

CANADIAN ALPINE JOURNAL 2002



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BELATED THANKS

Mark Twain once wrote that the only people who should ever use the singular “we” are either royalty or people with tapeworms, and this year I thought I would use this space to clarify that I haven’t been claiming either noble blood or admitting to parasites when I’ve used the term over the last ten years. There really is a “we” behind the *CAJ*, and those people all deserve to share in your kind comments during my time at this desk.

At the head office of The Alpine Club of Canada, the Executive Director, Bruce Keith, has been a staunch ally of the *CAJ*, helping through budgets thick and thin, and keeping in mind the bigger purpose of the journal in the face of some complicated political pressures. Standing right beside both Bruce and me over my entire term has been Leslie DeMarsh, in charge of gathering the patrons of the *CAJ* and connecting it to Club activities and sections. Leslie left the Club between last year’s journal and this one, and we’ve lost a great friend with her moving on. (However, her replacement, Audrey Wheeler, has already shown herself to be more than committed to the future of your journal.)

Also working directly with me at the head office have been, until a few years ago, Chris Haberl, a wizard at organizing all the material that comes in and out for the *CAJ*, and, more recently, Josée Larochelle in the same unenviable role.

The Publications Committee — and especially its leader, Bob Sandford — has also been fundamental in maintaining the integrity of the *CAJ*. Bob is a tireless advocate for all mountain literature, and he has repeatedly defended the need for ensuring that the *CAJ* has the resources to adequately reflect the scope of the Canadian scene. Bob was also the much-deserving winner of the 2001 Summit of Excellence Award at the Banff Mountain Film Festival.

For the last five years, Anne Ryall has been working very directly with me as copy editor. For never enough reward, Anne has been the one who has weeded through as many as 185,000 words (last year), checking for every misspelled mountain name and every punctuation oversight and ensuring that this collection of articles by a variety of authors is eminently readable. Anne gives up weeks of her own climbing so that you have something to peruse when the weather’s bad.

Finally, we’ve had a remarkable commitment from a wide range of patrons over the years — people and organizations who’ve long believed in keeping the *CAJ* alive. The list you see every year grossly under-represents the generosity and spirit of these contributors. This year, I’m especially honoured to add one more name to the ranks of patrons. When the ACC lost Eric Brooks this past year, we were deeply saddened; our loss has been leavened, however, by the announcement that Eric made a remarkable bequest to this publication. As Eric passed on, he left all of us a permanent trust of \$50,000 for the *CAJ*. In all the pieces you read this year, Eric’s love of climbing lives on. Thank you so much, Sir.

GEOFF POWTER

The opinions and information contained in the *CAJ* are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the positions of either the editor or The Alpine Club of Canada. While we attempt to check the articles for accuracy as best we can, it is not possible to do so authoritatively in all cases. Please use caution regarding ratings, route information, etc.

INSTRUCTIONS TO CONTRIBUTORS

The *Canadian Alpine Journal* welcomes contributions from all interested readers, in either English or French. If possible, submit a 3.5" disk, Macintosh or PC format, with a hard copy included. E-mail submissions are also welcome — try RTF format.

Submission deadline is January 15, 2003.

Photos are welcome, either as original slides, prints from negatives, or high-res Photo CD images. Clearly label and credit all photos.

Please send all submissions to:

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Front cover: Bruce Kirkby on Mount Waddington. *Chris Ferguson*

Inside front: Graham McLean on Denali’s West Buttress. *Rob Owens*

Previous page: Evening light on Lowell Glacier peaks. *David E. Williams*

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Back cover: Sylvia Forest on Cabeza de Condoruri, Bolivia. *Forest Collection*

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VANCOUVER _____





SKAGWAY

THE TRAVERSE

**THE FIRST COMPLETE
SKI OF THE COAST
MOUNTAINS**

**BY GUY EDWARDS
WITH VANCE CULBERT
& JOHN MILLAR
PHOTOS BY DAN CLARK
AND KARI MEDIG**



THE COAST RANGE SKI TRAVERSE was a self-propelled ski-mountaineering traverse along the spine of the Coast Mountains of western British Columbia and southeast Alaska. In total, 2015 kilometres were skied, climbed or bushwhacked between the tidewater Pitt Lake, near Vancouver, through to Skagway, at the north end of the Alaskan panhandle. The trip lasted for five and a half months — from February 2, 2001, to July 16, 2001. It was a long voyage in a harsh mountain environment with little human comfort, and it required a lot of physical and mental endurance. At times this voyage seemed to stretch ahead for eternity, but it is now just a collection of memories.

POST-TRIP MUSINGS

Three of us left Vancouver on February 2, 2001. John Millar, Dan Clark and I started walking up the muddy, overgrown logging roads along the Pitt River in a torrential downpour. Within minutes from the start of what was to be a long, long journey, we were cold and soaked through to the skin. Our packs were the heaviest they would be during the whole trip (about 85 pounds), and our bodies were not yet accustomed to the stress and toil. I asked myself, What am I getting myself into? However, all the uncertainty of the moment was overshadowed by the fact that we were finally starting a journey that we had been planning for so long.

Over the previous five months, we had devoted most of our time to organizing the logistics, planning the food, rummaging up gear and equipment and figuring out the route that we would take through these rugged coastal mountains. Our final month of preparation, January 2001, was incredibly hectic. Approximately 14 hours a day were spent buying, measuring, sampling, packing and finally shipping our 24 food caches. We reasoned that if we could survive each other's company during that time of intensity and stress, we could easily survive the actual trip. We were all looking forward to the calm, uncomplicated and focused existence of a ski mountaineer.

After the first four days of torrential rain and snow, including one tent-bound day, the weather cleared up. Uncharacteristic sunny weather and the resulting good travelling conditions enabled us to cover considerable distances. We soon adjusted to the inevitable change of pace from town time to long-trip time.

Vance Culbert joined us in Pemberton after we had covered 150 kilometres over 10 days of cold February travel. Vance had been waylaid with a bad ankle and fractured forearm from an earlier ice-climbing accident. In keeping with the self-propelled aim of the trip, he rode his bicycle from Vancouver to meet us.

The sunny weather of February 2001 allowed us to reach and cross the Lillooet Glacier, and traverse around to the Homathko Icefield — all in less than two weeks. We had planned to take one and a half months to cover that distance! All the extra food created an atmosphere unlike that on most ski trips, which are generally times of rationing and restraint. We were well fed and very happy; there was more than enough chocolate to go around.

However, the reliable weather did not last forever.

Extract from Vance's journal, March 2:

Stepping beyond the camp walls on Day 3 of a winter storm on the Homathko Icefield proved to be a bit of a struggle. Fresh and blowing snow had erased any sign of the protective snow walls, which had stood one and a half metres high at the start of the storm. Instead, the two double tents we now call home occupy a steadily shrinking pit that has to be re-excavated every couple of hours.

Having clambered to the lip of the pit, I found that walking forward necessitated plowing a chest-deep trough. The swirling snow in the air was indistinguishable from the snow on the ground. After just a few metres, the camp was out of sight, leaving my track as the only feature to be seen. In this completely white world, with strong winds and no visibility, one's sense of orientation is severely challenged.

Noting how quickly my track was filling in, I resigned myself to returning to our tiny world, crawling back into my damp sleeping bag and snuggling up with my snow-filled water bottle. Though we still had a few days of supplies left, we had no way of knowing when the storm would lift, so we had started to melt drinking water with body heat in order to conserve fuel.

When the storm finally broke after three claustrophobic days in our tiny tents, we were not as free as we had hoped. In the first hour of trailbreaking through three feet of fresh snow, John managed to wallow a grand distance of about 300 metres. We started alternating trailbreaking duties every 15 minutes, and finally got up to the Klattasine col — three kilometres in six hours!



Fortunately, on the northeast side of the col, the amount of fresh snow was much less. We easily glided downhill, even carved some turns, to meet the snowed-over logging roads of the Homathko River valley.

Although we were out of the much more hazardous alpine, the most serious accident of the trip occurred on the logging road as we headed down towards Bute Inlet. We were skiing along in the late dusk, trying to get to the Scar Creek logging camp, where we hoped to have a food cache. Dan Clark hit a patch of exposed gravel on an otherwise snow-covered, skiable road. He was sent for a tumble; with terrible bad luck, he landed heavily and badly hurt his neck. (*See the attached story.*)

Dan managed to walk the further five kilometres with us into the logging camp. Five days later, he flew out to the nearest town of Campbell River, where his injuries were assessed and finally identified as severe fractures to his C1 and C2 vertebrae. Dan, who had done so much to organize the trip, was seriously injured and was certainly not going to be skiing for the next few months with us.

As luck would have it, we had previously arranged to have another friend join us at Knight Inlet and the Klinaklini River. I had persuaded Kari Medig to fly in and safely place our food caches for us on the Ha-Iltzuk and Monarch icefields. Kari was a good person to fill the void left within our group since losing Dan.

At the head of the Klinaklini Glacier, sixty kilometres north of Knight Inlet, we were trapped in our tents by another storm. For four days, we were pinned inside while the tempests blew and our snow pit became deeper and deeper. This time we had already been travelling for many days and were only one day away from our next food cache. We started running out of food and fuel, and our sleeping bags and insulating jackets were getting wet. We rationed our meals by more than half and were again melting snow with body heat. Everybody's patience was wearing thin. Our card games had become too competitive, and we had started snapping at each other. Finally, a sucker hole in the storm lured us out; over one long day, with improving weather (luckily), we made it to our next food cache.

ALL THE HARD WORK in planning our food caches and logistics certainly paid off when we were on the trip. A big fear on a remote trip such as ours was that we wouldn't find a food cache or that a food cache would be destroyed by wolverines or bears. Perhaps we were successful because we found all our food drops, we had enough food and we usually knew where we were going.

Arriving in the Bella Coola valley on March 26, 2001, we had our first experience with the culture shock of re-entering a community after almost two months by



ourselves in the mountains. We were ecstatic with the opportunities for good food, lots of interesting distractions, and new people to talk to. These brief contacts with other people seemed to re-energize us.

Vance's journal, March 30:

Things to Do around Bella Coola (with apologies to Gary Snyder)

- Blow a greeting into a horse's nose*
- Eat many plates of potato salad at a party*
- Listen to Norwegian missionaries and Nuxalk Christians swap life stories*
- Contemplate salmon skeletons on the riverbank*
- Meet the entire population of Precipice, B.C.: 4*
- Dream about sailing down the Coast*
- Make a hot stone sauna on the flood plain*
- Hitchhike in order to meet people*
- Listen to people explain why grizzly bear hunting should be legal*
- Listen to people explain why grizzly bear hunting should be illegal*

North of Bella Coola, there is substantially less glaciation and the peaks are somewhat lower. The sleds we had previously used to tow heavy loads across the vast icefields were no longer useful as travel became a process of skiing up passes and back down into valleys — going up into and back down out of the alpine several times each day. The traverse between Bella Coola and Terrace had never been done before, which certainly added to the feeling of exploration and independence. This month-long leg was broken by a rest day at the unexpectedly fine facilities at

Alcan's Kemano hydroelectric-generation station. After only one day of rest in Kemano, we went back up into the snow and mountains and continued north to Terrace on a more glaciated divide.

Kari's journal, April 23:

It's a different type of life, spending from a third to a half of one's time in a tent, very close to — in fact, right beside — another person. We're usually all quite tired, so we sleep long and well, though sometimes it's hard to ignore the occasional bump from the other person shifting in their sleep.

John usually gets up first in the morning and passes over our hot chocolate, then porridge. Soon after, we break camp and head out, skiing for four to seven hours. Usually the skiing is mellow, allowing for lots of contemplation time, and sometimes there are nice turns to be made or there is sketchy terrain to be negotiated. Lunchtime is a picnic: cheese, sausage, crackers, hummus, gorp, chocolate and whatever. More travelling after lunch, until we're all tired and we realize that it's time to stop. Dinner's always a huge, mega-calorie affair and I usually give my leftovers to Vance, the "human stomach".

My stomach is pretty particular — actually, I'm lactose-intolerant — and since the food wasn't packed with that in mind, I can't really eliminate all milk products. Vance, being my tent mate, was the unlucky recipient tonight of my body's distaste for milk: exquisitely pungent odours. I wafted the smells out of my sleeping bag in his direction — and, wow, what a response! I finally got revenge for all those other times!



Terrace was our halfway point — two and three-quarter months and 1080 kilometres after starting. We said goodbye to Kari Medig, and Lena Rowat joined us as our new fourth person. Lena and her sister Ruby had just independently completed the Vancouver to Bella Coola portion of the ski traverse (only the third time that it had been skied as a continuous traverse).

We were excited about having Lena join us, as she had terrific experience with long trips and was already fit from having skied for the previous two months. However, Lena had some apprehension about how fast we skied. Her concern was well founded; over the few months that we had been skiing, John, Vance and I had developed a very competitive spirit. Our pace was therefore fast and uncompromising, and we realized at this time that it had probably been frustrating to both Dan and Kari. Lena browbeat us into slowing down (while still covering as much distance), and we developed other ways to deal with our competitiveness. She also influenced us to talk over our problems more thoroughly before acting — a female attribute?

North of Terrace, the terrain becomes somewhat more broken; this was unexpectedly the region where we experienced some of our most challenging travel. Spring melt-off was also well underway by this time, making it necessary to travel in the early-morning hours after each night's freeze. Travelling became quite treacherous after about noon, when the frozen surface crust melted and the slopes became much more unstable, resulting in lots of avalanches.

Spring was quite noticeable in the Nass River valley, bringing with it numerous animal sightings, many

beautiful colours and the smell of pollen. Beyond the Nass, one starts to encounter smaller icefields again (Nisga'a, Cambria) just before dropping down the extremely steep valley walls into Stewart. By this point it was very late in spring: lower-elevation travel had turned into painstaking bushwhacking, and previously frozen creek beds had become raging torrents that had to be negotiated.

OUR FIRST FORAY INTO ALASKA was through the small but notorious town of Hyder. From then on, we would be zigzagging back and forth across the American-Canadian border as we made our way north. Travelling through amazingly rugged terrain up and over to the Iskut River brought us first to the active Eskay Creek Mine, and further on to some abandoned mines and the remote homes of the Kosseys and legendary “Trapper Dave” — fantastic, warm and generous people with whom it was great to spend a day or two.

We accessed the Andrei Icefield, on the rugged Iskut-Stikine divide, via the Hoodoo Glacier. The Hoodoo River springs up out of the gravel some fifty metres from the toe of the Hoodoo Glacier, leaving a narrow but passable trail between surreal blue walls of ice and the fast-flowing river. Our short route across the southwestern portion of the Andrei Icefield was unplanned, as we'd originally hoped to raft or canoe down the Iskut River. Even though we did not have the appropriate large-scale 1:50000 maps, we decided to attempt this sixty-kilometre section, where a steep, 3000-foot icefall presented a significant obstacle that we had to negotiate.



Guy's journal, June 6:

Up early to more claggy weather. Vance broke trail for a while, getting visibility and definition in the whiteout by tossing a red stuff sack onto the snow ahead of him. We managed to get up and over onto the Choquette Glacier when the cloud ceiling lifted to about 6200 feet.

We started down the upper icefall (note: we don't have the 1:50000-scale map for this) and quickly realized that we had to rope up when we saw how rough and crevasse-riddled it was. We skied back and forth lots, searching for a route, finally going over to the north side and steeply down below threatening seracs. I was ahead, trying to cross over a bergschrund (large crevasse/slot in the glacier), when the edges collapsed into the slot! Me too. I fell into the slot!

First I fell thirty feet, upside down into a "worm hole", before the rope caught me. Then a large block of ice fell from above and crashed into me. It pummelled me five feet lower, knocking my skis, poles and sunglasses off and grinding me into a little sub-slot.

Initially, I thought, Wow, I'm going to be hurt — but I was okay! A little shaken up perhaps, but not so much as a small graze to show for the accident.

After I had climbed out of the crevasse, the others all rappelled down the bergschrund and we quickly skied and scrambled out from the dangerous zone below the seracs. What a lucky and crazy eye-opening experience!

WE MANAGED TO NEGOTIATE a route through the icefall and to descend off the Choquette Glacier. A further eight kilometres of bushwhacking through some very arduous bush brought us to the mighty Stikine River. Mighty indeed — too mighty for us to swim across.

We were very fortunate at this point to meet another West Coast icon, Bob Gould. He was very supportive of our adventure; for their part, he and his wife, Céline, inspired us incredibly with their work, which involves raising public awareness of the transborder rivers (the Stikine and the Taku) and striving to preserve salmon stocks and the wilderness attributes of these rivers.

Beyond the Stikine River, the Coast Mountains become heavily glaciated and much more alpine in nature. There is very little vegetation to be encountered. These extensive icefields allow for huge distances of unbroken travel. On a few days, we were able to travel as much as 40 kilometres per day! The arrival of summer was no longer a concern while we were on these huge, almost flat fields of ice and snow. Some of the most memorable peaks of the range are here: Devils Thumb, the Cats Ears, Burketts Needle and Mount Ratz.

Cecelia's journal, June 14:

Full of excitement at the opportunity to see a new region of the world, I joined the gang at the Goulds' Great Glacier fish camp on the Stikine River, and brought some climbing gear to enable us to attempt to climb Devils Thumb.

Yesterday, Vance and I tried to climb the south ridge of the Thumb. We didn't have much of a route

DEFINING MOMENTS

THIS WINTER, I set out on the longest trip of my life with some wonderful new friends. With my heart set on adventure, I said my goodbyes to family and friends as if they were my last. They nearly were...

On a perfect moonlit night five weeks into the trip, I relax as I glide down a logging road beside the Homathko River. It has been a long and stressful day, and I let my guard down as I ski the last few kilometres to camp. Suddenly I am airborne and my world stops as my head crushes into the gravel. Raging pain engulfs my head, and confusion wraps its icy fingers around the fuzzy reality I try to discern — darkness and suffering. My own low moans wake my shattered being and prompt me to try to move. Underneath my pack I can scarcely lift my face out of the gravel to find my missing headlamp. Cold realities knock the breath from my throat when I feel blood pooling in my hair. I feel completely alone.

It seems an eternity before I extricate myself from my pack and skis. I scream into the void for help, but the sound from the nearby river swallows my pleas. I call again and again, yet the cold moon offers nothing but silence. In my agony I realize that I must look after myself and catch up to the group. They are only minutes ahead but might as well be miles away. Once I have found my headlamp, my world turns red with the blood from my head. Waves of stifling pain sweep over me with every breath and every tiny movement. The urge to stay still is strong, but I know that I might die if I lie down here! With robotic detachment and practised persistence, I dig through my pack with one hand while I hold my head with the other. I put on clothes to offset shock, pull out the first-aid kit and bandage my scalp, check my pupils for equal reaction to light, put my pack on my Krazy Carpet, check the time, and check the time again. Eventually I start walking. I am afraid of a head injury and worry that I may not remain lucid, so I deny myself any drugs. Pain is my only companion on every step.

All my focus is on catching up with the group. Upright again in the moonlight, I feel a glimmer of confidence easing into my scattered thoughts as I walk pulling my sled. This confidence bolsters my spirits, and I try to downplay the incident. In these moments



the loneliness is not so suffocating. An hour later, when Guy and Vance come back looking for me, all of my resolve disappears in tears of anguish and fear. I replay the whole event and they usher me onward. Vance coaches my every step to refuge, and John and Guy offer complete support. I am fortunate to be with such patient and compassionate partners.

A week later, when I walk into the emergency department in Campbell River, the room falls silent. Whispers flood through the nurses and doctors, but it is the surgeon who sums it up for me. “Most people with this injury end up in the morgue,” he tells me candidly. I am overpowered by the gut-wrenching fear that I may never fully recover. For months afterwards, I live in apprehension that some complication may arise or that the bones may not heal. I often curse the momentary lapse of attention that sent me headlong into the ground. Therein lies a tremendous lesson. After pushing hard all day I got careless, and a simple little mistake became serious.

After a spinal fusion and four months in a neck brace, I have gained a new appreciation for life. Wearing a neck brace meant that I could not bend over, let alone roll over in bed. On the street, people averted their eyes and avoided conversation. Fortunately, these issues mattered less because dedicated family and friends offered much-needed support far exceeding my expectations. Out of nowhere people called, wrote and visited to provide me with wisdom and inspiration. Everyone commented on my good demeanour, but optimism is easy to maintain after walking through a hospital ward filled with paralyzed patients. That made it easy for me to appreciate how lucky I am.

Six months later, I am back enjoying the mountains, having endured the unknowns of recovery. The danger of the injury has subsided, but I constantly remind myself of the lessons learned. I am wary, however, of the freshness of those attitudes diminishing as time passes. I do not want to forget. I hope that I can treasure my new-found appreciation for life and for the family and friends who make it worth living.

DAN CLARK

description, and the route was certainly snowed up — plastered with ethereal formations of rime and ice. But we managed to do a few fun, technical pitches to get up to the skyline ridge. The position on the ridge was incredibly exposed, with a 5500-foot drop down the almost vertical north face, and a 2500-foot drop down the south face, from which we had just climbed. Truly stunning!

We were stymied by an impassable gendarme with overhanging and unstable snow mushrooms sticking to its side, and we came to the realization that the climb was out of condition and that we had to retreat. Being on a ski trip, we were not very well prepared for “winter” conditions on what is normally a rock climb. We arrived back in camp and shared our tale with the others, who still hoped to have a chance at climbing Devils Thumb by a different route to the summit. We had only brought a small rack, which necessitated the exchange of the climbing gear from one party to another.

WE MADE FOUR UNSUCCESSFUL attempts at climbing Devils Thumb. Our telemark ski boots, our aluminum crampons and the limitations of our other gear allowed us as far as the summit ridge but no further.

We then spent 10 mostly glorious days reeling off the miles as we skied across the rest of the Stikine Icefield to finally greet summer on the sandy banks of the Whiting River. A friend, Mark Hickson, came all the way by boat from Juneau and up the braided channels to help us cross this remote and little-known river. After pulling ourselves from the lush wilderness of the Whiting back up into the snow and ice, we made it over to the Taku River and out in time for the Fourth of July celebrations in Juneau, Alaska!

The remote landscape of the northern Coast Mountains is dissected by four enormous rivers that cut across its spine: the Iskut, the Stikine, the Whiting and the Taku. Much too large for us to be able to swim — without the old logging road bridges found on the rivers in southern B.C. — and very remote and pristine, each of them represented serious logistical challenges. The contacts John had made when we were initially planning the trip worked very well and enabled us to cross these rivers safely and expediently.

We canoed across the Taku River to the Hole-in-the-Wall Glacier (among the very few advancing glaciers on the Coast), which provided access onto the Juneau Icefield — the last section of the whole traverse! The weather on the Juneau Icefield was downright terrible: the first five days seemed like “life in a milk bottle”, with

everything white and the ground indistinguishable from the sky. However, the skies eventually cleared, enabling us to get a view of Mount Fairweather and other peaks of the “next” mountain range — the St. Elias.

On the foggy morning of July 16, 2001, actually on a trail and not bushwhacking, we made the final, knee-jarring descent to our goal — the wonderful town of Skagway, Alaska. Skagway was at times small and friendly, but it was generally overwhelmed by cruise-ship tourists. Seeking a more symbolic finale, we all hiked the historical Chilkoot Trail to the picturesque headwaters of the mighty Yukon River.

After five and a half months of skiing — travelling through winter, spring and summer — our bodies were tired and our minds were frazzled. We were sun-weathered and hairy, but very happy. We had ski-traversed the entire length of the Coast Mountains from Vancouver, B.C., to Skagway, Alaska, and to the headwaters of the Yukon River. It had been one of the longest alpine ski traverses ever completed, along one of the wildest mountain ranges in the world.

On a journey of such length and difficulty, there are bound to be good days and bad days, ups and downs. There were many disagreements over the course of the trip — times when each of us was frustrated or angry. We learned to deal with our moments of inner turmoil and to get used to each other. Although we are all very independent, we did develop a strong team spirit. Several months later, we are still seeking out each other’s company for new adventures. We are now, perhaps, best of friends.

This trip was conceived following the inspirational adventures of the estimable Dave Williams, Markus Kellerhals, John Baldwin and John Clarke, to name but a few. We certainly respect and appreciate all the people who travelled the country before us. Our trip was helped immensely by their previous trips.

The team: Vance Culbert, Guy Edwards, John Millar, Lena Rowat, Dan Clark. Our accompanying friends: Cecelia Mortenson, Kari Medig, Heather Culbert.

Our journey would not have been possible without help from many people and companies. Thanks to Mountain Equipment Co-op, Gore, MSR, Serratus, Intuition, G3, the Canadian Himalayan Foundation, International Travel Maps and Books, and all the people up and down the Coast who helped us out in their respective communities.





siula south face

it was the postcard that did it...

After six months in South America, Jer had seen most of the usual trinkets more than once, so the novel picture caught his eye. A few hours with the guidebooks and a map had the mislabelled peaks identified, and the seed was planted.

Jer had only been home a few days, hadn't even fully unpacked, when I stopped by to borrow a bike pump. After ascertaining that I was up for a bit of an adventure the next summer, he produced the picture from amongst his pile of alpaca sweaters and worn-out fleece mittens. The face looked intimidating. Lots of rock, and the ice was disturbingly grey. The picture had been taken through a pass from a fair distance away, effectively hiding the lower slopes from our scrutiny. "South face of Siula Grande. Never been climbed — not even attempted!" That hardly made it more comforting.

From the map (which turned out to be not entirely reliable), the angle of the face seemed to average around 65 degrees. Reasonable. It wasn't nearly as bad as the west face, on which the contours actually disappeared. Based on the picture and the map, there appeared to be a feasible line up the face, threading through towering seracs and imposing rock bands.

A plan was drawn up. We would spend June in the friendlier Blanca in order to acclimatize and iron out our systems, and then head to the Huayhuash for July. After spending the better part of a year in the southern hemisphere, Jer had a massive tick list of unclimbed routes; we planned to spend our entire trip on virgin ground. Peru has an extensive mountaineering history and is known for surprisingly straightforward climbing (Paddington Bear's

"Darkest Peru" notwithstanding). We were surprised that so many of the unclimbed routes seemed within our reach.

Many hours allotted to schoolwork were spent polishing funding proposals and poring over various climbing journals. However, despite our best efforts, there wasn't much to be found about Siula that didn't involve Joe Simpson. Although this was a little frustrating, we were after unexplored terrain. It looked as if there had only ever been three other teams in the basin out of which we were staging the climb.

Michel was a last-minute addition. His plans to explore Little Switzerland had come crashing (chopping?) to a halt when his partner suffered a particularly gruesome finger amputation in Yosemite. Having taken a year off to climb around the world, he was looking for an adventure; first ascents in Peru seemed to fit the bill!

June passed quickly. We spent a lot of time in the hills but didn't manage to get up anything significant. Experience came quickly, though. The Andes start at around 4000 metres, which turns a 6000-metre peak into an overnight trip. Despite preaching fast and light throughout our preparation period, we learned a few things the hard way. We would have had a stellar first ascent on the west face of Santa Cruz Norte, but the packs we were all carrying didn't contain bivy gear. I'm still not sure what we were carrying, but when the sun went down we got really cold and had to turn tail. I have no idea why we weren't carrying a stove or a foam pad. Lots of frozen water bottles, though, and the rock gear sure came in handy...

jay burbee

... but what if
we'd bitten off
more than we
could chew?

The next trip sees us heading around the widely acclaimed Santa Cruz trek to the Paria Gorge. We gear up for a stellar line on a big north face with just enough rock to keep us honest. Ha! After a two-day struggle to reach the bergschrund, we decide that we are outclassed when we begin aiding on pickets up the “easy slopes to the initial runnel”. We salvage the approach by opting for a gully line on *Pyramide de Garcilosa* but overestimate our ability to levitate, and find ourselves retreating once more.

One month gone, and we've only stood on top of one insignificant summit. Seems there were reasons no one had climbed the obvious lines we'd scoped from Vancouver. Although still having fun and climbing lots of incredible terrain, we are beginning to worry. What if we really have bitten off more than we can chew? Admittedly, we dreamed big; but surely we haven't overestimated our abilities too much? The only way to really find out is to head back into the mountains. We still have one big climb planned, and there is no point in getting worried before we've even really begun. Luckily, we can appreciate the irony of heading into our make-or-break climb armed only with an outdated photo of half the face.

Canada Day, 2001, sees us bumping along through the Andean highlands with some curious locals and a box of extremely noisy chickens. At around noon we attempt to buy the chickens, reasoning that if we own them we can leave them wherever we want. But they aren't for sale. We manage to convince our driver to carry on past the end of the line. Sunset finds us bedding down in a horse pasture, having driven within a day's trek of our basecamp.

Laguna Siula. From the end of the road last night, we could see the eastern slopes of Siula, where the first ascent took place in 1925. After a day of marching along the delightful valley to the base of the Sarapo glacier,



left: *Jer descending the lower Sarapo glacier.* photo: Michel van der Spek
above: *The south face of Siula Grande from the northeast face of Sarapo.*
photo: Jeremy Frimer

we still have no idea what our route will look like. The upper basin, from which the south face rises, remains hidden by the massive eastern buttress. Due to local topological quirks, the face will be hidden until we're directly below it. But that's still two days of tedious routefinding away. We've got a really bad apple of a receding glacier to deal with now. Equatorial glaciers get an intense dose of tropical sun, leaving us a jumbled mess of seracs, moraines and crevasses.

After a sufficient amount of procrastination and food/gear sorting, we set out across the moraine and up the glacier. There is evidence of grazing livestock up to the edge of the moraine. I'm sure that the cows would have travelled even higher had they thought there was something good to eat up there. Choosing the left-hand moraine, we make slow but non-technical progress, avoiding the fifth-class rock we've been dreading since reading an account from the '60s. Michel manages to get

his foot caught under a substantial boulder. Jer and I are a bit worried when we can't move it, but with a bit of desperation on Michel's part he gets free. We carry on with all joints functioning properly.

As we gain the ice, routefinding becomes more problematic. The tropical sun melts these glaciers rapidly, and the flowing water distributes silt in marvelous patterns. Unfortunately, these depositions then shield the snow from the sun, and the resulting chaos, though beautiful, is hell to travel over. Frustrating backtracking wastes much time.

As we cross the firn line, the clouds begin sweeping up the valley from the Amazon. We're facing east, on the eastern edge of the Andes, and it's a rare day when the big peaks are cloud-free. Having decided that we're not in an incredible hurry (it has only been a month; this acclimatization stuff takes time), we choose the nearest decent campsite and bed down. The east buttress of Siula towers above our camp and we witness a massive cornice collapse — commonplace in the mountains, but the subsequent 1000-metre free fall sure isn't!

The next morning sees us off again, through knee-deep snow and into the icefall proper. Jer outmanoeuvres the (thankfully) slow-moving seracs and hauls us into the upper basin. Of course, the afternoon clouds have arrived and there's nothing to be seen. After trudging through whiteout for a few rope lengths, we decide that breaking trail will be easier with a day's less food in our packs. The tent goes up, and we spend a frustrating three days waiting for the clouds to clear enough to get a view of the face we've travelled so far to climb. (As I look back, those days seem pretty comical. Small sections of the face would drift in and out of view as we strained our eyes to match the ephemeral features to those on our postcard.)

Eventually the clouds part and we get the full view. There are a couple of possible lines visible, but we're being choosy. It's not as though there's another team hot on our heels. We're not going to mess with the rock (although Huayhuash rock seems to be more solid than its reputation would lead one to believe), and the unbroken band of massive seracs would be a bit strenuous at this altitude. In order to get up the lower half of the route, we need to be able to thread our way between these two features. Above this, many runnels lead to the summit ridge. It remains to be seen whether any of them are climbable — these are after all the infamous Andean flutings. A reasonably direct line looks good from below, as long as a few key spots prove feasible.

Michel, the consummate photographer, wants better pictures. The shots we've been getting from below the face are pretty and all, but we need a more impressive perspective. Since we haven't been above 6000 metres yet, a bit more acclimatization probably wouldn't hurt, either. Sarapo closes off the western side of the basin and has only seen one ascent from this side. The original



Michel leading out on Siula. photo: Jeremy Frimer

route is way out of condition, but there is a steep snow slope leading to the summit ridge which looks good. After loading up with fresh rolls of film, we head up.

The initial slopes go well. We've broken a few trails around the basin, and the snow is perfect for step kicking. Lost in the wonder of these majestic mountains (or maybe it is the lack of air), I don't get many shots before the clouds start rolling in. I plead with my partners to bring the photographic mission to an end, but there is no stopping Jer or Michel. Too tired to protest, I am dragged along the ridge, which stretches on much further than any of us thought it could. There is an exciting crevasse or two, and we aren't sure if the crack we are following in the snow indicates imminent cornice collapse to our left or severe avalanche hazard to our right. We eventually win the summit, and the clouds clear up a bit for us. Impressive views of the sun setting on Siula's west face are well worth the effort. Then the sun goes down — fast. Here at the equator, the sun doesn't drift along the horizon; it screams straight into the ground. We have trouble adjusting to this but manage to stumble/rap/stagger our way back to the tent before numbness creeps much past our ankles.

Back in the valley, we recuperate with fresh trout and pancakes. There is some serious discussion as to whether we really want to head back up. Anticipating this, we

have left as much gear as possible up high. This bit of trickery provides the necessary boost to our motivation.

After regaining our high camp in one day, we decide that we need another day of relative rest before the stress begins. From high camp we break trail to the base of the face, and Michel heads up to scope it out. He pulls the bergschrund and cruises a pitch of spindrift-polished ice. In order to speed things up in the pre-dawn chill the following morning, we leave a rope over the bergschrund from his anchor and retreat to the tent for one last deluxe meal.

Somehow we get full bivy gear for three into packs, making us laugh even harder at the stunt we pulled on Santa Cruz Norte. Lots of stars in the sky mean that we hit the ground running. As the sun rises, we're gaining Michel's anchor from the day before. The initial ice apron goes smoothly; it's not too steep, but we pitch it out to protect against the rocks that occasionally whistle down. The ice is hard enough to make placing our ice screws a challenge. There are a few spots where turning our shiny new Express screws requires the use of a tool threaded through the hanger. Hey, Chouinard recommends it in *Climbing Ice*, and it's his company (in spirit).

As we approach the serac band, we encounter the first anticipated "tricky bit". The plan is to follow the hidden gully ("But it's got to be there," we reason) past the end of the serac band to the snow slopes above. We will then bivy in the crevasse below the upper headwall at the end of a brilliant day of climbing. It's remarkable how close to the truth we are able to guess. The gully does exactly what we want, avoiding the rock, although it gets pretty steep at the end. Michel finishes off the section with an 85-degree pitch (thankfully short), and we scurry (well, plod) across the snow pillow to the crevasse.

The crevasse is amazing. Its back wall arches up and over the lower side. From the lip, icicles stretch down and close off the front of the crevasse. With minimal shovelling, we manage to form a completely enclosed ice cavern in which to spend the night. It's almost too good. Food goes down easily, and water is carefully melted for the next morning. At roughly 6000 metres, it's the highest any of us has ever bivied. Although we agonized down below, our decision to forego bivy sacks is vindicated. There's a bit of spindrift, but Michel keeps most of it off me. What a pal.

After sleeping in a bit (it's that nice), we get going again as the sun breaks the horizon. Directly to the south, gorgeous views appear of Carnicero rising above a sea of clouds. There isn't much poking through this morning. Jer rolls the camera while I lead straight up from the bivy cave. The snow conditions quickly deteriorate, forcing us to deal with about a foot of aerated crap over bullet-hard ice. Chopping our way to each tool placement proves too slow, so a long traverse rightward is initiated. This leads to better ice conditions up runnels

that we follow until the previously avoided flutings rear their heads.

I recant all disbelieving statements I may ever have uttered. These things are atrocious. After a pitch or so of upward grovelling (does swimming with pickets constitute aid?), we get to the point where upward progress becomes hopeless. We figure that we are within a pitch or two of the ridge, so we elect to traverse a bit and see where that puts us. Jer excavates a Tasmanian-devil-style trail across seven flutings and gets us onto the ridge. Seconding this pitch involves lots of "controlled" slides through the sugary snow. By this time, the sun has set and it is getting noticeably colder. After a short discussion, we elect to go on for as long as we can simulclimb. Stopping to belay would be too cold. This brings us to the crest of the ridge proper, where we stop below a substantial serac. We have reached the South-southeast Ridge, climbed in 1982. There are about 100 metres of elevation to gain along the ridge, but our route is complete! Joining an established route isn't as satisfying as gaining the summit, but we are pretty pleased with ourselves. We take a glory shot (not too pretty), and retreat as quickly as possible.

Jer has been working pretty hard for the last few hours, and as Dr. Abalakov he doesn't get much rest on the way down. Upon reaching the traverse, he pretty much shuts down, so Michel and I put him in the middle of the rope and stumble back to the cave. It takes two hot water bottles, a litre of soup and the better part of our chocolate ration to snap him out of it. It's quite amusing to watch him try to figure out how he has gotten into his sleeping bag. He can't even remember who removed his boots. Our hypothermia scare over, we drift off, quite pleased with our crystal palace.

I was told as a novice that statistically I was pretty likely to hurt myself climbing. I've even taken to chastising myself: "That was a 22-year-old male thing to do, dumb-ass." I think I've done pretty well, but I'm sure no one sets out to get into trouble. With these thoughts in mind, we are extremely careful on the descent. Despite having rappelled almost two vertical kilometres from ice threads on this trip, we are still jumpy. So close — don't screw up now. We cross the final bergschrund, and get back into the sun for the first time in three days. Plodding back to the tent is a little surreal.

This climb had been built up pretty heavily for all of us. We took the next week to decompress and zip around the Huayhuash trekking circuit (nothing like sleeping at 6000 metres to make a 4800-metre pass trivial). On a side trip up to the basin below the west face of Siula, we met a Slovenian team who had just put a new route there. They had been on the mountain over the same time period as us. This got a chuckle from us all. What are the chances of two teams meeting on top of this mountain?

mayh

All my carefully laid plans are unravelling into chaos.

It's deep into my third night alone on Mount Thor. Sitting on my camo bullet bag in my portaledge tent, I ponder the rivulets of water draining into the puddles on the floor. How am I to bivy in this mess? Should I sit up all night, or lie down in the water?

I've been climbing and hauling for 14 hours, trying to beat this storm to a "sheltering" roof. A hard rain began just as I reached the roof, but I got completely soaked setting up my ledge tent. Now a sheet of water is pouring off the lip of the roof onto my tent.

This won't do. Despite my cold and fatigue, I go out into the storm and lower my tent thirty feet, out of the cascade. This freight-lowering manoeuvre becomes epic as my arms grow weak and wooden with hypothermia. An hour later I'm shivering in my sodden pit, hips and shoulders in the water. And for two nights and one day, I lie in those puddles of despair, wondering what happened to my luck.

Things got off to a rough start in Montreal when my car got tossed and most of my gear was stolen. I dropped \$5000 the next day replacing some of it, but many of the hooks, hammers and "special effects" were homemade and not replaceable. I spent many evenings filing hooks, making gear and worrying about missing gear.

The rock low down on Thor is problematic. It is a grey quartz pocked with gneiss which is both harder and weaker than Yosemite granite. Extremely expanding and loose, this rock has a big weakness: it is very brittle. Thin expanding flakes break easily. Fat natural hook moves atop weathered "crumble cookies" explode when

weighted, leaving blank rock or freshie slopers that must be "enhanced". This route I'm on looks so big and continuously hard that El Cap's *Reticent Wall* (A5a/b in April 2000) looks like baby food in comparison.

This brings me to the final and scariest problem I have to confront. My mind control is wavering. I wish not to disturb you, gentle readers, but I would be remiss if I did not recount the pivotal moment of the climb. This occurred while drilling the belay bolt on Pitch 2.

The pitch started with tenuous aid above two ledges and only got worse. After nine hours and a 50-foot run-out (and possible double-ledge fall) (A5), I finally got a decent knifeblade. Four hours later, I was drilling that belay bolt. How I got there was so lame (with five bolts) that my normal A5 high was replaced with despair. I had overdrilled a second potential A5 crux down to A4 because of my faltering mind control. Furthermore, I was just starting up a huge route and was already worried that at my current rate I would use up all my bolts before I got halfway up. It was a huge mental battle. It boiled down to the fact that either I had to regain complete mind control (and stop drilling), or I might as well untie and "walk the wind" right now, before exhibiting further "snail eye". (Snail eye: Ever poke the eye of a snail and see it retract into its body? That's what your manhood does, figuratively speaking, when...)

Several pitches higher, I led a fat pitch that took two days. The bottom half is quality A4-plus techno aid with tiny 'heads, expando beaks and hooks up to an expanding flake that is just good enough to call the run-out over. A blank section was climbed with hooks, a few bat hooks and two quarter-inch bolts. Above this is a long, two-inch-thick expanding flake that disappears, followed by a long hook traverse (A5) into a good corner.

emm

jim
beyer
alone on
mount thor

Pitch follows pitch — day after day, week after week. High up the wall, I realize that I have mastered the chaos. I realize that I am more comfortable on Thor climbing expando and dodging rockfalls than I am in Amerika. I feel a strange detachment from reality; with each misadventure, I stand back and say “What an adventure,” as if I’m commenting on someone else’s misfortune.

Climbing big walls is not a speed event. It is a way of life. While others play trendy speed-climbing or “free”-climbing games on easy big walls, I play a different game of big-wall ascent with rules of my own choosing. Climbing is anarchy. End of lecture.

I daydream of going to a different planet, one that has mega big walls, and spending a year on the face — just climbing, hauling, and taking rest days as needed.

While freeclimbing (.9 R) up to Hrungrnir “Ledge”, I pulled off a loose flake that cut the back of my left hand to the bone. It was not a place where I could afford to fall, as my protection was bogus. A huge double roof below with multiple sharp edges would not be kind to my single 9-mm lead line if I hucked. (I had extended my 11-mm lead line with my 9-mm tag line to finish a 250-foot pitch.) I was standing on dirty slopers with my left hand pimping an arête when my right hand pulled off the flake. The flake knocked my hand off the arête. I felt myself going off backwards, and time stood still as I slapped my left hand back onto the arête and my right caught a small crimper. I pulled back in and the “shake” did not skate my feet off. A six-inch jet of blood was spurting out of my hand with every heartbeat. The arête was immediately covered in blood. Blood was pouring off

my elbow and spraying into the air. The animal within took over and freeclimbed like a man possessed for about twenty feet until a solo backup knot on my harness stopped him. At this point my mind was able to regain control. I’ve had my share of injuries, but I’ve never had blood spraying out of my body. It was intense. I pressed my hand against my mouth and immediately got a mouthful of rich blood. I swallowed. It tasted really good. This shocked me. I swallowed another mouthful before reaching for the tape clipped on my harness. I surveyed the trail of blood to the blood-covered arête while licking my arm and beard clean.

An hour later I was hauling the pitch in a daze when my bags got stuck. I jacked the haul system from 3:1 to 5:1, which seemed to work for a while, but after 40 feet of increasing difficulty I broke out of my daze. I realized that my 25-foot chain of six haul bags was not stuck on the double roofs below. Perhaps my old lead line (chopped by a loose flake on Pitch 6) was stuck. This rope was dangling from the highest haul bag. I set a rappel to check it out and brought two rope bags to pad the sharp edges below. Once on rap, I dropped in at speed without padding any edges. I quickly confirmed that, indeed, the dangling rope was stuck some 400 feet below. All my other long ropes were in play, and to organize a 400-foot rap was too slow. I tied my 50-foot ninja cord to the 230-foot mystery rope I was on and salvaged what I could. The stuck rope was incredibly taut, for I had hauled 40 feet of stretch out of it. I looked up my rappel line to the roofs and saw a big, white, puffy wad on the edge of the lower roof. This puffy wad was my rappel rope sawing on a sharp edge. If my rappel rope separated on this sharp edge, I would get a quick tour of the lower face and make it to Valhalla before dinnertime.

And so I hung for a while, as I'm wont to do, and just laughed as I waited for my little dose to cut in.

I froze and tried to estimate my danger. The damaged section of rope was far above me but even so looked really bad. I clipped an ascender into each rope and reviewed options. It appeared that staying clipped into both ropes would be safest, so with some trepidation and a lot of innocence I cut the taut rope and got catapulted up into space. It was like falling upward, then I got that second of float, then it was a short fall downward.

And so I hung for awhile, as I'm wont to do, and just laughed as I waited for my little dose to cut in. There is so little sweetness in this life, so when my adrenaline rush cut in I just enjoyed the moment. Looking down at my hand, I realized that I had not dropped my knife — or cut anything important (like my rope) — during that out-of-control manoeuvre. And then I started laughing like a psycho.

Go Abe was a Japanese solo climber who over the summers of 1995 and 1996 attempted to climb a new route on Thor just to the left of my route. While leading an easy corner just 40 or 50 feet above Hrungrir Ledge, he pulled off a dangling flake that chopped his 10-mm lead line. He did not survive his 40-foot ledge fall and died alone. I'm sure that the Valkyries came and carried him off to Valhalla, for solo on Thor is certainly battle. Only those who perish on the field of battle go to Valhalla. I honour this warrior and admire his complete commitment to his chosen solo mission.

I was just 250 feet right of Go Abe's gear stash and death-bivouac chaos. My food and water were mostly gone and I hoped that he had left enough to fuel my solo mission. I led a 250-foot traverse (off route) to get to his gear but was dismayed to find no food or water. Parks Canada had recovered his body but had left most of his gear — the stuff I rooted and looted through. At the time of Go Abe's accident, his portaledge camp had been destroyed by rockfall and he was working on the upper headwall from a boulder cave. How he planned to climb the virtually ledgeless, overhanging headwall (1800 feet) without a portaledge has troubled my mind since first I saw this epic possibility.

I had now been looking up at the overhanging headwall for over a month. It was the perfect venue for me: extremely overhanging, it was also very blank, with only enough features to suggest a possible line. It looked like terrain on *Reticent Wall* or the Black Canyon's

Happy Trails (A5) except that it was far steeper and far longer.

I decided to drill a bolt on the first headwall pitch. This was decided before I even started up the route. The reason is silly but internally accepted. Go Abe perished on an easy pitch just 250 feet left of me, and my pitch will prove to be more extreme. I refuse to be killed in a situation similar to Go's, because stupid people will lump us together. For a person who stands alone outside the tribe this might seem strange, but pride sometimes requires a man to live and sometimes it requires him to die. Extreme techno aid-climbing has not yet advanced to a level where the first-ascent party can never show weakness — not once.

And so I started up the pitch (A4-plus) by climbing loose blocks (A3-plus ledge fall) to a corner and finally a blank arch. A trenched circle head blew in the arch, but I didn't huck as my adjustable daisy shock-loaded on a nearby funky knifeblade that held. After the bolt, marginal knifeblades driven straight up under thin expanding flakes led to a double-bolt belay — a rare treat and a sea of tranquility to ease my troubled mind.

A blank corner above led to expanding roofs and blocks. Four placements into the crux (A4-plus), the wire tore out of my trenched, small alum' head and I dropped into space. I wasn't scared — my mind instantly focused on my good belay anchor and I just kicked back and enjoyed the 25-foot ride.

Back in the old days, I seldom fell while big-wall climbing. Young and cocksure, I thought it was because I was good. Now I fall on every wall and know it is because the difficulty has increased to the point where cutting-edge gear and skill are not enough. Luck is also required — on a regular basis.

With two pitches fixed on the headwall, I looked forward to getting another load of ice chunks in the morning, then committing to the headwall and moving up to my high point. A big storm moved in overnight, however, and dawn broke bitterly cold and snowing. But this didn't deter me from the day's agenda, and midday found me crossing exposed, snow-covered scree and rock heavily loaded with ice chips, unroped in a blizzard. One slip and I would be over the edge. It was surreal in the half-light and the blowing snow. It was so real, yet I felt

totally disconnected from reality. But I heard the voice on the wind and I listened. It was my three-year-old daughter. “Don’t fall, Papa,” she pleaded.

Back at the ledge/tent, I piled in and resolved not to commit to the headwall until the weather broke. Five days later, the snow tapered off but the weather was not much improved. Daytime highs of 50°F in August had become highs of 10°F in early September. All my water was frozen. I had plenty of gas and ice but only seven days’ food. I was still eager to finish my route even though I knew that it would take a couple of weeks.

On the morning of the sixth day of the storm, I decided that in order to have any chance of summiting that year, I had to climb that day and the storm had to clear that day. I knew that once I committed to the headwall there would be no chance of retreat; each pitch on the headwall (except the last) overhangs 25 feet. I jugged the two pitches, cleaned one and racked up. It had taken five hours. Every rope was sheathed in one and a half inches of rime, every knot frozen hard. Everything was coated in rime, and still it stormed. I was shivering uncontrollably in the bitter wind. The pitch above looked A5. Would I be able to stand on dicey hooks while shivering this badly? Would my rope even hold a Factor 2 fall when it was frozen stiff as a wire cable? A rip to the belay was definitely possible. I realized that my best chance on the headwall would be to abandon my circuitous techno aid and drill the direct linkages with bat hooks. This would get me on top but would degenerate my proud route.

This was the hardest decision of my life, as I wanted to complete this route in the best style I could and in a single push. Yet I realized that it was September above the Arctic Circle and that it was not going to warm up. It was all too much. When my analytical side did the math, it didn’t add up. So then my aggressive side cut in with: “This is what we want.” ... “How far have you come because of me?” ... “I will bring us through this, as always; I will carry you, and in the end you will thank me.” Then I did the math again.

It was desperately cold and I couldn’t just hang around; it was either up or down. I felt sick to my stomach. I decided not to “think this through” but to “go with my instinct”. My instinct felt that I would not

survive the headwall in these conditions with the food I had unless I abandoned style and drilled it up.

