

AGGIE life

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The Great Outdoors

By jumping out of planes or scaling rocks, A&M students have found ways to add a little adventure to their lives

By April Towery
THE BATTALION

Whether it's floating aimlessly through the air or holding onto a rock 700 feet above the ground, Aggies do more than go to the Chicken on weekends.

Gene Kim, a senior mechanical engineering major, said he has been rock climbing for about three years and enjoys the thrill of seeing things from a different perspective.

"I had a friend who was climbing and so I tried it out, and when I got to the top I saw a really cool view," Kim said. "It's so exciting to see God's creation from the top of a mountain."

Rock climbing and skydiving have become more popular with their increased availability at Texas A&M.

The Student Recreation Center offers a one-hour rock-climbing orientation class for \$10. Participants receive a sticker allowing them to climb anytime. Many have taken the class aside from A&M students, from young children to older adults.

There are usually two experienced staff members supervising the rock climbing activities at the Rec Center, but it can still be dangerous if one is not careful.

"It really depends on how you climb and if you're leading or top roping," Kim said. "It can be as dangerous as sitting in your kitchen or jumping off a two-story building and hoping you live. It's not

dangerous at all if you do it right." Although climbing at the Rec Center is popular, Kim said it is nothing like actually climbing a rock in The Valley or Tahoe.

"There's really no comparison," Kim said. "Climbing at the Rec is only good for training. I usually travel to Austin, Reimers or Green Belt."

Kim, who has also been mountain biking and bungee jumping, said rock climbing is one of his favorite adventures.

"When I was 700 feet up in The Valley hanging off the side of a wall, I was just like, 'Wow,'" Kim said. "It really hits you when you're seeing everything so differently from how it is seen on land."

Kim said he would like to climb at a variety of places worldwide.

"I've heard so many good things about Joshua Tree and Red Rocks," Kim said. "I think they would be really great places to climb because of the scenery."

"It's so exciting to see God's creation from the top of a mountain."

— GENE KIM
senior mechanical engineering major

Although many rocks have been damaged because of people's carelessness, Kim said rock climbers are not responsible for the damaged rocks.

"Climbers are usually really environmentally conscious," Kim said. "When a rock is spray-painted or defaced, it is usually done by campers or teenagers, not the climbers."

Jillian Stewart, one of Kim's rock-climbing buddies, recently went skydiving with Aggies Over Texas.

Stewart, a sophomore biomedical science major, said skydiving is a great opportunity.

"We took a six-hour training course and learned the different parts of the parachute and gear," Stewart said. "We

also learned what to do if problems arose, such as the parachute not opening, and the various landing situations."

Skydiving is generally looked upon as a risk-taking activity, and although a lot of people say they want to do it, few actually take the chance.

"It's kind of one of those things where you have to put your money where your mouth is," Stewart said.

"You'll never be able to get that kind of rush again. It is scary at first, but once your canopy is open, it's a lot of fun."

Strangely, Stewart has never been fond of heights, but she said she wanted to try skydiving to prove to herself she could conquer her fear.

"It really helped me get over my fear of heights," Stewart said. "You see a different view of everything."

Static-line skydiving begins around 3,000 feet in the air, and the rip cord pulls itself when the diver falls. Free falling is a jump with two instructors holding onto the diver from up to 10,000 feet. In free falling, the diver pulls his or her own rip cord.

Although skydiving magazines say a large number of deaths occur, Stewart said there are not many skydiving deaths per year.

