



Matt Wiech places a camming device in a crack along Slanting Ledge on Upper Washbowl's Wiessner Route.

In a giant's footsteps

■ *EMS guide Matt Wiech never tires of taking rock-climbing clients up a historical route on Upper Washbowl Cliff.*

By Phil Brown

FRITZ WIESSNER is a legend in the history of rock climbing, and he put up many stellar routes in the Northeast: in the Shawangunks in downstate New York, on Ragged Mountain in Connecticut, in the White Mountains in New Hampshire, and right here in the Adirondacks.

All told, he pioneered some eighteen routes in the Adirondacks, including one of the earliest (in 1938) on Wallface, the region's tallest cliff. His most famous route is the Empress on Chapel Pond Slab, which the guidebook *Adirondack Rock* awards five stars, its highest rating for a climb's overall quality.

But Matt Wiech's favorite Fritz route is on Upper Washbowl, a vertical wall on the west side of Giant Mountain. He likes it not only for its historical significance and the variety of the climbing, but also for the breathtaking views of Chapel Pond far below and the High Peaks to the west.

"It's a treat whenever you get to climb this cliff," remarks Wiech, a guide for the Eastern Mountain Sports Climbing School in Lake Placid.

Certainly, the climb is more intriguing than its name: Wiessner Route. You can find similarly named routes in other parts of the country, a testament to the German immigrant's passion for adventure and travel. Indeed there are four other Wiessner Routes just in the Adirondacks: on Wallface, Noonmark Mountain, Mount Colden, and Indian Head. And there is a Wiessner-Austin Route on Big Slide Mountain. For sheer prosaicness, though, it's hard to beat "Old Route," the appellation of four other Wiessner creations in the Adirondacks, on Noonmark, Hurricane Crag, Chapel Pond Gully Cliff, and Rooster Comb.

When first done, these were tough climbs. In Wiessner's heyday, in the 1930s and 1940s, people climbed in hiking boots and protected themselves with hemp ropes (liable to snap) and pitons. The motto then was "the leader must not fall." Given today's sticky-soled shoes, nylon ropes, and chocks and camming devices that can be slotted into

cracks, most of Wiessner's routes are now regarded as fairly easy—which makes them appealing to novice and intermediate climbers with an appreciation of history.

As an EMS guide, Wiech is usually leading clients up moderate routes. Expert climbers, after all, seldom need to hire a guide. Wiech has a whole repertory of such routes, including the one on Upper Washbowl. Some of the others are Pete's Farewell on Pitchoff Cliff, Quadrophenia on Hurricane Crag, Tilman's Arete overlooking Chapel Pond, and Regular Route on Chapel Pond Slab. Though an expert himself, he never tires of doing the easier stuff.

"Some of my favorite days in the mountains are climbing more moderate terrain but covering a lot of ground," he says.

"There is something to be said for moving smoothly and quickly on rock rather than always being at your limit."

And so he doesn't mind taking me up Upper Washbowl's Wiessner Route even though he has already done it three times this year. Early on a fall morning, I pick him up at his home in Saranac Lake. On the forty-five-minute drive to the trailhead, we chat about his love of climbing.

Wiech, who is thirty, has been climbing more than half his life. When he was fourteen, he went to