I rappelled into the vapours. Eventually I felt a strange enchantment as I realized that I would live to see my children. I was supremely happy, as I had almost just given up that hope. But as I struggled out of my frozen outerwear I knew that I would have an opposite and equal reaction/depression on the following day.

Two days later the eight day storm broke, but the temperature never did rise during the following two weeks. I was supremely bummed that my route would require two summers instead of one. This taint would bend climbers against my proud route and me. I accepted my destiny.

The following day, I traversed to Go Abe’s stash and grabbed an ice hammer and an ice screw. His crampons would not clip to my boots. I soloed unroped with a small pack, for I had left everything behind except a micro rack, a rope, lunch and one litre of water. I expected to make my riverside campsite that day, as I had read in an old magazine that two members of the 1985 *American Direct* team had traversed off and returned via this “ledge”.

I made fast progress until Hrungrir Ledge became an overhanging wall. A forlorn 9-mm rope with multiple deep core shots was fixed between widely spaced quarter-inch bolts. I slid across this marginal rope. The next pitch wasn’t any easier as I traversed snow-covered slabs 10 feet above the sharp edge, looking at the death fall. I reached easy ground as night fell, so I crawled into a crack and shivered all night without bivy gear.

At first light I downclimbed 1000 feet on Hrungrir Ledge, but it ended abruptly on a blank, 2000-foot big-wall. I re-ascended 500 feet to a mixed gully and, without crampons and with but one primitive tool, climbed four pitches of 5.10 M6 to the shoulder. I took one fall on the ice screw while crossing an easy ice gully, but that was trivial compared with the shakefests I endured on the unprotected slabs and bulges above.

One snow-covered slab was particularly memorable. Small stones were frozen onto the slab, and these I cleared of snow, mantelled and stood on. While run out 50 feet, I encountered an “impossible move”: no holds

It was desperately cold and
I couldn’t just hang around;
it was either up or down.
I felt sick to my stomach.

If one hand had missed, I would not have had the strength to hold the impact of me and my falling pack...

and no possible friction moves on the wet slab. I couldn't downclimb, and a big fall in this situation would eventually be fatal. I packed snow onto the slab as a hold and, super-gripped, mantelled and stood on it.

After two of my coldest nights in the mountains and just over two days of alpine terror, I reached the base.

In early July, I returned to Thor. I had prepared in a manner similar to the year before by soloing a hard El Cap route in the spring — this time a new A5 variation to *Surgeon General* (A5). I also soloed an A6a test piece called *Cult of Suicidal* on Canyonland's Outlaw Spire which requires not only extreme aid expertise, but an ambivalence towards life which is refreshing. Pitch 2 (A6a) on *Cult of Suicidal* is a full 90-foot pitch of run-out with ground-fall potential. It is at least one full grade harder and more dangerous than anything on *Reticent*.

After a lot of load carrying and two rest days, I set out for Hrungnir Ledge. I rappelled in with six raps and did eight roped traverse pitches to my route. I was roped on the traverse, as the conditions were sketchy — three inches of snow on three inches of ice on loose scree, all lying on wet, dirty slabs. I adopted a “fourth-class” climbing mode of fixing my lead line to an alpine belay anchor, then returning for my 65-pound load of food. This worked for me because I got to kick steps with 20 pounds, then follow the pitch with 65 pounds in a set of steps along a horizontal rope fixed at one end. I slid an ascender for a belay.

As I was traversing an icefield just five feet above its bottom edge, everything collapsed. I found myself falling down a gully atop a thin slide of snow, ice and scree. I flashed on my anchor-protection-system safety and came up with “probable death fall”. My anchor was a one-by-one-by-three-foot boulder lying on loose, 35-degree scree. My fixed line stretched 150 feet horizontally across easy snow/ice without intermediate protection. I was clipped into this rope via a single ascender, and the edge of Hrungnir Ledge was but 40 feet below me.

Instantly I rocked my long axe from swagger-stick to self-arrest position. Just before insertion I flashed on angle of insertion, depth of insertion and body position. It was at this moment that I realized I was falling down a rock gully. I didn't think that an ice axe self-arrest would

work. While face down in self-arrest position and riding this rapidly accelerating debris, I looked down over my left shoulder and spotted a boulder — three feet above the gully, three feet left of the gully, embedded in gravel and coming up fast! I instantly dropped my axe and threw a four-point dyno for this boulder. My hands landed on either side of the boulder and I was in a point of balance when my 65-pound load drove me hard into the boulder. I was fully amped and I held on.

“I stuck it with both hands,” I repeated slowly as I looked below me to the edge. There was not another sizeable boulder above the edge of the 2000-foot wall below.

I survived this fall in the no-fall zone only because I reacted instantly, figured out a new plan of action, threw a “big old busta move” and stuck it — all in a couple of seconds. If one hand had missed, I would not have had the strength to hold the impact of me and my falling pack.

A strange moment of sweetness followed as I realized that I was in the zone, I was climbing well and I would live to climb those A5 pitches on the headwall.

After ascending to my high point and fixing an A5 pitch, I set out on what became the crux pitch. Two beak and head seams led to a small roof that provided only a circle head and bad 'blade stack. Further heads led to delicate hooking on loose flakes. The thin natural hooking up to the natural belay was the crux of the pitch (A5c). It was an “air-fall, 80- to 90-foot run-out”. I've put in short run-outs elsewhere that were rated higher (A5-plus), but they were ground-fall routes.

The weather broke the next day and for the next week was stormy and cool. Although I was on an overhanging wall, I was constantly damp from condensation — climbing in a cloud. I took one day off but climbed on all other days. One day was particularly miserable, so I quit after five hours.

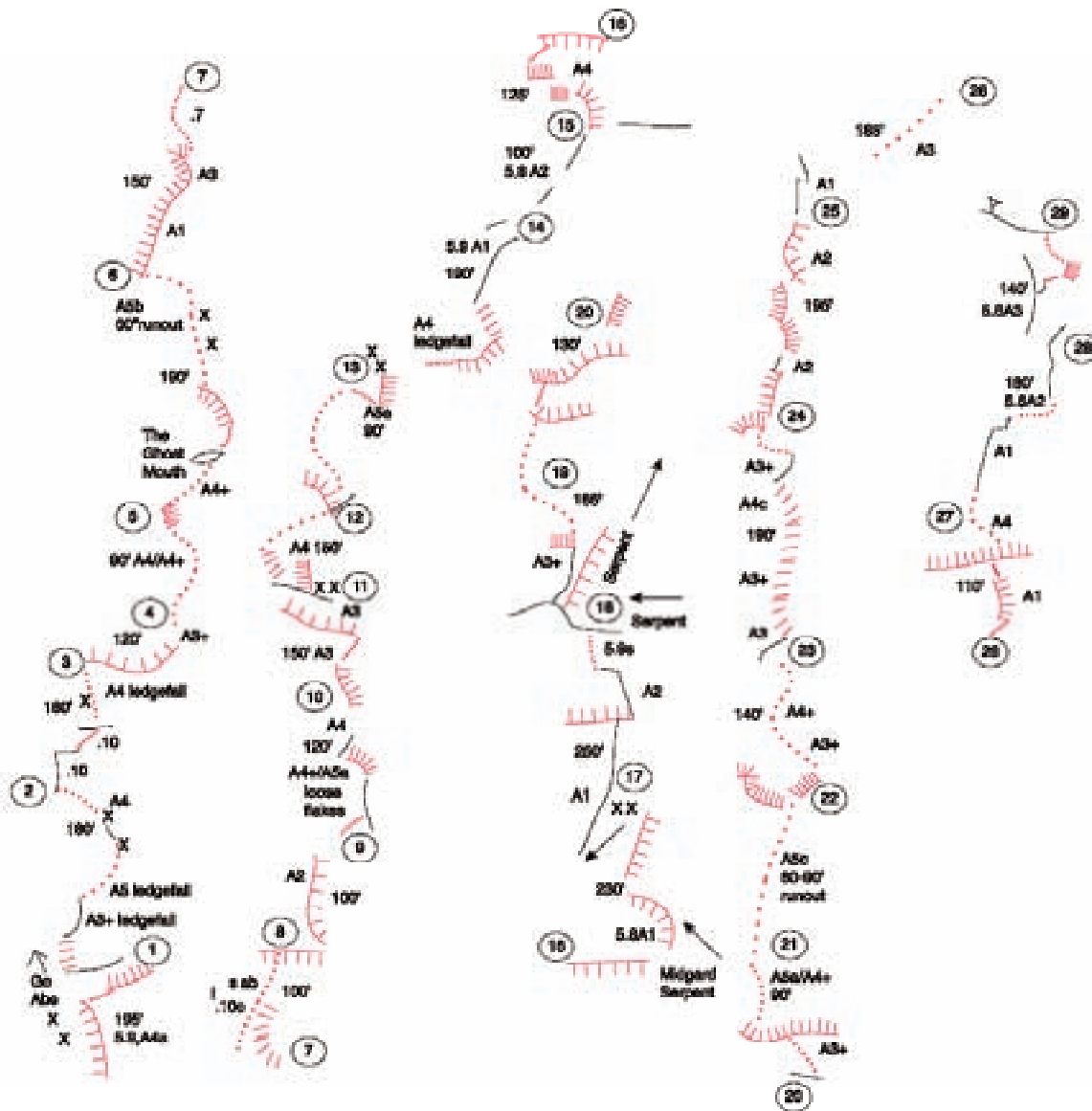
During this period I was distressed to note that what appeared to be a knifeblade crack from the ground was in reality a thin dike of black crystal. I did more drilling than expected here but still ended up with long, *Reticent*-style A3-plus/A4a pitches.

After 18 days on the wall in the summer of 2001, I reached the summit. I believe that my route, *Project*

Mayhem (VII, 5.10c A5c), is the hardest big-wall route on the planet. Sixty-six bolts and thirty or forty bat hooks were drilled. The route has five pitches of modern A5, three pitches of A4-plus, nine pitches of A4, and one and a half pitches of 5.10c face climbing. I hiked 175 miles and spent 57 days on the face and three months alone over the summers of 2000 and 2001.

After cleaning up the base of Thor, I rafted out with most of my gear on a tiny Kamikaze raft I had carried in. While rafting below the last major portage, I missed an

eddy and was swept into a rapid I had not planned on running. I jumped out into the shallows, but as I was struggling with my raft in waist-deep whitewater, a wave broke over it and carried away my only paddle. I jumped onto my raft and, lying face down on top of my packs, inserted my index fingers into the half-inch holes provided for the optional oarlocks. I then balanced my overloaded raft through the rapid and its four-foot standing waves, and floated the remaining eight miles to Overlord out of control.



Project Mayhem VII, 5.10 A5
 West face of Mount Thor, Auyuittuq National Park
 F.A.: Jim Beyer. Capsule-style, over 57 days in 2000 and 2001.
 66 bolts, 30-40 bat hooks

*takin' it...
in the*

*alaska
range*



story rob owens

photos rob owens & eamonn walsh

as

I swing into the dirt- and ice-filled crack, I am reminded of last spring in Alaska. The climbing feels similar, though today I am swinging into a crack full of moss. I miss periodically, dulling my picks. In Alaska, the cracks were filled with bulletproof ice; the climbing was easier, but the consequences were frightful. If I dulled my picks I would have to deal with them for another 8000 feet of ice and mixed climbing. Not much of an issue today, though: I have only another 15 metres of this and then I will be on comfortable Grade 5 water ice, and tonight I will be warm and safe at my home in Canmore. I am trying to free the previously aided bolt ladder on *Suffer Machine* on the Stanley Headwall, in my own Canadian Rockies — virgin terrain for this style, but still not Alaska. The lack of commitment today is replaced by an increase in difficulty, and similar emotions are brought forth. Six months earlier, we were defining ourselves and our style on a couple of Alaskan gems...

January 2001, Canmore, Alberta: Eamonn and I are strong! Our friendship, skills, motivation and energy. We have been climbing and celebrating together, with intensity, for the past few years. We have depth.

We need a plan. Something to test ourselves, to express ourselves and our friendship. *Pure* this time. We need a challenge, a level that we have never reached or even attempted. The path of our dreams leads us to the big mountains of the Alaska Range. We propose to start with Mount McKinley, which is replaced by thoughts of a committing route on Mount Foraker despite the self-doubt that flourishes within us. We then add Mount Hunter and eventually, not wanting to sell ourselves short, McKinley again.

The plan: *The Infinite Spur* on Foraker, which has been introduced to us via a local troublemaker who completed the third ascent of this elusive gem the season before. *The Moonflower Buttress* on Hunter, which was front-row centre at our basecamp, and in our dreams, during the Cassin Ridge trip two years ago. Lastly, another attempt on the Cassin Ridge of McKinley to round off the good ol' Canadian hat trick. Plum lines on the three major peaks that encompass the rugged Kahiltna Glacier. An ambitious target considering the weather patterns of the range, but we figure that we might as well plan big.

The summits are not the primary goals. We both need to stay within certain style guidelines: low-impact, single-push, safe, all-free, no jugging of ropes. We are going there to climb.

May 13, 6 p.m. We have just arrived in Kahiltna Basecamp. “Fuck it, there is no time to acclimatize — the weather is good and we should go for it.” We are camped at the base of the *Moonflower*. We are already tired, still unacclimatized, and trying a style that we know nothing about. Starting up an Alaskan Grade 6 with little more than day packs. At 8 p.m. the next day, we start climbing. Within three hours, we pass a couple of climbers who are camped at the standard first bivy ledge. They are the first to try the route this year, and from now on we are blazing the trail.

We climb through the night, all-free, leading in blocks and running it out, it being too dark to see places for good protection. Scratching up thin ice and granite, and stemming over the deadly snow mushrooms that are perched precariously from the winter storms. Are we too early for this route, for this style? The leader has a light pack, and the second has the stove, tarp and food.

At noon the next day, after a cold, tiring night of breaking trail on vertical terrain, we are at the base of the “prow pitch”. We rest a bit, freeze stiff and move on again. I freeclimb the first pitch, and Eamonn follows clean with the heavy pack. It was M5+. Great climbing, well protected and technical: five stars. I then free the next pitch, the pendulum pitch, which takes too long. I feel rather foolish; this pitch has never been freeclimbed before, and I was the sucker who thought that we should try it. If we are trying to go light and fast we are now failing. We want to climb all-free, but there should be the odd exception. It is M6 slab — safe, but boring compared to the rest of the climbing so far. Eamonn climbs the pitch as well but does weight the rope for his own safety due to the traversing nature of the pitch. One rope length later, before a big traverse, we chicken out and bail. Fear overcomes our will and desire. We are too light or too heavy — green at this style. It has taken 16 hours to climb 12 pitches, most of them not that hard. We are falling asleep at belays. We started the route unacclimatized and sleep-deprived. We learned.

We rappel the route, passing two fresh teams of climbers in the three hours that it takes to get down. As we lower off the last rappel, the glacier we are on is engulfed by yet another huge powder avalanche ripping down from the massive gully to our right. I feel small.



Day 2 on The Infinite Spur. photo: Rob Owens

We really weren't that committed, I guess. Think of how fast we can do it next time. Next time we will be confident!

After a day of rest, the weather is still good, as is the forecast; we are off to *The Infinite Spur* on the south side of Foraker. Different style, but a large challenge. We plan on keeping it clean, single-push, safe, but we will take our time. We have never done anything this massive or committing.

May 17, morning. Carrying 55-pound packs, we start the two-day approach on skis. It involves immense terrain with crevasses and slopes as large as I have ever seen. I am nervous, scared and so close to cracking under the pressure, to speaking up and revealing my fear. I want to turn around already. Self-doubt runs rampant. What if we get caught in a storm up high, what if one of us breaks a leg? If anything goes wrong high on this route, we are as good as dead. I am sick with fear. If I bail out I might as well quit climbing forever. I can't do that; this is what I live for. Climbing is my form of self-expression, my art. I master my fear for a little while longer.

May 18, 1 p.m., at the base of the route, in a storm, with avalanches pouring relentlessly off the steep walls surrounding us. I stick the point of my pocket knife into the palm of my hand, which exposes a large amount of

grotesque, meaty flesh that pours out from deep within. I have an excuse to chicken out — but I don't. I am worried about infection. If it gets infected, we're fucked.

May 19. We start up the massive route of our present dreams. Last night my fear was replaced with drive. All is good now and I am ready to commit. The fear is mastered.

We deal with a complex bergschrund, then send 1500 feet of steep snow, at night, in good weather. We have the reserves to keep warm in the frigid nighttime temperatures. We are now at the base of our reason for being in Alaska: multiple pitches of five-star mixed climbing — well protected, committing. Fear is lost and the zone is reached.

The climbing eases in the following days, but the weather worsens. We are blazing the trail for subsequent ascents, plowing through bottomless snow, digging platforms, knocking the tops off steep snow ridges. The puncture wound in my hand is constantly trying to close only to be ripped open at regular intervals, which sends striking pain down my spine. We climb mostly at night to avoid the shit weather that the daylight brings. It snows almost every day, and it is whited out most of the time. We push on, sleeping through the storms of the day and climbing in the cold, clear nights.



Eamonn coming up the "prow pitch", Moonflower.

We crank the foreshortened 3000-foot icy ridge in a record slow time — at night, in the cold and the darkness, digging the whole way — and we are exhausted at the base of the rock buttress that blocks the way. We are early in the season and there is a lot of snow left over from the winter storms. Maybe we should have waited a few weeks?

On the first ascent, in 1979, George and Michael went right of the buttress to find hard, loose 5.9 rock climbing. Last year, Barry and Carl went left and suffered through deep snow and slow ice climbing. We go straight up the buttress; the headwall is split by a gully that offers three pitches of very fun and interesting mixed climbing. At most AI4, but stressful where the ice is thin and run out, and tiring on the steep, vertical bulge, with packs that still weigh 50 pounds.

The same day, really tired now! We desperately need a ledge of some sort to stop and sleep on. We carry on with several pitches of steep mixed climbing up to M5.

Three hard pitches in total. The relentless spindrift, the heavy packs and our major fatigue don't help things. Amazing climbing quality. Ice-filled cracks. I begin to weep trying to get purchase with an axe pick so dull! I strive to reach the ice deep inside a crack that I can almost get an arm into. I swing twenty times trying to feed my fist and tool cleanly through the gauntlet in order to reach the ice deep inside. I have no accuracy and proceed to wear a hole in the back side of my glove. I throw a temper tantrum not five metres above Eamonn. I scream and curse through the unrelenting spindrift caused by the increasingly intense snowfall and wind. Seems to be a low point — or will it be a high point? Maybe, if I ever have the opportunity to reflect on this climb! Previous and subsequent teams have avoided this slow but aesthetic climbing by scooting left on easy snow slopes.

We are at the base of the dreaded horizontal ridge. The tent ledge we end up with, after two hours of digging and chopping, lends itself to the worst night of sleep we have ever had, not to mention a feeling of major commitment.

The following day brings suffering — the true meaning of suffering. Fear, danger, avalanches, near death from being pulled off the knife-edge snow ridge by a releasing slab avalanche. Shovelling, crawling, surviving every step of the way. Exposed, no gear except the rope and the grim idea of jumping off the other side. What would the consequences be of jumping off the exposed and jagged rocky right side of the ridge to save Eamonn if he slips

down the sixty-degree ice face on the left? Let's leave this one to mystery. Whiteout, howling winds, no stopping permitted (not due to a lack of wanting or trying to).

When my energy fades and my hope diminishes, Eamonn rises and takes the lead; when Eamonn is tired, I take the lead. We are feeding off each other's energy — if we both sit down we may never get up. We are a strong team. Our goal is life, and we know what it takes to keep each other moving. A surprisingly fun mixed pitch ends the suffering and brings us to a posh ledge below the serac band at 15,000 feet.

Morning after a good night's sleep reveals slight altitude sickness in Eamonn, and the grimacing, enhanced storm continues. Our journey to the summit will involve exposed avalanche slopes that are a funnel for huge terrain above. We have four days of food left. The slopes are already loaded and it is snowing heavily. When will it stop? If it snows for four more days, it will only get worse. We want to move now but can't. Getting sick up



A new variation at 13,000 feet on The Infinite Spur. photo: Eamonn Walsh

high is not an option. Going down is not an option. We are forced to rest a day. The darkest day of my life. Too much time to think about our chances, all that I want out of my life, all that I haven't yet received or experienced. My whole life runs through my mind. People I haven't thought of in years; people from my childhood; every meaningful situation that I have ever had — all of it revealed in the thirty-some hours that we spend being tortured, enlightened. Eamonn is feeling the same. We don't talk about it but we both know it, as we are writing it down on the small amounts of soggy paper that we have both brought for situations just like this.

The next day dawns and the storm raves on. The slopes aren't very visible but they don't look good. We hear the constant sound of distant avalanches. Eamonn feels better and we feel the need to go for it, get it over with. We swear to each other to protect ourselves as best we can. I want, need to live — more than ever before. If we must we will dig for an hour every rope length in order to find a place to put an ice screw: life insurance. We may get hurt but at least we won't be ripped off the mountain. I take off, and immediately knock off a small slab. I whimper and keep going. We must try. It isn't that bad. We find ice frequently enough to do running belays, and the snow seems fairly stable. Six hours —

a short day — with nasty winds and sharp snow ripping at the skin on our faces, produces safety at 16,000 feet. We dig in for the night, and end up digging every hour for the next twenty-five as the weather worsens and our tent threatens relentlessly to collapse with the accumulations of blowing snow. I stay soaked all day, and I know that my energy level is low when I refuse to warm up despite resting in the tent.

The next morning reveals a slight clearing and we go for it. Not twenty minutes later we are in a whiteout, again, and insane winds drain our energy. The climbing is easy, but we are very tired and it is very cold. I have the luxury of swinging my hands to prevent them from freezing, unlike the situation several days earlier on the "ice ridge" when the present blisters on my fingertips were created. Pragmatism, survival, desire and action! MOVE!

We summit, ponder for no more than three seconds and start down the broad, crevasse-ridden Sultana Ridge. We are not having fun. We haven't had fun for some time now. Fun is a luxury we cannot afford. Fun is for climbing at the Stanley Headwall after a morning start at the Summit Café and before an evening of reflection at the Drake Inn over a couple of warm Guinness Stouts. We are in the alpine, fighting. Alpinism is about self-discovery and the future. Enlightenment is unattainable



above and facing page: *Descending the Sultana Ridge*. photo: Eamonn Walsh

when you are wearing a smile and have your arm around a girl.

In zero visibility and with no sign of previous ascent, we wallow down the Sultana Ridge, deep snow all the way. Powder snow covers the crevasses; we fall into one at regular intervals. My back is tied in knots from the still too heavy loads. *Why?* I ask. One more night on the mountain, and we will be in the safety of basecamp. So close yet so far!

May 26, 5 p.m. We race across the flat glacier towards Kahiltna Basecamp — trying to beat the hordes of West Buttress-eers who have finally had a break in the weather, allowing them to get back to the safety of basecamp. If they only knew. We are eating our pain. I am ready to cry.

A good night's rest and a day of reflection provide the energy needed for the last push. We need to pick up our skis, which we left 12 miles of glacier travel away, at the base of the south face of Foraker. Our style dictates no garbage, and if we leave these skis we will be failing. We use snowshoes and leave basecamp at 9 p.m. Ten hours later, we have blown our loads but are back at basecamp and waiting for the plane. We are tired, sick of suffering and fully worked over. We are leaving! Too much pain already.

May 28, 9 a.m. We catch a glimpse of the route as we drop over One-shot Pass in our single-engine ski plane.

What a line it is! Plumb, steep, direct. Everything that I ever dreamed of. The style was impeccable. We spent less than two weeks in the Alaska Range and achieved great things externally and internally. Safe; minimal garbage; all-free; no juggling; low-impact due to the amount of time spent in the area; single-push; and very little time spent acclimatizing. We worked hard. We spent less than three days in total in basecamp.

I don't feel that we failed on the *Moonflower*. We left the route incomplete, but we didn't sacrifice our style. On Mount Foraker we overflowed with success. Our goal was to summit while keeping within certain style guidelines. We achieved both.

Now I can dream up new adventures. I just reached a new level — in climbing, consciousness, spirit and life. What is to come? I now understand the importance of, as my friend Ben always says, "takin' it". Sometimes you have to "take it" in order to "reach it". Climbing doesn't have to be fun. Fortunately, it sometimes is. We climb to push ourselves; we push ourselves to learn, evolve and prosper.

I feel now, here on what they call *Suffer Machine*, that today I have it pretty good. Not much suffering at all — pain-free, free at last!

We would like to thank the Canadian Himalayan Foundation, Petzl, Charlet Moser, Patagonia, Mammut, Powerbar and Outter Limits for their support.



NO FARE WHERE LIFE BEGINS

by GREG LANDRETH





ANOTHER BIG-WALL TRIP TO GREENLAND — I CAN HEAR THE YAWNS ALREADY.

Here is how the story generally goes: Optional number of protagonists hone their climbing skills some place, let's say Squamish, save up their precious loot to buy the ticket and — hey presto! — find themselves at the bottom of some large stone in Tasermiut Fiord, where the Chris Bonington Flying Circus has already encamped. Bewildered, they use their binoculars to pick out a line that hasn't been clobbered. A variety of grunts, heaves and close shaves ensues before they top out and run down to the waiting plane, hoping that the bleeding will stop while sitting dumbly in their seats, the *real* difficulties of intercontinental travel disappearing below at 600 knots. Fellow passengers hold their noses as trail dust bonds with polypropylene. Another *remote* big-wall in an *exotic* place bites the dust.



NO DOUBT, THESE ARE FINE ACCOMPLISHMENTS, BUT THEY MIGHT JUST AS WELL BE IN SQUAMISH.

What do “remote” and “exotic” really mean in this sort of scenario? Virtually nothing. These words resonate with a deep temporal, spatial and cultural meaning that we have robbed ourselves of the pleasure of pursuing in our headlong rush to put ever-larger number grades on isolated sets of technical difficulties that we call routes. The rich realities of the worlds surrounding these remote peaks have vanished from mountaineering literature. Even the words “remote” and “exotic” cease to have any meaning under the onslaught of passenger aircraft, and helicopters in particular. Life becomes sport becomes games. Mountaineering becomes sport climbing becomes bouldering. The wild stories of mountain explorations from the Golden Age have now largely given way to rather bland descriptions of body positions, regardless of location. However, there are glimmers of hope for those who may still recognize beauty and truth. Göran Kropp and Tim McCartney-Snape did pretty well on Everest, and Stefan Glowacz has done his best on Baffin these past few years. Then there is always *Northanger*.

Using a sailboat as a vehicle to access those mountainous areas of the world not yet besieged by the madding crowd is a guarantee of elegant style, even if it does limit one’s range somewhat. The ticket merchants have pared down our area of operations to the coastlines of Antarctica, Patagonia, Greenland, and a few other places best kept secret for now. Fortunately, these stomping grounds are large and far away; however, we shall always be competing with the incursions of aircraft and other weapons of war for their secrets. Usually, the impetus necessary for us to go through the extremely involved procedure of launching the boat in pursuit of mountaineering esoterica in these regions involves a bit of our own history, and this year’s expedition to northwest Greenland was no exception.

I had sailed aboard *Northanger* in the company of her previous owner in the summer of 1988, while making a transit of the Northwest Passage. As we passed the latitude of Upernavik, on the west coast of Greenland, I glimpsed at some distance the massive cliffs that form the great rampart of Sandersons Hope, dropping directly to the sea. John Davis first saw these cliffs in 1587, and since then their recognizable outlines had been used as landmarks for the whalers prosecuting their grisly trade in the North Water. We were on a different mission at the time, however, and the image faded. Last year, returning from a winter on Ellesmere Island, we again passed close by these storied cliffs, even loitering awhile at their base as we gazed upward in awe. Thousands of feet of orange-grey granite loomed over our tiny boat, and the small part of it that we could see certainly looked climbable.



Since we were hurtling southward at the close of a particularly harrowing expedition, we didn’t investigate further. But we began to dream another dream — a new big-wall in an unknown area.

Two days later, my wife, Keri, and I were dumbstruck to see the Reverend Bob Shepton heave into view in his sloop *Dodo’s Delight*, a British climbing team aboard heading for “our” wall. We lied furiously and wished them well, hammering our way back across Davis Strait to a snowy, godforsaken winter in St. John’s. They managed to bag the first ascent of the wall, a great effort, but we had to demur on their style. All the climbers had *flown* to Greenland and met Bob in Umanak. We decided on a nasty game of one-upmanship: we would find another wall further north and attempt that. Months were spent poring over aerial photographs and geological charts. At last we had it — a 1000-metre wall of granite sandwiched up against the ice cap at the end of a long, ice-choked fjord north of Upernavik.

TWO THOUSAND MILES OF HARD SAILING TO CLIMB A WALL THAT MAY WELL NOT EXIST.

It is exceedingly difficult to round up a crew on this sort of premise. There are no passengers; all who come with us are there for the duration and for the dishes. That’s just the trip part. It costs an arm and a leg to get the boat out there and at least a month of sheer hell in the boatyard prior to leaving. Added to that, you’ve got to swallow all our bullshit about style and endure months of us bossing you about for your own safety. There’s time for one attempt only,



and then there is the return journey, longer and harder than the outward one. Keri and I sent out the call to our usual suspects, but only one answered for duty. Jia Condon is a special sort of character and really should have his own boat, but he spends too much time climbing for that. That's okay; someone's got to make up for our oceanic atrophy on the sharp end of the rope. Through Jia we met Chris Romeskie, who is from Whistler, and it seemed we had a quorum. The rest of our crew consisted of various professionals who make our lifestyle possible: Duncan Kemp, a dentist from Victoria who likes to sail; and Angela Rivers, a doctor from St. John's who thought well of our idea. Greenland ho, then.

For once, the Labrador Sea was kind to us as we bolted from the industrial hell of the Fermeuse boatyard. Working on boats shortens one's life severely — unlike sailing and climbing, which lengthen it, if one doesn't get killed first. A thousand miles of pleasant sailing under spinnaker washed away most of the toxic angst caused by modern epoxies. We arrived in Nuuk without firing too much recently swallowed dinner over the side. Thus confident, we filled the hold with Danish pastries and cheese and headed north, but the proximity of mountains was

making Jia and Chris itchy. Too bad, there would be much more itching and bitching before we got to the vicinity of our phantom wall. From Nuuk northward, there are plenty of worthy targets for a boatload of climbers, many of them unclimbed, but we continued relentlessly further north. Each time we reached a pleasant anchorage below towering peaks, the "jonesing" would start: "Why don't we stay here for a few weeks and do that peak and that and that and" On and on. Keri and I were starting to doubt our sanity as well. What if there was no wall in the north? It was still a two-week sail to Upernavik, and the weather had been too perfect for too long. In brilliant sunshine we coasted past country that most people would give their eye teeth to explore. I knew, though, that this was exactly what would cause the expedition to founder; it's terribly hard to keep one's eyes on the prize when it's not known if there is any prize. If we attempted too many lesser objectives, we would just fritter away our time and have little to show at the end. I just hoped that by the time we reached the 73rd parallel the mutiny would not already be in full swing. Fortunately, Jia is cut from the same "all for one, and one for all" mould as us and we managed to maintain momentum northward.

From the tiny island town of Proven north, all eyes were cast upward. At this point the fjord walls begin to drop vertically into the sea, but the area, although spectacular, did not provide what we hungered for. It was not until *Northanger* nosed around the north side of Qaserssuaq Island that the cliffs under Sandersons Hope stood proud and bold above us. We inspected the base of Bob Shepton's route and carried on north into the promised land. From here the going got tougher as we forged our way across the icy reaches of Upernaviks Isfjord to the northeast, worming our way in towards the ice cap. Another headland rounded, and here at last was the Holy Grail of our quest.

THERE HAD TO BE SOME MISTAKE.

Waves of rotting granite tumbled down the "hill", chased by cascades of water and moss. Here and there was a climbable section, linked by broken grey rubble. I'll never believe another photograph in my life. Without further ado we headed south.

It was Sandersons Hope all along, of course. *Northanger* had known it, and she always comes back for her own. We snuggled ourselves into a tight little anchorage with front-row seats about five kilometres from the wall and at long last began to consider climbing. It didn't help a lot that we could barely even walk after such a long approach "march", but walking is not a necessary skill for this kind of climbing. After a week of further preparation, Keri brought *Northanger* out of her spider-web of mooring lines, crossed the strait and brought the bow right up against the wall. Chris, Jia and I jumped off



onto a small ledge a few feet above the water and heaved the haul bags across the gap. A rubber boat and outboard followed shortly after to serve as the escape vehicle. Didn't lose a thing. Keri and Angela steamed away to *Northanger's* lair, content to be rid of us for a while. We set to and fixed the first two pitches of relatively low-angle slab, then gazed back across the strait to where *Northanger* lay, her bilges full of wine and good food. We became commuters.

Wrestling the inflatable up and down off the ledge every day for four days was no easy task, but it meant that we could drive to work from the comfort of the boat, eating royally and patching gear each night. It also meant that Keri and Angela could come partway up the wall with us and enjoy the view. Finally, after fixing seven pitches, we severed the umbilical cord, took the portaledge to the wall and set up camp. From the first camp, we could see that the steep slabs would soon rear up into the upper section, where discontinuous cracks snaked their way through the compact orange granite. Far off to the right, we could see the *Dodo's Delight* route, *Arctic Firstborn*. From the start, the bold prow we hoped to climb would certainly be the most elegant and direct line on the wall, constrained as it was between two wide water streaks that defined the limits of our wandering. We just hoped that it would go free and without bolts to cap what was already an excellent adventure. The climbing continued hard (for us) at about 5.10+, every pitch going out a full 60 metres. My fingers spent most of the time curled tightly around the video camera as Jia and Chris led confidently out, my seized-up climbing skills not being up to the task presented by most of the pitches. Taking on an easy-looking ninth pitch, I led out around a corner into the most fearsome of moss gardens.

SINCE THE NEAREST SHOVEL LAY BACK ON THE BOAT, I SWALLOWED MY PRIDE AND RAPPED OFF, giving Jia the lead. Routefinding became quite a problem as we worked our way slowly up disappearing finger cracks that sometimes hid large amounts of vegetation. The rock continued to be good — featured and solid — but each day yielded at best three pitches, loaded down as we were. At this latitude, once the midnight sun dips below the horizon, it is amazing how quickly the darkness of the oncoming winter advances. Every day now we would lose an appreciable amount of light on this north-facing wall. This had implications for the return passage, too, which weighed remarkably heavily in the back of our minds.

It was somewhere below the second camp that Jia finally had to relent on our standards. The wild space between two crack systems would have yielded a fifty-foot fall on tenuous face climbing. He called for the bolt kit, not for the last time, and started drilling. One can sit

in an airplane seat with a broken ankle, but two thousand miles of sailing is a bit difficult in that condition. All for one, and one for all. Far away, Keri and Angela were working feverishly to ready the boat for our eventual return, and we owed our safety to them.

It was time for me to lead something else. Prising the camera from my tourist fingers, I chose another easy-looking ramp, leading into the steeper headwall. No sooner had I gone from sight and earshot from the belay than the crack reared up into a frightening, flared off-width topped by an unprotectable chimney. For what seemed like hours, I fought my way up the hideous thing, looking in vain for some face holds in order to avoid being spat into the void. I grovelled my way up the chimney, far above the last Big Bro, and ran out of rope at the roof. No belay here. Jia fed another coil of rope into the Grigri 60 metres below, and I went for the crack that *had* to open out through the roof. Fingers found moss, scrabbled desperately at it and went in. Just as I looked way back down the chimney to where the Big Bro grinned up at me, my jumars somehow became detached from my harness. The 'binner must have twisted loose as I was slithering around the roof, but away they went, rattling down the crack and ... stopped. They'd miraculously wedged across the crack, and Jia brought them up, wearing his "fuckin' sailor's" grin. He got his comeuppance, though; the next (crux) pitch was his, and

it was a *long* way across some loose flakes to the next crack. In the end, he prevailed — at the expense of another bolt.

On Day 5 after committing to the wall, Chris head-butted his way through the last wet overhangs, pulling on a piece or two before they finally yielded, and we heard his triumphant yell. The champagne, courtesy of Keri and Angela, was waiting at the top — and just in time, too. The next day, a front swept in across Baffin Bay and dumped two feet of snow over the mountain. The beginnings of autumn meant the beginning of the season of gales and storms, and with two thousand miles still to sail, we scarpered south.

EPILOGUE. On the return voyage, we were not so lucky with the weather. Davis Strait hurled its usual autumnal malevolence at us as we battled fifty-knot winds to enter Saglek Bay, Labrador, on the notorious 11/9/01. Tuning in to the BBC for the first time in months, we heard the news that shocked the world. I had thought that I was just kidding, but passenger planes really *are* weapons of war. Still, the caribou, wolf and bear strolled down the beach as unconcerned as before.

Down North. VI, 5.10+ A1. Northwest face of Sandersons Hope. F.A.: Jia Condon, Chris Romeskie, Greg Landreth.

Koan íí

Road not recommended for travel

<i>death camas</i>	<i>wood lily</i>	<i>purple fleabane</i>	<i>white vetch</i>
<i>shrubby cinquefoil</i>	<i>death camas</i>	<i>wild rose</i>	<i>moccasin flower</i>
<i>wintergreen</i>	<i>dryad</i>	<i>death camas</i>	
<i>wild strawberry</i>	<i>bearberry</i>	<i>purple harebell</i>	<i>death camas</i>
<i>black-eyed susan</i>	<i>death camas</i>	<i>blue-eyed grass</i>	

*crushed
in my hiking
boot treads*

monica meneghetti

Mark Twight would not have approved. Not one bit. It's not that Bruce and I were against going as light and fast as possible – the fact was that we were.

The difference lay in the objective: rather than attempting some sick, new technical route in a single push, we were setting out to cross an entire mountain range. And not just any range. We were going to cross the rugged, remote Waddington Range in British Columbia's Coast Mountains, notorious for its monstrous valley vegetation and its multitude of heavily crevassed glaciers . . .



Heavy & Slow

A black and white photograph of a rugged mountain range. The foreground is dominated by a rocky, scree-covered slope. In the middle ground, there are several jagged, snow-capped peaks. The background shows more distant, snow-covered mountains under a clear sky. The overall scene is one of a high-altitude, mountainous environment.

**A Traverse of the
Waddington Range
– Chris Ferguson –**



So, despite limiting ourselves to carrying just 30 metres of 8.5-mm rope, way too few calories' worth of food, and a tiny single-wall tent, we started the trudge up the Franklin valley with packs weighing well over 35 kilograms. The retribution was immediate. Our feet were sore before the ocean went out of view. Again Twight's wisdom, this time concerning training hard before a big trip, had been ignored. The traverse of the range was only one part of a grander scheme to circumnavigate a huge chunk of B.C. wilderness, Vancouver to Vancouver. We had just spent the previous 21 days sea kayaking up the Inside Passage to the head of the massive fjord known as Knight Inlet. Apparently, sitting on your ass for that long doesn't ready your body for a big load.

The efforts of the first two days were to foreshadow the tone of many of the days to follow. Modern adventurers in this area are assisted greatly by the presence of logging roads running up both sides of the valley. A little pre-trip inquiring revealed that the right side of the toe of the glacier was the easier to ascend; since the roads



both went the same distance up-valley, we headed to the south (right) side. Aching, blistered feet and the first of hundreds of scratches and bruises to come from bushwhacking were a small price to pay for making it nearly 15 kilometres to a campsite beside the last major side drainage before the glacier. The creek feeding into the Franklin River did seem inordinately powerful, but we reasoned that this glacier-fed flow would subside considerably overnight.

The next morning, the torrent had not dropped one centimetre. Bruce, the taller of the two of us, made a trial attempt at a crossing, but well before reaching the maximum-strength channel at the far side he called it quits. Travellers of yesterday might have simply cut down some tall trees and created a bridge, but we were not equipped to do this. Rather than chance a long stay waiting for the levels to drop, we took our lumps and headed back to the bridge across the river, only a couple of kilometres from where we had originally started. At the end of Day 2, we were camped only a few hundred metres further up the valley than we had been the night before.

These kinds of setbacks became routine. Without trails, or any information about routefinding, our day-to-day travel was filled with uncertainty and, too often, heartbreak. We were meeting the mountains on their own terms and putting in the kind of effort rarely experienced by modern climbers, who may not appreciate how good they have it with groomed trails, helicopter access or porters. Although the traverse proved almost our mental and physical undoing, it was one of those bitter-sweet, character-testing experiences that you would not give up for anything.

Well after the turn of the last century, the Coast Mountains north of Vancouver were still largely a blank on the map. Based on those mountains immediately visible from the city and those seen from ships up the coast, it was believed that these peaks were minor and rarely reached a height of 10,000 feet. Then one day in



All photos in this article by Chris Ferguson

September of 1925, while climbing a mountain on Vancouver Island, across the Strait of Georgia, Don and Phyllis (Phyl) Munday spotted a tall peak far off in the distance which stood out from all the rest — a calling beacon. That observation marked their destiny and led to numerous years of exploration around what became known for a while as Mystery Mountain.

These early years of exploration are documented in Don's *Unknown Mountain*, a classic account of man and woman struggling against everything the range could throw at them to slow their progress, and also the story of a short-lived battle with other players in the climbing and mountain community. For a while, the Mundays were thought to be mistaken, or worse, about their conviction that Mystery Mountain (Waddington) was a major peak and certainly over 11,000 feet. Through much hardship and determination, they were soon to prove that the summits were in fact over 13,000 feet high and to become the first party to reach the mountain's slightly lower and much less technical northwest summit, in 1928.

The preferred route to the mountain was up the Franklin Glacier, reached in those days by a long steamer trip up from the city via the Inside Passage and finally by small craft to the head of the inlet. Although they did not have the service of a logging road, they did have the

advantage of reaching a glacier that extended a few kilometres further down-valley than it does now. Blazing a rough trail first before carrying loads, they would move enough supplies for a couple of weeks to a basecamp far up the valley at a point of land across from the mountain.

Aided by better packs, efficient stoves and lightweight materials, we were attempting to push our way up and over the entire range in a single, unsupported bid. Along the way, we also hoped to climb Waddington's northwest summit. However, as the end of Day 3 found us still a good distance from the toe — where we had hoped to camp the first night — we realized that this trip would have to be one of “baby steps”. Setting any goal for the day was only a recipe for disappointment.

The next morning started on a particularly grim note: in 50 minutes we made only 200 metres of up-valley progress. A dedicated team of biologists and geologists might never be able to come up with a better set of defenses than those already fortifying the approaches to the high mountains of this range. Dozens of alders at once enmesh branches that may extend out for more than four metres. This grid work is the main component of the shield and acts in concert with many other forbidding barriers. The alders alone make progress with a large



pack a monumental effort — snagging, pushing, tripping and striking you simultaneously. Often, the thick layers of leaves accompanying them cut visibility to zero, resulting in many sudden drops off unseen rock ledges, or shin-bashing steps into the unseen. To this is added the misery of constant scrapes and stings brought on by patches of devil's club, by thousands of small pine needles and by the ferocious swarms of mosquitoes that instinctively head for shoulders that are hard to reach with flailing hands that are usually too busy keeping branches at bay to swat bugs anyway. Eyes are gouged, legs bloodied, and the backs of hands perforated and scrubbed raw. Body armour would not be out of place. More than once, we were wrestled to the ground or so mired in the bush that even a healthy dose of screaming every expletive in the book could not soothe us. We eventually lost the energy to show frustration. At times it was an utterly soul-crushing experience.

The brief openings were a gift, a chance to breathe

deeply, adjust a pack, have a snack and plot the course ahead. By noon we were well up towards the toe but could then see why the right is the better approach side. On the far side, the terrain was much less undulating and gave relatively easy access to the blue ice highway we were so looking forward to travelling on. Between us and the opposite side was a raging and absolutely impassable Franklin River. It must have been near its peak flow. In some spots, amazingly, it was channelled through fissures less than 20 feet across, gouged over millennia. On our side, the land heaved up into a series of ledges, buttresses and very steep talus.

After cresting a rise overlooking the valley bottom, we noticed some old man-made debris under a rock. Closer examination revealed that a previous party had stowed some stuff sacks in this nook, and we paused to sort through this unexpected sign of the passing of others. A stove that lit, a water purifier, a book, lightweight glacier screws, a solid-stem Friend, some small nuts and several 'biners were among the items we discovered. We assumed that these fellow adventurers had felt they were dragging too much weight on their bid to reach higher ground and so had made this offering to the mountain gods. Although this seemed an ominous sign as we struggled with our own heavy loads, my dirt-bag instincts kicked in and we set off again with the screws, the Friend and some 'biners jangling on the outside of our packs.

Weaving our way up and through the maze beyond was nerve-wracking. Pushed ever higher up the loose valley side, we didn't need to discuss the unthinkable, a vertical dead end, to know that it was uppermost in both our minds. After hours of tenuously feeling our way around this last great obstacle, I decided to drop my pack and scout ahead. The effect was immediate and exciting. Without the pig on my back, I felt as though I could fly. I rushed ahead for 25 minutes, following what I hoped were honed senses, and finally arrived at a steep gully that looked manageable and that led to the slopes angling towards the awaiting glacier. An hour and a half later, Bruce and I were contouring our way down this now seemingly treacherous slope. Hundreds of tons of fresh rockfall lay atop a layer of ice thinly covered with smaller debris. The sound of bus-sized boulders settling and grinding all around us conjured up the image of a screeching hawk readying to attack its helpless prey. This and the poor footing wore at whatever nerves we still had left. At long last, we slid over the edge of a final rock barrier and our feet touched the cold, hard ice we had dreamed of for three days. Triumphant, we set up our tent a few hundred yards further up on a fairly flat spot.



The next major goal was Fury Gap, the pass at the base of the northwest ridge of Waddington and the doorway to the eastern side of the range. On the fifth morning, we set off hopeful of a quick and easy walk up the intervening fifteen kilometres of glacier, jubilant in the thought that, at least for the near future, vegetation would not feature in our days. We made it to the gap in two days, but not as easily as desired. Crevasses and ice ridges had soon reared up, often forcing us to travel three hundred metres for every one hundred gained up-glacier. At the place where the glacier makes a sweeping left turn, off the only-too-well-named Icefall Point, we were forced far to the right of the two-kilometre-wide break-up in the ice which resembles a daunting tidal wave stretching across the glacier. This also marked the firn line, and upon rounding the corner we were obliged to make headway walking parallel to numerous crevasses that were only just barely covered in wet snow.

At the 8200-foot Fury Gap, we were blessed with mostly sunny weather; although we would have dearly liked to take a day off, we forced ourselves to do a sky check at three-thirty the next morning. Twinkling stars announced that we would be heading for the summit. The Northwest Ridge is a long and circuitous route that varies from snow arêtes to steep but broad glaciers clinging to climber's left of the crest. Despite a brief stint of whiteout conditions, the weather proved to be excellent, if a little warm for the snow. The climb caused our weary legs, now only burdened with fanny packs, to burn, and

our pace slowed as we gained altitude. Although the climb was not generally technical — the cruxes usually being the many 'schrund crossings and the ascent and descent of two steep sections — I still foolishly found myself on a vertical section of ice above a crevasse lip, clinging to my single mountaineering axe as I chopped a handhold with the bottom of my ski pole.

I shudder to think of the epic that would have ensued if I had broken my ankle in such a remote location and at more than 11,000 feet of elevation. But the views were incredible. Glaciers were everywhere, winding and tumbling down from dozens of impressive granite spires that jabbed at the deep blue ceiling. Although we could not see the ocean itself, the landforms to the west showed where we had paddled in and begun the arduous walk that seemed to matter little on such a spectacular day. When the true summit came into view — sheer dark rock and snow, just as it appeared on the cover of a book we had so often stared at longingly — we knew that we were nearly at our summit. Minutes later we stood atop a rime-covered snow mushroom, about eight hours after leaving our tiny tent.

The traverse was half over, but contending with the soft snow on the descent required all our concentration for the next five hours. The technical crux of the traverse itself was the descent down the northeast aspect of Fury Gap. Unlike the benign slopes we had ascended, the new terrain was steep and convex so that the many crevasses

were hard to detect until you were right on top of them. We weaved down through these, occasionally belaying one another over questionable bridges. Inexorably forced to the left, we were eventually stopped dead by a gaping hole. Luckily, we were able to gain a rock rib at this point, where we found that just a few metres above the bulge lay a partial bridge over the moat at the base of the rock. As it was steep, I set up a rappel station using a so-so horn and, thanks to some great karma, was able to back it up for the first rappel using the booty Friend in the only available crack. The descent down the remaining slope was accelerated by the threat of seracs from above. Our crampons were balling up badly, and at one point Bruce slid from above me into a thankfully shallow crack, his backpack finally proving to be of some good by absorbing the impact. Ahead lay the Scimitar Glacier, which begins its life in the shattered icefall that forms between Waddington and Combatant and which then continues down its great trench of a valley for many kilometres. After negotiating the lateral moraine and its debris, we had a chance to casually stroll down the ice, chatting as we hopped over many icy rivulets. We felt relaxed for the first time in days and had an opportunity to hash out some issues that had caused a good deal of stress during the paddle. Looking around at the raw grey rock and the snowy peaks, we found it easy to see why this range has been used to represent the Karakoram in Hollywood productions.

From our campsite below the awesome Radiant Glacier, we dared to plan a half-day walk up to a lake tucked into the head of Pocket Valley, where we would take the rest of the day off. You would think that we would have learned by then. The next day proved to be one of the worst, with hellish bushwhacking and the added insult of swampy terrain underfoot and blazing sunshine overhead, capped off by a fifty-metre, hip-deep wade through a glacier-fed lake. It took eight hours to travel approximately five kilometres. At least we found a pleasant, sandy lakeside spot where we could set up camp and contemplate how good it would be to take our first day off, after nine gruelling ones.