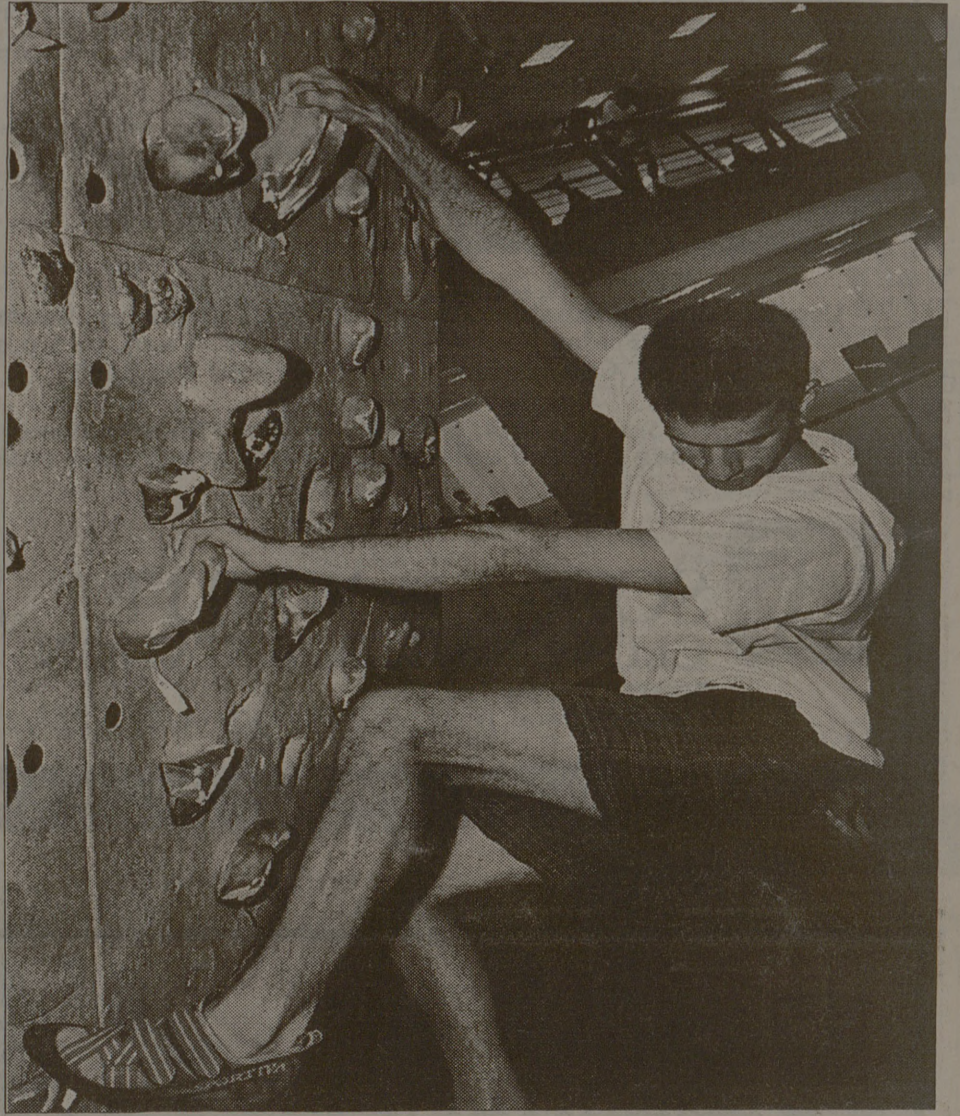
"The most common injury is a sprained ankle," Stewart said. "And that's usually self-inflicted from landing wrong."

Stewart said the wind has a large effect on a person's ability to skydive.

"I wasn't able to skydive on the day of my training course because it was too windy," Stewart said. "The parachute only goes 15 miles per hour."

Stewart said the instructors teased her because she was practically sitting in the pilot's lap when it was her turn to make the jump.

"It was so scary looking down. I was like, 'Why am I doing this?'" Stewart said. "But then once I started floating, it was the coolest thing. There's no other experience like it."



Pat James, THE BATTALION

Shawn Weber, a sophomore microbiology major, practice his rock climbing skills at the Student Recreation Center.

KISS OF DEATH

"Now, I'm all for staying young at heart ... but these people have gone too far."

I remember how badly KISS scared me when I was young. Their crazy makeup, black leather outfits, pyromania and outrageously long tongues practically gave me nightmares.



AMY UPTMOR
COLUMNIST

Still, I was amused by KISS, and as I grew older, I gained some appreciation of the contribution the band made to the world of music — no matter how, um, unusual they were.

Then came my opportunity to cover the KISS reunion concert in Houston. After suffering through the hordes of annoying, tacky fans, the Houston heat and a barely amusing opening set by Austin's Pushmonkey, the frightening four took the stage.

My conclusion is this: I'm still scared of KISS. I'm not so much scared of the band anymore. KISS was, to say the least, an interesting band to see live. The costumes and fire added to the imagery of these monsters of rock.

The crowd, however, was a little reminiscent of being in a live "Beavis and Butthead" episode, and that's what scared me.

What KISS revolved around in their heyday, as best as a 22-year-old can estimate, was rebellion. It defied the traditional image of a band, even of music. And the fans loved it — as they still do. Unfortunately, I'm afraid most of them still believe it's 1976.

