of the February climb to an audience of 20 at the Benchmark shop in Avon. Townspeople avoided the clutter of the outdoorsman. Mad River canoes and Phoenix kayaks tangled from the ceiling.

The Livonia resident doesn't pretend his excursion was all beer and skittles. He had the flu nearly the whole time and wasn't ready for some of the Mexican culture he faced.

Mexico has the third, fifth and seventh highest mountains in North America. Mounts Chaltapeetl, Popocatepetl and Iztaccihuatl are part of the Sierra Madre and Sierra Occidental ranges that descend the backbones of two continents from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego. The three mountains are between 17,300 and 18,700 feet. Mt. McKinley, in Alaska, is 20,000 feet.

HUTTON HAS been climbing for 12 years.

Part of his trip was taken up by the flu and cultural shock.

"Mexico City has a population of about 13 million, with a 30 per cent unemployment rate," he said. "The minimum daily wage is about \$5. And Pisa, Italy, isn't the only place in the world that has problems with sinking buildings."

Preparing for the climb up Popocatepetl, Hutton and his party of three visited lands that once belonged to the Incas and walked tiled streets once walked by Montezuma and Cortez.

"One street is known as the 'street of death.' It is where they apparently sacrificed people by cutting their hearts out," Hutton said.

Left the retelling sound, too discouraging. Hutton's slides made up for it with the panorama of beauty in the mountains.

"We had no snakes or scorpions to worry about," Hutton said. "And there are huts all along the way so we didn't have to carry a tent."

Some of the huts bore inscriptions on the walls from past visitors through the years, many from as far away as England and Austria.

On the way back from their trip, Hutton met a party of Japanese climbers, whom they exchanged food and tea with.

MOST OF the ascent was more a walk than a climb. But it was a steep rise in some cases, over ice-slicked snow.

"You got the feeling of really climb-

ing by walking closer to the edge," he said. "And since we were all roped together, everyone would yell at you if you got too close."

Hutton walked with mountain-climbing steel teeth, called crampons, attached to his boots. He also carried an ice axe to dig in with in case of a fall to stop any slide. Temperatures were in the lower 40s, but Hutton said a howling wind made it seem colder.

"We had only a few sunsets because of the clouds," he said, "but the clouds themselves were spectacular. They would blow up in a matter of three or

four minutes."

Some of the landscape was harsh and alien. Weather conditions caused some of the snow to form into what looked like white stalagmites, glistening needles that rose from the ground like frozen teeth.

"The walk was fun without being really dangerous," he said, though he has also done the more dangerous kind of climbing that most people picture in terms of mountain-climbing.

Hutton is co-owner of the Avon and Farmington Benchmarks. Sandy Graham, manager of the Avon shop, just

returned from a week-long climbing trip in Colorado with steep ascents, belaying and rappelling "and a lot of hard work."

ONE OF THE dangers Hutton faced, more than falling, was the threat of an avalanche.

"New snow falls over old layers of ice," he said, "and the different levels just don't sit well. Sometimes even your voice can set one off."

Hutton and his party made the climb within 1,000 feet of the summit before turning back.

THURSDAY, JUNE 8, 1978

(P-1C)10/12

"Here we are with the last picture we took before turning back," he said. "You'll notice each of us is trying to step back a little before the camera clicks so we'll be the one nearest the summit."

More cultural shock greeted them on their trip back.

"We stopped at a gas station where the toilet paper in the lavatory was just week's TV Guide. And we had to drive three hours to cover 13 miles to get back to our car."

"The trip was in an ancient four-wheel-drive car with about five levers

on the floor. We had to help the driver shift and hang onto the doors as we went."

Hutton began to climb during college in Arizona. He said his object for the talk was to educate.

"Education is the ability to cause people to want to learn more," he said. "And if they don't use the outdoors, they'll pave it."

Hutton is an advocate of what he calls "self-propelled recreation—hiking, biking, climbing."

"You get to set your own level of achievement," he said.

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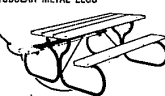
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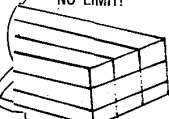
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