A sunny, restful day on what we dubbed “Moraine Lake” was followed by another sunny, fairly straightforward day of travel up the sides of a pristine alpine stream, over the snowy pass above, and across to what would be the final significant rise of the trip. After negotiating some glacier ice and a few steep slopes, we arrived at the final pass and could look down on the western arm of Twist Creek, the drainage that would take us to the Mosley valley and the edges of civilization. A tedious descending traverse to avoid a nasty hanging glacier placed us at a flowery campsite just above treeline.

The day off had done us both good, but Bruce did seem to be less energetic than usual, perhaps due in part



to the dread we both felt about the long, forested route that lay ahead of us. The main branch of Twist Creek came in about seven kilometres down-valley from our site. We had been hopeful that the further east we got in the range, the less dense the vegetation would be. But in keeping with the theme of the trip, as one obstacle passed, others came into play. Ankle-jarring boulders led to wet, thick bush and eventually more wooded areas. The melt-off was still at its peak, so the Twist was a menacing wash that pushed right up against the high edges of the densely timbered banks. Our only hope of crossing was to do so with the aid of logs jammed all the way across. A little reconnoitring uncovered a minor jam where one log spanned the frothy flow. With the greatest caution, we took turns, first wading and using the log as a handrail, then bellying ourselves onto the slick wood and inching along it towards a twisted knot of wood debris on the far side. In my mind, this — and not gaping crevasses, avalanche-prone slopes or the risk of general insanity — was the most dangerous part of the traverse. One slip would almost certainly have meant



drowning — or, at the very least, losing half our gear.

On the far side, we stumbled across an old camp and more rejected equipment, including ski bindings and goggles. As we continued, we more frequently encountered what was to remain one of the biggest obstructions of the trip: wind-downed trees. At times they appeared as a giant matrix from a game of pick-up sticks. We were forced to weave up and over these as though we were running through an army-recruit obstacle course, only we were still carrying large packs. As the day advanced, it started to rain and Bruce started to fade. When it came time to stop, the best we could hope for in the thick forest was a hummocky patch of moss just a few feet above the animal trail we had been only partially able to follow. We managed a fire, which lifted our spirits a little, but could not stop the wave of ill health that was now suddenly crashing over Bruce. The rate at which he had to relieve himself increased exponentially and he was unable to get much nourishment into his system.

By the time we were underway the next day, Bruce's panicked stops were occurring almost every half-hour.

I felt for him, but on occasion I could not help but laugh at the horrendous noises emanating from his body, and at his necessary total lack of inhibition when taking care of business where he stood. In 24 hours he had turned into a total wreck, dangerously dehydrated and getting weaker by the hour. Nevertheless he managed to plod on — there was really no choice, as a rescue of any sort here, wherever we were in the dense and featureless valley, was bound to take more time than he would want to wait — and after rolling over several steep undulations and attempting to cut the corner into the Mosley valley, we finally came out to what appeared to be an old and primitive trail.

Still contending with the odd overgrowth and wind-fall area, we reeled in the kilometres along Twist Lake and beyond to a point where it looked as if a bulldozer had once tried to cut a swath. A creek crossing, for which we didn't bother to remove our boots, led to more thick bush and the sudden loss of the trail. We wandered through this and emerged to find in front of us, just thirty metres ahead, a barbed-wire fence, a lush pasture and, in the distance, a group of beautiful horses. Civilization! After we passed through this large ranch without seeing a soul, Bruce pulled out the satellite phone and called a ranch / B & B that we knew of further to the east. The plan had been to walk out this road and over to Chilko Lake, where the raft portion of the trip back towards Vancouver was to begin. However, Bruce was in no state to carry on, so we were picked up, led to our cabin for a shower and later treated to a substantial meal, which Bruce had a hard time enjoying. The scales in the bathroom indicated that Bruce had lost a whopping 25 pounds. He was later diagnosed with giardiasis and immediately placed on an IV when he got to the nearest hospital. (We had used iodine in cases where we felt that there was any risk of the water being tainted.)

To say that such an adventure was enjoyable is difficult. Was all the suffering worth the results? I have come to think that it was, at least this one time. The rancher at the B & B said that many groups had decided to save the expense of the helicopter ride out of the range and had bushwhacked to the east. Every last one said that it was the last time they would do it. The journey has brought me great respect for the mountains and has acted as a sharp reminder that they encompass much more than just the craggy, snow-covered peaks. Our sense of pride in our success is tempered by the knowledge that a small number of dedicated explorers have spent much more time delving into the range than we have. The views of cascading waterfalls, beautiful alpine flowers and breathtaking mountains were all that much sweeter as a result of the work that went into earning them. The full mountain experience will not be soon forgotten.

**You have to admit, once you see it, that it is an utter plum.
An unclimbed strip of ice, all aquamarine and dull silver
and proud – glazed to the majestic east face of Mount Fay
like a thousand-foot band of inlaid gems.**

I fully understand how all the young guns (at 42 I can no longer call myself youth) coveted it, doubly so as it is visible from the base lodge of the Lake Louise ski hill. I wholeheartedly empathized with Steve Holeczi, the young 'un, when I informed him in early March that Jay Smith, Paul Teare and Chris Delworth were on their way in to try it. Steve's face broke in despair and he choked up over the lost dream. "Oh man, that's the crown jewel of the range!" he moaned.

But Jay, Paul and Chris floundered thigh-deep in the worst Rockies snowpack since 1957. They bailed miles before "the Jewel".

By early April the word was out and I'd heard that Eamonn Walsh and Raphael Slawinski, a powerhouse partnering of two key local players, were laying plans for an attempt on the Jewel. A competitive fire smouldered to life within my black little heart.

Farmboy (Steve House, who never did like being called "the Great White Hope of American Alpinism" — "What if I start believing the things you old guys are saying about me?" — had happily adopted this new moniker), Rolando Garibotti and Jonny Blitz showed up at my house in Canmore in early April. They had come to the Rockies to go ALPINE! CLIMBING! I talked up the Jewel, but the team decision was to go higher and more north-facing, recent temperatures having been too hot. We were Columbia Icefield-bound.

At the Saskatchewan River Crossing resort, we shuffled two vehicle loads of alpine paraphernalia and duffle bags pregnant with test clothing into a shed-sized room and then the four of us piled in, too. The next day was to be an easy "feeling out" of conditions. Hah. Eighteen hours later we'd gouged our ski skins to pieces and traversed acres of terrifying avalanche slopes to attempt *Echo Madness*. The cirque of the Stutfield Glacier surrounded us with regiments of azure seracs, their calvings thunderous and immediate. We quivered with each and every roar. To retreat from the worst of it, Rolo tied three



ropes together and belayed Blitz, Farmboy and me to safety, then downclimbed 200 metres of threatening snow.

That night, our cramped digs smelled like a WWF locker room in Savannah in August. Farmy and I spent our second night together in the queenie, with Blitz close by in the single and Rolo in a trench parted into the gear on the floor. Farmboy told us a bedtime story about being in the same queen-sized situation in South America with fellow guide Bob. Steve had been guiding down there for seven months and had not seen his wife, the beautiful Anne, in all that time. Bob awoke to Steve's somnambulant hand cupping his pec, and Steve's lips pursed and cooing unintelligible love babble. Bob screamed, Steve screamed, they both bolted out of bed and screamed some more ... then started talking about the Cubs' last season.

I had anticipated a fitful sleep, but I slept soundly due to my exhaustion, and because Steve is actually a very handsome man.

Blitz and I — the old guys — took a rest day the next day while Rolo and Farmboy skied in to check out *Sidestreet*, an alpine climb next to *Slipstream*. The lads didn't like the look: too little ice, not good nick. We planned on more ice climbing.

the case of the **TREMBLING** hands **barry blanchard**

In the restaurant the next morning, our omelettes were immense and I was enjoying mine thoroughly when Farmboy's psyche guttered.

"I'm just not keen on ice. I drove up here to *alpine* climb. There are things that I could be getting done at home," he said.

We'd all seen it coming (especially me, as I was sleeping with him). There's just no hiding a lack of inspiration in an alpinist who has travelled a thousand kilometres to alpine climb and can't. It turned into a goodbye breakfast for Farmy. Blitz returned from the souvenir shop grinning and dispersed some levity. He'd found bullet-hole stickers for our helmets; Farmy split.

Blitz and I climbed ice that day, and Rolo took pictures. Pulling into my house later, we were very surprised to see Farmy's car.

"This is going to be interesting," said Blitz.

Steve's eyes glittered and he was spewing: "I just couldn't drive all the way back to Mazama without at least taking a look at the Jewel. I drove up to the ski hill and walked out onto the deck and I wasn't expecting much ... then I saw it! It is bloody AWESOME! My hands were shaking so bad from lust that I had to rest my binoculars on the deck rail to steady them. There were all these skiers around me drinking beer and smoking and there I was hunkered down between them shaking and salivating and trying to steady my hands! We have to try it — I've already been to the hardware store and bought fuel and sleds to haul our packs in on!!"

Downer was that Blitz had to go back to work landing jets (despite the fact that he claims anyone can fly them: "Hell, they fly themselves."), so it was only Rolo, Farmboy and I who left at six the next morning for the Moraine Lake road head.

A rusted-out 4WD camper-capped pickup sat in the parking lot, as threatening to us as a guardian bull buffalo. We immediately concluded that the truck belonged to Eamonn and Raphael and that they were ahead of us, scooping the Jewel! Rolo peered into the windows and saw water bottles and the ice-climbing guidebook — definitely climbers. Steve placed his hand over the hood to feel for heat: cold, way ahead of us. We lashed our packs to the yellow kiddies' sleds and began skiing.

The 12 miles into Consolation Valley consumed a number of hours and we fretted over the twin ski tracks ahead of us.

"Maybe it's not Raph and Eamonn. Maybe it's a party on *Gimme Shelter*," I suggested optimistically.

Further on, Farmboy offered his own positive spin: "It takes a lot to succeed on a route like this first go. Maybe they're failing. Hell, I wouldn't even mind doing the second ascent, it's such a cool line."

Towards the end of the road, Rolo and I got our first view of the Jewel. A perfect, glittering plumb line brazed to a flat, black alpine wall. Comici's drop of water frozen in time. So direct that a first grader would point it out: "You should climb here. I'd like more milk now, please."





My ski poles rattled inside shaking hands.

At 1 p.m., we skied under the incredible east face of Mount Babel. That wall looks so much like a human hand commanding HALT! So steep, so overbearing, so long — 2000 feet high, yet lorded over by the 3500-foot east face of Mount Fay just to the south.

Up-valley we made out two climbers on *Gimme Shelter* and no one on the Jewel! Gleeeful hoots and yodels bounced off the valley walls.

By 3 p.m., our basecamp was established in the sparse timber lining the far eastern shore of the upper Consolation Lake. We skied off to check out the Jewel.

My friend David Cheesmond died attempting the Hummingbird Ridge on Mount Logan in 1987; now Rolo, Steve and I contoured over a moraine that David, Carl Tobin and I had crossed in February of 1984 during the first ascent of the East Face of Mount Fay. I looked up and remembered David, felt the heat of his heart there, as though the route were part of his bloodline, a trace of him left on the snow and on the rock and on the ice. I saw myself at 24 and I remembered the fire that burned in me then for these mountains. I shivered recalling the cold and the storm and the four days of striving up the face. I remembered the cornice that hit us on the second day — that screaming sky — the smack that knocked me breathless and bruised my left shoulder blade, badly. The hypothermia that haunted me for the

last days, my down bag completely dead; the brilliant climbing; the bond between Carl and David; Carl handing me a different kind of jewel on the last day when I wailed profanity into the crap-sucking storm. “Hey man,” he insisted, “it don’t gotta be fun to be fun.”

Good memories.

The grandeur of the Jewel grew as we skied. It reared up like God’s own totem pole, Jack’s beanstalk — 1000 feet of challenge, near-mythical in its linearity. The first pitch looked like a series of glass wind chimes tacked to the black rock, hanging by their tops only and draping down for body lengths to form fragile and translucent panes of ice free from the rock behind. I felt anxiety rise in my throat as I tried to gauge the size of these ice features. If the panes were the size of my leg, they would probably break when we tried to climb them. Without ice, the rock could prove to be featureless and unprotectable. And since we are true alpinists who have read Bonatti — and believe in him — we never take those sissy-assed bolt things.

Leaving our skis, we punched up closer to the pitch and I saw that the first span of ice was as wide as a door. My throat relaxed and I scampered on up all awash in excitement. We decided that Steve and I would stay and fix the first pitch while Rolo descended to camp and made dinner.

I've learned how to know when Farmboy is having a hard go of it. His breathing becomes raspy and rhythmic and sounds like a handsaw chewing through a plank. But the rasp is his mantra; he deals with fear and fatigue by focusing on it. And when he is in that space, he rarely, rarely speaks, and he makes no mistakes.

In the first 15 metres, I saw Steve's feet skate free from the ice twice, and when he finally pulled into a stable hang atop the first, beach-ball-sized bulge, he looked down to me and shouted, "WAS *THAT* STEEP ENOUGH FOR YOU, MR. BLANCHARD?!" In the Farmboy scheme of things, that represents the same level of braggadocio as Ali declaring himself "CHAMP!" and all the other bums "CHUMPS!"

Steve climbed out of view, breathing and focusing. I heard the heartwarming ring of a solidly pounded piton and I relaxed some and continued to pay out rope. In time I dangled a weighted sling at arm's length to establish a plumb line. I saw that the first forty feet of the pitch stepped out in a series of one- to four-inch-thick ice curtains. Ten degrees past vertical. "Holy moly!" I gasped. I dropped my arm and gazed out along the snow bands of the east face of Fay, buttressed by broad cliffs of Rockies limestone and bordered by a broken sky above and lush, green, rolling timber below. The highway a faint line way on out there, and the ski hill smaller still.

An hour later, Farmboy was anchoring and I was shivering. Excavating three knifeblades, two stoppers and a cam and then focusing them to a master point for our fixed line consumed another hour. I rapped to the end of the excess rope, downclimbed to the snow and ran uphill and downhill to warm up. Farmy rapped to me and we skied to basecamp.

Rolo had a story to tell.

The Gimme Shelter party had come upon Rolo while he was crouched down and gathering water from a small swale at the head of the lake.

"What are you doing here?!" exclaimed Rob Owens, a young local keener, aghast at finding any other soul in this valley.

"Oh hello, I'm trying to climb that thing," Rolo replied, rising to his feet and pointing to the Jewel. Rob's head jerked to the Jewel like a deep-sea rod being hit by a marlin. Farmy and I could be made out on the first pitch.

"Who are *those* guys?!" wailed Rob.

"That's Barry and Steve," replied Rolo.

"Oh man, my friend Eamonn is going to be bummed. He's coming in here to try that line with Raph tomorrow."

The plot thickened. Rob and partner skied away and shared the situation with Raph and Eamonn, who were bedded down in a cook shelter at Moraine Lake three kilometres down-valley. The race was on. Eamonn

suggested starting immediately. Rob skied out, drove to Canmore and actually considered not sleeping and coming back in! So much wanting; so many breaking dreams.

Rolo fired up the stove at 3 a.m. the next morning and we skied from our basecamp at 4 a.m. Rolo, being just about as fit as they come, soon outdistanced Farmboy and me. Closer to the base of the route, I had to shake my head because I swore that I glimpsed a second light just downslope from Rolo's! Another team? Couldn't be; must be Rolo's light reflecting off a block of snow. Yet the light looked all bluish, like light filtered through ice ... or like one of those fancy new LED headlamps! And there it was again! *Holy Shit!* It was another party and they were turning on their headlamps intermittently, stealthily, trying to scoop us! It had to be Eamonn and Raph making their play.

Ahead, Rolo had realized "OK, now we are racing," and he'd put his head down and kicked into overdrive. Rolo was the horse you wanted your money on. He hit his stride and left the field in the dust. I chugged on, trying to think up a climbing system that would accommodate five first ascensionists, but the Jewel was just too narrow and too direct. I couldn't see five of us being able to fit at any of the stances. One team following another would mean a lethal pummelling for the lower team. There seemed to be no "win-win" solution.

In the beam of my headlamp, Eamonn looked like someone who had just stepped from a hot tub into the dead of winter. Steam wafted from him, and sweat glazed his face and dripped from his hair and off his chin.

"Who *is* that guy?" asked Eamonn. "We tried to catch him and"

I laughed and said, "Oh man, that's Rolo. You can't catch Rolo. He's got the Alex gene; he's uncatchable!"

Steve arrived and met Eamonn and Raphael and said he'd always thought that they would meet in a wild place like this and that it was appropriate. Raph and Eamonn bowed out gracefully and, being gentlemen, lent me their cellphone to call my wife, Catherine, who worries sometimes, to let her know that we were all okay.

Rolo had already Tibloc-ed the first pitch. We'd taken the wee rope clamps (Tiblocs) to save on weight, but we found that they suck for full rope ascents because, despite decent technique on our part, the ropes took a shredding. They were brand new half-ropes, and that hurt (we concluded that jumars are worth the extra weight).

The pitch was a dangling enchainment of frosted-glass shower curtains, and sea-green bulges the size of bowling balls. Half of the gear was on rock, and at one point Farmy climbed behind a sapphire pillar, round as a telephone pole, so that the rope passed behind it and the pillar itself protected him. Crafty Farmy; smart Farmy. At the anchor, we decided that it must be WI7 because even though Rolo and I hadn't climbed it we'd gotten fully pumped Tibloc-ing it!

Leaving Steve's belay, I stepped down and traversed left to gain thicker ice: the "line". I tapped holes through the curtain and hooked my picks into them. It all vibrated, sounding like glass chimes, like broken glass tinkling down brass tubes. I felt that giving the ice a good smack with the broad side of my axe would make the whole curtain fracture and fall away. I just delicately placed my crampons because the thought of kicking in scared the bejesus out of me. Five metres out, I found a good cam and grabbed the edge of the curtain. It felt like a surfboard in my hand as I laid away from it.

The next ten metres were unprotectable and terrifying. Towards the end, I was in a race with my exhaustion and my need to stay quiet and not break the ice, and with the panic that was rising in me. I needed to be at the bulge of blue ice two metres above me, where the ice might be anchored to the rock, and I needed to be there NOW! because I was on the verge of falling.

My heart pounded like a jackhammer. If *my* breathing is a mantra, it is the mantra of the enraged, bovine bull pawing the ground: WHOOSH! HUUGH! WHOOSH! HUUGH! The bulge was, of course, overhanging and I fluttered towards it twice and retreated and my body shook like ... well, take a butter knife and clamp the flat blade between the heel of your hand and the top of a table. Strum the handle — *that's* what my body felt like. I stuck the bulge and quakingly drilled in a half-believable screw, then suggested that I come down while I was still alive. Then I suggested that Farmboy lead the pitch.

"I don't know what I could do up there that you can't, Bubba," Steve stated.

"I'm losing my mind up here, man. I think that I'm going to fall."

"You look fine from down here, Bubba. You're controlling it."

And Rolo added with his charming Argentine accent and diction, "Yas, Bubba, you look good, no?"

With that pep, I sucked it up and continued. The climbing remained fragile and steep. Eight metres higher I skittered upon a good crack in the rock. The crack was one metre long and solid and I stitched in four lovely pieces and fluttered on.

At 35 metres, I anchored to rock and ice under a small overhang. It was the only place where it seemed possible to stop. Rolo and Steve seconded carrying our two small day packs. The packs weighed about twenty pounds each and held between them three belay jackets, a titanium stove and pot, two 200-millilitre gas canisters, Cup-o-Soup, GU, spare gloves, headlamps, a tissue-paper-thin guide's tarp, a shovel blade and six litres of water. We graded the pitch WI6+ and after the ascent dubbed it the "psychological crux" of the route because of the fragility of the ice and the threat of the whole curtain collapsing. As I hung tight under the roof, my

stomach hurt fiercely and I feared that the anxiety of the last 35 metres had given me an ulcer.

Rolo cut through the bull when Farmy and I, observing good climbing etiquette, began handing him the lead gear: "Oh no! We should not even play dese game. Steve should lead, no?"

The edge of the overhang had concentrated the ice into a corner, and Farmboy stepped out onto what we assumed would be easier ground. It was — WI6.

A catwalk of snow trisects the Jewel atop our third pitch and we all enjoyed being out of the steepes for a while. An incredulous Rolo informed Steve and me that he was getting biceps cramps and that the last time his biceps had cramped was in the early '90s when he'd climbed the *Nose* in under six hours and led every pitch!

Farmy pulled onto another WI6-ish pitch. The seconding was knacking and Rolo and I took to "alpinizing" it: we hooked our picks into all the carabiners and screw eyes, and we did this absolutely shamelessly — though it really didn't help that much 'cause there were precious few ice screws on the pitch.

Leaving the next anchor, Steve said, "Someone else is going to have to lead the next pitch. I'm getting tired." Like condemned men, Rolo and I exchanged glances rife with fear and dread. Far above us, dusty clouds stumbled over the mountain like so many giant balls of sage. Flurries of graupel rained down on us; we were sporadically inundated with spindrift waves of the stuff. It felt as though truckloads of sand were being dumped over our bowed and covering — and mortal — heads. And like a gauzy, grey Zeppelin, the afternoon sun had laboured across the sky and passed beyond our horizon.

Rolo and I had wrestled into belay jackets and were watching Steve bridge onto an emerald green dagger when the air around us shook with the growing roar of an avalanching snow mushroom.

"FUCK! WATCH OUT!" I screamed.

Above and left of us, a shrieking white mass impacted the wall and exploded into a barrage of chalk-coloured cannonballs and plaster shrapnel. I lunged into the mountain, Rolo too. Steve disappeared in the mist and fallout of the hit. Chunks smacked in close to us; thankfully, none hit. Experience had shown me the face of man bombarded, and Rolo looked like that now: irises completely surrounded by white, like the yellow yoke of a fried egg; jaw slack and just beginning to quiver faintly.

"THAT WAS TOO FUCKING CLOSE, BARRY! I THINK WE SHOULD GET THE FUCK OUT OF HERE!" Rolo exclaimed.

"Yeah man, I think that you're right."

Rolo and I were freaked and we shared that with Steve, shouting back and forth over the 25 metres between us. Steve pointed out that he was in no position

to add to the decision-making process, bridging as he was between two vertical ice flows.

“I’ll come down if you guys want me to, but right now I have to move and keep climbing.”

So it was left to Rolo and me to invent the logic that allowed us to continue: “If one more comes down, we’re out of here.”

I teetered onto the last blue pillar of the lower ice features. It was huge and thick and proper. At fifteen metres, the ice arced past vertical and I entered my buffalo breathing mantra. I soon felt like Elvis shaking his booty on stage in 1957. At twenty metres, I was flambéed and I fumbled desperately to sink a screw, then to clip my quaking ass into it to hangdog — I did not fall! Seven metres higher, I crested over the lower ice system and ran the rope out to a sheltered rock anchor tight to the left wall of the amphitheatre I’d climbed into.

Arriving at my anchor, Farmboy stated: “You did a good job on that pitch, Bubba,” — confirmation of the pillar’s difficulty, and approval of my tactic. More pep.

Bold blue ice cleaved the rock over our heads, but above that lay acres of evil avalanche terrain. Our plan was to transfer to a far-less-threatened gully left of us. Rolo grabbed the rack and got after the snow-covered rock.

Farmy did his magic for another two pitches of glassy green ice, and then it was dark and we were into the snow climbing.

Rolo led off by headlamp.

Midnight. The air cracked with cold. Rolo brewed, and I shivered and belayed Farmy while he used our shovel blade to dig an honest-to-God, shoulder- to over-the-head-deep trench through the utter crap snow topping our gully.

“Can you believe this goddamned guy!” exclaimed Rolo as he and I shuffled up the trench on freshly excavated limestone.

At 3 a.m., I clung to the cold and dark edge of Mount Fay. I was 50 metres above Rolo and Steve and I could not make out the features ahead. I felt that I was balanced on the border of the world. I believed that one false step would pitch me churning into the void. I climbed back down to Farmboy and Rolo.

By 4:30 a.m., Rolo had carved us out a snow cave and we waddled in and draped the guide’s tarp over the door behind us. We sat on our packs and brewed Cup-o-Soup. Soon after, all three of us passed out with our heads



slumped to our knees, like bums in front of a fire. We’d been on the go for 27 hours.

We dozed for an hour and a half, then brewed tea. At 7 a.m., we climbed into the new day. The air was icy and my first draw on it sent my lungs into shock as if I’d leaped into frigid water. The air was sequined with ice crystals lit up by the dawn as airborne sparkling jewels. The sun felt so good and I pushed on through three more rope lengths. The snow was horrid: useless, vile, unbonded crystals that provided about the same resistance as the meringue on my mother’s lemon pie.

We all wrestled from the “pits” many times and left a perforation of craters along the ridge line which looked like a child’s “connect the dots” giant anaconda. At 10,000 feet, it

became too ridiculous — even to men of vision and desire such as us. The summit ridge line was only 500 feet above, but we just weren’t gonna get there. We floundered; we failed in creating the *alpine* route we had envisioned.

On our knees to keep from plunging through the papier mâché crust, we rappelled to the incredible Quadra glacier (in any other — normal — year, we would have downclimbed this terrain). The glacier sits atop a massive rock shelf fully 2000 feet above the valley floor and it looked, to me, like a massive white landing strip suspended in the sky. We traversed to its south end, walking overtop *Gimme Shelter* and feeling strange in the knowledge that this route was down there under our feet. The gully we descended below Bident Mountain is threatened by seracs and we dawdled not, bum-sliding and rapping in a haste accented by anxiety.

Thirty-six hours after leaving our little basecamp, we shuffled back into it. Rolo suggested skiing out immediately, but Farmy and I told him to get stuffed. Rolo accepted this well, perhaps because I ended up bivying out under the tissue tarp while Rolo had the pleasure of sharing the tent with Farmboy.

At dawn we skied into the new day and away from Fay. It had been a grand adventure in the company of good men, and, all things considered, the hardest ice climb I’d ever done. Later, around my kitchen table, with the help of Catherine, we decided to name the ice climb we’d created *Sans Blitz* in honour of our absent friend.

And deep in the dark reaches of my black little heart, a fresh ember smouldered to life: perhaps, one day in the future, Rolo, Blitz, Farmy and I could return and push the route to the ridge line, and maybe even the summit — “Avec Blitz”!



"POLAR CIRCUS, THE WEEDING WALL, SLIPSTREAM. THESE ARE BUT THREE OF THE HUNDREDS OF LEGENDARY ICE CLIMBS — THE CONSISTENTLY FORMED, STAINLESS-STEEL FLOWS — OF THE GRAND CANADIAN ROCKIES. TODAY, MOTIVATED ROCKIES CLIMBERS ARE SEARCHING BEYOND THE PATENT CLIMBS, LOOKING WITH A FINER FOCUS, AND FINDING THAT LESS IS MORE!"

SO BEGAN JOE JOSEPHSON'S ARTICLE on the changing state of Canadian ice climbing in 1995 ("Unformed Ambitions", *Climbing* #149, p. 73). His words could easily be cut and pasted into the 21st century.

In the early 1990s, ice climbing in the Rockies started to change. Because of the predictability of straight-up ice, climbers began to search out greater challenges that involved not more and more but less and less ice. This search led to new discoveries about what was possible and what constituted a "formed" ice climb. New developments in technique and philosophy led to creations such as Jeff Everett and Glenn Reisenhofer's *Suffer Machine* (200 m, V, A2 WI5). As this new philosophy blossomed, Rockies climbers fast became well-rounded thin-ice specialists who used a mixture of aid and moderate rock to connect splatters of ice. With these skills, François Damilano and Joe Josephson put up *The Day after les vacances de Monsieur Hulot* (270 m, V, 5.9 A2 WI6) in 1994.

With the turn of the century, skill and vision have snowballed. As more difficult terrain is explored, more sophisticated technique evolves. Difficulties come from steeper or blanker sections of rock, and ice provides a welcome rest. Modern ice climbers no longer use a rigid technique. Instead of crab-like repetition, climbers let the ice dictate how it is to be climbed and they proceed calmly upward with grace. In addition to better movement skills, the birth of quality screws, tools and crampons has changed ice climbing from a tolerable battle to a pleasant, guaranteed-outcome experience. With this powerful arsenal of philosophy and equipment, Jason Billings and Rob Owens on-sighted the *Suffer Machine*

bolt ladder at M7 — ten years after its first ascent. Although a free ascent was considered unlikely by its first ascensionists, *Monsieur Hulot* was on-sighted at 5.10+ M7 by Matt Collins and Raphael Slawinski in 1997. This year, ice routes such as *Nemesis* (160 m, VI, WI6), *French Reality* (145 m, V, WI6+) and *The Replicant* (120 m, V, WI6) were repeatedly done in half-day jaunts.

The new "M-climbers" are expanding on the thin-ice tradition that began during the Ice Age. Employing highly developed technical skills and open minds, these climbers are redefining what can be done with tools and crampons.

Being a latecomer had its advantages, as I was not limited by earlier preconceptions. — Raphael Slawinski

THE BIGGEST ADVANTAGE enjoyed by modern mixed climbers is their perception of terrain. Thin ice, hanging daggers and steep rock have become standard fare. Encountering these obstacles is no longer a rare, scary moment but an anticipated daily occurrence.

In the past, climbers progressed from low-angle to vertical and, in exceedingly rare formations, overhanging ice. This type of learning curve conditioned climbers to see steep and funky ice as the pinnacle of difficulty. As climbers developed, they pursued steeper or stranger ice until they were proficient at climbing long pitches of it. Working through the ice grades is still a very worthy accomplishment, but the process can be quickened and enhanced when approached from another direction.

M-climbing approaches ice from the opposite end of the spectrum. The exploration of steeper and blanker rock means that steep ice has become relatively benign

Eamonn Walsh on modern mixed ground on Mulletts.com. photo: Jeff Moore

CHASING
SCOTT
SEMPLER VAPOURS



above: (l) Barry Blanchard on the F.A. of B/D (photo: Pat Morrow); (r) Raphael Slawinski on-sighting B/D six years later during the second free ascent (photo: Rob Owens). facing page: Rob Owens on the F.A. of Haunted by Waters. photo: Andrew Querner

terrain. Strenuous dry-tooling exposes climbers to more severe difficulty than ice can offer, and this exposure restructures their perception of steep ice. After overhanging M8, WI5 seems quite slabby and that W6 dagger is reduced to a great place to de-pump. The rock has become the business, and the ice is the “thank God” jug at the end of the crux. The hanging daggers described as WI6X a few years ago don’t even get mentioned today; they’re a customary feature of most overhanging mixed routes. No longer dreaded, they’re cautiously loved as the saviours of flaming forearms. The terrain hasn’t changed, but climbers’ perceptions have changed from trepidation to appreciation. As a result, steep and strange ice has assumed a moderate position in the range of winter climbing difficulty.

Exploring mixed terrain also increases a climber’s physical efficiency. Moving over stone is a much more complicated process than moving over ice, and mixed climbing therefore engenders more sophisticated movement skills. Once more complex movement patterns have been engrained in a climber, ice not only becomes less strenuous, it becomes simpler terrain to pass over.

M-climbing has also redefined what it means for a route to be formed. Climbers from the Ice Age searched for new routes that offered icicles within a tool’s reach. Climbers from the Stone Age celebrate how far *out of*

tool’s reach the ice is. As recent accomplishments can attest, any angle or amount of rock can be climbed using tools and crampons; ice has (unfortunately, in some cases) become secondary. While taken to some ridiculous dry-tool-only conclusions, this new perspective has opened minds and redefined what is climbable.

With this new outlook comes a common shock to the system for an M-climber. After honing their skills on low-commitment bolted lines and racing through the ice grades, M-climbers often move towards challenging themselves on gear-protected climbs of infamous reputation. Because the mixed climbers of today have grown up steeped in the mythology of climbers past, they assume that the test pieces of yesterday will offer them significant challenges. Given their more highly developed skills, experienced M-climbers often find that these test pieces are not as difficult as they thought they would be, or not difficult at all.

Five years ago, Euros would come over to climb French Reality and write an article about it.

— Marc Piché, Canmore-based Mountain Guide

THIS YEAR, *French Reality* received nearly ten ascents. Despite a commitment grade of V and the serious nature of protecting the crux pitch, a couple of these ascents

were done in less than six hours car-to-car. Most felt that a grade of IV, M5R WI5+ (instead of V, WI6+) would be more accurate.

Armed with confidence, M-climbers go on to put up new routes like *Rocket Man* and *Stuck in the Middle*. *Rocket Man* (350 m, VI, M7+ WI5+) was created by Kefira Allen, Eric Dumerac, Raphael Slawinski and Dave Thomson in 1999. In the amphitheatre opposite *Riptide* (225 m, VI, WI6), *Rocket Man* is an unrepeated nine-pitch mix of bolts, pins and natural gear which finishes with an unprotectable pitch of M6+R. To date, Slawinski and Allen are the only ones to have climbed *Rocket Man* in a day.

In 2000, Patricia Deavoll and Rob Owens added *Stuck in the Middle* (145 m, V, M7R WI6) to the Terminator Wall. Following a line that is roughly *The Replicant* unformed, *Stuck in the Middle* involved figure-4-ing above natural gear before joining the crux of *Troubled Dreams* (145 m, V, M7 WI6). Within two weeks, Slawinski and Scott DeCapio, and Eamonn Walsh and Roger Debeyer had made the second and third ascents. Unlike the other routes on the “Trophy Wall”, the first ascent of *Stuck in the Middle* and its quick repeats have gone largely unreported.

By the early '90s, we chatted less and less about the once-mythical climbs: Polar Circus, the Weeping Wall, and Slipstream. Changing gear and attitudes had made those routes possible for even intermediate climbers.... Locals waited instead for the once-in-ten-years drips to form, and searched for any hanging phlegm of ice within tool's reach.

— Joe Josephson, “Unformed Ambitions”,
Climbing #149, p. 75

FINDING new climbs that excite modern mixed climbers involves a complicated recipe. Most M-climbers with an aesthetic sense want *some* ice on the route but *not too much*. They fantasize about overhanging series of “phlegms” far out of tool’s reach, or thin, splattered slabs. Because skills have evolved to this point, *French Reality*, *Mixed Master* and *Red Man Soars* could be substituted for the three climbs listed by Josephson.

When the route [Burning in Water, Drowning by Flame] was first done, it was probably pushing the envelope. By the time it was freed via a harder line, it was just another day out climbing.

— Raphael Slawinski

In 1993, Barry Blanchard and Joe Josephson made the first ascent of *Burning in Water, Drowning by Flame* (30 m, III, A0 WI6X). At the time, they were in the thick of the previous transition in ice climbing. Searching



HAUNTED BY WATERS

out more challenging climbs, Blanchard and Josephson pursued thin ice and snaggle dagers. As is true today, a change in perspective opened up new possibilities.

It took six years and another change in perspective to free *Burning, Drowning*. Using a modern philosophy, Ben Firth and Rob Owens freed this pitch, in harder shape, on suspect gear at a moderate mixed grade of M7. Missing the first free ascent by an hour, Raphael Slawinski redeemed himself by on-sighting the pitch. Photos from the two ascents vividly portray what the climbing involved and how the different philosophies overcame it.

I think people that are interested in doing this kind of climbing should have a very humble and respectful attitude and accept a long apprenticeship when they learn to do this because it's a serious game.

— Alex Lowe, *On Ice*, Cliffhanger Productions, 1995

M U S A S H I



DESPITE the aforementioned advantages, mixed climbing does create some potential dangers for inexperienced climbers venturing into committing terrain. Although ice is less threatening than it used to be, it still requires skill and judgement to be climbed safely.

Because crag-type venues offer a lot of complex terrain on which climbers can test their skills, there is potential for an “apprenticeship” to be quite short. However, getting out on gear-protected ice and mixed climbs is a serious endeavour, and a “humble and respectful attitude” is a wise one to have. Maintained throughout a career, such an attitude can also help climbers grow and learn when tides change.

A climber disappointed with the trivial difficulties of the classic climbs and bored with the repetitiousness of front-pointing has some alternatives. He can do the climbs in more difficult conditions, in better style, or he can do harder climbs.

— Yvon Chouinard, *Climbing Ice*, 1978, p. 186

RIGHT NOW is an exciting time to be an ice climber in the Canadian Rockies. The modern approach to winter climbing steepens the learning curve of those who embrace it. By immersing themselves in low-commitment terrain that is more demanding, climbers can gain a futuristic view of big objectives and discover how to succeed in climbing them. New developments have given competent climbers the ability to ascend demanding terrain with relative ease. Our mentors and teachers deserve our respect and admiration for what they did given the tools, techniques and attitudes at hand, but with developing technology and philosophy comes a breed of climber who climbs harder and faster.

Winter climbing is going through a revolution. Old test pieces are fast becoming trade routes, new standards are being set, and new limits are being explored. Along with these developments come upheavals in grade systems, hot-flaring opinions, and bruised egos. This time of change is an indication of the fantastic future of this wonderful pursuit.

There were many songs that you could not say anybody in particular made by himself. A song went around from fiddler to fiddler and each one added something and took something away so that in time the song became a different thing from what it had been, barely recognizable in either tune or lyric.

— Charles Frazier, *Cold Mountain*, Vintage Books, 1997, p. 380.

Thank you to Kefira Allen, Serge Angelucci, Tim Auger, Scott Backes, Barry Blanchard, James Blench, Joe Buszowski, Frank Campbell, Alain Chassie, Kim Csizmazia, François Damilano, Kevin Doyle, Eric Dumerac, Jeff Everett, Ben Firth, Jack Firth, Will Gadd,

left: *Daniel Dulac on Musashi (M12), the Cineplex.* photo: Andrew Querner
above: *Rob Owens on Mixed Emotions (M5 WI6).* photo: Scott Semple

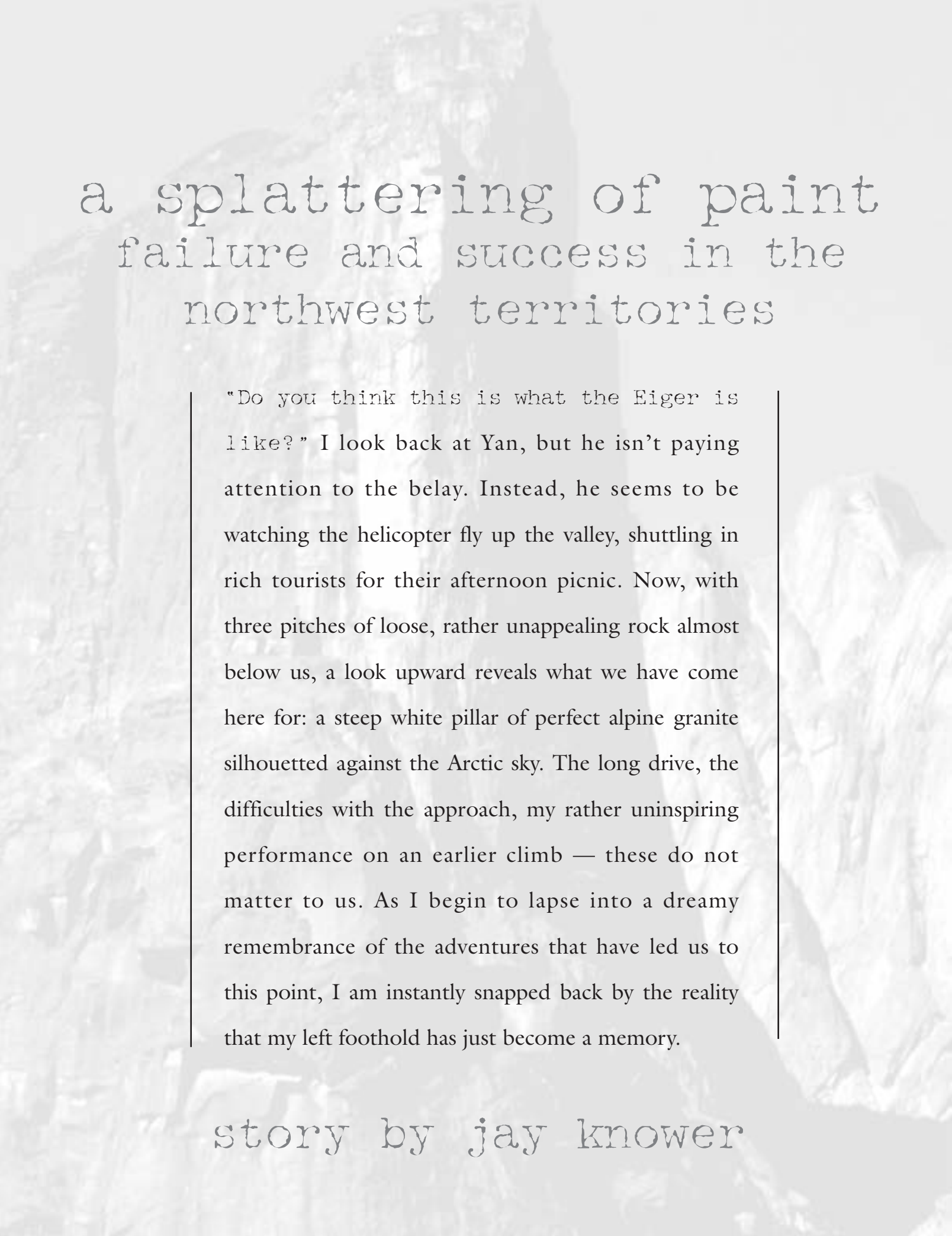


MIXED EMOTIONS

Jim Gudjonson, Keith Haberl, Bruce Hendricks, Steve House, Sean Isaac, Joe Josephson, Troy Kirwan, John Lauchlan, Alex Lowe, Jeff Marshall, Alain Massin, Bugs McKeith, Grant Meekins, Karl Nagy, Rob Owens, Tim Pochay, Glenn Reisenhofer, Cyril Shokoples, Raphael Slawinski, Jay Smith, Albi Sole, Larry Stanier, Grant Statham, Dave Thomson, Mark Twilight, Jyoti Venne, Ken Wallator and Eamonn Walsh and to all the climbers who have contributed to the greatness of Rockies winter climbing, both past and present.

Thank you to Margo Talbot for acting as bridge, mediator and liaison between old and new and for all her hard work towards making the fourth edition of the guide a printed reality.

A special thank you and a big thumbs-up to Guy Lacelle for his encyclopedic contribution to the world of ice climbing, for being open to new ideas and for continuing to crank in style.



a splattering of paint failure and success in the northwest territories

“Do you think this is what the Eiger is like?” I look back at Yan, but he isn’t paying attention to the belay. Instead, he seems to be watching the helicopter fly up the valley, shuttling in rich tourists for their afternoon picnic. Now, with three pitches of loose, rather unappealing rock almost below us, a look upward reveals what we have come here for: a steep white pillar of perfect alpine granite silhouetted against the Arctic sky. The long drive, the difficulties with the approach, my rather uninspiring performance on an earlier climb — these do not matter to us. As I begin to lapse into a dreamy remembrance of the adventures that have led us to this point, I am instantly snapped back by the reality that my left foothold has just become a memory.

story by jay knower

“Rock!” I yell with enough fear in my voice to warrant a worried upward look from Yan. The softball-sized foothold bounces off grassy ledges, barely misses the belay and careens out of sight into the talus.

Yan Mongrain and I are climbing a new route on Terrace Tower in Canada’s Cirque of the Unclimbables; the rock is bad, the weather threatening, and we don’t want to be anywhere else.

Flash back to Yosemite, 1998. I have driven from Wisconsin to test my mettle on the classic climbs in the Valley. I meet a promising climber from Montreal who is about my age and has also driven from the snowier environs of the East. In short, I have found the perfect partner — like me, but slightly askew. Yan Mongrain’s climbing style seems the antithesis of mine: where I grunt and use sheer power, he chinks and finesses his way up. I do have one trump card, though, as his Quebec upbringing has left his English a little lacking.

Basically, Yan has a tense problem. Not that he *is* tense; no, his climbing style is anything but. He tends to use the English language in ways few native speakers could imagine. Our climbing careers have run parallel, as I have climbed in Quebec and he has experienced the quartzite at Devil’s Lake. I know every piece on his rack and where he would be most likely to use it, and both of our moms are named Susan. He graciously accepts many of my annoying tendencies, and I his. It therefore does not surprise me or upset my grammatical sensibilities when he tries on a pair of my sunglasses and utters, “They are really ugly, isn’t it.”

Three years and a few climbing trips with Yan later, rumours of a pristine and uncrowded wilderness climbing area in the Northwest Territories begin to surface. Since the approach is both difficult and expensive, I figure that the area must be rife with potential first ascents. One call to Yan, and the trip is a go. We decide to leave at the end of July.

After a five-day drive and an arduous approach, Yan and I arrive at Fairy Meadows and begin to get used to life in the Cirque. We climb *Lotus Flower Tower* in a day and unwittingly make the first free ascent of *The White Tower* (III, 5.11a) on Terrace Tower. Our spirits and egos run high. The Cirque to us is a blank canvas; we are itching to make our first real brush strokes. We scour the area for potential first ascents, peering through binoculars and looking for but hoping not to find signs of human passage — bolts, slings, etc. The isolation, such an imposing force when we arrived, now seems less oppressive.

That was a week ago; since then, my pride has sufficiently diminished. Yesterday dawned perfectly clear. As we exited our bivy cave, we were confronted with one of those rare days in the mountains: the sky shone a vibrant blue, the wind had subsided from the previous night’s gale-force intensity, and the temperature hovered in the temperate range, forcing us to question the merits of actually wearing our fleece coats. Rather than going for a new route, we decided to attempt *Club International* (V, 5.11b), a newly freed route on Bustle Tower. The route had gained a positive reputation the night before as a group of Swiss climbers gushed over its steep and engaging climbing. We decided to give it a go if the weather cooperated.

I find myself fully engaged with the third pitch. The rock is loose. Very loose. Perhaps when the rock was more congealed, however many eons ago, its integrity could have been compared to that of Kitty Litter. Today it seems like crumbling concrete, or maybe just sand. I stem in a shallow corner, feet sketching on crumbly edges, and place pro’ that does not inspire any confidence. I am staring at a loaded gun and I worry that fate will soon pull the trigger. Why me, why now? If I can only centre my weight over the next smear and excavate a useable handhold, everything will be all right...

I finish the pitch, and everything is not all right; I just want to go down. The ground seems very appealing now, as a stare upward promises more of the same fear and anxiety. This is not why I am here, I tell myself, to follow someone else’s path. Though the path is decidedly difficult, my heart is not into it. Nothing is created; we are simply viewing someone else’s masterpiece, and a good one at that. Since *Lotus Flower*, however, we have selfishly wanted our own. Maybe I am just rationalizing. Maybe I am just scared.

The decision is made to go down, despite perfect weather, the perfect mountain range and a perfect partner. All I can think about is the welcoming security of the horizontal. Yan and I exchange choice words; he lets me know that this is my decision, that I am giving up. My head is not into it, and I want nothing more than to disarm the gun and set up the rappel. We descend without heroics, without battle wounds or a raging tempest. We rappel under blue skies, and my wounds are not visible on the outside. The rock scared me; and in dealing with the fear, I gave up.

A sullen walk back to Fairy Meadows instills a new resolve in me: I must prove myself. Not to Yan, as he is

already thinking of many projects elsewhere in the Cirque. I need to silence the small but persistent voice in my head that keeps reminding me not to let this opportunity go to waste. When climbing *The White Tower* on Terrace Tower, we spied a line to the right of the prominent white pillar, a line that cuts boldly and directly up the face. From our position back on the ground, the chiaroscuro of the face — the subtle shadows of cracks, corners and overhangs — does not register. Despite our excitement, we see only a barren pillar of granite, reminiscent of *The Rostrum* in Yosemite Valley. Perhaps a more experienced team would piece together an intricate route up the shadows; we focus more on the entire face than on its discreet features — daunting, for sure.

Yan and I return the next day to fix ropes along the Eiger-like lower section; the movement of our ropes frequently dislodges baseball-sized rocks, inundating us with the constant clackety-clack of the rocks tumbling down the face. As storm clouds threaten, I ready myself for the first pitch of the wall proper. We realize that if we can free this section a beautiful corner will open up to us, affording much easier climbing. This first section, however, seems very hard.

As I plant my feet on insecure smears and attempt to lock my fingers into a flaring and muddy crack, I slowly inch upward. A grunt here, a hand-to-foot match there; the rock begins to reveal itself to me. I struggle with a blind cam placement, but it eventually finds its own secure place in the crack. Yan becomes smaller as finger lock leads to finger lock, smears to smears and ... I am airborne. Hanging evenly with Yan, I let loose a stream of adrenaline-induced obscenities. Once sufficiently calm again, I aid up past my high point. We clean mud out of the crack and rehearse the moves on top rope. After piecing together a string of subtle, tenuous moves, we retreat for the day, pulling our ropes behind us. We will return tomorrow and give it another go.

The night passes fitfully for both of us; we labour under the thought that we are on the cusp of doing something truly good, something *first*. Climbers may, in social situations, say that they climb not for glory or recognition but for a feeling of oneness with the environment. Yan and I like that feeling, too, though we are both eager to leave our mark, to exert our will on a hostile environment. Terrace Tower reflects the late-evening sun back to us, the white granite as stark and naked as a blank canvas. Our masterpiece, something that will forever be ours, is simply a few bold brush strokes away. We fall asleep thinking not of the canvas as a whole, but which colour paint to use. Should we bolt? Should we bring pitons?