Now, I'm all for staying young at heart and partying like a rock star, but these people have gone too far. Saturday night, I was exposed to women my mom's age showing more skin than I do at pool parties, drunk old men headbanging to the point of whiplash, frosted eye makeup, teased hair, and classy phrases such as, "Forty bucks? Jeez, why don't you just take my left nut?" (referring to the outrageous ticket prices, not the astounding beer prices at the Summit)

These people are the reason Jenny Jones has a career.

These are the people who beat up my dad in high school.

What started out as simple rebellion through music has turned into a way of life, making me wonder whether reunion tours are such a good idea.

Good music grows even better with nostalgia and memory, which only come with time. Such

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KISS

Travolta, Sedgwick add reality to Phenomenon

By Amy Uptmor
THE BATTALION

Phenomenon is the story of George Malley (John Travolta), a slightly dimwitted, middle-aged mechanic and amateur farmer who can't seem to keep a pesky rabbit from eating his lettuce plants.

One night, George sees the light — literally — and realizes that if he sets the rabbit free, it will leave his lettuce alone and his problems will be solved.

This simple metaphor leads George through life after his "experience," which both scares and amuses his small-town friends, who long to hear wild stories of alien abductions and previews of the end of the world from their gifted and changed friend.

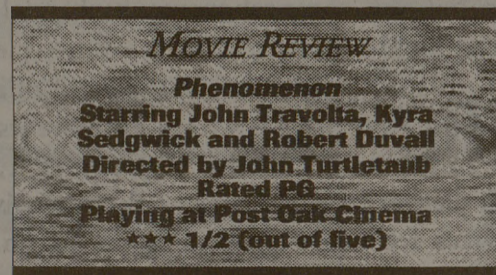
George's newfound powers help him win the heart of the woman who owns his affection, Lace (Kyra Sedgwick).

Lace doesn't want any confusion or complications in her life, hence she doesn't want to be involved with a man ever again.

But George's sweet, naive view of his intelligence and almost supernatural powers show her that loving him couldn't be less of an inconvenience, and she finally gives in.

Travolta brings sincerity and charm to the role of George, the quintessential misunderstood genius who doesn't even really understand himself.

Travolta is convincing as a man who has been blessed with a capacity of knowledge never before seen in a human being. Travolta gives an intimate por-



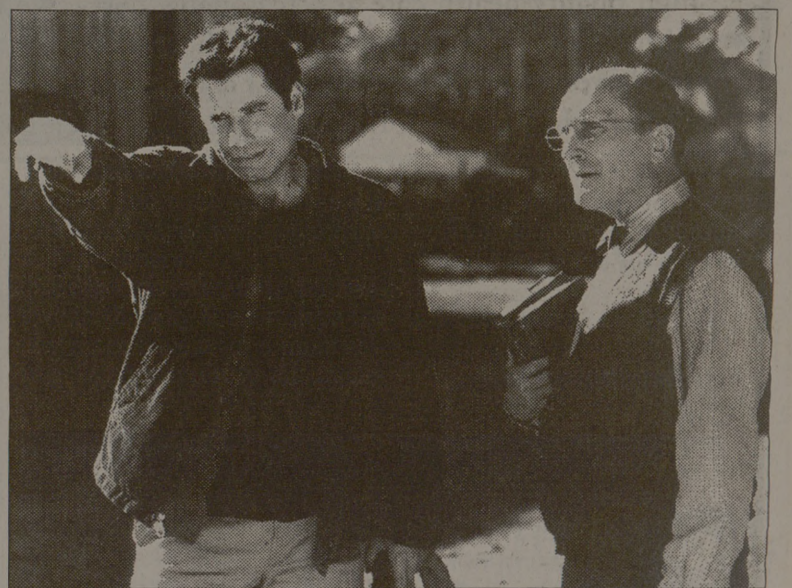
standing and loving partner for George.

Her down-to-earth acting makes Lace a lovable character who is easy to relate to.

Robert Duvall and Forest Whitaker provide excellent support to the leads as George's father-figure doctor and slow-witted best friend.

They play the two characters from George's past who stand by George and still recognize him as a person, despite his "powers."

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As a result of an extraordinary occurrence, George Malley's (John Travolta) seemingly unremarkable life takes a wondrous turn.