

## Daredevilish work

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### Specialists nudge, budge rock above Route 28

The boulder was as big as a car. For as long as Route 28 has been in existence, it had been suspended about 200 feet above the highway on a rock wall in Harmar, a notorious hillside best known for its tendency to buckle during freeze and thaw cycles and send rocks crashing down onto the roadway.

Yesterday, two acrobatically inclined French Canadian rock specialists, hanging off the cliff from ropes, pried the boulder off the wall with giant crowbars. In less than two hours, their efforts paid off.

With precision timing, Mark Thibeault, a 14-year veteran of the rocks, swung away as the giant boulder that he and Pierre Rousseau had been prying loose let go and crashed onto the road bed below.

"They're crazy," said one worker for a local company that was assisting them.

"It is only dangerous if you don't know what you are doing," said their boss, Daniel Journeaux, 38, president of Janod Inc., a highly specialized company based in Quebec and Vermont that is going to try to tame what may be Harmar's most aggravating hillside, parts of which are about 300 feet high.

Journeaux spent part of yesterday on the rock hillside himself, working with a handful of men who used high-pressure air blowers and crowbars to remove loose rocks from the face of the limestone and shale cliff formations.

By afternoon, Journeaux said, his workers started to attack the hillside with a machine called a "boulder buster," which sets electronic charges to disengage loose hunks of rocks. They drilled a line of holes in the rocks and filled them with water: Using the machine, they set off charges that "split the rock," he said.

The state Department of Transportation hired Janod contractors to try to solve its problem with a large section of hillside along Route 28 between the Harmarville and RIDC Park exits. Falling rocks are chronic problem there. In that 400 foot stretch, a massive rock slide in January closed the south bound lanes of the road for a week.

PennDOT engineer Ralph Beerbower said there are only about four companies who are equipped to stabilize rock formations such as those on the hillside. Janod is one of those companies.

To divert motorists away from the workers, PennDOT took advantage of new crossover lanes built last month to maintain traffic flow when landslides occur. The highway is expected to be restricted for about 10 days.

Yesterday, workers from Michael Eacchiano Contracting Inc. moved Jersey barriers into the area where the rock work was being done to keep the falling debris from spilling onto the median strip.

This is not work for the faint of heart.

Journeaux, who lives in Ontario and has been scaling rock walls in Canada and the United States since he was 16, said it takes about four years to train a worker.

"The first year, they listen and hang on. They have never worked on ropes before," he said.

Journeaux's father, Douglas, founded Janod Inc. in Quebec in 1968 to help stabilize rocks along a railway used by Quebec Cartier Mining Co.

In addition to removing rock, Janod builds rock and wire mesh fencing.

There are so few companies doing work of this kind in the United States that Journeaux opened a second office in Swanton, Vt., in 1994.

When he leaves the Harmar site, Journeaux is heading to Washington state, where he will help install an anti-avalanche system at a ski resort there.

Journeaux said that the best way to control a slide area is to keep monitoring it and removing the rocks.

On the railway for Quebec Cartier Mining, he said, his company "stabilized rocks for 20 years" until the problem finally subsided.

"We have not done any work for Quebec Cartier Mining for six years," he said.