Arriving at the beginning of the difficulties again, we take our time racking up and coiling the ropes. Whatever bravado we felt the night before is replaced by

a realization that above us lies a long stretch of difficulty. The not knowing, the uncertainty, is the hardest part. I shout encouragement as Yan adeptly hikes his feet up and forges past our high point. If he can just make it to the ledge, the climb is in the bag. As he slows, my shouts become more intense. I wonder if he notices the inflection in my voice, the slightly audible yet sincere desire for him to succeed. After what seems like forever, the word “Secure!” falls down to me. Yan has sent the pitch, and I smile as I begin to second one hundred feet of pure granite joy: tenuous finger locks, power laybacking, and a token wet section to remind us that we are actually in the mountains. This is one of the hardest pitches either of us has climbed; after an impromptu spewing session on the cramped belay ledge, we proclaim the pitch 5.12–.

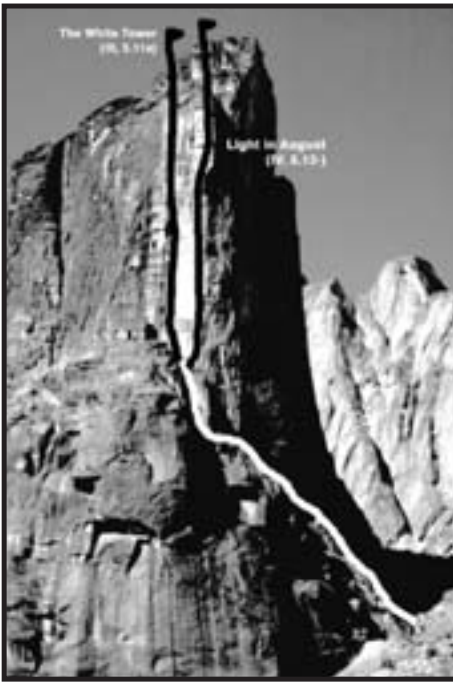
The aesthetics of Yan’s pitch seem to be extinguished by the next pitch. I embark on the kind of climbing the memory of which tends to elicit the same feeling one gets when being pulled over for speeding. Not pleasant. The finger crack widens to chimney size. Not your run-of-the-mill chimney, however — instead, a flaring, overhanging monster of a chimney. Each upward movement carries with it an unnerving outward movement. We rate the pitch 5.10 with a snicker.

“Every climb,” I pant, attempting to force air into my fatigue-addled lungs, “should have a sandbag pitch, a pitch that makes you want to cry.”

Always one to bring me back down to reality after my headstrong moments, Yan replies, “Who cares? No one, I think, will repeat her anytime soon.”

Above us, if we continue to the right of the white pillar, the rock becomes less steep, and we could top out without much more difficulty. To the left, a beautiful hand crack forges up the pillar proper. It seems both steep and intimidating. In an attempt to set things straight after my Bustle Tower incident, we decide on the left option. To the Western climber, hand cracks represent an opportunity to practise skills developed by miles of granite crack climbing. Not so for the Midwestern climber. Hand jamming at Devil’s Lake, my home crag, inevitably degrades into a graduate course in geology; the climber learns first-hand the rudiments of friction, or lack thereof, on the slick quartzite. Therefore, being as I am skilled in the art of crimping on the outsides of cracks, I tentatively rely on jam after jam and grumble at the dearth of cheater face holds. My confidence builds, though, and I soon resemble a deranged fan at one of those Atlanta Braves games, pumping my tomahawk-like hand into the rock.

The pitches fly by, and we flop onto a large, grassy ledge one pitch below the summit. Yan and I wearily congratulate each other; the next pitch looks relatively easy and we assume that the ascent is in the bag. The sun begins to dip below the granite bulk of Mount Proboscis — the summit awaits us. In one pitch, we will be able to



Routes on Terrace Tower, southeast face, Cirque of the Unclimbables

The White Tower. III, 5.11a. F.A.: Paul Freiburg, Kurt Blair. 1997.

F.F.A.: Yan Mongrain, Jay Knowler. August 10, 2001.

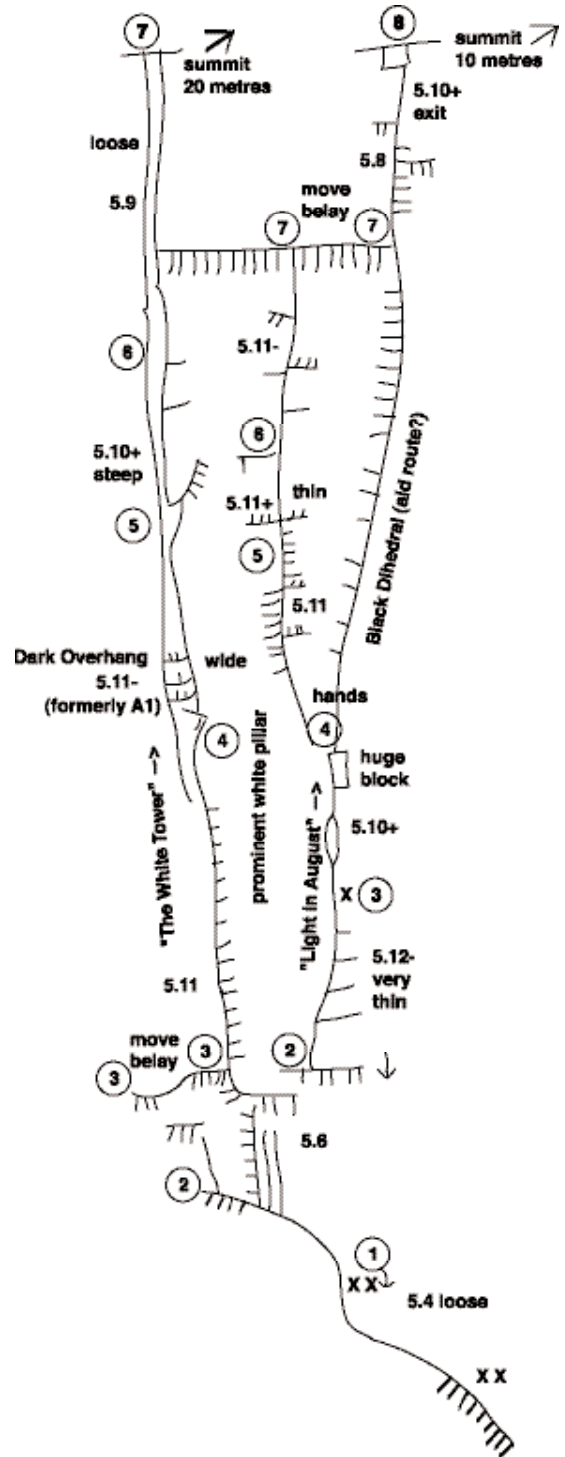
Light in August. IV, 5.12-. F.A.: Yan Mongrain, Jay Knowler. August 14, 2001.

splash that master stroke of paint onto the blank canvas of Terrace Tower. We will be forever linked to the rock, to our particular swath of granite; all we have to do is take out the pen and sign our names. This should be the easiest and most rewarding part — this is what we came here for. Yan, paintbrush in hand, leads the final, ledgy section and suddenly slows down.

“Hurry up, man, we don’t have all day.” I figure that some good-natured ribbing should coax Yan to the end of his pitch. I worry less about his climbing and more about the fact that I am selfishly devouring the last Powerbar.

“I, you know, can’t figure her out!” My interest in eating fades as I see the move Yan attempts. We both struggle at this section, the last move on our climb. Why can’t Terrace Tower just give in? Have we not respected her? We have not placed any bolts or pitons on our climb, and, except for the rocks we have knocked down, we have left her flanks intact. Okay, we did chalk up quite a bit, but this shouldn’t anger her.

Arriving at the problematic section, I soon realize the reason for Yan’s grumbling. After much difficulty and many expletives, the 5.10 final move is accomplished by a dynamic lunge into a moss-filled crack, fingers buried in mud and moss, and the adept use of a knee. Our climb has become a reality, and Yan and I wholeheartedly celebrate our new route. The canvas, no longer stark and uninteresting, is now suffused with colour. Yan, noticeably gazing towards the snowy distance, or perhaps towards nothing at all, flashes a weary but gracious grin. The rappels can wait; we must first take a minute to step back and admire our work. We christen our creation *Light in August* (IV, 5.12-) and I try not to think of the long drive back to Wisconsin.





the ruth gorge and the powers at hand

story and photos by
david marra

I met up with Sean Easton and Connie Amelunxen in the very civilized city of Anchorage. We promptly ran around with our heads cut off, until I realized that the madness had to end and did the only thing I could do: claim that I had no access to my funds. Within moments we were heading north to the funky town of Talkeetna.

Upon our 2 a.m. arrival, I unloaded the gear and my two sleepy partners onto the K2 Aviation runway. Leaving Talkeetna at 2:05 a.m., I sped back to the Anchorage airport to return the rental. This of course meant that I was inconveniently in the wrong place at the wrong time, but that's my forte. In fact, I would say that I excel at the quirky and confusing, as there is a certain clarity in chaos.

This little adventure would prove no different. Five minutes after dropping off the rental, an all-Alaskan hill-billy hippy wanted to give me a ride three and a half hours out of his way to explain the conspiracies that be: government, God, taxes and drugs. I thought to myself, "This guy is nuts — cool," and hopped in the slowest vehicle heading my way. Attempting to understand his vibe was an exercise for the drunk and disorderly. And I understood every word.

Connie and Sean were shocked to see me so soon. Turning their heads to greet me, they simultaneously mumbled "Eh!" then continued madly packing the largest rack the Ruth had ever seen. Within moments, the primitive calling for grease was upon us. Few words were spoken as we inhaled five pounds of flesh from the local burger joint before flying out.



Two hours later we were at the base of Mount Dickey, gyrating with joy.

The gorge is like some alien capsule of art which crash-landed on Ol' Man Winter's beard, including the hairy moles. On April 23, we committed to the southeast buttress of Mount Barrille, a proud-looking line with many deceptions. We organized gear and ferried loads, contemplating whether we were the masters of our destinies.

"The rock looks like shit," I said.

No reply.

We'd heard conflicting rumours about the rock quality in the area. Let's just set the record straight: it sucks. I'm from the Canadian Rockies (a.k.a. "the Chossies"), and the Ruth really does suck. There is some good-looking rock on Cobra Corner, but generally it's exfoliating granite.

Connie headed off to tickle the ancient belly of Barrille's first pitch on the crumbly granite poopoo. That night at basecamp, he tried to sound positive but the

What is greater than God, more evil than the devil, desired by the rich, held by the poor and powerful enough to kill you if you eat even the smallest bit of it?



opening page: *Sean Easton wallowing in fine conditions*
 above: *One happy Connie Amelunxen*
 right: *The boys into it*
 far right: *Mount Barrille, with the southeast buttress facing the camera.*
The route begins in the prominent couloir.

inevitable “That pitch was junk,” came out, and so, like good li'l bunnies, we continued to “will” our way up the wolf in sheep’s clothing.

Sean took the next pitch, aiding his way up a diagonal roof and cutting through the cheese-grater slab. Every piece of protection had to be cleaned of snow, then ice, then moss and then dirt, making progress so slow that I thought I heard Barrille laughing at us.

I was up to bat next. After cleaning Sean’s pitch, I looked up and saw no improvement in the rock. However, the terrain kicked back enough to attempt freeclimbing. It started on crumbly slab with marginal, run-out pro’, then traversed through bulging-belayer-eye death flakes into an off-width with just enough ice and

loose rock to make it gut-wrenching fun-fun. Four-plus hours later, “Off belay!” echoed through the gorge. My brain stopped to think.

After we used the second anchor to haul, Connie cleaned it. He was able to pull out one of the expansion bolts with his bare hands!

The daily ritual of ascending to our high point — clawing our way up, fixing lines, hauling, and getting back to basecamp only to hear each other bitch about the skin-peeling monster — lasted about a week. We chose to set up the portaledge 280 m off the deck, on a steep wall beside a snowfield we called “Texas” because of its shape and size.

I do feel content in the superficial simplicities of the mountain life — not missing any of the bells and whistles on this ball of confusion served up as the “civilized”. I sense my Authentic Self out here on the perimeter. Only fools try too hard; will too much ever be enough?

Towers of joy and pain surrounded us as I rested my halo for another dream-fuelled night. We would share our dreams each morning like lost treasures, creating a space for fantasy and emotion: sex in a gigantic toaster; fighting with Scotland Yard over who keeps a prize pig; imploding brain bits travelling the universe; and other soul-soothing tales of the unconscious.

Throughout the thirty days and nights, I would call to my wife. Sometimes a vision would return. Her back would be against the wind above a seaside cliff as she looked into the crouching darkness of a Gothic sunset.



She holds a deep mystery in her beauty.

April 30, 1 a.m.: Sean and Connie struggle to set up the portaledge as darkness and a storm spread their wings. I continue moving 20 metres above, hearing the very colourful frustrations of my partners trying to erect the 'ledge. The fly had needed repairs and had been "fixed" by a seamstress a few weeks earlier. Two cuts were made to finish the battle with the furious nylon, and we're still not sure who won. Connie got in first, meaning that he volunteered to take the "gimp pit" — the hammock that lay under the 'ledge. Later, while waiting out another storm, I had to do my time in the pit as well. Inside this womb we stayed, waiting out a three-day storm.

"Bob, tell Dave what he's won for his new home!"

"Well Dave, you've just won ceilings from the award-winning designer Brik Shiite Shak! That's right — no more messy, leaky skylights for you, just overhead impressions of your bros' asses. Also, you're getting *non-breathable walls!* These units attract sweaty body hair for that 'I'm a fly on the wall' look!

And floors by 'Ohmi!' — the floor that keeps breathing long after you're dead and gone — floor fishing utensils included!

And Dave, you've just won a *new bathroom!* Complete with Ziploc-bag pee bottle and 5.10 move in a hammock to use it! It'll keep your bowels guessing so you don't have to — enjoy, sucker!"

By the third day, the womb felt like a tomb.

Realizing that we didn't have enough food and fuel to make the summit, I attempted to head down and come

back with more supplies. I made it to the anchor — five feet away from the door! As I crawled into my bag with my wet tail between my legs, Sean and Connie couldn't resist:

"How was basecamp?"

Ha ha ha.

"Is our tent still up?"

Ho ho ho.

"Did you have a good visit with those Americans?"

Heh heh heh.

Idid what any realman would do: covered into my bag, mumbling sweet nothings until the cows came home. The next day, the weather broke — sorta — so we all raced back to basecamp to share lots of group hugs and sing "Khumbaya" at the top of our lungs. The days to follow at camp were lazy. I mean real lazy. We made the average crack-of-your-ass-showin', Dingbat-eatin' couch potato look like Mark Twight climbing 5.14f on acid. Waiting, watching, and wishing our route back into shape was more tiring than climbing it.

I know this place of thick emotion. This is why I'm here. I also know that I don't want to have to do this for the rest of my days to feel special. The passionate romanticism of a mountain man is jaded with popularity, not principle, in this era. There's a ghostly shame in writing this, as if I'm betraying my own kind. The purity and pleasure that lay in the untainted touch of a stone is evolving into a form I know nothing about, and it scares me.

On May 6, 2001, we were able to get back onto Barrille's southeast buttress. Pitch after pitch we strug-



Sean vertical-mud wrestling

gled with the broken toy. We were a vertical trail crew, breaking through features that could have been something beautiful.

Usually these features turned out to be a discontinuous crack or a rotten corner. My personal favourite was one of Sean's pitches. He had to hook and rivet up a blank wall in a snowstorm through sections of, well, vertical mud. When he attempted to hand-drill yet another rivet hole in the rocky mud, the muddy rock melted away. Like any good belayer, I got the camera out to record the up-and-coming whipper, a photo of which I could use later for my next article, "Rocked Limitations". No air time for Sean, only a sinister laugh and the bang of a baby angle going straight into the blank sandcastle. Foaming at the mouth, Sean finished his gem of a pitch screaming "Look into my eyes ... this is what ya want ... stay alive, stay alive ... look into my eyes."

The day finally came for the summit push. We'd fixed 1100 feet of rope above "Texas" to the end of the wall and the beginning of the land of ice and snow. Awakening early to a glorious morning, we ascended our ropes to the first snow ledge. We were faced with an easy corner above, and it was Sean's turn to

dance. Unfortunately, the dance turned into a dig, as the pitch offered vertical snow that had to be excavated before movement was possible. So much time was spent in the "easy corner" that we were all becoming increasingly concerned about the snow slope above. It felt as though we were seamen mending our sails while an encroaching storm hunted us down to swallow us whole. Aid-hooking on my ice tools, I was able to exit the corner with vital coaching from my bros. When I got out of the corner and onto the slope, all I knew of fear and loathing consumed me.

The exit corner led onto a very steep, unsupported snow slope. There I felt that I had to do something I hope no one ever has to do again: go against every ounce of logic and reason and blindly roll the dice. I dug a trough wide enough to stem my elbows and knees against its sides. Each move had a time limit based on how quickly the snow would slide away. For each poor purchase, I would lose another purchase. For every foot gained, I would slowly slide down, losing ground. It was by far the most dangerous climbing I've ever done. One hundred and twenty very long feet later, I was slamming every available piece of pro' under a rock roof.

These moments make it clear to me that the only difference between the *brave* and the *stupid* is the outcome.

The afternoon sun was incredibly hot, so we hauled ass for the last few hundred feet of easy mixed terrain to the summit. Reaching it was a bit anticlimactic, probably because we knew we had a kabillion rappels to do. Nevertheless, the reward and the relief consumed my soul. "Only fools try too hard," echoed within.

As we skied back to the remains of our basecamp, our K2 pilot, Randy, circled around us, tipping his wing to say hello, and then flew back to Talkeetna. We didn't think much of it as we re-established camp and resurrected our tent from the pool of water it had become. Later, as we snuggled in and drank the last of our Scotch, we heard another plane. Connie looked outside to discover that Randy was about to land beside our camp. We hopped outside to speak with him. Sure that we were goners, he had been so happy to see us that he was now bringing us a pizza! Yes, a real pizza! Still warm from the oven and in the delivery box. What a fantastic guy.

In return, we named the route after him.

Feelin' Randy 1000 m. 5.9 A2+. Mount Barrille, Ruth Gorge, Alaska. F.A.: David Marra, Sean Easton, Connie Amelunxen. 2001.

Special thanks to Sean and Connie, Arc'teryx, Mountain Equipment Co-op, Mammut, Black Diamond, Ambler Mountain Works, Valhalla Pure, the Canadian

Nothing is greater than God, nothing is more evil than the Devil.
The rich want nothing, the poor have nothing, and you would die if you ate nothing.

— *Going — should anyone ask — to Natural Bridge* —

Deliberate deadfall
covers sketched trail.
Not wanted here,
we clear old logs,
finger topo-map
contours, envision
a ridge.

The others weave bodies
between boughs, lift worldly
feet over fallen trees.

i nodi vengono al pettine
(the knots come to the comb)

My cheek wet, my body
stumbles through memory of
another hike off-path.

That's me, pack and shirt off
sun, creek below melting
sense leaving mossy ledge
to wet hair.
That's me recalling
three-point contact
counterbalance downclimb breathe
easier up than down.
Me stopping
too long
one hold no place to go but back up
rock crumbling beneath fingers arms
windmilling at shale.

Water in my eyes gasp of air remembering
waterfalls freeze-frame releases sound of
current crashing canyon walls pushing
me down along to standing wave hugging
boulder scanning undercuts for exit,
there, there.
Could this be me soaked in waterfall
wringing silty runoff from bra shorts
socks braids undone screaming? Me

standing on green and purple boots
under overhanging canyon wall rising
slick unclimbable? Mind thinking up-
current not possible climbing impossible
crossing not possible impossible not
possible? Ears gauging drop of waterfall
below hearing my own voice whisper the
only way out?

And was it me whistling each time sleep
threatened? Hallucinating weighing odds
against increasing dark? Scratching a
message into damp rock? Reciting poems
seeing carpenter beetle's
long antennae lame and missing legs
singing waiting. Was it me seeing clumps
of moss fall in the dusk grizzly sow and
cub knowing aloneness survival of the
spirit?

That's me trusting return to current
pushing me over flooding my nostrils
rolling me pulling me under reflexes
gagging at breath wait wait better to hold
it hold it push away from rocks don't get
trapped push against anything legs
straightening against submerged sweeper
surfacing lungs bursting with one gulp of
air.

Me raving on the gravel bar a man under
each arm fording downstream asking why
I jumped back in questions to keep me
talking. Me collapsed at the outwash
naked under emergency blanket crinkling
in a sauna shivering so hard it hurt
someone kiss me.

Me unbroken and alive
not off the
just a different kind of
path.

Monica Meneghetti



the geikster

I was ready to shake out a loop and lasso him so's I could rein him in. Then I could mayhap break him and ride on top of this unruly beast. But he saw me a-comin'! With ears back, nostrils flared, teeth bared, the big black shook its head threateningly, rolling its eyes at us. That there was one wild beast that wasn't gonna be rid by nobody. And so there it was. The long, arduous trek to what is known as the 'black horse' of the Rockies was all in vain. Overnight the white stuff had slaughtered the mountain. The first 750 metres being steep rock, climbing with snow on the face was not an option. But looking at that majestic mountain, I knew I'd be back in the saddle.

ericdumerac



ring, ring, ring.

“Eric here.”

“Dumerac, it’s Jeff. The Geikster is calling!”

“Absolutely, Chucky baby — let’s get the ball rolling.”

It was one year later: Chuck was chomping at the bit and I was eager, too. The proud stallion beckoned; we were to plan for the Geikster once again. Jeff Nazarchuck is one of those guys who’s like red wine: he just keeps getting better and better. He’s a multi-talented climber with loads of experience. Though impatient, Chuck is steady; he’s funny, and a master at downplaying anything — a good bud. He is best known for the impressive garden he keeps, a clever scheme to score big with the ladies.

Our team had a new addition for this attempt: a post-doctoral rocket-scientist type, Raphael Slawinski. He probably just wanted climbing lessons from masters such

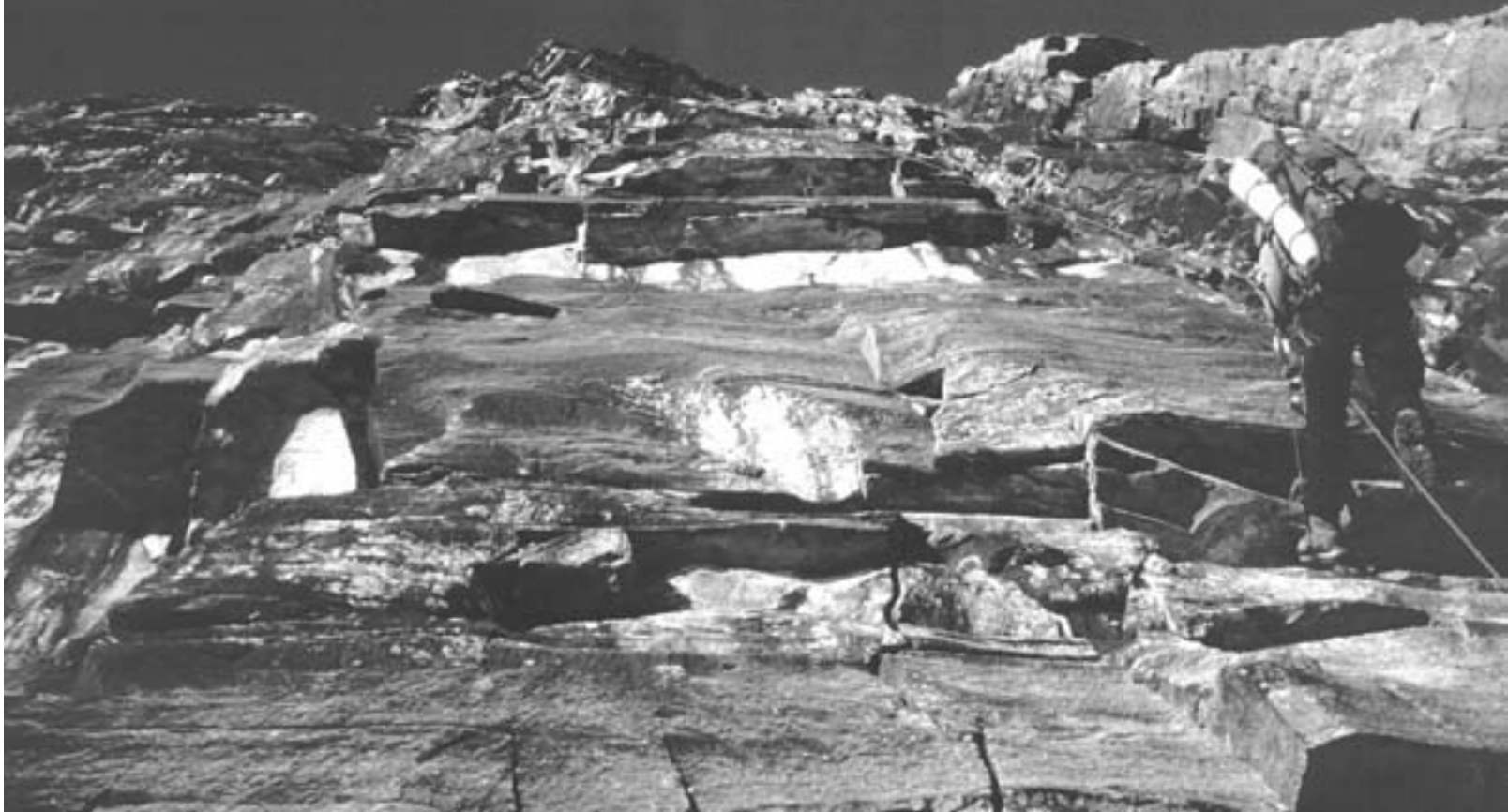
as Chuck and me. So we enrolled him, but he soon became a nuisance. First off, he had a bitter dislike for aluminum and pared down the climbing rack. Further, the guy makes up for this metal deficiency in his diet by regularly devouring the limestone of just about every hard alpine route around. So, during his turn to jumar on Geikie, well, Jeff and I were to find ourselves with the sad task of listening to a grown man snuffle and whine because he was starving. It would be truly heartbreaking, but eventually he would get his bellyful of quartzite and be satiated.

Chuck made the arrangements to send off the heavier gear by horse pack to an outfitter’s fishing camp by Amethyst Lakes. Oh yes, we were smart this time. Choppers were no longer allowed to land at this newly declared World Heritage Site. My feet could still feel the previous season’s gruelling walk; we had been like martyrs carrying their burdens. Well, Chuck was getting mighty irritable, but we waited for the perfect weather window — that high pressure that seems to come every year sometime in August. It finally arrived in mid-month and we took off like bats out of hell. In Jasper we went to a drive-in campsite, where we waited in line interminably. Chuck cursed the obviously dim-witted, lethargic tourists in the caravan of RVs. To this day, I truly think that his extremely impatient mental urges made us get into that campground much faster.

The next morning, to the sound of a rushing river, we took to the muddy, horse-trodden trail. The walk to the outfitter’s cabin was beautiful, the ramparts of Tonquin Valley rising above Amethyst Lakes and offering stunning views. At one point Raphael’s entire leg was engulfed in a deep, muddy hole. During the trip, we three alpiners made a funny chorus: Chuck would say “It’s all-’ight,” Raphael would follow with “Waz dat,” after which I would promptly supply the final chord by making the sounds of flatulence. To my teammates’ great pleasure, when natural, this would sound like a foghorn. Ah — boys!

At Maccarib Pass we took a break to let the Geikster’s spell mesmerize us. Imagine a land of quartzite, rich with steep peaks — an alpinist’s dream. Dominating with the ease of a great monarch is Mount Geikie. Right from the valley bottom, it presents itself with sheer cliffs on all sides. Its 1500-metre north face offers many pitches of steep rock climbing followed by an equal amount of mixed.

We picked up our gear from the friendly outfitter and began the final eight kilometres of the trek’s thirty-odd to the base. The highlight of the approach came when, at the outfitter’s recommendation, we used his aluminum boat to row across Moat Lake, avoiding the marshy land



around it. Raphael's teeth gritted at all that aluminum, but he discovered a new passion. I would not be surprised to see him leave his day job and become ferry master at Moat Lake. The water was smooth and calm, reflecting alpine magnificence. A hungry trout leaped above the surface to ingest some unfortunate insect. We made a lovely grassy meadow our basecamp.

bandits incoming! We were immediately under heavy attack. They came simply as a giant swarm. Although they were easily crushed by my mighty hand, their tactic was to overcome their targets through sheer multitudes. The annoying aerial vampires swooped down mercilessly, their parasitic probosces aimed at us. I got my revenge at supper, when I would pluck them off my clothes and throw them into one of the many giant spiderwebs found everywhere in the talus. It was fascinating and satisfying to watch the big hairy monsters sink in their poisonous fangs. Paralysis immediately followed, after which the mosquito would be neatly mummified and added to the many others already in the web. It gave me an idea for any parasites who might wish to poach my routes in the future!

The blue light from my Tikka headlamp illuminated the beads of dew that had accumulated on the many

spiderwebs, making them look iridescent. Every so often, the sounds of distant rockfall resounded throughout the valley. After finding that the moat at the base of the route had receded to such an extent that it was impossible to bridge, we opted for a new start to the left. We released Chuck; like a mad dog finally given the bone he has been teased with, he attacked the rock ferociously. At first he wanted to do what was obviously a much harder crack to the left because it was "more aesthetic and would be fun". We verbally restrained the bugger, reminding him that we still had 1500 metres to go and to please take the line of least resistance, thank you. The leader would fix the lines after the pitch was finished, and the unfortunate other two would jumar. We took turns on the lines we juggled: one a 10-mil, the other a dreaded 8.5-mil bungee.

Pitch after pitch he went. Chuck was strong and made quick work of the first 350 or so metres. Then it was my turn. I tell you, my friends, this was like playing at the Back of the Lake (Lake Louise Bluffs). A certain .10a crack is one of the most superb I have done anywhere. Given the considerable amount of Rockies choss I've climbed, the rock seemed ridiculously perfect. I found my stoppers to be almost useless, as just about every placement consisted of a perfect cam in a perfect crack. Then we got to the aid section. I was very happy



to free it at .11a. I left the ropes fixed at our high point and we rappelled back down to a better bivouac ledge. It was a pleasant evening on our airy perch as we brewed up dinner and tea and recalled the excellent day's climbing.

after spooning with Chuck all night, we awoke to more stellar weather. It was Raphal's turn. ("Raphal" is not a misspelling; I call him that because "raphal" sounds very much like the word for a wind squall in French. And this man is a tornado in the mountains.) It was fun to see him enjoying the fantastic climbing, the arête he was ascending boldly profiled against a deep blue sky. Raphal neatly circumvented the A3 section with a new variation. When we did the famous pendulum pitch, I grabbed a historic 'biner and replaced it with one of mine. The 'biner had "DH" stamped on it, for D. Hannibal, one of the first ascensionists. After many pitches and a perfect 5.8 crack, we were at the great traverse. We decided to forgo the traverse and go directly up. We found this to be most expedient and safe. The upper headwall was now above us. We unroped and charged up the initial snow slope. As we looked way down at the moraine, the shadows there resembled a giant dragon's head waiting for us to take the plunge into its bowels. Yet the mountain had been kind so far. We found that the ice gullies were quickly deteriorating. As if to emphasize that point, a wet slide came charging down. I dashed for cover and waited as it rushed passed and baptized me slightly. The lads had a tense moment, as it seemed that the slide had engulfed me. Though a little shaken and wet, I was fine.

We roped up and began simulclimbing more difficult ground to avoid the gullies. The boys cursed me at one point as I led them through a narrow tunnel. Miraculously, the otherwise steep barrier of a rock band opened up to us, providing a wonderful passage through. The ensuing gully had both mixed climbing and awesome ice. Finally, another seemingly impenetrable barrier loomed ahead: the last rock bands on the upper face. I pounded in a perfect pin belay and decided to follow what looked like a gentle traverse to the top. I stepped out onto this traverse, the boys later telling me "It was so cool watching that eerie blue glow disappear to what we knew would be the summit." Suddenly and violently the entire mountain toppled to the ground! *Just joking*. This amazing voyage, with excellent rock quality, awesome and varied climbing, great exposure, flawless protection and impeccable weather, would have a grand finale as well. We topped out, cheered our good fortune, and set up a final bivouac right on the summit proper!

It had been a good achievement — a Rockies *grande course*, as the expatriates called these great routes. We had waited for the weather and climbed the route in style and with speed, even freeing some aid. It was so awesome to sleep right on the top. In the morning, stunning crepuscular rays cascaded down through the Ramparts. Not just another tick in the book, this will have been an experience I shall truly cherish. The *Hannibal/Lowe* route on the north face of Geikie is the classiest alpine route I have ever done, for all the reasons such a claim deserves, including sharing it with most excellent friends indeed. Ah, climbing, alpinism — such sweet endeavors! We climbed it because it was there.



the inner ranges

YAMNUSKA YAMABUSHI

ROB TORKILDSON

Yamnuska is a sacred mountain. Though no one has officially conferred the title of sacredness on Yamnuska, it can be argued that there is a general consensus among the residents of the Bow Valley. In many parts of the world, there are mountains such as Kailas, Sinai, Tai Shan and Fuji-san that are recognized as sacred. These mountains are places of worship, and pilgrims travel great distances to reach them; they arouse feelings of overwhelming devotion. I feel this devotion towards Yamnuska, and with each ascent I am blessed with a sense of fulfillment which allows me to transcend not only the world but myself.

In Japan there is a society of climbing monks called the Yamabushi; these monks consider sacred mountains their temples, and alpine meadows their cathedrals. They practise ritual ascent up mountains as a means of purifying and strengthening themselves for the inevitable return to worldly concerns.

Recently, I returned from an extended stay in northern Japan with the Yamabushi. While there, I participated as an initiate in the Aki-no-Mine *shugyo*, an intensive autumn retreat deep in the mountains of Dewa Sanzan. Drawing on the Shinto worship of nature and the Buddhist pursuit of enlightenment, the Yamabushi seek to attain magical and healing powers and a deeper sense of self by following the prescribed combination of intense physical hardship, meditation in nature and esoteric rituals carried out deep in the mountains.

This *shugyo* was unlike anything I had previously experienced, allowing me to step “out of the box” and expand my horizons. Taking place in northern Japan’s Yamagata Prefecture, the *shugyo* was conducted deep in the sacred mountains of Dewa Sanzan at a remote

temple far from any human contact. We began the retreat inside Kotokuji temple with four days of deprivation: we were not allowed to eat, sleep, or wash ourselves. During these four days, we occupied our time with mantra chanting, cleaning the temple and doing full prostrations. This period represented a sort of hell from which we would rise up and come back to life refreshed. Several times during our stay inside the temple, men dressed in black would enter with fire boxes and throw chili peppers into the coals. This “smoking out” created a truly hellish environment, and many nearly choked to death during the experience. At the end of the four-day period of deprivation, I was surprised to find myself neither hungry, nor tired, nor lusting after a bath. On the contrary, I felt surprisingly fresh, blissed out and in a very nice “zone” of awareness.

After this somewhat gruelling and enclosed period, we went out into the mountains and spent the next week deep in nature’s theatre. Dressed in traditional Yamabushi clothing (pantaloons; ninja boots, or hemp sandals; a flowing outer garment decorated with dragons, chanting beads and small lacquered hats; a conch shell; and a deer pelt to sit on), we climbed sacred mountains, moved up rivers to their source and meditated underneath pristine waterfalls. I found the mountains craggy, steep, subtropical, and difficult to climb because of the foliage and wetness.

The purpose of this intense period in the mountains was to train both the body and spirit through arduous exercises, facilitating the ability to harness spiritual energy. Occasionally, veteran Yamabushi would demonstrate incredible feats such as walking through fires, climbing ladders of swords and pouring boiling water over themselves. Initiates

are commonly hung over cliffs by their ankles as a test of sincerity. Also, I must add, we were shown and taught many esoteric rituals throughout the *shugyo* — several secret in nature. The majority of these rituals involved fire and water and were held outside in the fresh air. We ended the *shugyo* with a traverse linking up the three sacred mountains of Dewa Sanzan (Gassan, Haguro and Yudono).

After the *shugyo*, I felt strengthened and made the decision with my wife, Kazumi, to go on a sacred-mountain climbing spree throughout Japan. Deciding to climb only mountains held sacred by the Yamabushi, we climbed Chokai-san, Hiko-san, Ontake and Tatayama, as well as many other lesser-known peaks. The highlight of this spree was climbing Fuji-san along the ancient Yamabushi *ochudo* route with Pat Morrow and Yuichiro Miura. This route was created 1300 years ago by the founder of the Yamabushi society, and is a circumambulation around the mountain along its upper reaches. Along the way, we were able to see several caves where Yamabushi ascetics had meditated and even died within the mountain. The route has been closed for many years due to its danger and requires special permission from the Japanese government. Our journey turned out to be slightly epic due to a raging typhoon.

On the plane ride back to Canada, while I was thinking about my experiences staying with the Yamabushi and climbing sacred mountains, the image of Mount Yamnuska kept appearing in my mind’s eye. I had a feeling that the pseudo-Yamabushi-like circuit that Pat Morrow, Kazumi and I had developed the previous year on the mountain should be realized on my return.

Since my move to the Calgary area, Mount Yamnuska has always been like a glowing beacon for me. On my weekly

sojourns into the mountains, I was consistently drawn to Yamnuska's large wall, golden in the early-morning light, and the surrounding environs lush with forest, a diversity of plant life (even orchids and morel mushrooms) and wildlife. Once, I was even surprised by a bear in a saskatoon berry patch.

Over the years, I had heard many great stories about Yamnuska — ranging from terrifying climbs, the geological disorganization of the mountain, the first ascent of the wall in the 1950s by Hans Gmoser and Leo Grillmair, the mighty ravens that live on the upper crags, and authors living on the mountain in order to finish books, to vision quests held by the Stoney and Dakota Indians. The mountain not only was a power source but had a real history.

After numerous traverses of Yamnuska, I began to realize that I was unconsciously being drawn back, that I was consistently pausing in the same areas along my route and that there was a series of power spots along the way.

Using what I knew of the Buddhist philosophy towards sacred mountains, and the Yamabushi practice of stopping at significant spots during a climb to the summit or along a mountain traverse, I developed a Yamnuska circuit comprising nine stations offering the opportunity to stop and meditate, tell stories, celebrate and reflect. Over the summer of 2000, I began to share my circuit with many people. What I found was that my route was suited to all types — renowned climbers, overweight bureaucrats, yoga gurus, mountain guides, geophysicists, juvenile delinquents, flatlanders, the elderly, dogs, children and city folk. I realized that we all came to the mountain with our own set of established fears, ambitions and personal concerns. The mountain, with natural genuineness, lets us confront these emotions. And it isn't just the individuals who benefit from the circuit; Yamnuska also benefits from the joy, spiritual growth, and respect for nature which we gain throughout our day on the mountain.

This relationship between humans and mountains has never displayed itself so profoundly to me as it did in the case of my close friend Jason Macleod. In March of 2001, Jason was hit head-on by a habitual drunk driver

on the Trans-Canada Highway. He was as close to death as a living human being can be when I left for Japan that April to be with the Yamabushi, so it was a trip clouded in trepidation for my friend's welfare. In ancient times, the Yamabushi were thought to have special healing powers and the ability to communicate with the *kami* spirits; they were often consulted by villagers in times of need. On my trip, I hoped to tap into some of this power and I prayed for Jason's recovery. I also had an idea for my return to Canada: I would ask Jason if he would like to use my circuit on Yamnuska as a means of gauging his recovery.

I shall never forget the first time Jason, his mother and I made our way up Yamnuska. In a superhuman effort, Jason dragged his withered body, using crutches, up the first steep section. I had never seen such an extraordinary physical effort and I felt that in some way Yamnuska was encouraging Jason along his path. I was truly a witness to a man and a mountain communicating on a very deep level. Over the summer, Jason and I would meet on Sunday afternoons and continue on Jason's quest to the summit and the road to recovery. These Sundays spent moving up the mountain with Jason began to resemble a sacred pilgrimage, and I went away from them refreshed and inspired. Just several months after his accident, Jason made it to Station No. 1. As he arrived, a cloud burst into raindrops above our heads and was just as quickly parted by rays of sunshine as Jason splashed his face in the ravine's trickling spring. Station No. 1 is the only spot along the six-hour circuit where there is water. It is located in a ravine and is thick with pine trees and various species of singing birds. This is where we wash our faces, listen to the subtle sounds of nature and prepare to enter the mountain with eyes wide open.

Only weeks afterward, Jason was able to make it easily to Station No. 2, which is located on the highest set of rock bands, directly above two heart-shaped ponds, and is a series of beautiful rock pallets with views of the magical transition from prairie to mountain. Here, everyone grabs a pallet and we spend ten minutes in meditation focusing on the ponds below and the concepts of love and heart. Station

No. 3 is called "Ravens Way" in reference to local bard Ben Gadd's novel. This station is located on a ledge around the back side, just before the crack. Here, away from the sounds associated with the front side, we tell stories and white lies and create new myths. Right before my journey to Japan to become an initiate of the Yamabushi, Jason, with much gusto, blazed partially on crutches to Station No. 4, where we gaze out over the wall for the first time. For many, this has proved to be the most frightening or exhilarating moment of the circuit. I've even had people who under no circumstances were able to bring themselves to look over the edge and into "the abyss", as I like to call this station. It is a place for thinking about and confronting fears (maybe a good place for hanging Yamnuska initiates over the edge by their ankles).

Returning from Japan at the end of September, I found a very healthy Jason ready to attempt the east summit and Station No. 5. It was an extremely windy and fairly cold day as we made our way up the mountain, briefly stopping at the first four stations. I call Station No. 5 "Climb On, Monkey Boy" in commemoration of the small placard on the summit. I'm not sure what happened to the individual referred to, yet I have a feeling that he might have lost his life on Yamnuska (if anyone knows for sure, I would like to know). At this station, we usually have lunch if it's not too windy and I like to have everyone make up their own mantra using a part of the mountain range in front of us.

Years ago in the Himalayas, I ran across a monk looking out over the mountains and chanting a mantra. Sitting near him and listening, I suddenly realized that his mantra was the range of mountains in front of us. He was singing the mountains!

After a great effort, Jason made it to the east summit. We celebrated with a wee bit of Scotch and a few bear hugs, and Jason recited a Viking saga that means a lot to him. A great moment on Yamnuska. This was to be our last visit to Yamnuska, and Jason and I have plans to open the coming season on the anniversary of his accident by completing the entire circuit of nine stations. New Yamnuska Yamabushi initiates are welcome to join the journey. What lies

ahead for Jason on the circuit must remain somewhat vague, as I'd like him to experience each station as a new experience, accomplishment and beginning:

Station No. 6 is the true summit of Yamnuska and is the station for celebration and leaping around like frogs. Once, on the sacred mountain Omine-san, a Yamabushi monk saw a climber disrespecting the mountain. Wanting to teach this man a lesson, the monk turned him into a frog and later left him on the summit. For the Yamabushi, leaping up and down like a frog on the top of a mountain is symbolic of respecting mountains and being mindful of the return trip still ahead.

Station No. 7 is in the saddle and is

where we meditate on our backs, looking towards the sky. It is here that we begin our return. Station No. 8 is called "Wall Gazing" and involves staring up the wall at its highest point. Many great monks have had spiritual breakthroughs "wall gazing".

Station No. 9 is a walking meditation: near the end of the circuit, we walk in a figure eight around a family of trees. This form of meditation uses both sides of the brain and can be quite liberating.

At the end of the circuit, I always hope that the participants have experienced an ecstatic feeling of rebirth into a new and more spiritual life, similar to the feeling I experienced after my

shugyo with the Yamabushi in Japan. Mount Yamnuska has so much to offer us as human beings, and we have so much to give back in the form of respect for nature and believing in the sacredness of mountains. In the tradition of the Yamabushi, I am in the process of planning a seven-day traverse starting with the Yamnuska circuit and carrying on over Buller Pass to Mount Assiniboine. From "the 'Boine", I plan to head in the direction of Shadow Lake, ending the traverse of these three sacred mountains at the ship's prow on Castle.

I'm hoping to avoid people, roads, etc. as much as possible and to stay as high up as I can. Presently seeking Yamabushi partners...

A BOLIVIAN ADVENTURE

SYLVIA FOREST

Our driver dropped us off at the trailhead to Huayna Potosi, and left. It was 10 p.m. He promised to be back for us the next day at around noon. The wind howled through the narrow pass, down the moraines and through our clothing, blasting our ears. We looked at each other, our eyes expressing the mutual thought "What the hell are we doing here?" We felt very alone. Standing on the pavement, we peered through the darkness.

"The route description sucks!"

"It's irrelevant — I can't even see the mountain, let alone the trail!"

"I think, maybe ... yeah, there's a bit of a trail over here. Must be it."

Lisa Paulson and I started our South American climbing trip in Ecuador with Kirsten and Anya Knechtel and, for a short time, Marlo. We acclimatized on Cotopaxi and Chimbarazu and then shifted our attention to slightly more technical climbs in the Condoruri cirque in Bolivia. Satisfied with what we had accomplished, Kir and Anya decided to continue their adventures along the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu, while Lisa and I thought we would have a go at one last peak in Bolivia's Cordillera Real before heading to the Amazonian jungles. We chose Huayna Potosi because it was accessible, non-technical and beautiful.

A half moon emerged from the horizon. It was odd, hanging upside down

in an unfamiliar way, but as it turned from blood-red to pale yellow with the passing night, it lit our way from moraine to glacier. Despite the dim light, we frequently lost and regained various cairned trails leading in what seemed the right direction. It was not until we reached the glacier and got a view of the southwest ridge that our suspicions were confirmed. We had deviated from the standard route, probably right at the road.

Our navigational hiccup proved to be a blessing in disguise, for instead of plodding up a tedious and well-worn cattle track, we found ourselves confronted by a beautiful and benign icefall. We weaved our way through a puzzle of gargantuan crevasses and ice walls, marvelling at the ponderous snow gargoyles that monitored our progress. The magic and overwhelming beauty of the ice was tempered by arduous post holing in knee-deep, sun-crusted snow. I was *sooooo* cold! Wearing everything we had, we shivered despite the exertion of breaking trail.

A devious and intricate ramp system eventually led us to the upper plateau. We joined the standard route just above Argentino Camp, at 17,800 feet, where most parties spend a night before climbing to the summit. In the distance, we saw headlamps bobbing up the steep headwall like fireflies in migration.

Daylight found us trudging up the northeast ridge, the travelling easy, thanks to a compacted trail, but exhausting. Most parties were already on their way down from the summit. We exchanged pleasantries with them, put our heads down and kept going.

The summit is a pyramid that can be gained either by its exposed north (Polish) ridge or by the more direct north face. Although it was still early morning, we chose the face to save time. We had long since ditched our rope and a few other non-essential items in order to save weight, and we felt quite comfortable soloing up the 800-foot, 45-degree incline. Our comfort level dipped a bit near the summit when we heard muffled voices above us. Snowballs bounced towards us from the descending climbers. In a casual tone, Lisa voiced what I was thinking: "Let's move over. They might come down on top of us." I guess she meant it literally, for no sooner had we moved out of the fall line than I heard a shout. I looked up to see an ice axe flying vertically through the air like a rocket. A millisecond later three people cascaded past us, tumbling together in a tangled mass of ice axes, crampons and ropes, reminiscent of Bugs Bunny and the Tasmanian Devil. I looked at Lisa. "Guess we're not going to the summit, huh?"

We climbed down to where they lay in a heap at the bottom of the face. They'd fallen 600 feet. As it turned out, this was a guided party. The guide, Jose, had been lowering two clients simultaneously down the face when his anchor pulled. The anchor, we concluded, was an ice axe planted vertically in the snow.

A quick assessment revealed one broken collarbone, one boot-top fracture and one uninjured mountain guide. It was 9 a.m. No other parties were left on the upper mountain. We would not have been there so late ourselves had it not been for our creative routefinding earlier in the night. Knowing that help would be a long way off, Jose volunteered, at our suggestion, to try to catch up with one of the descending parties in order to initiate a rescue. Lisa and I then began the process of secondary surveys, and bandaging and packaging as best we could with our limited supplies. The major concern, apart from the injuries themselves, was hypothermia. We were at 19,000 feet, and despite the brilliant sunshine it was bitterly cold.

Within the hour, we had Tobias, the German, slung and swathed, his collarbone immobilized. Likewise, James, from England, was splinted with a combination of clothes, packs, ski poles and his boot. Lisa's training as an EMT was a tremendous asset, and the resulting splints were effective.

Just as we were ready to start transporting James down the mountain, Jose returned from his marathon high-altitude sprint for help. Despite the original tactical error that had resulted in the accident, Jose proved to be a caring and talented guide. The three of us worked as a team for the next several hours, hauling and lowering James

down the mountain while Tobias walked on ahead.

At 1 p.m., we reached the headwall separating the summit ridge from the lower glacier. The steep headwall was mined with an open bergschrund, so a double-anchor system was established to accommodate the extra load of two rescuers and a patient. We lowered a very reluctant Tobias first, with Jose assisting him over the 'schrund. Lowering James over it required two attendants, so Lisa did the honours at the anchor while Jose and I manoeuvred the litter over the hole to mellower terrain below. Argentino Camp was now less than a kilometre away and we could see two figures silhouetted against the snow. We sent Tobias ahead on the trail, knowing that the two climbers would escort him safely off the mountain.

It was getting hot, but James was still cold despite the extra layers we were donating to him. The snow was getting soft. At least we were off the steeper part of the mountain. Now it was just hard work. No rescue party was in sight. Doing the math, we knew that it would take several hours for help to arrive from La Paz; still, we had expected to see someone by now.

And so we continued to build anchors, lower, readjust, and shift positions from hauling to breaking. Late in the afternoon, we spotted two climbers slowly making their way up the glacier. When we met them their enthusiasm was overwhelming, but it took some effort to convince the new recruits not to dash down the mountain in uncontrolled urgency with James in tow. T-slot anchors appeared new to them, and the sidehills were tricky.

Near the bottom of the glacier, almost 4000 feet below the summit and eight hours after the accident occurred, we were met by reinforcements. Another five climbers had made their way up the mountain to meet us, and Lisa and I were officially out of a job. Still, James implored us not to leave him. How could we?

At 5 p.m., we arrived at the moraine below the glacier. A small tent city had been erected, and climbers, hikers and taggers-on of all descriptions milled about. A doctor promptly injected James with a powerful painkiller, and Lisa assisted the doctor in respinting his leg. With less than an hour to go before darkness, the new rescue party had the arduous job of transporting James down the rugged trail to the highway. Lisa and I, now quite superfluous, said our goodbyes and made our own way down. At the road, we were amazed to see our driver waiting for us. We had been climbing without stop for 20 hours. By choice (or due to the altitude) we had eaten one chocolate bar between us in that time. Still wired but with fatigue setting in, we relaxed in the jeep and let the driver take us to La Paz.

Tobias was out of the hospital the next day. James spent the next two weeks of his vacation in a hospital in La Paz and then flew home to England to recover. They thanked us for saving their lives. We guffawed, thinking the praise too much. After all, the only reason we were at the summit when they fell was because of a delay caused by our own routefinding error. Nevertheless, maybe it was all meant to be. Whether coincidence or cosmic intervention, I think that, perhaps, we did save their lives.

ALPINE ENGAGEMENT

KEVIN MCLANE

Adapting French Alpine Grades to British Columbia

In the summer of 2001, two new alpine guidebooks to British Columbian ranges were published — *Alpine Select: Climbs in Southwest British Columbia and Northern Washington* by Kevin McLane, and *Selkirks South* by David Jones — becoming the first guidebooks in North America to use an overall grading system founded on the European French

system. Climbs in the forthcoming *Waddington Guide* by Don Serl, *The Bugaboos Guide* from Chris Atkinson and Marc Piché, and *Selkirks North* by David Jones will follow suit.

The genesis of this approach goes back to 1999, when *Alpine Select* was being developed. No overall grades had ever been used for Canadian West Coast climbs, so an effective system to meet the needs of climbers was a priority.

French Grades, with a few subtle but important changes to reflect North American practice, and standard YDS grades for technical rock difficulty, seemed the only good solution. The well-travelled French initials continue to be used, and the term "Alpine Grades" was adopted as being more suited to North America.

Historically, Canadian alpine guidebooks (in the past, commonly written

and published by Americans) have made little formal attempt to address overall challenge or engagement, or adopted National Climbing Classification System (NCCS) Roman-numeral grades to try and do so. NCCS is now almost never used in Canadian rock-climbing guidebooks, and consequently many Canadian climbers, particularly younger ones, have only a vague sense of what they mean. Others hold the impression that NCCS is a “time required” grading system because of its use as such in highly influential rock-climbing centres such as Yosemite and its entrenchment in the American climbing psyche as measure of “time required” on rock climbs. NCCS was designed for Lower-48 American terrain in the late 1950s, and in its original form did attempt to cover the “overall” concept. But in the 1960s, it was usurped in the Lower 48 to become a rock-climbing “time required” system. Today, NCCS in either flavour is unable to embrace the full complexity of high alpine terrain such as that of western Canada. Hence the use of NCCS or look-alike Roman numerals in Canadian alpine guidebooks has brought ongoing uncertainty for climbers as to exactly what they mean — whether time-based or perhaps a locally customized overall grade. NCCS/Roman-numeral grades also bring the limitation of using only six levels of grading, unlike the fifteen or so of Alpine Grades. Adoption of NCCS/Roman numerals as a method of addressing overall grades seemed ill-suited to British Columbia.

French Grades are the most well-known of alpine grading systems, originally developed in the 1940s by Chamonix guides for the Mont Blanc range, and since the 1960s universally applied across the western Alps, particularly by British guidebook writers. Through the influence of European climbers and globe-trotting North Americans, their use has spread on an informal basis to many of the world’s mountain regions, and they constitute perhaps the closest thing to an international alpine grading system.

Alpine Grades are founded on both objective terrain characteristics and subjective skill assessment. Perhaps the best single word that describes their essence is “engagement”, the shibboleth that helps distinguish the unique degree of

challenge, difficulty and commitment that each alpine climb presents. In one meaningful set of initials, Alpine Grades help climbers match their ability and comfort level to climbs where they can hold a reasonable chance of success. With fifteen or so categories of grade to choose from, and initials that sidestep any confusion with NCCS/Roman-numeral grades, they offer the most effective answer to the eternal question of the would-be alpinist: “How far do I have to stick my neck out?”

Alpine Grades come as much from the gut as they do the head, because an often broad array of psychological and physical demands, as well as technical difficulty, must be weighed before embarking on a climb. They are an intuitive as well as an analytical measurement that helps a climber sense where a particular climb fits with his or her comfort level when it comes to the constellation of alpine uncertainties: length, altitude, weather volatility, approach, severity of terrain, belay security, isolation, protection, stone fall, crevasse difficulties, exposure, bivouacs, technical difficulty, icefall, fatigue, cold north faces, sunny south sides, and long ridge traverses — to name a few. These uncertainties all matter to the best climbers, but their fullest implications can carry a sense of urgency for lesser climbers.

Alpine Grades are designed for and best suited to high alpine terrain and summertime conditions which broadly fit the classic model of the European Alps — in effect, most of western Canada. As snow cover declines at lower elevations and the “pure rock climb” ambience begins to dominate, the subjectivity of the engagement grade begins to lose its value in favour of the more technical pairing of YDS grades and the number of pitches.

Four Significant Adjustments for Canadian Terrain and Practice

Some significant differences between the French system as originally designed and the realities of Canadian terrain have needed to be addressed. As short but very difficult alpine rock climbs, particularly in the Chamonix area, have evolved, French grading practice has considerably elevated the technical-difficulty aspect of a climb at the expense of the commitment. This remains a contentious matter in Europe,

and it is proposed here that the original intent of the French system be maintained in order to keep a strong eye on the true level of commitment, or engagement. A 5.12 rock climb of six pitches off a flat glacier with a rappel descent does not merit ED.

The four Canadian terrain factors below, largely involving remoteness and glaciation, can all raise the engagement grade of a climb in varying and subtle ways. An increase of half a grade, at most, would appear appropriate in certain cases.

1. *Approaches can be substantially longer and more demanding than in Europe.* This can influence the grade in some cases, especially where the approach may be physically punishing. The North Ridge of Columbia and the North Ridge of Clarke are examples.

2. *The remoteness of distant climbs — those in the Waddington Range or deep in the southern Selkirks — can influence the engagement factor.* The neck is stuck out considerably further on a climb, say, in the Tiedemann group than on comparable terrain in the Bugaboos, around Lake Louise, on Mount Slesse or, for that matter, near Chamonix.

3. *Very heavily glaciated terrain, such as in the high regions of the Coast Mountains of British Columbia, can present serious glacial approaches and descents which are significantly more hazardous than in Europe.*

4. *The descent must also be considered in the Alpine Grade, unlike common practice in Europe.* Some descents can be very challenging, and all mountaineers are well aware that “It ain’t over till it’s over.” This does not necessarily change many grades, but it has to be considered. When climbers are topping out, there is a considerable difference between walking off Mount Temple after climbing the *Greenwood/Locke*, and having to climb back down the Northwest Ridge of Sir Donald.

What to Expect

(“Long climbs” are characterized as 800 metres or more; “short climbs” are characterized as up to 400 metres.)

F: Easy (Facile)

Very easy climbs involving minimal hazards — typically scrambles that could encompass much steep walking or easy glacier travel, with technical difficulty commonly at third-class, but up to

fourth-class in limited situations. Climbs are invariably also the route of descent.

PD: Not Very Difficult (Peu Difficile)
Can be considered an introductory level for novice climbers, involving third- and fourth-class rock climbing — often reaching into low-fifth-class — and presenting relatively low hazard. Climbs can be long, or possibly exposed snow climbs generally not exceeding 45 degrees, and crevasse problems are usually limited. Many *voies normales* are PD; climbs can be lengthy and are often descended on return.

AD: Fairly Difficult (Assez Difficile)
This grade demands competence at all aspects of alpine terrain and technique. The main difficulties are often considerable amounts of fourth-class and low-fifth-class terrain, but shorter climbs can commonly reach up to 5.7. The AD grade covers many ice climbs up to 50 degrees frequently involving broken glaciers, knife-edge ridges and mixed climbing. AD is the grade of the more difficult *voies normales* and is often the grade of descent.

D: Difficult (Difficile)
This is the pivotal grade between “less demanding” climbs and “hard” climbs. Significant undertakings for experienced

climbers, climbs at this grade demand at least the same terrain competence as AD routes, but also higher technical skills on rock and ice. Terrain can range more widely than at any other grade, particularly in length — from long, consistently fourth- to mid-fifth-class climbs (Temple’s East Ridge), to shorter, non-committing climbs well into 5.10 (Grainger’s Southeast Pillar), and from largely fourth-class but committing climbs (Sir Donald’s Northwest Ridge) to intimidating climbs on poor terrain into mid-fifth-class (Nooksack Tower’s *Beckey/Schmidtke*). This tends to be the grade of the more difficult ice climbs, often involving complicated icefalls (Shuksan’s Price Glacier) and faces up to 55 degrees. Descent is usually via a climb of PD or AD.

TD: Very Difficult (Très Difficile)
This is the defining grade of the “hard” climbs aspired to by many alpinists. Climbs at this grade are commonly long and involve considerable amounts of mid-fifth climbing, routinely to 5.9 (Howser’s *Beckey/Chouinard*, Slesse’s Northeast Buttress), or are shorter but technically much harder. Short sections of aid are possible. Climbs can present significant objective danger (Temple’s

Greenwood/Locke). Some may hold considerable amounts of mixed climbing and steep ice with sections at 70 degrees or more (Edith Cavell’s 1961 North Face route, Waddington’s *Cowboy Way*). Climbs may also present mostly moderate technical difficulty in serious or remote situations (Deltaform’s *Supercouloir*, Robson’s North Face, Clarke’s North Ridge), and escape opportunities can be very few. Descent is almost always over the top and down a route that may be up to D in ascent.

ED: Extremely Difficult
ED routes require an exceptionally high level of skill and experience on alpine rock or ice (usually both), including a tolerance for sustained objective danger in highly committing situations. Difficulty is commonly sustained fifth-class well into 5.10 with possible aid, or major mixed climbing on poor terrain encompassing ice that can be vertical. Climbs where retreat may be very hazardous are commonplace. Climbs at this grade are always physically punishing and routinely exceed 1000 metres in height. ED1, ED2, ED3 and ED4 denote a range of difficulty from “harder than TD” up to the most demanding climbs in the world.

Benchmark Alpine Gradings

The stated grade characteristics are the theoretical foundation; on the ground and in the pub, however, experienced climbers instinctively measure the engagement factor of alpine climbs by comparing one with another, “slotting them in” much as was done by the Chamonix guides of sixty years ago. The development of a broad base of tentative benchmark grades applied to well-known climbs in Canada and the U.S.A., along with some well-known examples in Europe, is intended to help that process. Over time, some grades will undoubtedly change as more sophistication is gained. As ever, some will always be pleasantly contentious. The Alpine Grade is paired with the YDS grade in guidebook application — i.e. TD, 5.10a A2; or AD, ice to 50 degrees — giving the engagement grade and technical difficulty at a glance.

British Columbia

Combatant Mtn., *Belligerence*ED3
Howser Spire, *Watchtower*ED2
Mt. Waddington, South FaceED1
Combatant Mtn., *Skywalk Complete*ED1
Howser Spire, *Beckey/Chouinard*TD+
Moby Dick Mtn., *Boomerang*TD+
Slesse Mtn., Northeast ButtressTD
Mt. Clarke, North RidgeTD-
Mt. Waddington, *Standard Route*D+
Snowpatch Spire, *Southeast Corner*D
Mt. Sir Donald, Northwest RidgeD-
Bugaboo Spire, Northeast RidgeAD+
Mt. Assiniboine, North RidgeAD+
Claw Peak, West RidgeAD
Slesse Mtn., Southwest ButtressAD-
Mt. Sir Sandford, Northwest RidgeAD-
Pigeon Spire, West RidgePD
Uto Peak, Southwest RidgePD

The Rockies

Mt. Alberta, North FaceED3
Mt. Robson, Emperor RidgeED2

Mt. Andromeda, *Andromeda Strain*ED1
Mt. Temple, *Greenwood/Locke*TD+
Mt. Deltaform, *Supercouloir*TD
Mt. Edith Cavell, North Face (1961)TD
Mt. Robson, North FaceTD-
Mt. Andromeda, *Shooting Gallery*D+
Mt. Athabasca, North FaceD+
Mt. Temple, East RidgeD
Mt. Edith Cavell, East RidgeD
Mt. Andromeda, *Skyladder*AD+
Mt. Athabasca, North RidgeAD
Mt. Victoria, Southeast RidgePD+
Mt. Athabasca, North GlacierPD

United States

Keeler Needle, *Harding Route*TD
Bear Mtn., North Face (1967)TD
Grand Teton, North FaceD+
Mt. Stuart, North Ridge CompleteD+
Grand Teton, *Black Ice Couloir*D
Mt. Rainier, Liberty RidgeD
Mt. Shuksan, Price GlacierD
Mt. Whitney, East ButtressD-

Mt. Redoubt, Northeast FaceAD+
Mt. Baker, North RidgeAD
Mt. Whitney, East FaceAD
Pingora, South ButtressAD
Mt. Rainier, *Standard Route*PD+

Europe

Eiger, North Face (1938)ED1/2
Mont Blanc, *Central Frenay Pillar*ED1
Grandes Jorasses, Walker SpurED1
Droites, Northeast SpurTD+
Mont Blanc, *Red Sentinel*D+
Aiguille du Midi, Frenedo SpurD+
Tour Ronde, North FaceD
Matterhorn, Hornli RidgeAD+
Courtes, *Cordier Route*AD
Mont Blanc, *Standard Route*PD+

Alpine Grades were developed by Kevin McLane, Don Serl and David Jones, with considerable help from Sean Dougherty for the Rockies climbs, Andy Selters for climbs and perspectives from the U.S.A., and Simon Richardson for the worldly European view.

THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF GREY

JASON MACLEOD

[Editor's note: Canmore climber Jason Macleod was very nearly killed by a drunk driver travelling on the wrong side of the Trans-Canada Highway in March 2001. The photo says it all; Jason had life-threatening injuries that kept him in hospital for months.

He has since had to relearn how to walk, and now — gradually and miraculously — to climb again. I asked Jason to put down some of his thoughts regarding this very different kind of accident from the ones we usually read about in our climbing publications. Jason's journey back is also referred to in the earlier article by Rob Torkildson.]

Most of us who play in the outdoor world have come to accept a certain amount of risk, i.e. "I am willing to do *this*, but not to do *that*." We tolerate some risks more often or to a higher degree than others, but the risk is always present — the challenge. And depending on the activity we participate in, the potential for injury also varies.

Yet, how often do we actually stop and think of what "injury" means? When you think of an injury, what does it look like and for how long? Think about this for a moment.

It would seem that we think of one extreme or the other: either a few bumps and scrapes — perhaps something that will leave a scar — or game over. Or we think of dying doing what we love to do, which is somehow meant to be a good way to go.

However, it is far more difficult to consider: "What if I could not **(insert favourite activity)** anymore?" Somehow the world of grey is far worse than the black-or-white world we like to think of when we are accepting a risk.

Ask anyone in their physical prime which they would choose:

- a) dying doing what they love
- b) being maimed while doing what they love, and never being able

to do it again

- (c) And what's behind doors No. 3 and 4? Dying doing something else. Even worse, being maimed doing something else and still never being able to do what you love again. We don't want to *think* about it.

Who wants to be a caged animal? Physical limitations tend to lock up those who express or experience life by being outdoors and active. And when you can no longer be active, you no



longer want to be outdoors and reminded of what you cannot do. You don't want to hear how good the snow/ice/trail/weather is. Hearing about the adventures your friends are planning tears your heart out. And the energy builds. Some of you may be familiar with this.

Experience has told me that this takes about six months to a year to really get going. We can deal quite well with short-term disability — read more, do all those little projects we've been meaning to get to when the weather is bad, etc., etc. But when all your friends are continuing on without you, and that pain in your **(insert body part)** just won't stay away, and you wonder if you will ever get better, that's when the *real* frustration sets in. You crave the wind in your hair, the adrenaline of a steep line, the satisfaction of making it to the top;

and those old photos, well, they just don't cut it.

How many times have you heard that someone you know just blew his or her **(insert body part)** and will be out for a while. "No way! Aww, that sucks!" You go round, say a few attaboys about your friend's physio work and the old "You'll be out there in no time." And you're outta there! Don't want to get the same thing! Or even think that it could happen to you. We tend to be like that, especially in hospitals.

"I don't want to think about it," seems to be the recurring theme. Perhaps it's the fear of having to change our whole lifestyle. For most of us, being outdoors is a lifestyle: we do it, we talk it, we live it. It's about the next day of **(insert activity)** or the next trip. Our friends are into it, and it's exciting. And if we cannot live our life that way — well, we just don't want to think about it.

So why do we avoid thinking of the grey area? What are we afraid of? You may want to ponder this for a short while, just to realize how uncomfortable it is.

It is said that courage is not fearlessness, courage is going on in spite of fear. In order to have the courage, you have to understand the fear. That is where true acceptance lies. And depending on whether we do this before or after the fact, this can either be liberating or paralyzing.

Fortunately, most of us who indulge in outdoor sports also have a great amount of spirit and drive. And so when we do get injured, we recover well and fast. Before we know it, we're out there doing it again, with a lot more appreciation. And there is NOTHING more satisfying than being back in the game, and knowing it.

*Not all wounds are self-inflicted,
but all healings are.*

the LIGHTER side

ANIMAL FARM SCOTT SEMPLE

Last year, Ben Firth and Raphael Slawinski were putting up or repeating the hardest mixed routes in the Rockies — most of which were up at “the Gulag” on Mount Rundle. This became newsworthy to the point of making it across the ocean. Raphael found the following puzzling Web translation of a Spanish news flash about the Gulag:

Animal Farm, first Canadian M10 Canadian the Horseradish tree Firth and Raphael Slawinski, absolute fanatics of dry-tooling, is redescubiertó the first North American M10, “Farm” Animal, a channel that after its opening was graduated like M9+, and that, contrary to the habitual thing, has been reconsidered as the harder channel of compound to the other side of the Atlantic. The line at issue slides in the depths of the ice cave Gulag, under the Terminator wall of Monte Rundle (Canada). Until they returned the past month of December Horseradish tree Firth and Raphael Slawinski there, with intention to repeat this route, that they themselves graduated like M9+ month the past as March, when they chained it for the first time. But Firth and Slawinski, which between both they have scaled all the M9 opened in Canada, changed of opinion after this second repetition. For both one is really a M10 solid, that inaugurates east degree within the Canadian compound. The reason for this regraduación is the comparison with respect to other lines of M9 that both have been able to chain without dragoneras. In opinion of both, they are below “Farm” Animal. A first example is “Caveman”, a M9+ opened by Is

Isaac in Haffner considered Creek and like referring within dry-tooling a more duro of Canada. It is, basically, an authentic collection of complicated and technical passages on mixed land. The second example is “Thriller” (M8+/9-), in Stanley Headwall. For Firth, to chain this channel without dragoneras was more reasonable than the terrorífica “Farm” Animal with the aid from the cordinos. And of the first Canadian M10 to the second. During their visit navidena to the cave Gulag, Firth and Slawinski opened and equipped “Animal Direct”, variant “a final Farm” Animal, in which Slawinski made the first ascent. Horseradish tree Firth, was on the verge of scoring second, but to little centimeters of culminating the final section, a board of finísimo and delicate ice, the Canadian fell in a flight of almost 10 meters.

To poke friendly fun at the posting, I responded with the following:

Horseradish Tree silently approached his Master’s door. He raised his hand as if to knock...

“Come in, Horseradish Tree,” the Master said.

Horseradish Tree opened the door, crossed the room and knelt in front of his Master. He kept his eyes on the mat in front of him. Like lightning, the Master grabbed a tool from his holster and flung it through the air. It whirled and stuck in the floor in front of Horseradish Tree. Horseradish Tree stayed completely still. Good, the Master thought, he is learning quickly. The Master studied Horseradish Tree from behind his glasses. “Yes, Horseradish?”

“When will I be ready, Master?”

A friendly laugh came from the Master. “So impatient, young Horseradish Tree. You must let these things happen to you; you cannot make them happen.”

“But when will I know?” Horseradish Tree interrupted. “When will I inaugurate the east degree within the Canadian compound?”

The Master sighed. So impatient. “You will know you are ready when ...”

“Yes?”

“... when you can chain the channel ...”

“But Master, I have chained many channels.”

“... without dragoneras.”

“Without dragoneras?”

“Yes, without dragoneras and without aid from the cordinos. When you can slide in the depths of the ice cave and come out unscathed without cordinos, when you can chain any channel without dragoneras and not fall in a flight of 10 metres, when you can hear that grasshopper at your knee and still cross a board of finísimo and delicate ice — when you can do all this, young Horseradish Tree, you will be ready. You will be the harder channel chainer of compound to the other side of the Atlantic. You will be ready to challenge the Dark Euro Master. You will be ready to challenge Bubu Tree.”

Silence.

“Now go, Horseradish Tree. Go and think on what I have said. I must work. I have another paper to write for the geophysics conference next month...”!

HE SHALL NEVER CAIRN AGAIN

PAUL ADAM

It was July 6, 2001, when I phoned John Clarke for some reason that I have long since forgotten because of the drama that was to follow. I was somewhat taken aback when the ringing of the phone stopped and a voice said "Hello."

I had expected to hear an answering machine cut in with the message that John was out of town until late August. Taking a second to recover my poise, I asked, "You haven't left on your trip yet?"

"Which one?"

"The Exstew. Why, are you going somewhere else?"

"Germany. I leave tomorrow."

"Germany? Why Germany?"

"A major change in my life. A medical condition requires that I make a trip to Germany. My climbing career is over. I should have a list of unclimbed peaks in the Coast Mountains on the Web by the middle of January."

I asked what had caused this sudden and possibly fatal end, and how long he had known about it. Apparently, the first indication of the condition had appeared about a month before. Realizing the seriousness of the situation, he had called off his Exstew trip immediately and planned the trip to Germany in order to sort his life out. Initially, he had only informed those directly involved; now, however, knowing that the condition had progressed to a point where he was sure of his fate, he felt comfortable telling others. At best there were six months left, and no chance to cairn another summit.

After expressing my sympathy at this dramatic, medically induced change in his life, I hung up and called Tami Knight on another matter. No sooner had she answered the phone than I informed her that John's life had taken a major turn and that he would never wander the mountains alone again. Through the phone, I could hear her jaw drop and her mouth remain agape without a word coming out (this was almost as shocking as John's dilemma). Finally, one exited from between her lips: "John?"

We talked for a minute or so, then

she turned to her kids, Isaac (11) and Dominique (9), and told them. Through the phone, I could hear them shrieking "Not John," and "I can't believe it."

Finally, after the shock had worn off and the explanations had been explained, we discussed my original reason for phoning, which I have since forgotten.

Others in the climbing community were shocked and surprised to hear that such a fate could have befallen John. He was the last climber anyone would have expected to suffer from the consequences of a self-inflicted injection of fluid into a gaping and waiting cavity.

In the middle of August, I phoned John to see if the trip to Germany had produced the desired result. Amid the darkness, John found humour: "It has been so long since I've been in Vancouver at this time of year, I don't know whether I can handle it."

"The question is, Can Vancouver handle you at this time of year? How was the trip?"

"Well, not as traumatic as I had expected, but only half as successful as I had hoped."

It turned out that he had not met all the people he needed or wanted to meet. It was obvious that things were getting very serious. Because the condition had hit him at an advanced age, one got the feeling that, even if he survived the experience, he would likely never see a cairn close up again. Near the end of the conversation, he asked if I would accompany him to see a priest some time in the near future.

Thus, on September 16, we made our way to his favourite church. Standing there in the cathedral surrounded by walls of cedar, the padre asked John whether he understood the direction his life was taking and whether he was able to accept that there was no return. John looked the Father in the eyes and said "I do."

With that simple statement, I knew that John had accepted the terminal nature of the path he had found himself on and that he was prepared to face this new path. At that moment, I knew that

he was at peace with himself and that he could depart the mountain world he had inhabited for forty years, happy and contented. He seemed to have accepted the idea that he would never wander alone through the mountains again. Observers could see John carefully watching the growth of the waistline that had doomed him and signalled the end of a life of carefree cairning on untrod summits for one of Canada's finest mountaineers.

Over the next few months, I would check in with him regularly. Each time, I was told that the growth was continuing. Despite knowing that the growth was likely to rupture in early January, according to the doctor, John remained upbeat about life and the future. His outlook was amazing given his knowledge that the climax involved hours of howling in agony, writhing in pain, and bleeding, along with requests to be given drugs in order to be put out of the misery inflicted by the condition.

On January 14, 2002, the phone rang and a voice bellowing down the line told me that it was over. The intonation revealed that it had been a long and painful process. I could hear the wiping of tears on the other end of the line, and they started to well up in my tear ducts as well; I had to accept that my friend would never make another first ascent. Fighting back the tears, I asked, "Well, what was it?"

The Irish voiced boomed out, "A boy! I'm a daddy!!"

Actually, I knew, as did all who knew him, that John and fatherhood were an ideal match. No one would bring a babysitter to any climbing party, as John would always take the job of playing with the kids while the adults chatted in a somewhat intellectual way.

Congratulations, John and Annette, on your September 16 wedding (what was that about making a lot of women happy by not marrying them, John?) and on the birth of Nicklaus at 4:14 p.m. on January 14.

P.S. There is less poetic licence here than you might imagine.

history & organizations

THE DEBT WE OWE THE AMERICANS

R.W. SANDFORD, V.P. PUBLICATIONS, A.C.C.

This year, the American Alpine Club will be celebrating its 100th birthday. As The Alpine Club of Canada has many American members and because of the long-standing and close link between the clubs, it is perhaps only appropriate that Canadians mark the AAC centennial with a few observations on the American influence on mountaineering in Canada.

Though Native peoples and a number of early European explorers did climb the occasional mountain, their achievements were not technically in the domain in which we categorize climbing today. The first technical ascents of high mountains in Canada did not occur until the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway granted easier access to Canada's western mountains in 1885. The earliest climbers were from Europe, but it took only a couple of years for the Rockies and the Selkirks to be discovered by American tourists and adventurers. Many of these were mountaineers with experience in the Alps and in the Rocky Mountains further south.

Decades of close association with European guides (first hired by the CPR) and American climbers helped make Canada the alpine nation that it is today. Sometimes, as with the creation of The Alpine Club of Canada, Americans simply shamed Canadians into developing their own alpine culture.

The founder of the American Alpine Club, Charles Fay, climbed extensively in Canada in the years following the completion of the CPR through the Rockies. He was the leader of the expedition to Mount Lefroy on which Philip Stanley Abbot became the first mountaineering fatality in Canada, and which first brought the mountaineering potential of our peaks to Canadian public attention. Fortunately, Fay was not the kind to walk away from disaster or adversity. He made an impassioned defense of mountaineering at the inquiry into Abbot's death which put an end to the grumbling in political circles

that mountaineering ought to be banned in Canada. Fay was also a member of the Anglo-American expedition that made the first ascent of Mount Lefroy on the anniversary of Abbot's death, an expedition that opened the door to mountaineering adventure and exploration in the vast alpine regions north and west of Lake Louise.

When Charles Fay brought the American Alpine Club into existence in 1902, he inspired Arthur Oliver Wheeler to try to create a sister organization in Canada. Wheeler tried for years to generate interest in a national mountaineering organization in this country, but in the end was unsuccessful. It was only after Fay offered that a Canadian chapter of the American Alpine Club could be created to suit the needs of the United States' northern neighbours that Elizabeth Parker was able to wake Canadians from their apathy, allowing them to realize the importance of mountains to their own identity. This, however, did not mean the end of American influence on Canadian mountaineering.

When The Alpine Club of Canada was created in March of 1906, it had 117 members. Fifteen of these were Americans. At the Club's first General Mountaineering Camp, held in the Yoho Valley in the summer of 1906, some 133 climbers graduated into membership of the Club. Eight were Americans. Today, The Alpine Club of Canada boasts some 6000 members. Of these, close to 400 have American addresses.

American influence on The Alpine Club of Canada has been profound. The positive nature of this influence can be measured, to a real extent, by the number of honorary memberships bestowed on Americans — including the AAC's founding president, Charles Fay; early climber and photographer Walter Wilcox; alpine artist and naturalist Mary Vaux Walcott; and climbers Albert MacCarthy, James Monroe Thorington, Brad Washburn and Henry

Hall Jr. In the long history of the ACC, there are few of any nationality who have done more for climbing or who are more respected in Canada than American William L. Putnam, who was presented honorary membership in 1985.

Perhaps as important as American ACC membership has been the American literary influence on Canadian climbing. Early books by Walter Wilcox drew the attention of the entire world to the alpine glories of Lake Louise. Climbers and adventurers of the calibre of Howard Palmer and Lewis Freeman not only made important ascents in the Rockies and Selkirks, they also published enduring accounts of their adventures, helping to establish a mountain literature genre in Canada. James Monroe Thorington was a fine and accomplished climber and writer who became one of Canada's earliest and most highly regarded alpine scholars.

Nowhere has American involvement in Canadian climbing been more influential than in the writing of mountaineering guidebooks, a tradition that goes back to the first trail guide ever written in the Rockies, in 1897. This tradition comes full circle with popular contemporary guidebooks authored or co-authored by Americans on mountain ranges as accessible as the Alberta Rockies and as remote as the big stone walls of Baffin Island.

As a centennial gift to the American Alpine Club, the ACC will be producing a bound edition of Alfred Ostheimer III's hitherto unpublished account of an extraordinarily prolific expedition he made to Jasper National Park in the summer of 1927. Fittingly, the publication of this joyful account of a summer of summits in the Canadian Rockies was jointly funded — by Canadians and their American friends. On this most important anniversary of the AAC, we hope that our gift will become a lasting memento of a century of association and shared appreciation of the glories of Canadian peaks.

100 YEARS AT MOUNT ASSINIBOINE

R.W. SANDFORD

One hundred years ago this past August, a young British vicar made the first ascent of Mount Assiniboine in the company of two professional mountain guides who were in the employ of the Canadian Pacific Railway. In celebration of this centennial, local resident Loni von Rotz, granddaughter of one of the guides on the first ascent, climbed the mountain to honour the memory of her grandfather. This ascent, done in the company of guide Sepp Renner of Assiniboine Lodge and Loni's Swiss cousin, Ruedi Kaufmann, also commemorated the role that Swiss guides played in the development of Canada's unique mountaineering culture.

Long known as the "Matterhorn of the Rockies", Mount Assiniboine was judged by many to be unclimbable. It wasn't until 1901, when the CPR invited Edward Whymper to the Rockies, that the image of the mountain began to change. Whymper had made the first ascent of the Matterhorn, and many were looking to him to bring down its Canadian equivalent. But there were problems. Whymper was now 62, and his prime climbing days were over. Though he brought some of Europe's best guides with him, they didn't climb anything significant and were seldom more than a day's ride from the main line of the railway. There was also Whymper's drinking problem. He argued incessantly with his guides and with his outfitter, Bill Peyto.

Even when word came that an American team was about to attempt Mount Assiniboine, Whymper remained unmoved. When it became clear that "the Lion of the Matterhorn" was no longer capable of anything as formidable as Mount Assiniboine, James Outram, a young British vicar who had joined the Whymper party in Field, expressed an interest in the peak. A disgusted Peyto offered to make the attempt affordable for Outram by taking a direct route that would make it possible to reach Assiniboine in only two days from Banff. In order to assure Outram's success, two CPR guides, Christian Bohren and Christian Hasler, were hired at Chateau Lake Louise to accompany him.

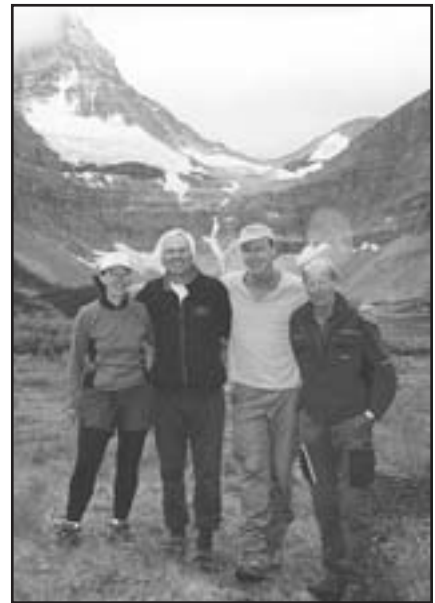
Though Peyto made good on his promise to get to the mountain in two days, the climbers' first attempt on the 11,870-foot peak was unsuccessful. Faced with the difficult routefinding, they were driven off the summit ridge by bad weather and the lateness of the day. With a better route firmly in mind on their second attempt, however, they were able to overcome the verglas that had formed on the mountain during the night and make the summit. On August 3, 1901, they stood "on the loftiest spot in Canada on which a human foot had then been planted".

The story of Christian Bohren does not end with Mount Assiniboine. Born in Grindewald in 1865, Bohren had come to Canada in 1901 to spend his first season in the Canadian Rockies. Though he loved the Rockies, his family back in Switzerland was unimpressed with his long absences. He spent two summers at Lake Louise before returning permanently to Switzerland, where he married, and raised a family that he supported by guiding.

Loni von Rotz grew up in Grindewald without knowing that her grandfather had guided for the Canadian Pacific Railway in the Canadian Rockies. Because it had not been a happy time for her, her grandmother never talked about Christian Bohren's summer-long absences in Canada. It was only after Loni moved to Canmore in 1978 that her brother explained her grandfather's connection to the mountaineering history of the Canadian West. Suddenly, Loni knew why she was here.

In order to establish a link with her grandfather's life in Canada, Loni made it her ambition to learn to climb. She made her first ascent of Mount Assiniboine in August of 1997. Though she felt that it was an important moment in the history of her family, she believed that the link might be made stronger by climbing the mountain on the anniversary of her grandfather's first ascent. On August 27, she did just that.

The day dawned perfectly clear at Assiniboine Lodge, and the climbers set off early towards the classic route up the



mountain. The party consisted of Loni; her cousin Ruedi Kaufmann, who was visiting from Grindewald; guide Sepp Renner; and Sepp's son, Andre. By 9:30 a.m. they were on the dizzyingly high summit, where they met a party including Canadian Everest summiter Laurie Skreslet. It was a profoundly emotional moment, especially for Loni and Ruedi. Loni's mother, who was the last living daughter of Christian Bohren, had died only two weeks before. Loni had felt under great pressure to fulfill her intergenerational promise to her grandfather. But the summit is only halfway. The descent route off the big ridge of Mount Assiniboine is very exposed. It was only after reaching Assiniboine Lodge that Loni could savour her achievement. She had made a permanent connection to the life of her grandfather which her children, and her children's children, might keep intact.

From the centennial ascent of Mount Assiniboine, we learn that history can be circular and that we can give meaning to where and how we live by valuing connection to place and celebrating the achievements of those who came before us. We are an alpine nation today because of Swiss guides such as Christian Bohren, and we remain so because of the inspiration they continue to provide to Canadian climbers who follow in their footsteps to the summits of our most celebrated peaks.

THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF MOUNTAINS IN CANADA

ENGAGING CANADIANS IN CONSERVING, SUSTAINING
AND CELEBRATING MOUNTAIN AREAS



The year 2002 has been declared the *United Nations International Year of Mountains*. During this year-long celebration, nations around the world will be recognizing the importance of their mountain areas as planetary water towers and repositories of biodiversity and cultural heritage.

Mountains are important to Canadians. No matter where we live, Canadians are connected to and affected by mountains. We are a downslope, downwind and downstream people. Throughout 2002, The Alpine Club of Canada will be one of more than 100 partners in the mountain West which will be offering opportunities for Canadians to understand more about this country's remarkable mountain heritage.

*For further information, please contact The Alpine Club of Canada
or log onto Canada's IYM Web site at www.yearofmountains.ca.*

ACC FINANCIAL GRANTS AND AWARDS

△ *The Endowment Fund*
△ *The Environment Fund*

△ *The Jen Higgins Fund*
△ *The Jim Colpitts Fund*

△ *The Helly Hansen Mountain Adventure Award*

Endowment Fund

The ACC Endowment Fund provides grants to a variety of projects consistent with the Club's constitution, goals and objectives. Funding preference is given to projects of benefit to the Club.

Environment Fund

The ACC Environment Fund provides grants supporting projects aimed at preserving and protecting mountain and climbing areas as well as alpine flora or fauna in mountain/climbing areas.

Jen Higgins Fund

The Jen Higgins Fund provides grants that promote creative and energetic alpine-related outdoor pursuits by young women (approximate age: 25 and younger). Higgins Fund grants are not intended to subsidize women attending established outdoor programs or other courses.

The Jim Colpitts Fund

The Jim Colpitts Fund provides financial support to two

selected Alberta teens to attend the ACC's "Mountaineering 101" camp for 17- to 24-year-olds.

Helly Hansen Mountain Adventure Award

Grants will be awarded to: expeditions; mountain-related cultural or heritage initiatives; projects that (1) educate individuals or groups regarding the characteristics, benefits and dangers of mountain environments, (2) maintain and improve access to alpine areas in an environmentally sustainable manner, (3) develop technical mountaineering skills, or (4) create a permanent refuge for mountaineers to safely use and explore alpine areas.

For further information or for application forms, please visit our Web page at www.AlpineClubofCanada.ca/funds/index. Or you can e-mail alpclub@telusplanet.net, phone (403) 678-3200 ext. #1, or fax (403) 678-3224. To contact us by regular mail, please send your inquiry to: Box 8040, Indian Flats Road, Canmore, AB T1W 2T8, Canada.

*The annual application deadline is December 31.
The annual grants announcement date is March 1.*

The General Mountaineering Committee of the ACC, and the *Association of Canadian Mountain Guides* have established the *Karl Nagy Memorial Scholarship Fund* to honour Karl's memory. Each year, one aspiring amateur leader or ACMG guide candidate will be sponsored to attend a week of the GMC in order to extend his or her skill development and training. The required funds will be generated by the annual Mountain Guides' Ball.

*For an application form, please contact The Alpine Club of Canada:
accprogs@telusplanet.net; (403) 678-3200 ext. 112; Fax: (403) 678-3224; Box 8040, Canmore, AB T1W 2T8*

the north

A PIECE OF THE PUZZLE

DAVID E. WILLIAMS

Steve Sheffield and friend Kate picked Laurent Mingo, Glen Hearn and me up at the Whitehorse airport, and we drove to the Arctic Research Institute at Kluane Lake. In perfect weather and with Andy Williams as our pilot, we soon had the food cache in place on the Lowell Glacier. Early the next morning, April 21, 2001, we were dropped off at the Slims River trailhead. Things had gone like clockwork and we were ready to start a three-week spring ski adventure into the St. Elias Mountains. We planned to traverse from Kluane Lake in the Yukon to the mouth of the Alsek River at Dry Bay, Alaska. From a technical standpoint, we felt that the proposed trip would involve a fairly straightforward traverse over the huge and relatively unbroken glaciers of the St. Elias Mountains.

Two days of travel saw us camped on the lower Kaskawulsh Glacier. The magnificent splendour of the Slims River valley makes the walk to the Kaskawulsh a worthwhile trip in itself. I had previously walked down the Slims on our way out from Mount Logan in 1989 (see *Waddington* at <http://www.bivouac.com/TripPg.asp?rq=Pg&Tripld=11>). On that trip, a delightful day's walk in the June sun with light packs was involved. In April, snow and ice still clung to the shaded areas and everywhere shoots were sprouting skyward — and our packs weighed us down a little.

Our Krazy Karpet sleds in tow, we skied up the south arm of the Kaskawulsh and descended onto the Dusty Glacier through a small col 6 km east-southeast of Pinnacle Peak. From here we had some impressive views of the Kennedy-Hubbard massif. This was to be one of our last views for a while; from this point (Day 6) onward, the weather became very unsettled. Vast portions of the trip were completed under whiteout conditions and with the guidance of the compass needle. On several sections of the traverse, we saw little of the surrounding scenery and were nearly always breaking trail. This year we carried a GPS for the first time. In the whiteout conditions, I found that taking a reading at lunchtime and in the evening to confirm our position was comforting, as the instrument gave us welcome reassurance that we were on the right track.



Camped out of the wind on the Lowell Glacier. photos: David E. Williams

We headed east-southeast down the Dusty Glacier and descended onto the Lowell Glacier from the mellow shoulder 2 km west of the junction of these two glaciers. Heading south and then southwest, we picked up our food cache, positioned 5 km southwest of Ulu Mountain, and continued south to the Tweedsmuir Glacier. The evening before we descended to the Tweedsmuir, the skies cleared to give us incredible views of the enormous peaks of Seattle, Foresta, Vancouver, Weisshorn, Ulu, Hubbard and Kennedy.

From the Tweedsmuir Glacier, we had hoped to descend onto the Vern Ritchie Glacier through a high col 1.5 km to the west of Mount Vern Ritchie. Unfortunately, we became pinned down below this col by bad weather. After spending a good part of a day waiting for a clearing that did not come, while the slopes became more and more loaded by the minute, we retreated back out into the swirling white world of the Tweedsmuir Glacier. By lunchtime on May 2, we had had enough of the weather, and we made camp. The morning of Day 12 dawned with more wind, spindrift and snow, and we

remained stationary. The next morning, there looked to be a partial clearing setting in, so, optimistically, we broke camp. As we left, a huge whistling swan flew by just below the cloud, 6 ft. above the ground. The swan circled back around us and then continued southwest down the Tweedsmuir. Four days before, two small birds had landed next to the tent, appearing happy to have found some point of reference — interesting to think that these animals very likely have just as much trouble in whiteout conditions as we do.

We descended the Tweedsmuir Glacier to an elevation of 820 m and continued southeast and uphill into increasing cloud to the ridge crest 1.25 km west of Peak 1695 m. In the white conditions, it took us quite some time to find a route south to the glacier directly below. We carried our skis down since we felt uneasy about slope stability. The next day saw us negotiate more white terrain south-southwest to the Vern Ritchie Glacier. We descended the Vern Ritchie to just above the upper junction with the Battle Glacier. This was Day 13 and was perhaps one of the low points of the trip. We suffered a broken

binding and frustrating, sticky downhill trail-breaking. But with Glen's soup inside us and Laurent's binding replaced, things looked good, even the snow falling lightly outside. The air was finally still for the first time in over a week.

Once on the Battle Glacier, we crossed into Alaska in glorious sunshine. We skied south through an obvious gap that connected us with the Novatak Glacier. By lunchtime a serious wind was blowing from the north. Gusts would send our sleds awkwardly skittering ahead of us. By the evening, dark clouds, particularly to the west in the direction of Yakutat, were enveloping everything, but being camped at only 1800 ft. made for a warm night. We woke to the noise of courting ptarmigans and the patter of raindrops. We headed south then west-southwest for another dank day of compass-work, finishing up 2.3 miles north of Mount Reaburn in the Brabazon Range. While putting up camp, we were treated to a momentary and magnificent view towards the calving Yakutat Glacier, and Harlequin Lake way below to the west.

Gaining the pass east-northeast of Mount Reaburn turned out to be a steep undertaking, but after considerable effort in the deep snow we arrived at the crest just as the sun was breaking through the clouds. We then descended south onto the Chamberlain Glacier. Lunch that day was a wonderfully relaxed affair in the warm sun. The afternoon saw us skiing to the head of the Chamberlain, where we made Camp 17. We basked in the evening sun for the first time, enjoying incredible hues on snowy peaks and views of Pacific surf below. However, by morning the wind had picked up and the cloud and snow had enveloped us once again. We stayed put for the day.

On Day 19, May 10, we were treated to one of the most spectacular days of ski touring I have experienced. The day dawned clear, sunny and cold. We broke camp and made our way over steep terrain to the shoulder that divides the Chamberlain and Fasset glaciers. The exposure here directly above the upper west fork of the Fasset Glacier was terrific. On the upper Fasset Glacier, we were treated to incredible views. The majority of the peaks of the Brabazon Range lie between only 4000 and 5000 ft. above sea level. But what they lack in height they make up for in ruggedness, with pinnacled peaks, and icefalls descending to sea level. Surrounded by the blue of the upper Fasset's spectacular and immense icefall, we skied down on perfect fresh snow. Carving a route between the slots and enjoying the incredible backdrop of Tanis Lake at the toe of the Fasset, the vegetated coastal flood plain, a surf line and the Pacific Ocean, was a scene to remember.

For months prior to the trip, we had worried about getting down the Fasset. However, the icefall is compressed on the eastern edge and is constantly avalanched from the slopes above. To our relief, we were



On the upper Fasset Glacier

down and off the exposed slopes well before the sun's rays took effect. The afternoon followed with a plod to the head of the west fork of the Fasset, and we dropped down onto the upper Canyon Glacier and camped.

Before descending to the Canyon, we climbed our first peak of the trip, the impressively high Peak 4405 (ft.) at the head of the west fork of the Fasset. The wind by now was again very fierce, but we were just in the nick of time before the next front to get the views back north over the Icefield Range and the country we had come through. We could also see north up the length of the incredible Asek River, west to the Fairweather Range, and south to Dry Bay at the mouth of the Asek River, the final leg of this trip.

That evening, each of us was very relaxed and happy after a long but fulfilling day, having eaten dinner after 10 p.m. For me a piece of the puzzle was almost in place. For with the completion of this traverse, which I now felt confident about, I would be linking our Mount Logan traverse of 1989 with our traverse from Dry Bay to the Lynn Canal (near Skagway) of 1991 (see Hollinger, CAJ 1992, pp. 20-25; Kellerhals, VOCJ 1991, pp. 25-30; Waddington at <http://www.bivouac.com/TripPg.asp?rq=Pg&Tripld=2>; Williams, AAJ 1992, pp. 126-127). From Peak 4405, I thoroughly enjoyed viewing some of the country we had travelled through in 1991. I had been anticipating this view. The dominance of Mount Fairweather and the massive Grand Plateau Glacier did not disappoint.

Unfortunately, the poor weather, as expected, came in again overnight. We managed to scramble up Peak 4510 (ft.) at the head of the Canyon Glacier, but there were no views that day. We did, however, watch a wolverine scampering across the snow. We had also seen a fresh set of wolverine prints leading into the Fasset icefall the day before.

We spent the afternoon in the tent as the snow wall we had built slowly collapsed in the drizzle.

On the penultimate morning, the skies were clear but the wind was intense. Packing up was a severely chilling experience. We snowploughed down the aptly named Canyon Glacier, bracing ourselves against the tailwind. Soon we were off the snow and ice and on to moraine rubble. Vegetation began to appear and we spotted several goats on the canyon walls. We began to hear birds chatting, and running water, and we sniffed incredible smells. After travelling through a little bush, we stopped for a relaxed lunch on a small rise west of Split Creek and surveyed Dry Bay. We were able to pick out the airstrip we were heading for just north of Tanis Mesa. The afternoon was spent crashing through willow thickets and brittle salmonberry bushes as we followed moose trails in and out of spruce stands. Moose antlers littered the landscape here.

In the late afternoon, we arrived at the Tanis Mesa airstrip, where we found a small Forest Service cabin. We spent a very pleasant evening wandering around in our bare feet in the grass and moss, savouring the end of the trip. In the morning, after a sound sleep, a Gulf Air Taxi Cessna arrived from Yakutat. The low cloud and intermittent rain did not seem to bother us that morning as we flew into the sunshine of Whitehorse.

As a footnote to a CAJ 2000, p. 121 article, I noted the completion of a multi-year traverse from the Skeena River, B.C., to Dry Bay at the mouth of the Asek River, Alaska. This has now been extended. With the completion of the 2001 spring ski traverse outlined above, from Kluane Lake to Dry Bay, I completed what had turned into a personal though initially unplanned goal: to traverse the Coast and St. Elias mountains from the Skeena River, near Terrace, B.C., to near McCarthy, Alaska. This occurred over a period of 13 years. Although the traverse is at times somewhat disjointed, the complete distance of some 2300 km has been more than covered. Apart from the Juneau Icefield traverse, a small portion of the Stikine Icecap, and the ski out from Mount Logan, the routes have all, to the best of my knowledge, involved pioneering traverses on foot and on skis. The duration of the traverse (excluding the climbs of mounts Logan, Steele and Fairweather but including bad-weather days) totals 277 days, and the traverse route covers 2376 km involving 299,355 ft. of elevation gain. Including all side trips to climb peaks, the duration increases to 319 days and a total of 3416 km involving 586,377 ft. of elevation gain. A total of 176 peaks were climbed, the majority of which were first ascents. The 23 or so that were not first ascents, excluding mounts Logan, Steele and Fairweather, were either climbed by a new route and/or, to the best of my knowledge, were second or third ascents. For more details, see Williams at www.bivouac.com/TripPg.asp?rq=Pg&Tripld=1319.

UNCLIMBING THE CIRQUE

JONATHAN COPP

Rock climbing in the Cirque of the Unclimbables is still in its infancy. Hard to believe? And I'm not referring to outlying areas such as the Vampires and the spires to the southwest — I mean in the Cirque proper. It was the area's rich climbing history coupled with its inspiring possibilities for new challenges which first struck me.

Like many others, I'm sure, I thought: "But what about the indefatigable wet weather?" So you roll the dice? Maybe. Our season was "average" in the opinion of our bush pilot, Warren La Favre. "It's been a shit June. No, really, a shit June," Warren powered over the headset as we approached the Cirque in his 1957 Beaver. By August it was no longer "shit" but "average" and we had gotten some great climbing in.

I was lucky to have almost five weeks in the Cirque, and the merits of three great partners. The hyper-classic *Lotus Flower Tower* was of course on the schedule, but our minds were open to any daunting challenges that might present themselves.

The trip wasn't without false starts and wet, icy retreats, but they keep ya honest, right? As I saw the peaks dip in and out of cloud, a few thoughts began to crystallize; Parrot Beak Peak, Bustle Tower and Proboscis had roles in them.

Timmy O'Neill, John Abel, Brooke Andrews and I landed in the Northwest Territories in early July. From stories I've heard, it seems that going in any earlier will lead to wet walls and snow-filled cracks. We made a few soggy attempts at the *Lotus* early on, leading the first pitches in full rain gear under the waterfall created from the large roof above. One storm left us discombobulated and swapping partners. Brooke and John descended while Timmy and I continued up into the snow flurry "for fun". That's how twisted waiting for bad weather can make you.

Eventually other parties arrived in the Cirque to climb the *Lotus*, so Brooke and I refocused our attention on Bustle Tower. I couldn't believe that there wasn't a freeclimb up the 2000-ft. monolith. The beautiful line of *Club International* (V/VI, 5.10 A2), put up by Sean Isaac and Conny Amelunxen, seemed the perfect line to free. The route follows steep, left-facing corner systems through perfect granite. Our first good spell of weather found us high-stepping. Within three days I had nearly climbed two routes on Bustle Tower. On the first jaunt, Brooke Andrews and I climbed the first four pitches of *Club* to then venture out left into some splitters. We found a five-pitch variation that bypassed the aid on *Club International*, culminating in a crux finger crack and winding through bulbous granite ears and over a juggy roof. This free

variation, called *Don't Get Piggy* (5.12-), regains the final, easy left-facing corner of *Club* before hitting the ridge line.

After a short breather, Timmy was ready. He had climbed the *Lotus* with John and was now jazzed for another adventure. Having gazed up into the aid on *Club International*, I was sure that Timmy and I could give it a good free attempt. Armed with a standard rack and day gear, we climbed the route in eight hours or so. Wonderful climbing (good work, Sean), and the crux was easier than the *Piggy* variation — and more direct. *Club International* (V, 5.11b).

Day 4 of the good weather pulled Brooke's eyes back to the *Lotus*. Of course we had to climb it. I thought that I had enough energy left. We stemmed into the initial corner at 8 p.m. and made the bivy ledge by midnight. A few hours of rest brought the orange glow back into the sky. Clouds were also building — maybe the end of the window! After soppin' up those head-wall pitches with a biscuit they were so tasty, we were eating snow on the summit by 2 p.m. and staring out at the endless mountainscape stretching into the Arctic Circle.

As all things do, the weather window ended and so did Brooke, Timmy and John's time there. I had another two weeks, however — to sit in the tent and fester, I thought. But when the new recruits — Chris, Kevin and Josh — arrived, they brought with them renewed energy and optimism. After humping beastly loads up into Fairy Meadows, Josh and I set our sights on Parrot Beak Peak, one of the largest and least explored walls within the Cirque. I believe that there was only one aid-route on it, and that had been climbed once! The line we were scoping took a meandering course up the centre of the wall.

One day, after one too many Scrabble tournaments, one less cloud floated in the sky, so Josh and I made for Parrot. Our plan was to work out the first few pitches of the route because they looked thin and might require a bolt or two. Once we were actually on the wall, though, perfect edges and thin features appeared in the bulletproof granite. Within a few hours we were 600 ft. up the wall without having placed a single pin or bolt. We hadn't planned on continuing, but it wasn't raining or snowing yet, so... A handful of hours later, we were 2000 ft. up the wall and I was drilling the first bolt. It was for a belay. Josh was down there shivering and I had a T-shirt on my head for a beanie. "Unprepared" is an understatement. The next gust of wind held a few raindrops; without any shell layers, we were outta there — but very psyched on how the route was going and looking forward to our next attempt.

Another morning of mediocre weather, after many days of bad weather, left Josh and me wondering if we shouldn't climb the *Lotus*. We figured that we wouldn't need much if we climbed it fast enough and that maybe we could beat the looming afternoon showers. Four and a half hours after beginning, we were standing on top of the tower, grins as big as the mountains. We simulclimbed most of the route, hooting and hollering to each other along the way. "Josh, don't miss the splitter hand crack through the roof!" "Jonny, these knobs are insane!" It was great making it back to camp for lunch and the pitter-patter of the rain.

From Josh's very first day there, a main goal in the back of our minds was to freeclimb the *Original Route* on Proboscis in a day. The route had never been completely freed (although Feagin and Blanchard came very close) and the wall had never been climbed in a day, as far as we knew. The challenge was enticing, especially after kicking steps up What Notch and gazing out at the golden face. We made a few attempts at it, getting as far as the top of the icy notch before the next storm cycle rolled in.

When the second true weather window of my trip opened, Josh and I were in position for Parrot Beak Peak. Back up on that wild face with two ropes and no jumars, we made smooth progress and we knew where to go — until we didn't. A few run-out face sections connected cracks and corners, and the final headwall plastered us into a left-facing corner running with snowmelt. We had freed everything up to that point, and the final 400 ft. found us grappling with numb hands and wet rock. By late afternoon we had made the top. We named the route *Pecking Order* (V+, 5.11 R).

That goal in the back of our minds was still there, though, buzzing away like a pesky mosquito. As the weather window was holding, we decided to give it a go. After one day of rest, we woke early and climbed from the Fairy Meadows cirque up and over What Notch and into the Proboscis cirque. By 9 a.m., we were starting the first pitch of the legendary *Original Route*, sans jumars. After only a few wet sections, we were into the meat of the climbing: a splitter finger and hand crack soaring for pitches up a streaked face. We grabbed knobs and edges when the crack pinched down. The crux fell into Josh's lead, and we both hung on for the on-sight. Hats off to Josh, because it was spicy. After simulclimbing a long section and piecing together the final pitches, we stood on the catwalk summit at five-thirty in the afternoon. *Original Route* (VI, 5.12 R). Our fingertips sore and our heads clear, we relished the deafening silence of the place, and the silencing of that buzz in our minds.



MANSON ICEFIELD, ELLESMERE ISLAND — 2001

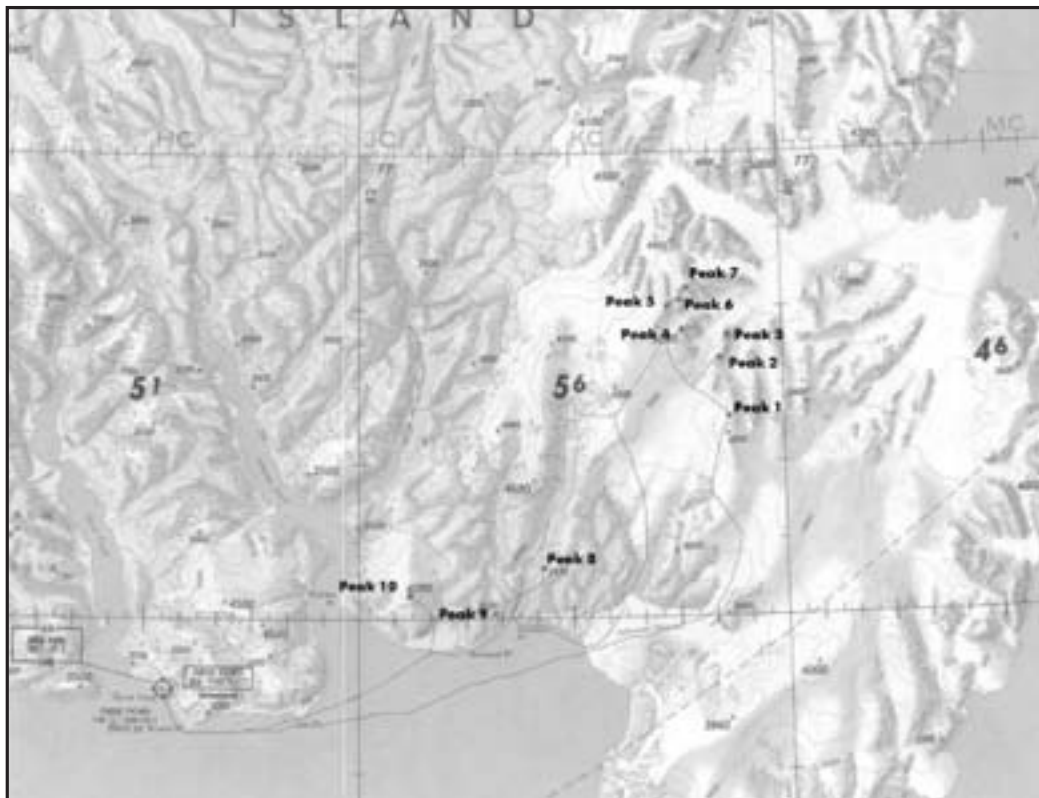
GREG HORNE

A month-long, 300-km, unsupported exploratory ski tour and mountaineering trip was made from the village of Grise Fiord on the south end of Ellesmere Island. Grise Fiord is Canada's northernmost community; there are only two other permanently occupied places that are further north: Eureka and Alert. The team consisted of Marek Vokac and Lars Tore Ludvigsen from Norway, and Marshall Netherwood and Greg Horne from Alberta.

The easily accessible climbing history of the area is limited. Dr. George Van Cochran made five expeditions to the Manson and Prince of Wales icefields from 1976 to 1990. Many peaks were climbed to the north and south of Makinson Inlet. See the *Canadian Alpine Journal* of 1977, 1979 and 1982 for details of his first three expeditions. In May 1988, on a 400-km ski tour similar in style to ours, John Dunn and Mike Sharp climbed two summits of the Manson Icefield: a 4000-ft.-plus summit in the Thorndike Peaks area (521500E/8544500N, Zone 17X, NAD 27), 11.5 km east of the head of Bentham Fiord; and a second peak, 4500-ft.-plus (528000E/8556500N, Zone 17X, NAD 27), located 11.5 km southeast of the same fjord.

Our team walked or skied for 55 km eastward on the sea ice of Jones Sound to the Jakeman Glacier. The Jakeman, 7 km wide at its snout, is one of the few named glaciers flowing from the Manson Icefield. The scale of the landscape is huge. As a comparison, the Columbia Icefield in the Canadian Rockies is 325 square km while the Manson is approximately 6000 square km and feeds over fifty glaciers flowing into the ocean. The largest glacial snout has a 15-km front calving icebergs into Smith Bay. The Athabasca Glacier of the Columbia Icefield, by comparison, is 6 km long and .75 km wide. The Manson is part of the physiographic division called the Precambrian Highland. Where bedrock was encountered, it was a shattered, reddish, coarse-grained igneous material.

Two days of skiing over and around ice moguls on the lower Jakeman led to the firm line and smoother skiing. We traversed a



above: *The route around the Manson Icefield*
 below: *Ascending Peak 6, Peak 5 behind*
 facing page: *“Hyperbolic Ridge”*
 All photos and the map courtesy of the author





large, glaciated dome along its western slope. The 1:250000 topographic map 49A indicates the highest contour of this dome with an elevation of 4000 ft. (1219 m). Due to variable weather patterns and our inability to recalibrate the altimeter after leaving the ocean, we had more faith in the GPS-calculated heights. The GPS (Garmin 12) unit consistently averaged reading 13.5 m altitude while on the sea ice, so all mentioned heights were corrected by subtracting 13.5 m from collected elevations. The measured height of a central ridge crest was 1368 m, and it is possible that a slightly higher point on the domed ridge exists to the south. Given that a contour line is missing on the map, this dome is potentially the highest point on the Manson Icefield.

We established two different camps on a glacial plateau in order to climb nearby peaks. First, despite starting off in a wind chill of -34°C , we made a 20-km return trip to the twin summits (Peak 2 and Peak 3) of what we called “Hyperbolic Ridge”, so named because on our descent to the col

between the summits, the curving snow slopes resembled a hyperbola. A perfect alpine day: squeaky, Styrofoam-hard snow arêtes; manageable trailbreaking; and the occasional crevasse penetration.

During our 15 days of travelling on the icefield proper, we discovered numerous crevasses. This usually occurred when we weren't on skis, and consisted of knee- to armpit-deep penetrations mainly on ridges and summits. Crevasse widths and depths varied from tiny to killer. On one occasion, a creaking and snapping glacier opened the beginning of a crevasse under a tent vestibule overnight.

Night was a relative concept given the 24-hour sunshine. Solar gain in our tents generally kept the inside temperature from dropping much below -15°C . Lows did drop to -30°C at the beginning of the trip. The only significant cold discomfort was due to the wind chill on our faces while travelling.

From a second plateau camp, we ascended four more peaks. Peaks 4 and 5 were climbed on skis and could be compared

to ski ascents of Mount Kitchener or North Twin in the Rockies. From Peak 5, we descended its east ridge to Brockenspectre Col (where the phenomenon was seen), then climbed the west ridge of Peak 6. Both these ridges offered good cramponing on snow and ice, with belays required at times. The traverse from Peak 6 to Peak 7 involved more cramponed walking and step kicking. We then reversed the traverse of peaks 5, 6 and 7 to regain our plateau camp.

On our return route to Grise Fiord, we descended a different glacier to a brackish lake dammed by the Jakeman Glacier. A side trip into Fram Fiord included scrambling up two minor peaks (Peak 8 and Peak 9). The Norwegian ship *Fram*, captained by Otto Sverdrup, visited this fjord in August 1899. Our last ascent, starting from 3 km west of Anstead Point, was up the southeast slopes of Peak 10, at the southern edge of a small, unnamed icefield east of Fielder Point. We had impressive views to the polynya (open water) southeast of Smith and Cone islands and across frozen Jones Sound to the north coast of Devon Island.

Polar bear protection included two shotguns, noisemaker pistols, bear spray and a camp-perimeter tripwire alarm system. We saw no bears, nor any tracks, old or new.

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Manson Icefield Ascents by Horne et al., 2001

<i>Date</i>	<i>Mountain</i>	<i>Elev. (m)</i>	<i>UTM East</i>	<i>UTM North</i>	<i>Route</i>
May 6	Peak 1 (glacial dome, central ridge crest)	1368	518035	8511790	Traverse of western slopes
May 7	Peak 2, “Hyperbolic Ridge” North	960	517897	8521634	Up SW ridge, down NNE ridge
May 7	Peak 3, “Hyperbolic Ridge” South	952	519010	8524798	SSW ridge
May 10	Peak 4	1347	513575	8525398	SW slope
May 12	Peak 5	1334	511962	8528548	SSW ridge
May 12	Peak 6	1340	513157	8528774	Up W ridge, down N ridge
May 12	Peak 7	1247	513904	8530484	W ridge
May 14	Peak 4, repeat ascent	1347	513575	8525398	SW slopes and NW rib of subpeak
May 19	Peak 8, boundary, land claim GF-23/49A	741	496300	8496500	SSW ridge
May 19	Peak 9	457	490500	8491500	NE slopes
May 21	Peak 10, Fielder Ice Cap	1111	480430	8493145	SSE slopes

All UTM's are NAD 27 in zone 17X. Elevations are from GPS and corrected to measured sea-level difference.

DEVON ISLAND — 2001

SANDY BRIGGS

In 1998, John Dunn and I skied with sleds around the east coast of Devon Island from Brae Bay (Jones Sound) to Croker Bay (Lancaster Sound). We then returned to our starting point by skiing across the Devon Ice Cap (see *Canadian Geographic*, July-August 1999).

Because of the fine scenery and wildlife viewing, we returned to the area with our friend Chris Cooper in mid-May of 2001. This was not a mountaineering trip, but we did seek out the spectacular views by hiking up several hills including Cape Fitz Roy in the northeast. Three years earlier we had gone around Cape Warrender (Lancaster Sound), but it proved slow going because of the lack of ice for sledding. This year we decided to detour behind the Warrender group of mountains using glacier highways inland.

The large glacier (we referred to it as the “Warrender East Glacier”) immediately west of the Cunningham West Glacier offered an ideal sled route into the high country. We camped at 450 m, where a lesser branch split off to the right of the main glacier, and used the sunny afternoon to admire a nearby 1080-m peak that had attracted our attention from much further away because of its graceful ridges (GR 480250 E, 827450 N, on sheet 48E and 38F [Dundas Harbour] 1:250000 topo, 74°33’N, 81°40’W). After a few hours’ sleep, we hiked up the peak in spectacular late-night lighting, reaching the summit at 4:20 a.m. on June 2. Judging by the tracks, an Arctic fox had been there not too long before. Our prospect included the mountains of Bylot Island about 100 km to the south; part of the Borden Peninsula of



John Dunn on Point 1080, with view to Lancaster Sound and Bylot Island

Baffin Island; and a huge sweep of Lancaster Sound and out into Baffin Bay. The weather was calm, and we lingered to savour the beautiful Arctic morning and the sense of freedom and privilege that comes with being in such places.

The next evening, we hauled our sleds to a camp at 880 m about 12 km to the west. Here we waited for two days for a chance to ski up the high peak of the Warrender group (c. 1250 m), but the weather did not permit this. On the afternoon of June 4, we skied west and then south, back to near Dundas

Harbour (abandoned RCMP outpost) on the coast.

This year, the mid-May to mid-June weather seemed better than it had been in 1998. We saw a similar number of polar bears (19 this time), as well as numerous muskoxen, foxes, hares, seals, belugas and walrus (at a distance), and a few lemmings. And that’s not even mentioning the variety of birds encountered along the way. All in all, it was another fantastic Arctic journey with great companions.

KLUANE NATIONAL PARK SUMMARY — 2001

During the 2001 climbing season in Kluane National Park Reserve, a total of 42 mountaineering expeditions were registered. This accounted for 163 people spending 2872 person-days in the Icefields.

The weather was again typical of the St. Elias Mountains: “unpredictable”. Some expeditions hit it lucky and had few bad-weather days, while others had to wait out long periods of poor weather. Avalanche conditions seemed to be more hazardous this year; all season long, climbing teams throughout the Icefields reported a very weak layer in the snowpack. Some teams wisely decided to abort or change their planned routes due to this phenomenon.

As is the norm, most expeditions were to Mount Logan, with only the King Trench and East Ridge routes being attempted. Of the 23 expeditions on Mount Logan this year, 11 were successful in reaching one of

the main summits (Main Peak, East Peak and West Peak). Successful expeditions took from 13 to 24 days to reach a summit, depending on weather and the team’s abilities. Other mountains that saw climbing activity this year include Queen Mary (six expeditions), Lucania-Steele (four expeditions), King Peak (two expeditions), Kennedy (one expedition), Walsh (one expedition), Vancouver (one expedition) and Pinnacle (one expedition). The Icefield Discovery Camp was in operation again this season; its location may be the reason Mount Queen Mary was a popular destination. Only four guided expeditions took place in the Icefields this season. There were also three ski-tour expeditions into the St. Elias Mountains.

Of note was a traverse of Mount Logan, up the East Ridge and down the King Trench, by a keen crew from British Columbia. Another B.C. crew did a ski tour

of the St. Elias Mountains from Kluane Lake to Dry Bay, Alaska. And a B.C. couple was successful on both Mount Logan and Denali this year.

Only one major search-and-rescue operation occurred during this season. The incident involved the loss of one of the premier mountain pilots in the area; his aircraft crashed on takeoff after picking up two climbers in the Mount Kennedy area. The two climbers survived the crash, in which the aircraft ended up 30 m down a large crevasse, and were rescued the next day. Other public-safety incidents were of a more minor nature — frostbite, altitude sickness, medical emergencies — and in each case the climbers were able to get themselves to their basecamp and fly out.

In addition, scientists were at work on the slopes of Mount Logan this year. Because of the altitude and the cold, Logan’s ice and

snow have never melted. Glaciologists took ice cores from the Logan plateau; from these cores, a history of the earth's climate can be obtained. The team established two camps this season, one on the Quintina Sella Glacier and the other at about 5330 m on the upper plateau.

Anyone interested in mountaineering in Kluane National Park Reserve should contact: Mountaineering Warden, Kluane National Park, Box 5495, Haines Junction, Yukon Y0B 1L0, Canada; or call: (867) 634-7279; or fax: (867) 634-7277; and ask for a mountaineering package. OR visit the

Kluane National Park Web site: <http://www.parkscanada.pch.gc.ca/kluane>

RICK STALEY,
MOUNTAINEERING WARDEN,
KLUANE NATIONAL PARK RESERVE

ROCK CLIMBING IN THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

MATT CHILDERS

She is an elusive opponent — spectacular but fickle, combining unmatched beauty with unwavering unpredictability. She has broken many a heart, but when you are allowed to taste her glory the rewards surpass words and drift into the realm of dreams.

I speak of none other than the Logan Mountains of Canada's Northwest Territories. Tucked away at the far northern end of the Canadian Rockies is a fragile alpine paradise that comes alive for only a few months each year. Here is located some of the most spectacular alpine rock climbing in the world. The remoteness and the weather can make climbing anything in the Logan Mountains a serious undertaking. During my time spent in this area, I have come to fall in love with the landscape and its challenges. The spirit of adventure is alive and well for those inclined to roll the dice and sample what this range has to offer.

Technical rock climbing has been taking place in the Logan Mountains for over fifty years. Tales of unclimbed peaks paved with pristine granite have lured northward their share of rambblers hoping to get in on the action. I cannot claim to be an authority on the history of this range. I will, however, attempt to speak on the similarities and differences between the three areas I have visited there: the Vampire Spires, the Cirque of the Unclimbables and Mount Nirvana. While all three areas lie within roughly a fifty-mile radius, each is unique in its own way. There is no shortage of rock in the Logan Mountains; that is not the problem. The challenge comes in trying to find the good rock — in seeking out the elusive diamond in the rough. The rock can vary from impeccable alpine granite to the choss from which nightmares are made.

The climbing in the Logan Mountains is extremely remote and can be quite difficult to access. Depending on the area, a float-plane, a helicopter or a very, very long hike or paddle in is required. The weather is another issue. It can fluctuate drastically from year to year. Just when you think that you have the pattern understood, it can throw you a curveball to the tune of two feet of snow in mid-July. The news is not all bad, though; sunny days with 60-degree temps are not uncommon during peak season. On the good days, it feels as if you are climbing in sunny Yosemite; on the bad days, you know that you couldn't be further away.



Mount Nirvana (left) and the Minotaur (right), Ragged Range.

The Vampire Peaks

First visited by climbers in 1996, the Vampire Peaks are a spectacular cluster of granite walls and spires. The actual Vampire Spires are composed of three golden towers: the Fortress, the Canine, and the Vampire Spire. Ranging from around 650 to 1300 ft., all three spires offer clean crack systems to picturesque summits. Roughly three or four miles away in an adjacent valley stands the Phoenix. The Phoenix is a shapely 2500-ft. granite massif that dominates the area. Although not "discovered" until fairly recently, the Vampires hold a wealth of quality rock on very attractive features.

When our bush plane landed on the small lake (actually, "pond" would be a better description) in the Vampires, I was awestruck by their size and beauty. We were the second group of climbers to venture into this area and we couldn't believe our eyes. Our team came from the southeastern United States and consisted of John Young, Harrison Shull, Cogie Reed, David Coleman and me.

There was no issue in deciding on our first objective. Rising higher and more intimidatingly than Yosemite's Half Dome, the Phoenix beckoned us forward. The weather was favourable, and we began humping loads on our first day. We also got a little taste of

the size of the area. What looked like a 100-ft. entry slab to the wall turned out to be a 250-ft. pitch. The route we chose took a beautiful natural line up the steep prow that split the Phoenix's southeast face. Johnny, Harrison and I committed to the wall with five days' worth of supplies. The climbing turned out to be a mixture of moderate aid-climbing combined with good freeclimbing. The steepness of the wall dictated portaledge bivies when our days ended. The lower pitches featured some very vegetated cracks, but the rock got cleaner as we gained elevation. The upper headwall was split by a series of splitter cracks that we dubbed the "railroad tracks". These unbelievable cracks split the very apex of the prow for over 500 ft. A few more pitches led us through the upper corner systems and deposited us on the summit of the Phoenix. Our route, *Freebird* (VI, 5.9 A2+), took us five days.

We then packed up and moved basecamp to the base of the Vampire Spires. After a day of idyllic bouldering around camp, the looming Fortress called us forward. I should note that the bouldering in the Vampires is exceptional and would be quite popular if it weren't in the middle of nowhere. I should also note that at this point we were on about the 10th day in a row of absolutely perfect weather.



Peaks of the Ragged Range. both photos: Matt Childers

The Fortress is split by an elegant corner system that casts routefinding to the wayside. Once again, the climbing was superb. The rock on the Fortress was very high-quality, and the climbing consistently challenging. We reached a three-tiered ledge about halfway up the wall on our first day. Cogie gave me a nice scare the next day by taking a nasty 15-ft. ledge fall when the rock gave way under a stopper he was standing on. Luckily, no damage was done, and we raced for the top. The final few pitches involved rappelling off a false summit and then climbing a very loose corner and a final moderate pitch to the top. We called our route *Cornerstone* (V, 5.10 A2+).

After a rest day, Cogie and I set off to the Canine. Moderate but looser climbing took us within 150 ft. of this narrow pillar. We retreated in the face of a blizzard and were happy with our decision to leave in one piece.

We felt very fortunate to visit this area while it was still relatively untouched. Excellent climbing conditions allowed us to get in lots of climbing. The last three years have seen a dramatic increase in climber traffic. Many of the most obvious lines have now been climbed. However, virgin lines remain and the established routes are all excellent. The rock on the actual Vampire Spires is cleaner than anything I saw in the Cirque of the Unclimbables, except for Mount Proboscis.

The Cirque of the Unclimbables

The outline of the Lotus Flower Tower is ingrained in the mind of any climber who has ever seen a picture of its face. During the summer of 2000, I had the fortune of climbing *Lotus Flower Tower*. The route was superb, and the climbing flawless. Unfortunately, a horrendous storm hammered us on the summit and we had to descend in very serious conditions. Showing its true colours, the weather remained socked in for the remainder of our stay.

Steady climber traffic has raised some very serious issues for the Cirque in the 21st century. The human-waste issue was dealt with during the 2000 season. John Young installed a primitive toilet in Fairy Meadows with support from the Canadian and American alpine clubs. Another issue facing the Cirque is climber traffic on *Lotus Flower Tower*. Practically every team visiting the Cirque wishes to climb *LFT*. When the weather finally clears, this can result in two or three teams being poised for a traffic jam. Extended periods of good weather can remedy this problem, but crowds are a real issue for this route. Another problem is the greatly increased use of helicopters in the Cirque. This takes away from the wilderness aspect as well as providing some noise pollution and a general disturbance. Overall, though, I found the Cirque to be in excellent condition, with all teams removing their trash and waste properly.

The Ragged Range

Tucked away in the Ragged Range rises the forgotten high point of the Northwest Territories: Mount Nirvana. Only 20 mi. away from the often-visited Cirque of the Unclimbables, this section of the Ragged Range sees practically zero climbing traffic. Access to this region can be complicated, and there is not much material available for reference. Chris Van Luvuen and I were lured into it in the hope of finding clean granite walls amidst the chaos of the Ragged Range. The perennial bush pilot Warren LaFavre originally clued me in on this area by describing some “nice walls” south of the Cirque. Our objective became more clearly defined after talking with Jack Bennett. Jack made the third ascent of Mount Nirvana by establishing a new route on its east face in 1996. His provocative description of big walls flanking the area to the east of Mount Nirvana baited us further.

Our first helicopter flight into the Ragged Range was fairly demoralizing. We

flew over a maelstrom of glaciers, granite, mountains and valleys. There was a distinct lack of appetizing objectives, and even if there had been, there was zero flat ground to land on. We went back to Glacier Lake and tried to figure out what to do. After further review of the map, we realized that we had not even been near Mount Nirvana.

So, after some adjustments in the directions, we successfully landed in the stunning east sanctuary of Mount Nirvana. Before us rose the striking south face of the Minotaur and the distant peak of Mount Nirvana. Our basecamp in a pristine alpine meadow provided a nice contrast to the well-trodden Fairy Meadows.

The weather was splitter when we arrived. Sunny skies with 65-degree temps spurred us on to begin immediately. The approach took about three and half hours and involved a slab that required roping up. The warm temperatures had every glacier in the valley releasing huge quantities of rock and ice. It sounded like a war zone, and at this point we were feeling quite small. After fixing two pitches, we returned to basecamp.

The next day, we made steady progress up the wall. The climbing was a challenging mixture of aid- and freeclimbing. On the whole, the rock was considerably looser than in either the Cirque or the Vampires. We set up our portaledge about two thirds of the way up the wall. That night, the temperatures plummeted and a storm dumped over two feet of snow. All of a sudden our idea of saving space and weight by not bringing sleeping bags didn't seem too bright. We retreated the next day via a series of miserable and freezing rappels.

For the next two days, Chris and I tormented ourselves over whether or not to return to that frightening wall. Honestly, we were both scared. But as Joseph Conrad wrote in *Heart of Darkness*: “It was written I should be loyal to the nightmare of my choice.” So up the hill we went for the nightmare of *our* choice. Being familiar with the terrain allowed us to surpass our high point on the first day. However, as night came, snow began to lightly fall.

Luckily, the morning dawned cold but clear. A couple of long pitches fed us into the blocky summit corner systems. It was dumping snow as I pulled the summit mantel, but by the time the anchor was set the sun had come out. The summit offered us glorious views of Mount Nirvana as well as of the storm heading our way. We hightailed it down the wall and reached the ground without drilling a single hole. We called our route *Run for Cover* (V, 5.10+ A2+).

Flying over the vast wilderness of the Northwest Territories is a refreshing experience — wide open spaces and a landscape that is as severe as it is beautiful. Climbing in such a spectacular area is a gift that should never be taken lightly. We must strive to preserve and maintain this precious region.

MOUNT NORTHUMBRIA, BAFFIN ISLAND

AIDAN OLOMAN

On the ridge, Mount Northumbria. photo: Sean Easton



On June 18, 2001, I flew from Vancouver to Iqaluit, Nunavut, to explore Auyuittuq National Park and attempt a first ascent.

The initial plan was for me to fly to Broughton Island and meet Sean Easton there a few days later because of flight availability. A few weeks beforehand, however, information about the ice pack in the area led us to believe that we might have to change our plans. We found out that due to weather patterns that were warming the area earlier than usual, travel from Broughton Island to the northern end of Auyuittuq was unfeasible. The ice had melted enough that taking a snowmobile across was not viable, but there was still enough of it to make boat travel impossible. So we made an alternate plan.

Rather than walking 130 km from the northern fjords to the southern end of Auyuittuq at Pangnirtung and climbing a feature three days into the trip, we decided to start from Pangnirtung, walk along the edge of the still-ice-filled Pangnirtung Fiord and then enter the park and look for freeclimbing objectives.

On June 21, Sean Easton — and his mother and stepfather, who had come to the park to hike — met me in Pangnirtung. We took a taxi from town to the end of the road (approximately 5 km) and then headed off along the shoreline, jumping between ice, rocks and tundra.

Two days and 30 km later, we arrived at the entrance to the park. Staring at granite spires and open landscapes, we walked another two days to the emergency shelter at the base of Mount Thor.

Throughout this time, the weather ranged from cloudy to rainy or snowy. Finally, on the morning of June 2, the sky broke and we saw blue. Wanting to get high in order to get a better perspective of a possible objective, we decided to head up a snow couloir to the south ridge of Mount Northumbria. We left at 1 p.m., and reached the summit at approximately 1 a.m. after traversing a small pocket glacier, going up another snow chute and finally climbing six pitches of classic ridgetop terrain ranging from 5.4 to 5.6.

The summit of Mount Northumbria was one of the most beautiful places I have ever been to — an incredible feeling of solitude amongst a sea of granite bathed in the golden glow of the Arctic summer sun. We arrived back at basecamp at about 11 a.m., ate a delicious hot meal and went to bed under a clear blue, sunny skies.

Twenty-four hours later, feeling recuperated, we decided to walk down the valley and attempt the southwestern side of Mount Tirokwa, in the hope of finding a few pitches of classic 5.10 splitter cracks. Unfortunately, by the time we were four pitches up, the sky had quickly changed from blue to grey and

we were forced to discuss our progress. Realizing that we were in a good place to retreat, we reluctantly descended. As we reached the tundra, the rain started. Over the next few hours, the wind started gusting fast and strong and the rain turned to snow. We had made the right decision.

Unfortunately, the weather did not clear until we had made the decision to head out of the park due to time restraints based on the possibility of having to walk the 30 km back to Pangnirtung in the case of ice still blocking the fjord.

Luckily, when we got to Pangnirtung Fiord there was little to remind us that it had been filled with ice 12 days earlier. We called Parks, and a boat came in the following afternoon. Two days later we flew from Pangnirtung to Vancouver to be greeted by green trees and summer weather.

The time I was able to spend on Baffin Island has left me with a desire to return. The Arctic landscape has such an awe-inspiring emptiness. I look forward to exploring for longer next time, and climbing splitter cracks under the midnight sun.

Thank you to both the Canadian Himalayan Foundation and Mountain Equipment Co-op for their support in enabling me to have the experience of visiting and climbing in one of the most inspiring, exotic and beautiful parts of Canada.

the west coast

THE REAL MCKIM: NEW ROUTE ON SLESSE

KELLY FRANZ

September in the Lower Mainland. The late-summer weather was good, and it couldn't hold much longer before the rains set in. When Guy Edwards called me up to go climbing, how could I refuse? After some debate and phone calling, we finally decided that it would be all right if I climbed the new line that Guy and our friend John Millar had been eyeing on Slesse. John was going to solo the Northeast Buttress with Laurin Wissmeier that day and couldn't be in two places at once. It was likely to be the last nice weekend of the year, so it was decided that I was allowed to climb the route with Guy.

My girlfriend, Marsha Hamilton, and I left Squamish at five on Saturday morning and picked up Guy and another friend, Lena Rowat, in Vancouver. The plan was for Guy and me to try this new route beside *Navigator Wall* while Marsha and Lena attempted the Northeast Buttress. Hopefully, I could be back in school by Monday.

We arrived before 9 a.m. at the parking area — not exactly an alpine start, but not bad for having driven from Squamish. We found John asleep in Laurin's station wagon, and when we woke him he complained of abdominal pains. He was experiencing what we all thought was appendicitis but what turned out to be a mystery illness. At least testing his abdomen for rebound tenderness was fun: Poke. Ow. POKE. OW! Yup, looks like appendicitis. So John was off driving to the Chilliwack hospital. After trying on feminine swimwear and scribbling "5.4 climber" on the dusty window of the truck beside us, we were off. Laurin had left a few hours earlier to solo the Northeast Buttress.

Luckily, Guy knew the approach well. We had no trouble getting into the alpine and up to the Propellor Cairn, all the while lurching on wild blueberries. On our way up, we ran into Laurin descending with a serious limp. Apparently he had slipped on "the only patch of snow around" (what was left of the glacier) and careened into some rocks, hurting his knee rather nicely. Lena traded runners with him (she happened to own them), and we left Laurin to limp back down and wait for John to get back from the hospital. So far so good, I guess.

At the Cairn, we split into two groups: Guy and I slipped on our climbing shoes and

headed up the Navigator Spur while Marsha and Lena traversed over to the Northeast Buttress. Guy and John had climbed *Navigator Wall* recently, so Guy bolted ahead, soloing and showing me the way at the difficult spots. We made good time up to the top of the spur and despite our late start felt as though we could cover some ground. We decided after a round of rock, paper, scissors that I would have the first pitch, and I took off to the right to try to gain a left-facing corner system. I had to downclimb around a blank section and ended up finding a decent corner facing the other way and hidden from the belay. Guy fired up the difficult cracks of the next pitch and pulled around a small roof to belay on a good ledge. I followed, then led off on easier terrain. Guy gronked and then followed.

The rock was mostly granitic and of generally good quality, but there were some loose sections and there was always loose rock on the ledges. Guy made fun of me for testing every handhold with a smack, but it worked fine for me. He just seems to try not to pull too hard so nothing falls off, although we both enjoyed tossing the really loose stuff far off the wall to crash on the slabs below. We alternated leads as the afternoon wore on; usually my pitches would be short, riddled with gear and rope drag, and on easier ground than Guy's stylish and difficult leads.

When we got to a ledge after the fourth pitch, I finally got a chance to prove my worth. We had traversed left to gain the ledge, as the corner system we were following had run out for the time being. By going to the ledge and then up and right again, we could join the corner system where it reappeared. So I set off, trying to find an easy way up the face. It was challenging climbing and the pro' was nonexistent, so I managed to hammer in a thin knifeblade. I didn't trust it at all (though Guy liked it from the belay), so I hammered in another one slightly higher up. Then I was ready to try the traverse



A view of the route from the Propellor Cairn. The climb follows the Navigator Spur (centre spur in photo) to a pillar below the notch to the right of the south summit (highest point in photo).

across the face. Guy could see that I was faltering, and he said not to worry about style, but I didn't want to aid this section, especially since I knew that it was within our (Guy's) ability. I made a few moves across the face but couldn't commit to a fall on the pins. I hadn't counted on being so pumped, and I relented the lead to Guy, who quickly climbed past my high point and then made quick work of the rest of the pitch. After he hoisted our two light packs, I followed, removing one of the pins and leaving one in. I guess that it was a nice-looking pin, but if I encounter it again I won't depend on it. Anyway, we were now back in the good corner system, so I led the next pitch, which was easier.

It was getting fairly dusky now, and there were some good ledges — almost bivy-sized, really. Guy came up and squeezed in one more pitch, then searched around to

find a few one-person ledges after stretching it out. I heard him yelling his head off to Lena and Marsha, who were about even with us on a super-sized bivy ledge on the Northeast Buttress. I was jealous. I followed the pitch and arrived sometime after dark. We ate some dinner, drank some water, and generally lounged for a while. After we were done dinner and playing flashlight wars with some campers at the Propellor Cairn below, and just as boredom was overtaking me, Guy surprised me. I think highly of Guy, and, compared to him, I am a novice in the mountains, but what happened next I still cannot believe. He pulled out a harmonica and started wailing blues riffs into the night. We sang all kinds of nonsensical blues for an hour or more, just sitting on our little ledge in the blackness on the side of a cliff. Eerie, maybe, but definitely memorable. I don't think Marsha and Lena ever heard us.

The ledge we had supped on was too small for us both, so we rock-paper-scissored for it. I won and sent Guy packing, down about 10 m to a crappy ledge below. He showed me, though, by moving one rock and creating a heavenly bivy ledge complete with legroom. I bid Guy good night, he bid me good suffering, and we slept until dawn.

In the morning, I awoke to stellar views and a cheery-as-ever Guy asking (yelling) "How did you suffer?" I had actually suffered well, in my down jacket and a light sleeping bag. So had Guy, but he had been visited a few times by the pack rat he was sharing the ledge with. We drank some more of our three and a half litres of water; we had a little under two left when I started up the eighth pitch of the climb.

This pitch was my favourite of the route, with great position in a corner, solid orange rock, and good cracks to climb. The cracks were mostly small lower on the pitch, but by the top of the pitch I had used all of the big gear on a harder wide section, up to about fist size. There was a great belay ledge, and I belayed Guy up. Above was a confusing overhang, and we could go either right or left. After some debate, we decided on the left side and Guy jumped in.

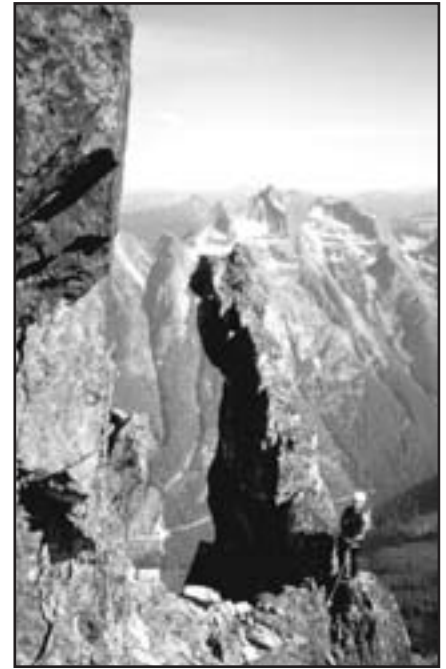
This was the second-hardest pitch on the route and involved hard moves over a bulge to easier ground above. Guy belayed me up, and suddenly we were on top of the pillar we had been climbing for a day and a half. The terrain above looked easier, as we were at a large white gully of broken rock which we had seen from the ground and in photos before the climb. I set off on a long pitch; after simulclimbing across the easy gully, we were back into solid rock, heading up on the right side.

Guy took the next pitch, past shallow cracks and an enjoyable, exposed face section to gain the next set of cracks. I chased him, then led up gradually worsening rock until I was so sure that I would kill Guy with rock-fall that I had to belay. I couldn't even move, I was so scared of sending down a huge rock that would at the least decapitate him and at

the most I don't know what. How would I feel, killing Guy? That just wouldn't do. Guy came up, head intact, mentioned that the rock is often very fractured near a ridge, and did one last short pitch to the top of the ridge. I followed, then we did one rap off the other side, traversed unroped across a slope and up a fourth-class chimney, and roped up again at the base of the Southwest Buttress. Guy then chased me as we simulclimbed to the top of the north summit.

We arrived on top twenty minutes after Marsha and Lena had gained the summit from the Northeast Buttress, and there was even another party there who had come up the Southwest Buttress. Guy knew one of them from his paragliding days, and they offered us a lift back to our truck. Guy, Lena, Marsha and I lingered on the summit as the other two descended the regular route, and we followed when they were out of the way. We eventually decided that we didn't want to miss our ride and that it would be a good idea to get the 20 km back to the car over with as easily as possible. After some debate involving Guy's knees in relation to his ripe old age of 29, Marsha's and Lena's apathetic state, and my supposed passion for running descents compared to the others, we came to a decision. I was voted as the designated catcher-upper, and so I tried to catch the two guys. They were both older than anyone in our group, and one guy was at least 60. This person visibly older than my father was running down the trail as fast as my 23-year-old legs could carry me. They were so fast — faster than I would have thought anyone that age could have moved — that I only caught them when they finally took a rest. I barely got a blueberry in my mouth and we were off again, running down the trail as fast as gravity could take us. What the hell were we running from?

On the summit, the two guys I was chasing had told the rest of us about a wasp's nest on the trail in the forest below. After I caught up to the two I was aiming for, they promptly got at least ten stings each as we went down the trail. I got none. I carefully marked the area with a piece of tape across the trail and "bees" written with sticks. Minutes later, Guy, Marsha and Lena saw the warning. Marsha and Lena both got stung. Guy did not. In any case, after soothing their stings in the creek at the bottom of the trail, the two nice guys (in pain) gave me a ride back to the truck, almost running out of gas in the process. I drove around, picked up Marsha, Guy and Lena and gave some guy who I thought spoke French (but did not) a ride out to the pavement. Marsha and I dropped off Guy and Lena in the City, and before too late we were back home in Squamish. I had plenty of time to get to school the next day. I slept through my classes and had sore legs for a week from running down the trail. I'll climb with Guy any time he asks, but next time he can do the running.



The author on the ridge.
photo: Guy Edwards

The Real McKim. V, 5.10+ R. East face of Slesse Mountain. F.A.: Guy Edwards, Kelly Franz. September 21–22, 2001.

This description details how *The Real McKim* was climbed on the first ascent. It is probable that this route could be done in a day from the Propellor Cairn, possibly in fewer pitches, and could be descended via Crossover Pass. A full rack including cams to a No. 3 Camalot, and a small assortment of pins was used. About five pins were placed on the route, and one was left fixed on the crux pitch. No bolts were used.

Approach Slesse as for *Navigator Wall*. Solo or simulclimb the first seven pitches of that route, then belay on a 1-m-wide, sloping grassy ledge just above the top of the Navigator Spur, as far right as possible. About 60 m to the right is a large, left-facing dihedral going up most of the face. Covering a large part of the face visible directly above the belay and to the left of the dihedral, are two huge, darker scoops out of the rock, and in the middle of these two scoops is a ledge. Immediately above this ledge is the crux of the route. The route goes to the top of the pillar directly above the Navigator Spur, between the *Navigator Wall* and *Stoddart-Mullen* routes. *The Real McKim* joins the *Stoddart-Mullen* above this pillar. It is possible to finish up the north summit of Slesse via the Southwest Buttress.

P1. 30 m, 5.7. Traverse right and slightly down, and then slightly up to the bottom of a small, hidden, right-facing dihedral. Hanging belay.

P2. 45 m, 5.10–. Continue up this dihedral, with cracks in the corner and on the left side offering decent pro'. After about 30 m,

head right around some loose blocks and under a small roof. Gain the roof at the far right side and move to a larger, left-facing dihedral visible from the first belay. Belay on a ledge.

P3. 5.8. Continue up the main dihedral on slightly easier ground. Belay on small ledges about 35 m up.

P4. 5.9. Traverse to the left on quality rock over a poorly protected face to the sloping, grassy, 1- to 2-m-wide ledge between the two dark scoops on the face. Poor belay here on pins and nuts.

P5. 40 m, 5.10+ R. Face climb up then right to gain the corner system again. On the first ascent, one fixed knifeblade was left 5 m above the ledge. Delicate face climbing on hard-to-find protection made this the crux of the route. Belay in main corner system.

P6. 35 m, 5.8. Go up the corner system on good gear past some ledges and pick one to belay on.

P7. 60 m, 5.8. More of the same, climbing past small ledges up cracks in a large corner system. (The F.A. party bivied to climber's right on some small ledges 10 m apart.)

P8. 35 m, 5.9. Continue in the main corner system up a very fine pitch on clean rock with good protection past one or two bivy-sized ledges. Belay on the higher ledge, just below the spot where the main corner crack splits to either side.

P9. 50 m, 5.10+. Follow the crack to the left above the ledge, past a wide, overhanging crack to some hard face moves and easier climbing above. Belay on top of the main pillar, which you have been climbing all day,

in view of a large, white scar and a gully that goes from the ridge above down to the right of the pillar (the climb joins the *Stoddart-Mullen* route here).

P10. 5.7. Simulclimb up and across the scarred white rock into solid, low-angle cracks on the right.

P11. 5.8. Keep climbing up and right, first through cracks, and then face climbing over a bulge to join more cracks.

P12. 5.9 R. Climb up in cracks on good rock, then on very scary and chossy rock as you near the ridge. Be very careful not to knock anything onto your belayer.

P13. Gain ridge. (The F.A. party rapped once off the ridge and carried on to the north summit via the Southwest Buttress.)

Descend via the standard route and Slesse Creek.

SPRING WANDERINGS IN THE COAST MOUNTAINS

JOHN BALDWIN

Duffey Lake Road to Lizzie Creek

There is nothing like writing a guidebook to give you enough trip ideas to last a lifetime. This past spring I made it a point to catch up with two ideas that had been floating around in the back of my mind for quite a few years. The first was a ski traverse in the mountains east of the Lillooet River, where the deep trenches on the Coast give way to broad, subalpine valleys that make for good ski terrain when combined with the surrounding summits and pocket glaciers.

Our plan was to traverse from the Duffey Lake Road to Lizzie Creek over the four-day Easter weekend. After shuttling vehicles, our party — Matthias Jakob, Brian Chisholm, Doug Brown, Helen Hamilton Harding, Rob McLachlan, Ann Rathbottom and I — headed up Caspar Creek through shafts of sunlight and billowing snow flurries. Past the end of the road we skied on the snow-covered creek, then up the open slopes to the high col at the head of the valley. The south side of the col was a steep avalanche slope that we partially avoided by cutting through some bands of timber. Our first night was spent in the broad subalpine pass between Twin One Creek and Van Horlick Creek.

The next morning, after awaking to a fresh dump of snow and clearing skies, we grabbed our day packs and set off to Snowspider Mountain. We meandered up through open glades and glistening bowls onto the northeast ridge; this was going to be the ski run of the century. But just as we arrived at the summit, Doug's binding broke! He had a spare in his pack, but it was 1000 m below. We tried to console him with the gorgeous views of northern Garibaldi Park and scrounged up some webbing, hoping that he could attach his foot to his ski somehow. By the time I had adjusted the buckles on my boots, however, he had managed to strap himself in and had launched off

a set of turns on the first pitch — he wasn't going to miss this run! We hooted and hollered for turn after turn all the way back to the packs. In the afternoon, we headed south up Van Horlick Creek, first through an old cut block, then following the creek through the trees to a camp at the head of the valley.

With blue skies on Day 3, we knew that we could make the trip. We headed east onto the divide with the Stein River, which we planned to follow south to Lizzie Creek. At the ridge crest, a huge cornice blocked our access onto the glacier. Rob and Matthias had the great idea to tunnel through it. We were immediately rewarded with some great skiing. From Storm Mountain we got tremendous views of the icy divide between the Stein River and Mehatl Creek — a tantalizing ski route across the sky. East of Storm Mountain we dropped through a narrow, 2300-m col and swung around the west side of Brimstone Mountain to a camp in the 2000-m pass above the Stein River.

On our last day, we were able to ski all the way up the ridge west of camp, even where it narrowed to several metres in width. This took us to the glaciated bench east of Meditation Mountain. With the past few good days, the south-facing slopes were now icy hard in the morning, but as we did our last climb up the north-facing slopes to the col between Aurora and Lindsfarne mountains we found enough powder for one more great run.

We began our 2000-m drop to Lillooet Lake after lunch, first swooping down the southeast slopes of Aurora Mountain and then across open rock slides northwest of Tundra Mountain. We picked up the logging road at 1500 m. The first few kilometres were fun. By 1200 m, however, the alders were so thick that we missed the washed-out bridge. It was at this point that Brian began

to question our sanity. This was his first-ever trip backcountry skiing, and with all the powder and sunshine he had started to think it was all fun. Fortunately, the main road to Lizzie Lake, only a kilometre away, was alder-free, and we coasted down this into the depths of spring in the main valley below.

Tantalus Range Ski Traverse

The second trip I had thought about for many years was a ski traverse of the Tantalus Range. It's not exactly an obvious idea; there are no big icefields and the surrounding valleys are at sea level, so the route is sort of like traversing the backbone of a dinosaur. But the tremendous view of the Tantalus Range from the highway to Whistler (and many places in Garibaldi Park) is one of my favourites, and every time I drove past it, it tickled this idea in the back of my head. I didn't think this happened to many people driving to Whistler, so I was totally surprised to see on the bivouac.com Web site a 1997 article by Paul Kubik describing a traverse of the Tantalus Range that he had made with Jos Van Der Burg, Blair Mitten and Gerry Egan. Their trip had been in June, but Doug Brown, Gordon Ferguson, Stan Sovdat and I were going to try it at the beginning of May. For the most part, we followed their route.

We began at the north end of the Tantalus Range, at Sigurd Creek. With a start at 100 m above sea level, this is a classic Coast Mountain trip. We carried our skis and a week's food up the steep trail through the old-growth forest, with occasional glimpses of the Squamish River through moss-hung branches. At a lookout near 550 m, my camera battery died and I made the agonizing decision to run back to Squamish and get a new one and then catch up to the others that night. On my return I followed their tracks up into the snow, switching to skis above 800 m, and finally dragged myself into

our first camp at 1200 m as a bit of evening sun shone through the clouds onto the north side of Ossa Mountain.

We continued the long climb to the shoulder of Pelion Mountain the next day, arriving at 2160 m pretty much as the next storm hit. Here we waited for half an hour, hoping to squeak past the first difficult section before it got loaded with new snow. A few false glimpses got our hopes up and we edged out onto the big slopes above Mawby Creek, which have a fairly big cliff at the bottom. Fortunately for us, the visibility was so poor that we couldn't really see that far down; when the clouds parted enough to see the bench descending across the east side of Pelion, we bolted for the far side, only to become lost in the fog near 1680 m as we tried to find where Paul Kubik's party had downclimbed a step into the col.

The third day dawned ominously grey. We packed up quickly and managed to ski for an hour or two before we were caught by the next wave of whiteout. This at least allowed us to get onto the flat shoulder southwest of Zenith Mountain, where we could wait to get a look at the Rumbling Glacier — the real crux of the trip. We napped in the afternoon as the snow whipped past the tent. It snowed all night, and the next morning as well. But in the afternoon of our fourth day it cleared up enough that we skied over to Zenith Mountain and kicked steps up to the peak. What a place! It was 2100 m straight down to the Squamish River, and the whole east side of Tantalus and Rumbling Glacier was spread out before us plastered in new snow. It was wild beyond our dreams, but if the snow was stable, there was a route that would go. With only three days' food left, we watched the weather closely that night, not eager to retrace our route over Pelion

or bushwhack down to the Squamish River.

In the morning, fog engulfed our camp and we were kept guessing right until the last minute. By the time we were packed up, it was clear that we could go for it. We began with a long traverse out onto the big slopes above Tantalus Creek. Looking down at avalanche debris 1000 m below, it obviously didn't matter whether our Pieps were turned on. From this point, the glacier was a continuous icefall, so we worked our way up open slopes to reach a shelf at the top of the glacier which ran along for almost 3 km under the cliffs on the east side of Mount Tantalus and Mount Dione. This was an incredible place to ski. We worked our way gradually across the shelf, with the face above us still fluted in winter snow and with huge seracs stacked up against each other below us. At the base of Mount Tantalus, we skirted above a tall nunatak, and beyond Mount Dione we avoided a heavily crevassed area by climbing high underneath a few seracs. This got us onto the last shelf before the Serratus Glacier, with wild views of the Squamish River 2500 m below. Huge cliffs blocked the continuation of the shelf onto the Serratus Glacier, but Paul Kubik's party had worked out a beautiful route that crossed a narrow gap in the long south ridge of Mount Dione to reach the west side of the mountain. We followed this, skiing right up to the ridge crest, and then downclimbed a hard snow gully 100 m onto the Dione Glacier. From here we could see out to Georgia Strait and the tip of Point Grey in Vancouver. It was strange to be on a week-long trip so close to home! The scenery rolled by as we dropped across the Dione Glacier, taking in gorgeous views of the north side of Serratus Mountain. We thought about stopping at the Red Tit hut, but the sky was milky enough to keep us

pushing through the Ionia-Serratus col. Enjoying the corn snow, we dropped onto the south-facing slopes here, and after making a steep traverse to the east above cliffs, we dodged bluffs and wet snow avalanches down to a camp at 1400 m on the flats above the west end of Lake Lovely Water. We sat in the sun that evening, soaking up the end of a truly incredible day in the mountains.

The weather was starting to change again by the next morning. We had the option of going down the Lake Lovely Water trail, like Paul Kubik's party, but decided to continue our planned route to Woodfibre. We headed south past the east end of Lake Lovely Water. A narrow draw led nicely through bluffs on both sides to the col beyond, and under a thick, grey ceiling we dropped into the basin beyond, not quite sure how to get past the long west ridge of Mount Pelops that plummets into Red Tusk Creek. We followed sketchy patches of timber through some cliff bands at 1500 m, unsure of whether our route would go until the last minute. This allowed us to traverse directly onto Mount Conybeare and contour around towards Mount Sedgwick. By the time we reached the col between Sedgwick and Conybeare, however, it was raining and our only option was to bypass Sedgwick and head down Mill Creek. We skied down to below 900 m and then plunged through the lush rain forest to the valley bottom and a soggy camp in the middle of the logging road.

Fortunately, the rain let up overnight, so we had a pleasant walk down to Woodfibre. Walking out to the ocean was a fitting finish to this wild traverse. What we didn't expect was the culture shock of stepping out of a week in the wilderness and into the hissing, steaming mass of pipes at the pulp mill on our way to the ferry back to Squamish.

VANCOUVER ISLAND 2001

LINDSAY ELMS

It was another busy season on Vancouver Island, with a number of interesting climbs repeated. In April, Randy Davies and Mark Mieras climbed Steamboat Peak and a little later Mount Schoen. Up-island, Peter Rothermel and Tak Ogasawara climbed Hapush Mountain in March, and Lindsay Elms climbed Mount DeCosmos in May. In June, he attempted Mount Ashwood in the Bonanza Range but was repulsed just below the summit by weather. Chris Barner and Paul Rydeen also had a busy season up-island in June when they had a fly-in camp into the Bate-Alava area with the Heathens. Climbs were made of the Thumb, Mount Alava and some of its satellite peaks, and the Northeast Ridge of Mount Bate. The highlight of the camp was when Gene Berkey and Shauna Schmitke got engaged on the summit of the Thumb gendarme. Nick Elson and Alana Thiolet climbed the east

peak of Mount Cain, and Chris Barner, Paul Rydeen and Tak Ogasawara made the second ascent of the West Buttress of Rambler. Chris, Paul and three others also traversed, from north to south, all of the summits of Nine Peaks. June was also a popular time on Mount McQuillan as a number of parties reached the summit throughout the month. Meanwhile, on Rugged Mountain, Peter Rothermel, Tom Carter and Bob Schroeder climbed the East Ridge in late July.

The Canada Day weekend saw Joe Bajan, his son Adam and two buddies on the summit of Golden Hinde. On July 5, Sandy Briggs, Bev Sweetman and Martin Carver also reached the summit. On August 8, Randy Davies and Mark Meiras climbed Golden Hinde in 20 hours and 44 minutes from trailhead to trailhead. The first 24-hour return ascent of Golden Hinde was in August 1998, when Lindsay Elms and Keith Wakelin

went in via Phillips Ridge. Usually this climb is done as part of a Strathcona Park traverse, taking up to seven days. A few days after Randy and Mark's ascent, Frank, Chris and Erik Wille climbed the Hinde in 22 hours and 20 minutes return. This appears to be becoming a fitness test piece on the island. On August 29, Ron Adams and his son James also climbed the Hinde. On their way in, they passed Randy Davies while he was collecting some emergency supplies that he had left on Phillips Ridge during his ascent. Although they completed the climb in three and a half days, Ron said that they must have stopped to smell more flowers along the way, but he couldn't really remember that.

On August 11, Lindsay Elms and Peter Ravensbergen climbed El Piveto Mountain via Elk Pass in 16 hours return, and on the same day Mike and John Waters, along with Aaron Hamilton, climbed a new route on

Mount Colonel Foster. Their plan was to repeat the North Buttress route, which they had previously climbed in 1996; at the last minute, however, they decided to try a new line (X-rated) on the Scar, a prominent feature left when one of the towers disintegrated in the earthquake of 1946. The first seven pitches were on loose rock with minimal protection, some dicey face moves and an unprotected chimney, but pitches 8 and 9 proved to be solid, and the crux of the climb was a 5.9 hand crack. A low-fifth-class scramble brought them onto the summit of the North Tower. They then rapped the west face and went down the couloir and back to their camp at Iceberg Lake. Another notable climb of Mount Colonel Foster occurred when Hinrich Schaefer, Joachim Stadel and

Steven Hargn completed the rare feat of a north/south traverse. The first day, they climbed the Flavelle-Beckham North Buttress route to a bivy ledge below the North Tower; the following day (September 16), they traversed the five other summits. This traverse was first completed by Joe Bajan and Mike Walsh in 1973.

Elkhorn Mountain was climbed on August 12 by Charles Turner, Peter Rothermel, Graham Maddocks and Denise Hook, followed by Sandy Briggs, Julie Deslippe and Hinrich Schaefer. On September 4, Lindsay Elms climbed Elkhorn South, traversed under Elkhorn's west face and descended the normal climbing route. On September 23, the west ridge of Nahmint Mountain received a possible first ascent by

Rory Ford, Rudy Brugger, Barb Baker, Gus Attiana, Chris Youngman and Peter Rothermel. The island's third-highest mountain, Victoria Peak, was climbed in September by Charles Turner, Brian Ross and Randy Davies via the normal South Face route.

On the rock-climbing front, the main news to report is the continued development of the crags at Crest Creek. The Heathens have primarily been involved in the development, which has seen new trail work completed and a number of new routes climbed: Four new aid routes were put up by Chris Barner, and eight new freeclimbs were discovered. A "bolt fund" at Strathcona Outfitters in Campbell River helps provide funding for fixed-anchor maintenance.

FLYING SKI TOUR OF THE SOUTHERN COAST MTNS

LENA ROWAT

About three years ago, I discovered the joy of distance backcountry travel when I joined a friend for two months of her hike on the Pacific Crest Trail from Canada to Mexico. At the time, I had recently fallen in love with ski touring, and so I looked north for a route that would allow for distance ski travel. The following spring, when I turned down an invitation to climb the East Ridge of Mount Logan and then later regretted it upon hearing about my friends' adventure there, I found my line. I would ski from home to Mount Logan, climb it from the east, and ski down the King Trench on the other side. It is an aesthetic line connected entirely by mountain ranges. I figured that in two-month bites the whole line could be completed in four or five years, provided that the enthusiasm remained.

From that point in time, I set about to secure a partner who could join me for the first section of this journey, from Vancouver to Bella Coola, B.C. Finally, in the spring of 2001, my sister, Ruby Rowat, found time in her schedule, with one month's notice. So after a month of busy preparation, I picked her up at Vancouver International on March 1 and the next day we got a ride by motorboat with the Garicks to their weekend property at the north end of Pitt Lake, where we headed off into the mountains. My sister had only telemarked once before, yet she managed to figure-eight my tracks at the first opportunity, despite the week's load of food on her back.

The brilliant weather of the first week allowed things to go smoothly and teased us with the notion that we might not spend too many days tent-bound. We might have rethought this when, after arriving in Whistler, we were forced to wait four days before the weather cleared enough for five food drops to be placed by air on the icefields between there and Bella Coola. We were not so smart, however, and left Whistler without

checking the forecast. After one day of travel and two days tent-bound in a storm that closed the resort's ski lifts, we decided to return to Whistler in order to wait out the rest of the bad weather and dry out. Finally, on March 21, we set out from Highway 99 via Callaghan Lake. After a day of noisy snowmobile accompaniment onto the Pemberton Icefield, we were off into the serenity of the mountains. Just one month later, we popped out, feeling about as healthy and happy as can be, onto the Noeick River road outside of Bella Coola.

Unfortunately, numerous storm days during the first third of that month had stressed us out about completing the journey as planned, putting some strain on our relationship and causing us to rush more than necessary through a lot of beautiful terrain. We crossed the Waddington Range — from the Scar Creek logging camp to the Knight Inlet logging camp — in two and a half days, and we only spent one day in each of the logging camps, despite the fact that we were treated lavishly in both. We crossed the entire Monarch Icefield — from the col north of Princess Mountain to the bottom of the Files Glacier, near Ape Lake — in eight hours. On that day, we started out at speed in order to cover some ground before the sun caused the snow to drag at our skis. By 9 a.m., however, a storm was brewing, and so instead of stopping to bask in the sun and cook breakfast, we fled the prospect of more storm days. The next night (April 22), we were picked up on the road 16 km from Bella Coola. We arrived unnecessarily ahead of the depletion of our food supply and we had had to work through some glitches in our relationship, but we still love each other, and the journey will be remembered as a beautiful festival of wintry B.C. Coast Mountain scenery. I hope to linger longer through the next section.

Many thanks to John Clarke and John Baldwin for going over the maps with me.



Ruby skiing "the Middle Ground"

With few exceptions, route descriptions were obtained from Baldwin's guidebook, and we generally followed the dotted line on Baldwin's "Sketch Map of the Southern Coast Mountains" (CAJ 1988, p. 19). The notable exceptions are: 1) We passed through Whistler instead of Pemberton, and travelled the Pemberton Icefield and the Manatee range rather than the mountains on the north side of the Lillooet River in order to reach the Lillooet Icefield; 2) Logging roads pushed far up Kattasine Creek made for an easy descent into the Homathko valley; 3) We accessed the Franklin Glacier directly from the head of Scar Creek and left it via the Whitetip Glacier; and 4) A new bridge across the west arm of the Klinaklini River gave access to a ridge just north of the bridge ("the Middle Ground"), providing very easy and scenic access to the Klinaklini/Silverthrone area.

Many thanks also to Dale of Tyax Air and his ski plane based out of Squamish. Intuition Liners, G3 and Arc'teryx reduced gear costs for us, as did our parents, who gave us well-thought-out "birthday" gifts.

MOUNT JOB — PROBABLE FIRST ASCENT

FRED TOUCHE

Calling around for a partner to join me for this potentially historic climb was like pulling teeth. Everybody, it seemed, had already made unbreakable plans for the weekend. Josie was the only one who was still wavering. She would call me the next morning and let me know. Sure enough, the ringing phone awakened me at six o'clock sharp: "Hi Fred, it's Josie. I'm coming along." This caught me off guard. As much as I wanted to get Mount Job out of my system, the thought of actually attempting the climb caused me some worry.

At 5 p.m., we arrived at the end of the Lillooet Main logging road, 23 km of pavement plus another 50 km of gravel past Pemberton. We were instantly attacked by swarms of blackflies as we filled our backpacks with miscellaneous useless gear. The first part of the approach followed a decommissioned logging road to its end and then involved a short bushwhack down to a field of slide alder and on to a wide alluvial fan composed of dried, rock-hard mud, and gravel. From there we hiked along an old, overgrown road that had in places turned into a creek bed. After an hour we arrived at Affliction Creek, which drains the glaciated basin north of the Capricorn-Job massif. A strong sulphur smell greeted us as we reached the creek bed, an indication of the lingering volcanic activity in this area. We paralleled the east side of the creek, unable to safely cross the fast-flowing water. While scouting out the approach five weeks earlier, I had managed to cross on a patch of hard, late-season snow bridging the creek. I had also discovered that gaining the Affliction Glacier was next to impossible from the east side of the creek. The snow bridge had now melted away, and we continued along the wrong side of the creek. Eventually we were forced high onto gravel banks and we suddenly found our path blocked by a gravel canyon formed by a creek tumbling down from Plinth Peak to the east. Just beyond, we noticed a potential creek crossing right below the terminus of the glacier. The only viable method to get down to the bottom of the canyon was to rappel off a few miniature alder bushes. This unexpected approach-hike rappel wasn't exactly the incentive we had been hoping for, especially since we had just glimpsed our route up to the Capricorn-Job col in the distance. Where there had been snow a few weeks earlier, we could see a large patch of brown on the higher reaches of the face.

Our immediate worry, of course, was the creek crossing. Josie got to the ice wall at the glacier terminus first and proceeded to replace her plastic boots with runners. Continual rock avalanches have deposited a blanket of rock on the lower half of the



Mount Job. The route ascends the obvious couloir in the middle of the face.

Affliction Glacier. Like a giant conveyor belt, the glacier carries the rock along its surface and dumps it off at its terminus, where the fast-flowing creek in turn pushes the rock further down the valley. We donned our helmets and quickly forged the icy creek as rocks of various sizes pelted down around us. A rock missed us by about 1 m as we laced up on the other side of the creek.

Gaining the west side of the glacier didn't present any technical difficulties, but almost every rock we stepped on moved because of the slippery ice foundation. The sulphur smell disappeared as we climbed out of the creek bed, suggesting that the sulphur gas may somehow be trapped underneath the glacier. A more plausible theory is that the sulphur is trapped inside the rocks and that the gas is released when the rocks break up while tumbling down the creek. After about 2 km, the rock blanket began to peter out, exposing the underlying ice, which had numerous creek channels running along its surface. We found two body-sized bivy spots at the edge of the last finger of gravel and bundled up for the night. Josie, who is notorious for feeling the cold, crawled into her -40°C down bag, while I made do with a thin overbag. The night sky was crystal clear.

Josie conveniently ignored her alarm, which was set for 3:30 a.m., and we got up an hour late. After filling up our water bottles, we cramponed in the moonlight up to the snow line, where we roped up because of the upcoming crevasses. As we zigzagged our way towards the face, a continuous snow route up to the Capricorn-Job col emerged. This scenario was infinitely better than the expected scramble up steep, dinner-plated rock. We easily skirted the last bergschrund around its west side and step kicked up the slope above. Occasionally, rocks would spontaneously crash down on both sides of us but always a safe distance away. The 150-m-high

slope was initially at an angle of about 40 degrees, but increased to 50 degrees with a short, final section at 75 degrees where a cornice had sheared off. This is where we pounded in our only two pickets and regretted not having brought a second ice axe. After topping out, we discovered that we could have avoided the climbing by approaching the col from the south.

We hiked about 200 m along the broad lower portion of Mount Job's east ridge. The next section of the ridge was steeper, but several gullies on the southeast slope of the mountain appeared to lead towards the narrow upper part of the ridge. Two snow patches on the slope looked like good features to aim for. Before reaching the first snow patch, we scrambled up a gully with awfully loose scree, triggering minor rock avalanches with every step. Josie, who was behind, narrowly escaped being hit. We negotiated a steep section on the lower snow patch and crossed over a small rib to another rib above the lower part of the upper snow patch. Downclimbing the loose rock looked dangerous, so we opted for a rappel off a less-than-solid-looking rock horn. Our rope was bombarded by rocks during the rappel.

Josie led up the final snow patch and then scrambled onto the crest of the ridge. This would be the moment of truth. We fully expected to run into a terrifying gap or other unpleasant surprise, but after skirting around a horn we were instead blessed with a highway to the summit, the only apparent technical challenge being a small summit horn. Josie declined the honour of being the first to the top and let me take the lead on the only "good rock" of the whole climb. The summit horn is about 3.5 m high; we rated it 5.2. Josie soon joined me on the summit, which had room for two people but no more. She didn't seem very thrilled, her mind being focused on our impending descent.

Her idea of rappelling into the gap that separated us from the west peak, then climbing down a gully to the south, didn't appeal to me. After taking another look at the gap, we decided instead to follow the east ridge all the way back to the col. Later we reached a step where we rappelled down to the edge of the lower snow band, after which another rappel off a snow bollard brought us down to a field of loose scree. Not wanting to down-climb the steeper upper part, we opted for one last rappel into a gully. Josie went down first and then plunge stepped down the remaining scree to the broad lower ridge and the end of the technical difficulties. On the last, vertical part of the rappel, I managed to knock loose a stream of boulders, one of which hit my leg. Fortunately, I escaped with only a bruise. Then, as I was retrieving the rope, it suddenly went slack. My best guess is

that the rope cut right through our anchor (a single prusik cord) when I pulled on the rope, although I had no intention of climbing back up to confirm this.

To avoid returning down to our bivy site via the unstable north face, we boot skied down to the glaciers south of Mount Job, then roped up for a three-hour clockwise circumnavigation of the mountain. At one point, crevasses forced us to hug the south face of Job, where there was continual rock-fall. We returned to our bivy site without difficulty, 10 hours after we had left. Once we had finished off the last of our food, we set off for the journey home. Josie was fascinated by a natural waterslide that we followed until it disappeared under the ice. The creek was difficult to cross. We continued along its west side, well past the point where the overgrown road merges with the

creek. Eventually the creek branched out into several channels, where we managed to cross.

Given the modest difficulties we encountered, it's surprising that there have been no previously recorded ascents of the mountain. True, the rock is horrific, but with a stable snow cover several moderate gully routes on the south face were apparent. The east ridge itself or the variation that we followed, combined with an approach from the south, is likely the easiest route to the summit. The north face offers some steep snow/ice routes but is lined along its full length by menacing cornices that linger into late summer. For the ultimate hard (wo)man, there's the traverse between the west peak and the main summit.

East Ridge of Mount Job. Probable first ascent of the mountain. Josie Heteyi, Fred Touche. August 11–12, 2001.

FROM CASCADE TO MUSSEL

DAVID E. WILLIAMS

In the summer of 1994, Tanya Behrisch and I spent a very wet few days at the head of Cascade Inlet on the central B.C. coast, 65 km northwest of Bella Coola, with the intention of exploring the alpine at the headwaters of the Nascall, Tezwa and Kitlope rivers (see *Behrisch, CAJ 1995, pp. 70–71*). However, after days of sitting out the pouring rain at 800 ft. with only 3 km travelled, we aborted the planned trip and returned to our kayaks. Prior to our washout, Alex Frid, Pierre Friele and Ken Legg visited these headwaters from the southeast during an outstanding unsupported alpine traverse from Carlson Inlet on the Dean Channel to the northern end of Kitlope Lake (see *Friele, CAJ 1992, pp. 30–33*). Subsequently, in the summer of 2000, Crystal Huscroft and a friend made an inspired dinghy approach to the area in an attempt to complete a very bushy clockwise horseshoe traverse of Cascade Inlet (see *Huscroft, CAJ 2001, pp. 103–104*). However, as far as I could tell, the main divide leading north-northeast from the head of Cascade Inlet to Mussel Inlet was untrammelled, and such a traverse would only join the invisible tracks of John Clarke et al. (see *Clarke, CAJ 1995, p. 73*) on the final few kilometres, during the descent to Mussel Inlet. With the novelty of the route in mind, Peter Celliers from San Francisco, Greg Statter from Sydney, Australia, and I planned such a traverse for the summer of 2001.

We arrived in Bella Bella on July 21 with a mountain of gear. After some last-minute shopping for white gas, we were off with Pacific Coastal Airlines. I was in shock. I have been to this part of the Coast on numerous occasions and have rarely seen clear skies. I had simply come to interpret the landscape from maps. We flew up the length of Cascade Inlet, peering down to where Tanya and I



High above Kynoch Inlet. photo: David E. Williams

had paddled past waterfalls cascading from alpine to sea over the coastal slab, and landed at the head of the inlet. With the odd wet stumble, we negotiated the packs, loaded with 17 days' food and gear, to shore. The float plane left and we rapidly settled into trip mode. After a brief lunch, the arduous part of the trip commenced with the usual coastal thrash through a gorgeous forest, the physical intensity broken by the odd porcupine and beaver skull sightings. A day and a half of this saw us breaking out above the trees with the length of Cascade Inlet stretched out below our feet. The second night was spent taking in the view over and over again.

To reach the alpine, we ascended the ridge that rises directly north at the head of Cascade Inlet and then we followed the ridge system northeast, this being the divide

between the Braden and Nascall river valleys. While eating lunch on the third day, Greg spotted a bear chasing a goat down a snow slope. We watched in anticipation until the chase disappeared behind some rocks, where presumably the bear enjoyed a fresh lunch. The route that afternoon took us in the general direction of the chase, which was not too comforting given that bears do not appreciate interruptions while feeding. On our fifth day out, we made a side trip to climb the prominent and unclimbed Peak 6100 from the south (93 D/13 872559). That day, we had views into innumerable pristine valleys including those of the Tezwa, Kitlope and Nascall rivers.

For the first four days of the trip, the weather was relatively unsettled but okay. The fifth day was one of those perfect

summer days. From the sixth day onward, however, the weather turned more and more unstable, and it became downright appalling for the last three to four days. We lost three days in total to the weather and would have lost more if our pickup time had not been quite so pressing. The compass and altimeter were certainly worth their weight in gold.

From the head of the Tezwa River, we headed directly west, then north and northwest as we followed the main divide above the headwaters of Kainet and Poison Cove creeks (Poison Cove is where Captain Vancouver's crew, of the *HMS Discovery* and *HMS Chatham*, suffered severe shellfish poisoning in June 1793). When the clouds parted, the Coast Mountain scenery was stunning. We caught glimpses of Kynoch Inlet, unlogged watersheds and the amazing Tezwa River wilderness snaking on as far as you could see, and saw goats around almost every corner. Continuing northwest brought us to the incomparable slab and rock formations of upper Kalitan Creek — 3000-ft. walls broken only by the white of cascading water. This country felt remarkably wild and remote. Here we had occasional views to Mussel Inlet, our end point, although it would take five more circuitous days to arrive there.

Due to the fact that numerous contours were missing on the map, we had been anticipating and worrying over the technical difficulties of several sections of the traverse, but up to this point it had been relatively straightforward to work our way around these obstacles. From the 13th day onward, however, the route became increasingly demanding. This was compounded by deteriorating weather. We continued along the divide north, and northeast for approximately 3 km above the lake at 2380 ft. in the upper Kalitan valley, then west, north, west again and finally south as we made our way counter-clockwise around the headwaters and a lake at 620 ft. in the northerly fork of the

Mussel River. We backtracked on several occasions, trying to find a route that would work. On one section of ridge, we carefully negotiated gap after gap. After lunch on Day 14, the rain started; it rained and rained and rained. The extensive, stiff-fourth- to low-fifth-class slabs turned into "slime" rinks, and our climbing rope became a wet noodle. On one of the most challenging sections of narrow ridge, where the map indicated precipitous drops to either side, we saw nothing but the local heather, rock, ice and snow, with the route scrolling out ten to twenty metres ahead.

Obviously, we did get the odd momentary clearing that treated us to incredible vistas; overall, however, it was a bit disappointing that we saw so little of the latter part of the trip. Not one photograph was taken during the last three days, until we arrived at Mussel Inlet, and there was no stopping for lunch on those days. At Camp 16, on the ridge to the east of the main Mussel River valley, we spent our last night out as three-dimensional puddles in our dripping dome. But our lower elevation (2100 ft.) meant that it was now considerably warmer. The bowls of hot soup and heaps of steaming pasta certainly helped to enhance our humour that evening.

After getting up at 5 a.m. the following morning, we descended into a wet, mature forest containing several large Sitka spruce. There was some micro-terrain to deal with, but the going was relatively straightforward. Once on the lower flood plain of the Mussel River, we had to cross two sizeable tributaries. The first of these came up over our belly buttons; the water felt pleasant, warm and clean — a welcome bath. We picked up a bear track that had centuries-old paw prints imprinted in the ground. Later, at times, we were able to follow a rudimentary hunters' trail. Disappointingly, even in this remote place some of the huge spruce had been removed years ago. In order to alert any

bears that might be present, we clapped and whistled as we strolled along. Even so, as we rounded a corner we ran into two huge cubs with a mama grizzly bringing up the rear. The cubs immediately turned about and ran up and over Mum. Mum approached a little closer, sniffing the air as the inquisitive cubs stood up on their hind legs just behind her. I have to admit that we were too close for comfort. For the first time ever, I had my hand on our pepper spray. When we clanged two of our ice axes together, however, Mum calmly and slowly walked into the thickets, although the cubs were inclined to stay put and view these three exciting anomalies for a little longer. After perhaps five minutes, we continued on our way. These were beautiful, healthy animals — big, round and plump; endearing faces; damp, brown fur bristling on their bodies. Wonderful. We are very privileged here in B.C. to have such majestic animals roaming as they have always done in *their* forested landscape.

Eventually we arrived at the mouth of the Mussel River, where glacier-scoured walls descended 2000 ft. from the alpine above. Crossing the marvelous delta, we followed the path through the reeds which the family of bears had made as they meandered along, digging up roots and munching on flower heads. In this beautiful, peaceful place, we sat under our fly in the drizzle and consumed the remnants of our food. Then, having given up on the float plane ever arriving, with the rain coming on strong again, we started to put the tent up. We honestly felt that we had been forgotten, and we decided that if we had to become cannibals Peter would go first. The tent was half up when the plane arrived. A few minutes of mad activity later, we had everything packed. After flying through some fierce weather, we arrived in Bella Bella with enough time to change out of our boots before stepping onto the plane for the trip back to Vancouver and that bright yellow orb in the sky.

RIDERS ON THE RIDGE

YANIK BÉRUBÉ

Business is emptiness. Cragging, and long snow slogs up obvious mountaineering objectives that had been climbed hundreds of times were bringing my psyche down. Climbing had to be more than movement in a less than horizontal world. Climbing, to me, is about exploring and reinventing yourself in a world that defies the comfort, security and lull of modernism. The time had come to get out there and live a bit.

I remembered a picture coming onto the computer screen on a gloomy winter day in the lab where I study at the University of British Columbia. This striking knife-edge ridge on a beautiful mountain tucked in the amazing Tantalus Range brightened my day. The caption indicated that this obvious

feature had yet to be climbed. Adventure was knocking at the door. Jeremy Frimer's amazing picture had sparked a flame that I knew could only be appeased by action.

It was the month of July, the days were long, and the weather was half-decent on the Coast. My friend Michael Kubik was itching to go hike or climb somewhere different. With a map, a bit of climbing gear, and some information gathered from the Internet, we headed towards Ossa Mountain. It became obvious early on that the weather gods would not be on our side that day. While we were hiking on steep, muddy terrain, the clouds closed up and started to remind us of why the trees are so big on the "wet" coast. Unfazed, we continued, intent on hiking

more than climbing. Much time was spent looking for a bridge over Sigurd Creek. No such chance. The clouds thinned momentarily and allowed us to catch a glimpse of the base of the ridge from a distance. It looked steep and beautiful. The lack of time and a bridge stopped us from trying to get a closer look. Home it had to be. Ossa would have to wait.

Partners. They make or break the alpine-climbing experience. They are definitely more important than petty considerations such as "Do I really need a couple more 'blades on the rack?" Climbing with someone you don't like is pointless if not dangerous for both of you. Roger Linington — friend, climbing partner and housemate — with his



photo: Roger Linington

gritty British sense of humour, was the perfect partner in crime for this climb. Even though I had only seen part of the ridge, and from quite a distance at that, I quickly got Roger to believe that it would be *the* line of the summer.

The weather forecast looked good for the next few days, and both Roger and I were pumped to get onto our objective. Everything was falling into place. I spent most of Friday in the lab, thinking about the climb to come. Questions about the technical difficulties that might be encountered and the kind of gear we should bring with us were flooding my mind. We packed in the evening and went to bed looking forward to the next day.

We knew that a late start would be quite acceptable since there would be no climbing on the first day and only a six-hour approach to camp. After a hearty breakfast, we loaded the car with our gear, hopped in and started driving on the Sea to Sky Highway. The highway led us to the Squamish River Road, which winds its way through the absolutely beautiful valley named after the river. After crossing both the Squamish River and Ashlu Creek, we parked, shouldered our bags and started the hike in. I had warned Roger that the trail was brutally steep in sections. In retrospect I think that I emphasized this aspect of the approach to remind myself that this first day would be anything but a picnic.

Steep hiking brought us to a marshy area, which then led to even steeper hiking next to a beautiful series of waterfalls. We finally reached the upper valley that would bring us to the base of the mountain. The forest of enormous trees was only occasionally interrupted by old avalanche paths. These were often filled with tall, bright green Indian hellebore that had erased all trace of a trail. The valley led us to amazingly colourful

heather, home of much mosquito and black-fly. After looking for the bridge for a few minutes, Roger and I discovered an old log with a flat surface carved in it on the other side of the creek. The bridge was no more. The only option now was to wade across the glacier-fed creek. We quickly found a shallow but wide section just fifty metres from where the bridge had once been. The crossing was only about ten metres long, which was fortunate for us given the coldness of the water. After drying our feet, we quickly shouldered our packs for the last stretch and moved away from the swarm of bugs. Another hour of steep going got us on the moraine, just below the glaciers flowing from Ossa and Pelion mountains. Much flatness as well as a profusion of water streaming from the glaciers made this the ideal place to camp. We had been hiking up steep terrain for a bit more than six hours and were quite ready for some rest. We set up camp and started cooking and brewing.

That evening, we had excellent views of our objective, the north ridge of Ossa Mountain. The initial buttress looked steep. The way to the buttress was somewhat hidden, but a large icefall just below the start of the ridge suggested a pretty exciting approach. Roger suggested that we climb through the hourglass at the bottom of the glacier and ascend the steep section early the next day to get to the base of the ridge. Seconds later, ice blocks the size of refrigerators were released from the icefall and came crashing down the hourglass. "Ummmh, maybe not," he added.

"It looks pretty darn steep before getting established on the ridge, doesn't it?" I asked Roger as well as myself. Roger agreed. Doubts were starting to insidiously enter our thoughts.

"Well, lad, we haven't come all this way

just to go home tomorrow, have we?" proclaimed the ever-reassuring Brit. We agreed that we should give it a good try, especially if the weather looked good. Those negative thoughts had surely been coming straight from our tired legs and shoulders. We hit the sack early, planning on an alpine start the next day.

Sunday saw us leaving camp at around 5:30 a.m. under a cloudy sky that reflected my state of mind. After struggling with the lateral moraine, we got onto the glacier, and my thoughts started to sharpen up. The food and rest in camp had been just what we needed. Our minds and bodies were psyched for climbing. We roped up and contoured the icefall by skirting the glacier on its east flank. We could see the toe of the ridge in the distance and a few minor crevasses along the way. We quickly moved westward and were soon standing at the base of the ridge. Each step forward had progressively revealed more and more about the nature of the rock. It looked solid and featured. We hid from potential rockfall in a little cave. Roger held the rack up to me. "Well, lad, I believe it's your lead."

I tied into the double ropes and racked up. The rock was steep but featured and blocky, so I decided to keep my climbing shoes in my pack. Short cracks offered good protection as well as good foot- and hand-holds. I climbed with confidence until I hit a nice little ledge. I decided to set up an anchor there. Even though the pitch had been short, the climbing above looked as though it might wander a lot. Anchoring there would definitely reduce rope drag. Roger met up with me at the belay with a grin on his face. "The rock is pretty nice!" he remarked.

"Not bad at all," I agreed.

Roger grabbed the rack and set out in his big leather boots up a short dihedral. After putting in a couple of pieces of protection, he reached a rock overlap at the end of the dihedral. Continuing on the left did not look too appealing, so Roger started to traverse rightward and upward. The climbing was starting to get harder, but Roger, keeping calm, finished the traverse, climbed up some thin features and stopped at a sloping ledge to build another anchor. I quickly followed, admiring Roger's composure on this short but intimidating pitch.

"I had to stop here because all this traversing made the rope drag almost unbearable," he commented.

"It's all good, Roj'. I think it might be a good time to switch to rock-climbing shoes, though."

"Definitely."

The going was already slow and we were starting to think that if the pace didn't pick up we would never climb the whole ridge.

"We need to climb longer pitches and climb a bit faster," Roger commented.

"Fair enough," I replied.

The weather had been improving immensely and we were now treated to a mostly blue sky with some minor clouds hanging onto the summits of Ossa and Pelion. I set off on a short but perfect hand crack that led to a small overhang. As I climbed to its left, the movements felt good but the gear looked bleak higher up. I down-climbed and traversed to the right. This brought me directly below a short, vertical wall, with my last piece about twenty feet below me. I was only about a foot short of reaching something above the vertical wall, and very few holds were to be found.

"I think I could pull this move but the consequences of messing up would be pretty bad," I told Roger.

"Why don't you try traversing to the left under this long roof — it looks like the wall you would hit around the arête is pretty featured," Roger replied.

Following Roger's advice, I started traversing. The climbing was easy, but protection was scarce. I was able to put in a half-decent cam. The angle of the wall forced me to crouch and then throw my leg on the other side of the corner. I was riding the arête the same way a knight would ride his noble steed. I could hear Roger laughing.

"What the hell are you doing there, lad?"

I tried to think of some intelligent way of explaining the situation, but nothing came to mind. The wall on the other side of the arête was steep, yet amazing crack systems made the climbing easy and safe. Roger yelled that I was out of rope just as I hit the crest of the ridge, a superb position on the mountain. After following this lead, Roger admitted that he had tried to go around the corner in better style but had had to resort to my unconventional technique. We looked up ahead and were happy to see the terrain becoming more moderate.

"A full-rope-length pitch and reaching the crest was exactly what we needed. I think we're going to climb this thing, man!" Roger started up a short, vertical wall to traverse onto the east face of the ridge. He then

climbed straight up the long, steep wall, which featured another incredible crack system, to regain the ridge proper. After I reached him we had a snack and decided to start simulclimbing the low-fifth-class rock encountered on the ridge.

The day was perfect. The sun was strong and made the rock feel warm to the touch. The clouds that had previously been sitting on the neighbouring summits had finally disappeared. We moved together with good rhythm, enjoying the views and the climbing. Staying on the ridge, we climbed around patches of snow and wet rock until we had to start belaying again. Two more pitches brought us to steep snow covering the rest of the ridge. I belayed Roger from a rock anchor, encouraging him as he fought with ten feet of "7-11 Slurpee" snow that would not hold his weight.

"This is frightening, man!" Roger shouted.

"No worries, I've got a bomber anchor down here," I replied. I looked behind me and noted the cliff bands and the huge bergschrund a few hundred metres below us. I could see why Roger was getting the willies. The rope ran out, and Roger built a huge snow bollard anchor since we had not brought any pickets. The angle eased up as we started moving together again.

Three hundred metres of diagonal traversing on snow brought us to the high point of the ridge. A gap separated us from the summit headwall. Looking around our high point, we could find no easy way to reach it. Both sides of the mountain merely offered abrupt drop-offs that led to steep rock walls. Tired and dehydrated, we felt our collective patience being put to the test.

"It would really suck to have to retreat here — we're so close to the summit," I said.

"Yeah, and if we decide to go down the face we just traversed, we'll have to deal with going across this huge bergschrund, and I'd hate to do that," Roger replied.

We continued looking around for a way across. Roger called me over and showed me

a left-facing dihedral. "I think this reaches the snow-rock bridge we can see below. I could belay you from above."

"Right on. It looks fantastic. This might just be our ticket to the headwall," I replied.

I downclimbed the dihedral, traversed the snow-rock bridge, which offered exhilarating views into the guts of the mountain, and finally climbed up some way on the headwall. Roger followed with a huge smile on his face. He quickly grabbed the rack and proceeded to climb easy-fifth-class rock towards the summit. I could not see him anymore when I heard him call "You should come up here, lad — there are some pretty good views."

I followed and cleaned the pitch until I ran out of mountain to climb, exiting exactly where the summit cairn was located. Roger and I shook hands, congratulated each other, sat down and enjoyed the views and the light breeze.

After a summit shot, we started our way down the mellow west ridge. Three hours of scrambling, snow plodding and bushwhacking brought us back to camp thoroughly exhausted and dehydrated. Tired but happy, we cooked some pasta and started packing. We left our moraine camp and hiked, waded and hiked some more to reach one of the first lookouts on the trail. The setting sun provided us beautiful views of Mount Garibaldi basking in the alpenglow. We finally reached the car at around 9:30 p.m., with that special hangover feeling brought on by fatigue and dehydration.

Although only of moderate difficulty by modern standards, Ossa's north ridge had been a fantastic adventure. The exploratory nature of a first ascent combined with the remoteness of this part of the Tantalus Range proved to be exactly what I had been searching for. I felt alive more than ever before.

North Ridge of Ossa Mountain (2260 m) 600 m. TD-. Tantalus Range, British Columbia. F.A.: Yanik Bérubé, Roger Linington. July 7, 2001.

THE BERKEY-HOWE UNION SPIRE: FIRST ASCENT

The Union Spire is an amazing free-standing granite pillar located at the head of a huge alpine cirque on Nadina Mountain near Houston, B.C. Formations like this are very rare in granite. The spire is 40 m tall, and the summit is an incredibly exposed 2 m x 2 m platform, sheer to overhanging on all sides. The route is 5.9 and 25 m long, leading right to the top of this wild needle. Bring one rope, at least four quickdraws, and a very light rack with a few .75" to 2" camming units. Belay on the uphill side of the spire after crossing a moderate snow slope. Climb up and left to the west face of the spire. Follow bolts across this face to the exposed downslope face, then up this to the top. Exposed but

well protected. Rappel with one rope from a two-bolt anchor.

Access: Drive south from Houston to Kilometre 39.5 on the Morice-Owen FSR (locally called the Huckleberry Road), the turnoff for the Owen Lake Recreation Site (Klate Road; signed). Turn right, pass the rec site, drive across a bridge and up a hill and turn right at a "Y" in the road at 1 km. Continue for 6 km to the end of this logging road, which is in good two-wheel-drive condition, and park at the bottom of a clear-cut just after the road crosses a small creek (45 minutes). Walk south and then west and uphill along an overgrown logging spur, then up across the clear-cut towards the standing timber near the top

southwest corner to find flagging on a rough trail through thick bush. Follow this trail to treeline on Nadina Mountain, gaining approximately 500 m of vertical (1.5 hours). From treeline, trend up and north across easy slopes to the edge of the huge cirque. Continue uphill along the south edge of the cirque to the flat summit plateau of Nadina Mountain. From the top of the cirque, drop down for 80 m across talus and moderate snow to the uphill side of the spire. It is probably worth bringing an ice axe. The spire is located at 0639850E/5996200N [NAD27], coordinates plotted from the 93 L/2 1:50000 map.

BRIAN PEGG

TALES OF CROW: AN ORAL LEGEND FROM THE COAST MOUNTAINS

TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL GIBBERISH, WITH SCHOLARLY COMMENTARY BY DREW BRAYSHAW

1. *When the World Was Frozen*

Crow has always wanted to be known as a trickster, like Raven. So every chance he gets, he is looking for ways to play tricks and do things that stories will be told about. Now it came to pass one winter that Crow went travelling with First Man. They visited Where Many Rivers Meet and together climbed a frozen waterfall. It was very cold. After that, First Man was very tired. He is old now, for he was born when the world was young and he has spent many ages on the high mountains, seeking out hidden treasures and becoming wise. So First Man fell asleep and Crow stayed awake by the fire.

Crow had heard many tales and stories of First Man's magic. It was said around the lodges in the evenings, when young men were telling stories, that First Man owned a magic shell. Anyone who put this shell in his ear would hear the very earth itself call out its secrets. And more than anything, Crow wanted to discover those secrets and be mentioned in the tales that young men told around the summer campfires, in the lodges of the people — the way that First Man was.

Crow looked at First Man. First Man was sleeping soundly. He did not look as though he would wake up suddenly. So Crow slid one hand over to where First Man's medicine bundle was lying and he carefully undid the knots that held it shut. Immediately, a bright, powerful light shone out of the bundle. Crow jumped back at once, but First Man did not even stir. So in a minute Crow was back at the flap of the bundle. He raised a corner of it up slightly and peered within. The bundle held many strange objects Crow could not identify. Some seemed to be miniature models of mountains and glaciers. Here was what looked like a snakeskin covered in fur; there was a mysterious iron tool. Carefully avoiding touching what seemed to be a shrunken head, Crow reached into the bundle and pulled the only shell-like object out from under a pile of flint arrowheads. It was warm in his hand, like a small animal. First Man did not stir as Crow carefully retied the knots on the bundle.

Lying back on his bedroll, Crow clapped the shell to his ear and listened. He was horrified to feel the shell squirm and then somehow slide its way down into his inner ear. Frantically he poked his finger into his ear to try and fish out the shell, but it had slid down far past the point his finger could reach. He was glumly considering the possible use of a fish hook to retrieve the shell, when he was startled by a chuckle. He turned and saw First Man watching him and smiling somewhat toothily.

"So little Crow wants to have some of First Man's magic?" asked First Man.

"Foolish Crow, know that had you asked I would have given gladly. Now you are stuck with a shell in your ear and you will have no one and nothing but your own greed to blame for what befalls you."

With a nod and a wink, First Man dissolved into a cloud of mist that drifted from the fire into the night, leaving Crow alone with a most painful itching in his ear.

Later that winter, Crow and Dog Hair were looking for ice in the Black Rock Canyon. Conditions were warm, too warm to climb Cooking Pot. So the two friends went exploring in some seldom-visited gullies above Dish of Gold. They climbed up one gully until confronted by a broken-off pillar, then followed another drainage for an enjoyable thin-ice ramble. The day was only about half over as they hiked back down goat trails to the Dish of Gold. Dog Hair began preparing to leave for the long sled ride back to Big Smoke but stopped when he saw the strange way Crow was acting. Crow was bent over in a contorted squatting stance. It looked to Dog Hair as if a short, invisible person was pulling sideways on Crow's ear.

"What is wrong, Crow?"

"Think we should hike up that narrow gully that lies high on the hillside, Dog Hair. Something up there sounds like ice to me."

"Sounds like ice? Have you been eating the spotted mushroom again, Crow?"

"Dog Hair, my friend, I hear the sound of a high voice chanting prayers to Winter God from that gully. Let us explore and see what we can find."

"But I hear nothing, Crow."

"Still, what else have we to do?"

The two friends trudged up the gully. It was dry and stony. They hiked in silence, with Dog Hair bestowing many doubtful looks on his friend. Rounding a corner, they were surprised to find a short pillar of ice hidden where no one would see it. "Ice! Ice! Ice!" sang the pillar as they climbed it. Above, a further half-hour hike up the gully led to another short, frozen curtain of icicles.

As the two friends sledged back to Big Smoke, Crow heard another chant coming from a drainage near the trail. That week, he called up Witch Doctor and asked him if the drainage had ever been explored. Witch Doctor consulted the spirits and replied in the negative. So come the next weekend, Crow sledged back up the Longest River to the drainage. Imagine his surprise when he found three Bald Eagles unpacking their sledge at the base of the ice. They explained that they had seen ice while passing by and had stopped; judging it to be of excellent quality, they were preparing to climb it. Now Crow was alone, and so he dashed by the Eagles while they were coiling their ropes

and he began to sprint up the ice, muttering to himself "Mine! All mine! Me first!" The first short length of pleasant ice was followed by a nasty steep section. Through the shell in his ear, Crow could hear it laughing at him: "I am steep and poorly formed, and only a fool would climb me!" Yet Crow did not want the Bald Eagles to see him retreating, so he climbed a bit of the ice, then climbed up a tree, and up some rock, and moss and dirt, and more of the ice, to the top. Then he saw that the Bald Eagles had merely set a top rope on the lower ice. He felt stupid then.

2. *When the Days Lengthened*

Now, in the springtime, Crow spent many days nesting in the hills of Where a Fire Once Burned and flying among the cliffs. And he saw that those who spent much time there climbing almost always followed cleaned paths up the rock to avoid the moss and lichen. Crow knew that his friend Baboon was soon to come visiting from the East, and he thought that it would be a great trick to clean off a swath of rock and then trick Baboon into climbing up it as if it were a long-established route. So with a rope and a scraper and a long-handled brush, he spent several days clearing moss and dirt from a rock and merrily throwing down large rocks at families of Sheep that stopped to watch him.

It was a beautiful day in spring when Baboon arrived from the East. The flowers on the ledges were blooming pink and purple. Peregrine flew through the air, and Dolphin sported on the waves. Crow and Baboon hiked up into a pleasant valley amidst the hills of Where a Fire Once Burned. Crow unobtrusively led his friend to the very crag where he had patiently cleaned a strip out of the moss.

"Say, Baboon, this looks to be a fine climb."

"Indeed it does, friend Crow, indeed it does."

"Hmmm... It seems no one is climbing it. Perhaps, Baboon, you would like to stretch your arms and legs a bit by waltzing up it?"

"Well, I don't know, Crow. Recently I have all but given up climbing in favour of contemplating the mysteries of the female form. In fact I have not put toe to rock for well over six moons. But, if you wish to ascend, I will gladly follow you up it."

It was a somewhat subdued Crow who found himself wrapping a rope around his waist and confronting the rock bluff. He had planned on Baboon's long arms and short legs subduing the rock and had envisioned himself flapping up the pitch with the security of a tight rope from above. However,

when he began climbing, things went easily at first. Then he came to the dreaded Blank Spot. He fell off. He got back up. He fell off again. Baboon laughed at him. In desperation he said to Baboon, "Look at that beautiful girl in the sport bra over there!" and pointed. While Baboon was distracted, Crow pounded a bolt into the rock. Then, carefully concealing it from Baboon with his body, he stood on a sling attached to the bolt and reached a hold on the other side of the Blank Spot. Unfortunately, he was awkward recovering the sling and Baboon saw what he had done. "Silly Crow, using aid! I should stop belaying you right now!" Despite the affront to his dignity, Crow refused to come down and climb past the Blank Spot again without the use of the bolt. When Baboon climbed the route, he found the Blank Spot to be too much for even his simian reach, and he was sorry for being so self-righteous to Crow. The rock laughed at both of them, not caring that it sprouted a brand new bolt.

3. *Long Days and High Peaks*

On the weekend after the longest day of the year, Crow and his friend Snow Spider decided to visit the high Noble Stone Peak, where Crow had been many times before. Snow Spider was about to balloon her way to the great Northern Ice Fields and wanted to climb some rock before she left. The two friends made the long wagon journey from River Flats to the valley below Noble Stone, where Angry Volcano looms to the south, and north and west the borders of the Bigger Mountains begin. Carrying heavy bundles of food, clothing and tools, they trudged up sharp stones and huge spills of gravel to a campsite on a knob. Crow cooked dinner while Snow Spider waxed eloquent about the failings of those she knew. No one was spared a cutting comment. Crow wisely said little at first, but then boldness enlivened his tongue and he made several grandiose statements at which Snow Spider politely laughed.

In the morning, both Crow and Snow Spider were lazy and did not depart from camp until Sun began to warm the rocks. They found a line of huge footprints leading towards the rocks they were to climb, and they debated whether Grizzly Bear or Sasquatch had made them. Upon reaching the rocks, they began climbing. Neither felt very bold, so their route zigzagged up the face like the track of a drunken sailor, avoiding all difficulties. When they reached the top, Snow Spider proclaimed herself unimpressed by the climb. Sending out a long trail of silk from her spinnerets, she flew off on the south wind. Crow flew back to camp and then went thoughtfully home, somewhat disappointed that a face he had thought for two years would provide excellent climbing should prove so ordinary on close acquaintance.

For several months now, Crow had been determinedly courting Cougar. At first receptive to his ardent advances, she became, by

degrees, rather cool, then noticeably uninterested. Crow retreated to his nest to groom his feathers and drink whiskey. A small thundercloud formed over his head and rained perpetually for a week's duration. It was a rather dispirited Crow who made plans with Witch Doctor to visit the Pointed Peaks. However, two days before their expedition was to depart, Cougar asked Crow, Would he consider visiting Noble Stone Peak again? She and her friends were planning to travel there and felt that the presence of Crow could not help but benefit them.

Crow spent a sleepless night considering his options. He saw that with either choice he would still end up in trouble with someone. With this in mind he told Witch Doctor to proceed without him and he prepared to revisit Noble Stone Peak. He found himself travelling there in the company of Cougar, Stone Cube and Pint Bottle, in Pint Bottle's fancy wagon. The four of them were to meet Flying Squirrel, Four Names, Maple Syrup and Mallard Duck at the base of the mountain. After much levity and good spirits along the way, they finally reached the mountain. Not only had their four companions arrived, but so had four Mountain Goats. The meadow was crowded with the skin huts of the climbers. Crow knowingly blamed Shiny Head for the crowding: "If it were not for that new picture book of Shiny Head's, this valley would be peaceful and quiet. On the other hand, thanks to Shiny Head, I am famous!" With this thought he became quite proud and strutted around with his chest feathers puffed out like a rooster, much to the amusement of Cougar.

Over dinner, Cougar, Stone Cube, Pint Bottle and Crow chatted to the Mountain Goats and watched the antics of the other four, who were climbing high on the Noble Stone. Maple Syrup and Mallard Duck returned to camp after a visit to the Moon. Meanwhile, Flying Squirrel was attempting to climb up the Great Jagged Buttress with Four Names. Unfortunately, he lost his way and dragged her high up on a spiny pinnacle, where a blank spot vexed him sorely. After many attempts, the two retreated down the north side of the pinnacle and arrived wearily back in camp not long before daybreak, to the amusement of the others.

The next day dawned stormy but then cleared. The cocky party of Mountain Goats rushed off to the Great Jagged Buttress, which they predicted would cause them no problems. When Stone Cube, Pint Bottle, Cougar and Crow passed below them, they saw that the Mountain Goats were screaming about loose rocks, dangling from ropes, getting lost and generally flailing around. In fact, the confident Mountain Goats retreated, humbled, from only a short distance up the route. Crow puffed out his chest feathers some more.

Pint Bottle and Stone Cube began climbing to the Moon. Crow and Cougar roped up to their left and set off up a huge, frozen breaker of stone which scared Crow,

although he wouldn't admit it. He thought that there might be no way through the tube to the gentle waves beyond, but he didn't want to look anything but brave and confident in the presence of Cougar. However, upon arriving at the tube, he found an easy passage through, though quite exposed. Higher up, the two found thin sheets of stone like ripples on a calm sea. Cougar climbed most, if not all, of the route in leather boots, claiming that her paw hurt. Meanwhile, the two watched Maple Syrup and Mallard Duck climb partway up the north slopes of the Great Jagged Buttress to retrieve gear that Flying Squirrel and Four Names had left behind during their night descent.

High on the wall, Crow and Cougar wandered away from the line they had planned to climb, across snowfields and up rickety ramps clad in black mourning rocks. They reached the rim quite late in the day and hurried back down the Snowchute to their campsite, where they found only Stone Cube and Pint Bottle left, awaiting them. The others had all fled, leaving them alone with the mountains. They slept under the stars and the next day wandered over to the hot springs for a day of swimming and lounging. Sore Feet, who resembled a certain Famous Singer, visited them there, bringing with him a case of beer.

After another month or so, Crow found himself dragged into the mountains by the enthusiastic Ferret. Together with Mule Deer, Ferret's partner, they hiked and scrambled up into the mountains near the Great Stone Chair. Ferret and Crow were planning to make a pilgrimage to visit the reclusive Wise Night Birds, who perch behind the Chair, out of the sight of men; as part of their plan, they anticipated sleeping under a rock high on the arm of the Chair. That night, however, Lightning Thrower rode his black cloud horses through the sky, and Ferret and Crow took shelter with Mule Deer and some others in the small and crowded Lake hut. Here they passed the night eating each other's chocolate and lying about peaks they had not climbed and routes they had once seen a picture of in a magazine, as was the normal practice for the young braves of their tribe while resting before a challenge.

Long before Sun rose in the morning, Ferret and Crow were awake and active. In the dim light of the time before dawn, they trod forth, prodigiously encumbered, and set out for the Wise Night Birds' roost. The first obstacle blocking their path was an arm of the Great Stone Chair. They clambered over this, but not without cost. Crow was drenched by a sudden flood from within his backpack. Investigating, he found that his "ice hook" had punctured his water bladder. Henceforth he would go thirsty that day, much to his dismay.

Crow and Ferret continued across the snowfields around the back of the great Chair, then dropped down a ramp to stand in

Misty Valley beneath the Wise Night Birds. The two birds stood silent and aloof with an obvious line of snow between them. A large gaping absence marked the bottom of this snow line.

“Hmmm, I think we can climb that up to the shoulder of that one bird if we can only get through that big ...”

“It looks kinda tough to get started, but once we get over that ... huh.”

“Yup.”

After staring at it for half an hour or so, the two timidly crept over to the base of the wall, near the taloned feet of the Birds. What had appeared from a distance to be an insurmountable obstacle seemed not so bad from closer up, and the two soon found themselves scraping their way up steep rock, with claws grating and striking sparks. After re-establishing on the snow, they quickly ran out a few hundred metres of moderate climbing, then were forced to slow down and belay a rope length of tricky grey ice before topping out on the shoulder of the Snowy Owl. The bird swivelled its pale head and gave them such a piercing look that they elected to call themselves satisfied, and they quickly ran away — down to the sunny snow bowls of the Ice-covered Chaos and back around to the front of the Great Chair, where Goat and Marmot crowds played in great abundance. At Lake hut they reunited with Mule Deer; before long, they found themselves eating ice cream among the hoi polloi of Expensive Mountain Town.

As the days began to shorten, a time of blazing heat arrived. One weekend, Crow found himself alone in the Wide Valley after spending several days and nights working on his pathetic chariot, which was held together only by the most ramshackle of stop-gap measures. As all the other members of the tribe were presumably already out climbing, he decided to venture up the east side of Jagged Granite Peak by himself. On the way, he passed some rock-throwing Bald Eagles; on the summit, he met a party of Mountain Goats. He was mortified to find that he had left his provisions at home, and he had to resort to begging for scraps of tofu dog from the Mountain Goats. As is often the case, they felt that they had climbed a harder route than he had, because they had used a rope and he hadn't. His wings were very tired that night, but his heart was filled with the bright air of high spires, and for a while he was happy.

Now, as the days shortened further, Witch Doctor and Crow began to negotiate an agreement to climb some mountain together. After a protracted bargaining session, they found themselves near Moon Lake, climbing the High Peak of the Moon, a remote and bushy obscurity. Both had previously noticed that the hidden, north side of this peak sported a remarkable buttress. Planning to go fast and light like the current alpine gods, the middle-aged Witch Doctor and the “thinks he is a fast climber but isn't” Crow found themselves inexplicably moving

slowly, mired in a hideous alder thicket somewhere around the time they should have been halfway up their chosen buttress. After another few hours, they reached a point at which they could actually see their objective. Witch Doctor pointedly mentioned his dislike of alpine bivouacs. Crow looked in his pack and saw that his only bivy gear was a flannel shirt. Unanimously, the two of them veered off course and up a supposedly easier ridge. With each of them claiming to have found the “easy way up”, their paths diverged and they threw rocks at each other for a few hours until they surprised themselves by summiting. The descent by a supposedly simple route involved protracted downclimbing, unexpected rappels, endless tree thrashing, and a long march on tired feet.

Fortunately, the Mexican place in Wide Valley was willing to stay open as long as the two of them kept buying margaritas. Witch Doctor became inebriated and mercilessly berated Crow for not ever climbing in the Highest Peak area, where “the real Coast Range is [*sic*].” The next day, the hungover pair went looking for some rumours of good limestone both had speculated on. Although they found both limestone and fashion victims, none of the stone could be described as good, so they went home and drew lines through sections of their respective black books and agreed to never discuss the matter again.

4. A Well-named Season

The leaves changed colour. Crow, with tired feet, decided to pass on the mountains for a while. With his old friend Round Head, he headed up to the famous Granite Man Mountain to do some slab climbing. Arriving in Southerly Wind at a leisurely time, the two friends headed up the Granite Man's famous Stomach by a route both had climbed many times previously, a route that wriggles and twists like a drunken worm. It was wet, but this was not unexpected; a few hours later, Crow and Round Head finished off the climb and prepared to walk down. After putting on their street moccasins, the two wandered out onto the polished slabs on top of the Granite Man's Stomach. With Crow in the lead, the two walked up to a familiar place where one steps across a particularly polished bit. That day, it had a slimy trickle flowing across it. Crow, bold and confident, pasted his moccasin to the ooze and began to step across, thinking to himself how brave he was as Round Head made little mumbling noises about maybe using a rope. “Hah, this is casual,” said Crow — then his foot skidded out and he was sliding down the slabs of the Stomach like a greased toboggan, with Round Head screaming at him, “Stop yourself! Stop!” After travelling five or ten body lengths in half as many seconds, Crow found himself plunging over a roof onto the steep upper section of the Cyclone, and he frantically convulsed to one side and caught a small shrub sprouting from a seam at the lip,

then, with Round Head struck dumb with horror, shinnied up it to relative safety. Without discussing it further, the two re-donned their climbing shoes, roped up, and belayed across ground both would normally have walked on barefoot or in flip-flops. They headed for the nearby Ale House and spent several long hours saying “I nearly” and “That was so” and “You almost” and “If I hadn't ... I would have” and drinking.

After that, Crow seemed to have a poor autumn. He twice hiked twenty leagues to the same peak, only to turn around both times for silly reasons. He climbed a few boulders at Lake in the Forest but spent much longer sitting on his crash pad under a mossy rock, watching smoke drift up into shafts of afternoon sunlight and doing his best not to think of anything. He went to the Place There Was a Fire several times but found excuses to sit around and talk or watch others climb rather than do anything himself. What was to be a “determined attempt” to solo the Left Ice Ribbon on Obvious Peak in the Sky Highway Group ended in a thunderstorm not far short of the crowded hut at the mountain's base. His new chariot developed perplexing knocking sounds that he spent more than one weekend attempting to troubleshoot; eventually the noises stopped of their own accord.

It wasn't until late autumn that Crow really found himself able to climb again. Over Pumpkin Holiday, at Gneiss Canyons, he spent two days falling off face climbs and watching the aurora borealis from a hot tub at night. He liked it, but he felt wrong somehow. For Red Poppy Day, he packed his chariot with Cougar, Flying Squirrel and Four Names and drove south to the place where the Stone Monkey stands alone in the desert. Several friends and members of the tribe, too many to list, had also made the journey. The first day climbing saw Crow and Flying Squirrel take turns making gear-ripping falls on a sketchy purple widget on a route Crow had previously led on his first attempt many years ago. Later that day, the two of them pulled on gear and got scared one pitch off the ground on an easy crack climb up a Horse. That night saw much wine drinking and guitar playing around a blazing campfire. The next day, Crow and Flying Squirrel climbed faster and better. Neither pulled on gear, and they did seven or eight routes — most of them obscure, loose sport climbs too new to be in the guidebook. For the first time in months, Crow felt that he liked what he was doing. That night, he drank lots of wine and listened to campfire gossip and guitar playing. He told several strange jokes unconnected to climbing, in a bizarre, Howdy Doody accent, and threw up in a bush beside his tent. He spent the next day taking pictures of his three friends slinging ropes back and forth to the Stone Monkey's mouth. The last day saw them climb some odd route in the rain and then leave. Crow had got his groove back and was

sorry to wave goodbye to the Monkey. He knew that the season had ended, but he didn't realize at the time how much of a circle he had flown through the year.

Epilogue

Early in winter, Crow and Big Legs made the long journey east to climb in the Rubbly Mountains. On their first day, the two set out up Overcrowded Waterfall near Big Mountain Town. As Crow spiked his way up the easy ice that starts the route, he reflected on his year and tried to start writing the song he would sing of it. His mind left the work of climbing, one of his heels caught in the rope that he was carrying on his back, and once again he found himself tobogganing down a climb completely out of control. This time he sunk an ice tool into a bush and stopped himself well short of the drop below. Big Legs was aghast, but Crow mostly felt stupid. He went on to climb many waterfalls that winter. He still wants to be a Raven, but it is doubtful that he will ever stop playing tricks on himself like the one described above. A Crow he was born, and a Crow he will remain.

An Anthropological Commentary by D. Brayshaw

"The Tale of Crow" is typical of the short but involved personal myth cycles of the southern Coast Mountains. Unlike in the epic stories associated with the great heroes of the pantheon (some of whom, such as First Man and Witch Doctor, we briefly encounter in this tale), the action is mostly self-centred on the third-person narrator. As with most legend cycles, the historical events that inspired this tale are hidden under a veneer of mythology and are difficult to accurately reinterpret; added to which fact, the difficulty of properly translating Gibberish, a dead language spoken only by scholars, renders my final transliteration even

more suspect. Furthermore, I have chosen to frame the original rhyming couplets of this story cycle as a prose piece, and the rhythm of the original tale in Gibberish has been unavoidably lost. The various anachronisms and shifts of tense in the narrative appear to be intentional although somewhat suspect literary devices. However, with these caveats, I have listed below my interpretations of the noteworthy subjects possibly referred to by this story cycle.

After the Gold Rush 50 m. WI3. Two 25-m WI3 pitches separated by 10 minutes of stream-bed hiking in a gully north of *Energizer*, above Goldpan Park, Thompson River valley area. F.A.: Cam Campbell, D. Brayshaw (both solo). February 2001.

Kanaka Kolumn 50 m. 5.6 WI3+. A 25-m WI2 pitch leads to another short pitch with a slushy curtain of steep ice. Steep shrubs and mossy rock on the right side may be used if the curtain lacks the required consistency for tool placements. Located 150 m north of the Kanaka Bar Café, five minutes' drive south of Lytton, in an obvious draw, and visible from the highway if you know where to look. F.A.: D. Brayshaw (solo). February 2001.

Working Class 30 m. 5.8 and a point of aid (later TRed at .11b). A nice crack pitch moving left out of *First Class* up an arch and past a blank spot (bolt), at Funarama in the Smoke Bluffs. F.A.: D. Brayshaw, Mike Buda. May 2001.

Raised by Bears. III, 5.7. Seven 60-m+ pitches. Takes the big face right of "the Moon" on Mount Athelstan's Fantastic Wall. Many pitches require simulclimbing in order to stretch 70 m or more between protection (belay) possibilities. This rather wandering line with a fair bit of lichen avoids the main difficulties of the face through relentless

traversing back and forth. F.A.: Fern Webb, D. Brayshaw. June 2001.

Standing Wave. III/IV, 5.9 R. Ten 60-m pitches. This line climbs the obvious buttress left across the major gully from *Moonraker* on Mount Athelstan's Fantastic Wall. Seven pitches lead up to and across the hanging slab to the snow patch. Then climb three pitches across the snow patch and up easier rock on its left flank to the rim. Protection is thin and sparse on the slab; take pins and expect to spend a while finding suitable belays. The rock is impeccable, though. A better finish above the snow patch would take the obvious arête directly. F.A.: Sarah Goldin, D. Brayshaw. July 2001.

Snowy Owl Couloir 400 m. III, 5.7 AI3. The obvious right-hand couloir on the north face of the Owls. After rock climbing or dry-tooling around the 'schrund for a full pitch, climb a long length of 55-degree and easier snow and finish with two 45- to 50-degree pitches up hard, grey ice to the shoulder west of the summit pinnacle. There is a great picture of the route in *Alpine Select*. To get off, descend the south face and cross the Weart Glacier to the Wedge-Weart col, or traverse up over the northeast ridge of Mount Weart. F.A.: Brent Nixon, D. Brayshaw. July 2001.

East Ridge of Peak 7210 400 m. Third- to fourth-class. Hope range. This peak is called "Crescent Lake Peak" by Fairley, "Eaton Peak North" by Culbert, and "Mount Grant" by Beckey — take your pick. The east ridge gives a long, interesting scramble on sometimes bushy and fractured granitic rock. As a bit of a consolation prize, the impressive northeast and north buttresses are waiting for a party with a much greater tolerance for slide alder bushwhacking. F.R.A.: Don Serl, Drew Brayshaw. September 2001.

Panorama

Perched high,
each simple form
surrounding me
is a tidal wave
rising slowly,
leaving me
flooded,
Forms collide together
as mountains —
strong, proud, unsmiling
soldiers posing for
a military portrait
not afraid to die.

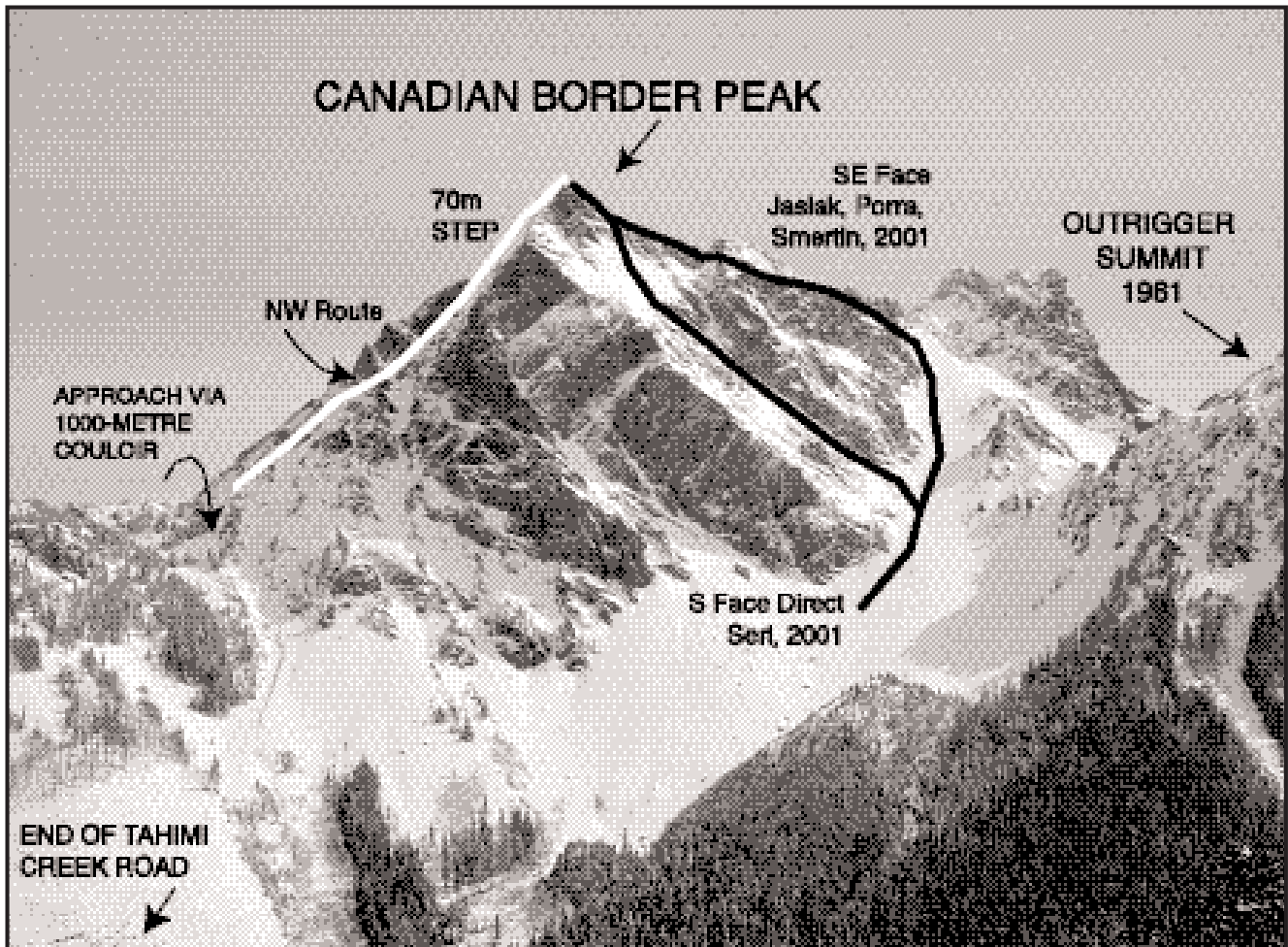
Against a Tibetan mountain wall,
truncated couloirs,
endless gravel kames,
broken rock ridges,
blank snow faces,
rock prisms,
saddle mountains,
creviceless glaciers,
irregular pyramids,
cracked rock faces,
no horizontal,
stone fingers.

I wrote the poem in this double format, which is meant ideally to be read by two people in order to get the impact of two different voices. I found it to be the only way I could describe the disturbingly powerful scenery I experienced from a perch in the Gokyo valley of Nepal, overlooking Chomolungma and hundreds of other named and unnamed peaks. I hope that the emotional experience and the geological descriptions complement each other to give a more rounded panorama.

Tom Gleeson

TOMYHOI AND CANADIAN BORDER PEAK

DON SERL



The main Tahimi Creek road south of Chilliwack is now ungated, giving good access to the north side of Tomyhoi Peak (7435 ft./2275 m) and the west and south sides of Canadian Border Peak (7516 ft./2291 m).

On May 6, from about the 15-km point, a few hundred metres short of the first switchback on the logging road (~3000 ft./900 m), Emanuele Porra, Irek (“Erik”) Jasiak and I climbed the huge snow gully leading directly to the hanging glacier east of the summit. The upper 500 m of the climb took four hours in soft new snow, but the route is aesthetic, direct, and quick given decent spring snow.

Emanuele, Irek and friends had nearly completed the climb in late March. This is unlikely to be the first ascent of so obvious and attractive a route, but no record exists.

On July 2, Emanuele, Irek, Andrei Smertin and I easily traversed to the south face of Canadian Border Peak in one hour from the end of the upper spur on the road

(~4500 ft./1400 m). I climbed the 400-m slabby ramp on the left side of the face leading nearly directly to the summit (some mid-fifth class; four hours from the car), while the other three continued rightward up the east ridge near its low point about 400 m east of the summit. Somewhat complicated traversing (fourth-class) on the crest and south side brought them to the top. The descent was made via the normal route; the rappel at the upper “step” now sports two solid pitons, but the slabby gully lower down on the regular route is as unattractive and dangerous as ever.

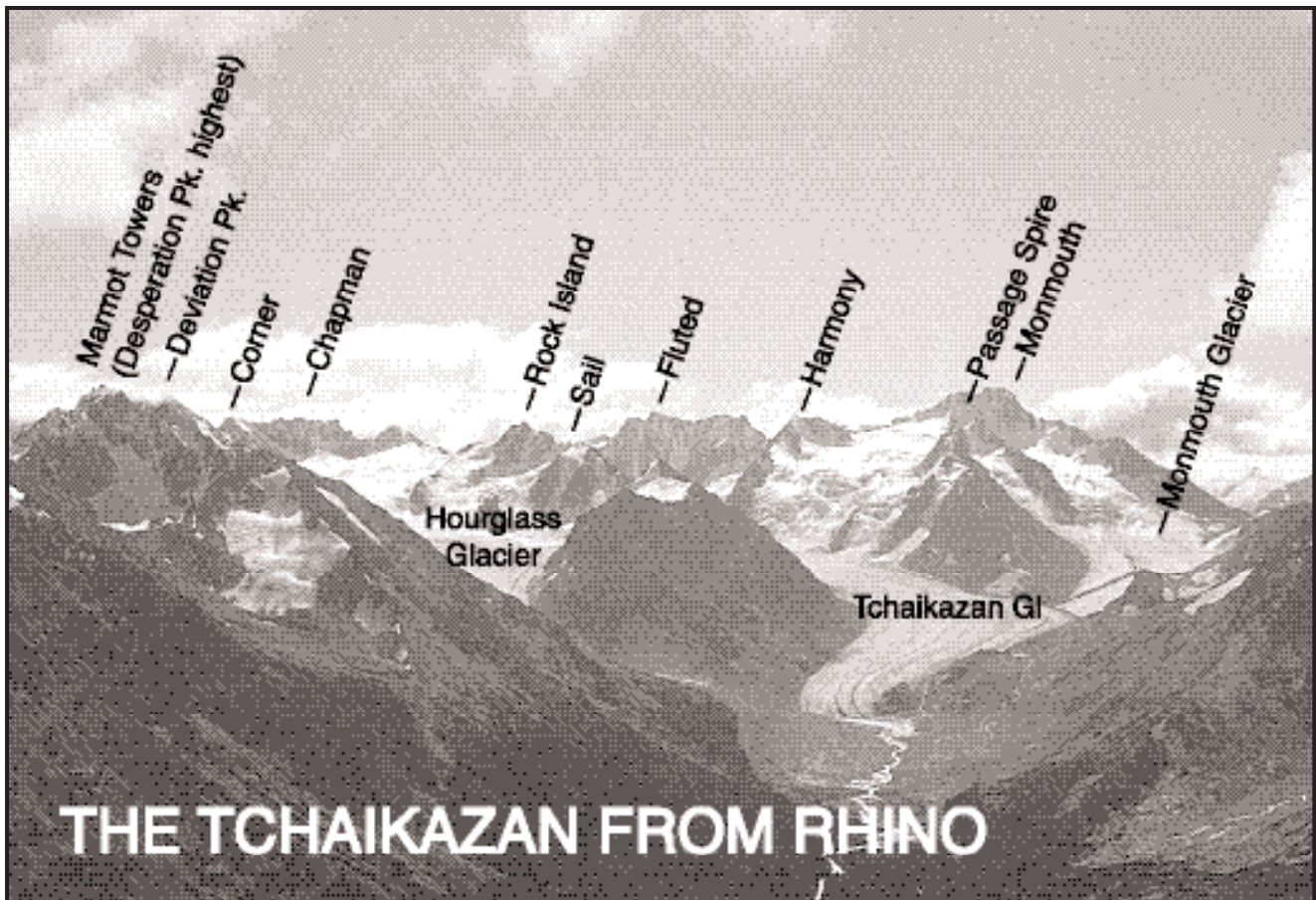
The guidebook record on south face routes was unclear to begin with and has deteriorated. Culbert’s 1965 guide describes a southerly approach from Twin Lakes via a traverse west of American Border Peak but says that this joins the normal route from Slesse Creek. The 1974 Culbert guide asserts: “There are class 3-4 rock routes from the basin on [the] SE side of [the peak], but

approaches from this side are no longer important.” Beckey’s 1981 Cascades guide notes the possibility of reaching this basin from the northwest shoulder and “ascend[ing] rock wall to reach summit ridge E of the summit” but says: “It is not certain the route has been completed.” All mention of these possibilities disappears in Fairley’s 1986 southwestern B.C. guide and Beckey’s 1995 second edition.

In fact, Tony Ellis, Arnie Shives and Glenn Woodsworth climbed CBP in September 1961, as described in the *B.C. Mountaineer* of February 1962. The party climbed the south face to the east ridge, then traversed this to reach the summit — pretty much the route followed by Andrei, Emanuele and Irek. With quick, easy access and more pleasant climbing and solid rock than the “standard” northwest route, either south face route ought to become the route of choice for CBP aspirants. The 1961 party reversed their route for the descent, and this too is worthy of consideration in the future.

THE TCHAIKAZAN: A BRIEF CLIMBING HISTORY

DON SERL



The Tchaikazan is a valley, a river, and a collection of peaks in the Coast Mountains of B.C., about 200 km north of Vancouver. Lying on the eastern side of the range away from the prevailing weather and draining onto the Chilcotin plateau, the area is drier and more open than most other groups in the range. Since 1994, this area has been included in Ts'ylos Provincial Park, along with the outstandingly beautiful, 70-km-long Chilko Lake to the west, the largest high-altitude lake in Canada.

Excluding the Cascade volcanoes, the group contains the closest ten-thousand-footers to Vancouver; in fact, including the contiguous Falls River valley to the east, there are eight 10,000-foot peaks in the group, with fifty more summits topping 9000 ft. (The maps to the area are still in imperial, so all elevations will be quoted in feet. For those of you who can think peak heights in metric — and I can't — there are eleven 3000-m peaks in the group.) This is the second-largest collection of “big” peaks in the Coast Mountains after the Waddington Range. Glaciation is extensive, with half a dozen kilometre-wide valley

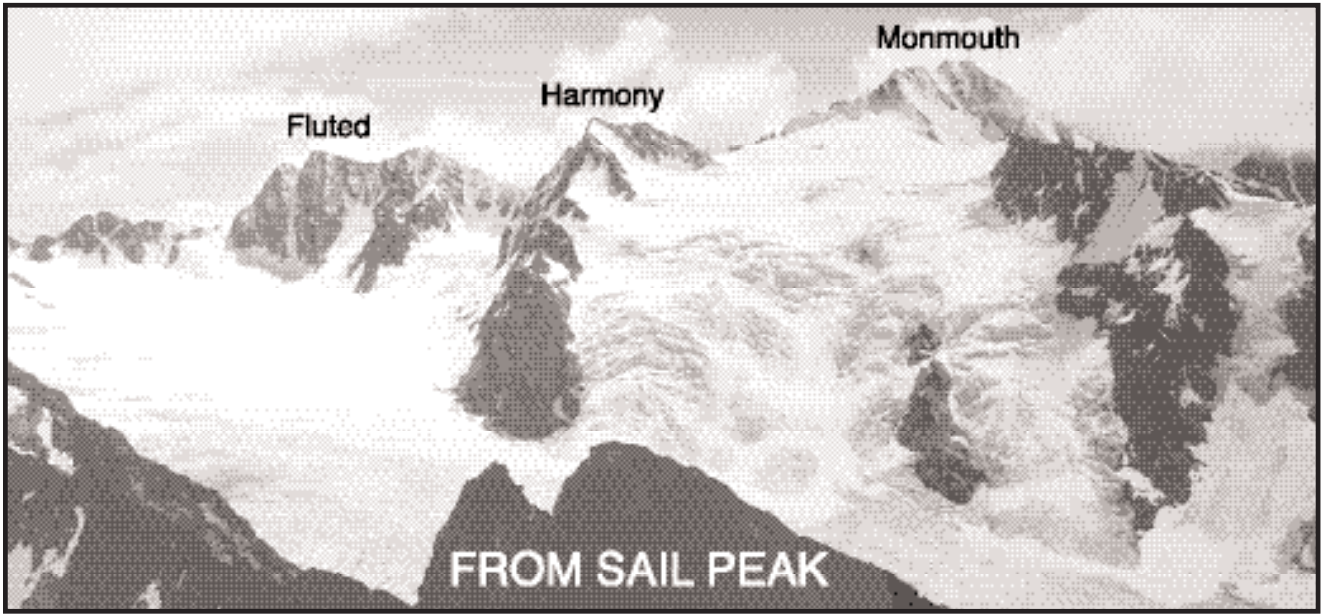
glaciers radiating from the head of the main valley, but gradients are low and travel on the ice is generally exceptionally easy. A pleasant hiking trail, with under 200 m of elevation gain in roughly 25 km of travel, leads from the mouth of the Tchaikazan valley to open, meadowed flats at the head of the valley, where basecamps are commonly set. Chopping in is also possible, but the staging point is a long way from helicopter bases at Bluff Lake or Williams Lake, so larger groups are necessary to minimize deadhead expenses. The scenery is grand, and there are plenty of flowers and glades nearby to complement the rock and ice.

Given all these attractions, the Tchaikazan has attracted a long series of mountaineering groups, but the area is not faultless. The rock is almost all poor; in compensation, there are numerous moderate routes up high peaks, and attractive snow and ice faces and couloirs abound on the steeper northern flanks.

Nor is the area easily reached. The drive is long and challenging. From the city of Williams Lake (about 350 km from Vancouver), drive west on Highway 20 for

90 km to Hanceville. Turn southwest towards the Nemaia valley on a good gravel road, travelling 90 km to a small bridge over Elkin Creek. Turn south onto a rough 4WD road, reaching the north end of Taseko Lakes in 20 km, an airstrip at the south end of Fishem Lake in 42 km, and the end of the road in about 50 km. The drive should take 10 to 12 hours from Vancouver. And although the walk in or out is exceptionally pleasant overall, Miserable Creek and especially Friendly Creek in the upper section of the valley are difficult crossings, and the 2 km of bush between them is nasty in parts. (The best crossing on Friendly is often on a log-jam at the falls in the slot canyon about 400 m upstream from the Tchaikazan junction. If the log-jam has washed out, bash upstream another bushy half-kilometre to reach the less-confined creek bed in the moraines.)

The area was first explored in the post-war '50s and '60s, as Vancouver-based mountaineers sought out new challenges following the long concentration of efforts on the Waddington Range through the '20s and '30s. An Alpine Club of Canada party in



Carefree, north face

1951 made off with the first half-dozen first ascents, including that of Monmouth Mountain, highest in the area at just under 10,500 ft. (about 3200 m). Altruist Mountain (10,000 ft.) was nearly climbed by a party approaching from Chilko Lake in 1957; ironically, it endured to become the last of the 10,000-footers in the Coast Mountains to be summited. In what was to become a pattern of assailants being attracted back for repeated bouts, Rolf and Heather Kellerhals climbed out of the Falls River valley in 1961 and then based themselves in the Tchaikazan in 1962 with another couple,

netting the first ascent of the impressive Fluted Mountain (10,100 ft.). That summer, too, another party attempted Mount Winstone (10,200 ft.), a broad, icy, triple-summitted mountain at the head of the Falls River drainage. This withstood two attempts in 1962 and a couple of probes the following year before finally succumbing. The 1963 party also made the first ascent of one other ten-thousander: an easy snow peak called “the Beauty” (10,200 ft.).

The following year was “clean-up” year. A 1964 British Columbia Mountaineering Club camp organized by Martin and Esther Kafer and including many of the “hardest” Coastal climbers of the time made something in the neighbourhood of twenty first ascents and finished off the remaining unclimbed ten-thousanders: the Beauty’s steep, imposing, rocky companion, the Beast (10,200 ft.); Desperation Peak (est. 10,200 ft.), the highest of the challenging Marmot Towers; high but gentle Rufous Mountain (10,000 ft.); and the elusive Altruist Mountain. That year also saw a step forward in Coast Mountain mountaineering; the first ascent of the “National Pillar”, a 600-m rock spur on the north face of Mount Winstone, by the Kafers, Paul Plummer and Kaspar Winterhalter, was the first time a modern “route” was climbed on a Coast Mountain peak as a “line” rather than as the simplest way of reaching a summit.

BCMC and ACC camps continue to this day, splitting the honours for “new-routing” with smaller, “independent” teams. Fred Beckey visited the north face of Mount Winstone in 1972, 1983 and 1987, netting his friends and himself four fine alpine ice and/or mixed routes. A large, strong BCMC

group in 1975 made many challenging new routes on the Marmot Towers and on sub-peaks and ridges of Monmouth; another in 1986 snagged two fine lines on the north face of Fluted. Approximately a dozen routes, including virtually all the “obvious” ridges and faces, have now been climbed on Monmouth and its subsummits. With a variety of partners, I visited the valley in 1982, 1991, 1992, 1993 and 2001; aesthetic ice lines on the north faces of Carefree, Rufous and the Rhino have been the significant outputs, but the list of “to-dos” remains long.

What of the future? The valley is very beautiful, and there are a vast number of objectives, many at moderate levels of difficulty. This will continue to attract club camps and mountaineers seeking moderate wilderness adventures. Guided wilderness mountaineering is also popular. Numerous north-face ice lines remain to be climbed, but hitting “good” conditions requires persistence and luck. There are patches of good rock on the Marmot Towers, around Beehive Peak and south of the Falls River valley, each of which may attract some attention, but the lines are at the modest end of the spectrum and bigger plums elsewhere will likely keep most of the “harder lads” in other areas. There are still quite a few unclimbed 9000-ft. summits (which “means” something, in a way that 2743 m cannot), but — as with the rock lines — these are not especially compelling in and of themselves and so will likely fall from time to time rather than seeing themselves become prime objectives. Nevertheless, the Tchaikazan will continue to be an attractive destination for wilderness mountaineering, yielding occasional fine lines for many years to come.

.the interior

PARADISE OR MISERY?

THE BUGABOOS TO ROGERS PASS IN SUMMER

GLENN REISENHOFER

I have always been a dreamer. I simply look at any map, and the mystery of adventure unfolds. My mind travels the corridors and ridgetops, investigating new possibilities. This was how it was when I first considered journeying through the Purcells. As my mind travelled the maps and guidebooks, it dawned on me that on this traverse one could visit four huts (now five) and hike almost completely free of bush. This seemed like a good idea to me — at least on paper.

I first tried to hike this traverse with Colleen and our “fifty-pound hound”, Keisha. We got bogged down by bad weather, and an increasing feeling of insecurity had all of us heading for the logging roads with our thumbs waving for a ride. Keisha doesn’t have any thumbs so she just wagged her tail.

After a few years’ hiatus, the trip was back in the planning. The former northern-Selkirks traverse team was summoned. Kevin and Chris agreed to participate, but Steve was in love and couldn’t join the group. We needed a fourth, so we called on “Junior Snow Ranger” Scott Kinnee to aid us in our quest. At the last minute, Carol Crow decided to join our group. Carol was born in Las Vegas, Nevada, and became an illegal immigrant to Canada. She is our plastic mascot with an adventurous attitude.

Hot, dirty and smoky, we found ourselves with a million others at the Bugaboos. Consistently stable weather had the beautiful park packed with vertically oriented people. Both the hut and the nearby campground were full. Applebee Dome is a great campsite with many astounding views. As soon as the tents were up, a bouldering session followed and tender toes got scratched as our sandals were no match for the course granite we played on. Carol kept guard over the tents and warded off any snaffle hounds that dared to venture too close.

There are days in the mountains when we are fully alive — life is bursting at the seams of our being, and excitement tingles



The Malloy Igloo. photo: Glenn Reisenhofer

our pores. This was a day like that. Bugaboo and Snowpatch spires caught the early-morning light as we quickly packed our gear and headed towards the col. We figured that there must have been seventy people in the general vicinity of the Bugaboo-Snowpatch col — tiny ants everywhere. Our excitement increased as we departed from the masses. The Howser towers, in all their glory, waved us goodbye as we descended the Vowell Glacier. The spires of the Howser massif are like good friends; I always enjoy seeing them, whether I’m in the Bugaboos or on some peak in the Rockies.

The peaks around the Malloy igloo are stunning. The west face of Wallace Peak begs to be climbed, and Pernicular Pass, with its standing granite fingers, adds to the beauty of this wild place. Finding the Malloy igloo was surely appreciated, for we had arranged for a cache to be flown in thanks to our good friends Theresa Becker and Ian Thom. We

were also happy to find the hut because it is a great refuge from the wind. Our group was impressed by the hut register. I had no idea that so many people skied the Bugs-to-Rogers Pass traverse. We were one of the very few who visited this remote hut in summer.

I felt honoured to sleep in this hut, for it had previously been one of the original fibre-glass igloos at the Bugaboos, long before my time. Once the Kain hut was built, one of the two original igloos there was picked up by a helicopter for transport to the Malloy site. The line holding it onto the chopper broke and the igloo was badly damaged. The other igloo was packed and shipped to the Malloy site instead. A poor spot was chosen for the hut, and each spring it filled with glacial silt. The igloo was eventually damaged beyond repair and was replaced with the present igloo; this structure is the original igloo that was dropped from the chopper and repaired.



Looking at Climax Col, far right. photo: Glenn Reisenhofer

Way off in the distance, we could see a beautiful summit named in honour of James Monroe Thorington. Thorington co-wrote the first guide to the Canadian Rockies with Howard Palmer, wrote the first guide to climbing in the Interior region and climbed with the famous Austrian Conrad Kain. We planned on setting up our third campsite below this great peak, but we would get there only after slogging all day across the Conrad Icefield.

We had just managed to navigate through a difficult section of crevasses when we saw in the distance two people ascending towards us. They were not loaded down with heavy packs and they gained elevation rapidly. When we all finally met each other, our group was blown away by these two people. One fellow was in his sixties and the other may have been 17. They had only one small pack between them, no harnesses and no rope, and they were super-keen on reaching the summit of Mount Conrad that day. We warned them about the crevasses ahead, and they went on their merry way. We all shook our heads in disbelief.

We finally made it to the end of the glacier that day, only to realize that we hadn't travelled to our original destination, Crystalline Pass. Tired and disoriented, we set up camp at an intricately beautiful place and enjoyed the fact that we could now relax. After a day like that, the first item that comes out of your pack is the Scotch, which was thoroughly appreciated by all — including Thorington, as fine alpenglow danced on his summit pyramid.

Our first overcast day of the trip occurred on Day 4. Before we descended into Crystalline Pass, we were astounded by the sheer distance we had to go that day to get to and over Climax col. I felt my knees

grow weak. On the way down, Chris decided to wrestle with a wasp nest and got stung several times. Later, at the pass, he joked about it being the fastest he had moved on the trip so far. Scott got out his crash pad and worked on a few boulder problems while Kevin and I pored over the maps.

Our journey now traversed below several peaks, passing beautiful tarns and numerous flower gardens, to the loose, scree-covered Climax col. At first we were not sure whether this was indeed Climax col, so I volunteered to hike up and check. Beyond the col a new world unfolded, but we still had to get everyone up including our heavy packs. Acting as our guinea pigs, Chris and Scott were the first to descend our quickly rigged *via ferrata*. We noticed Scott throwing his axe in the air in disgust once he got down. Kevin and I looked at each other and wondered what was going on. Then Kevin noticed that the tent Scott had been carrying had come untied and had rolled unstoppably to the bottom of the snow slope we had to traverse. We looked at each other and laughed, crying out "Junior Snow Ranger!"

After an eternity, we made it off the Hume glacier. To make matters worse, Scott and I had made it down an hour before the others and we figured that we would set up one of the tents and get supper going to ease the pain of the day. By sheer bad luck, the two of us together had neither the proper tent-and-pole combination nor a stove with a pot. Needless to say, morale was low and we prepared and ate supper in the dark. The next day would be a short one.

The following morning, the sun was shining as we found ourselves camped beside a beautiful waterfall that cascaded down a huge slab of brown rock. We slowly got moving and strolled towards Snowman Pass. This

was our first day dealing with bush, and it wasn't so bad. At the pass, a large lake tempts you to stay for awhile. If it were close to any road, it would be visited constantly. The little lakes nearby provided us with a great opportunity for bathing.

From Snowman Pass, an enjoyable, unnamed pass is crossed at GR 961388. I bet that the summits on both sides of the pass are unclimbed. The Valley of the Lakes was a special place to camp, featuring outstanding scenery, good friends and some much-needed and well-deserved rest.

Dawn brought heavy clouds, and the weather broke just as we were leaving camp. We were heading over Syncline Pass (a.k.a. Cold Shiver col) that day, but for some mysterious reason we veered slightly to the northeast and proceeded to go off course without knowing it. This eventually put us in the wrong drainage, resulting in lots of side-hilling and cliff negotiation — all in the rain, of course. After a while we figured everything out, only to venture off track again. This time we thought we were going over Syphax Pass but found a glacier at the top. What was going on? Why couldn't we figure this out? Cold, tired and thoroughly wet, the gang found its morale sinking to an all-time low. At least we got to go downhill this time.

One rap at the top of the glacier brought us to some easy terrain. We all thought that we were finished with the difficult part of the descent. Lower down, we realized that we weren't so lucky and that we had truly messed up. Unbelievably, we were standing at the top of an ice wall — absolutely incredible. We searched desperately for a way off but found none. Our alternatives were to either go back up (undesirable) or rappel several times (unimaginably scary). After collectively deciding to descend, we went about setting up the first rap. I drilled out an Abalakov, but we couldn't figure out how to thread it. I suggested using a pen and maybe pinching the end of the thread and pulling it out that way. This didn't help very much, but Kevin came to the rescue with his suggestion of using a safety pin from the first-aid supplies. With the safety pin stuck in the pen, an Abalakov hook was made.

The shortest rap distance went down the same funnel as most of the rockfall, but we didn't know that until the first guy rapped. Textbook-sized rocks flew through the air as both Scott and I were rappelling. Scott had to dive behind a serac to avoid getting hit. Here we were, receiving the worst rockfall any of us had ever encountered — and we were backpacking, plus we had no helmets on. This all added up to a very bad situation.

When we reached Malachite Creek some of our gang were on the verge of hypothermia. Once we quickly set up the tents and got hot chocolate in their bellies, they were warm and asleep in minutes. Kevin's wonder tarp saved us from misery as we dined outside, amused by the pools of water cascading off the top of the tarp. There wasn't much cheering that evening, and everyone headed

to sleep after dinner. It was a day that definitely needed to end.

Morning presented more rain, and this caused us to abort our plans to go over Malachite col (we couldn't tell where it was, anyway). Instead, we headed over to a col on Carbonate Mountain at GR 966482. We didn't want a repeat of the previous day and so played it conservatively. On our map, an old mining road was drawn on the other side of Carbonate Mountain. We decided to go for the road and see where it would lead us. The road proved a blessing, for it was in perfect shape and quickly took us down to Bobbie Burns Creek. We found a tiny hut situated at GR 948509 on the west branch of Carbonate Creek just before the two branches of the creek join together (where the road crosses Carbonate Creek for a second time on the way down). I momentarily thought about how nice it would be to stop there, but I kept the thought to myself; we had to get to our cache at the McMurdo hut, for we were totally out of food.

Once down and across Bobbie Burns Creek, we picked up a rather good trail leading up the creek. At times we marvelled at how good this trail was and wondered why it was in such wonderful shape. Much later, we learned that a new hut had been placed at International Basin and that the trail we were on likely led there. We then had to veer off this trail and head up a steep and slippery hill towards the Spillimacheen Glacier. This was Pass No. 2 for the day, and we all felt the pain. This was also Day 7 and only our second time dealing with bush. Not bad so far, considering that we were in B.C.

Finally we made it to the Spillimacheen Glacier. Now we knew that the McMurdo hut was not too far away. It would have helped had we known where the trail was leading up to the David basin; oh well, it's all good training, right — thrashing through the bush? As we travelled over huge, wet logs

and crossed mossy, leg-breaking granite boulders, my mind went into autopilot. I remembered packing the cache at home, and I was trying to recall the goodies that were in it. All I could remember was stuffing my daughter Elsa in with the food to see if she would fit, and then a smile crept across my face.

On our eighth day we finally took a full rest day, but it was not a happy one. Both Chris and Kevin decided to bail out at this point of the trip. A fellow from Salt Spring Island was visiting the hut and offered these two mutineers a drive out. At first this was very disappointing news — particularly painful when you haven't had a coffee yet. Gradually we all got used to it, and then we proceeded to get out the bottle of Scotch. Well, it was a rest day, after all.

Scott and I continued, but we deviated from the original ski route to continue along a ridge system from Silent Pass to Caribou Pass at GR 796690. The nature of the trip changed totally, for now there were only two of us and the terrain was completely open. All day long we walked along the ridgetop, glancing down on little tarns and enjoying the immense peaks to the west of us. Again there was no bush because we luckily hit the Parks Canada border, which consists of a 10-m-wide swath of felled trees. We arrived dog-tired at a wondrous little campsite at Caribou Pass.

A grand Parks Canada trail took us all the way down to the Beaver River, where we crossed on a cable car. Being a novice cable car crosser, I now know to wear gloves in order to prevent metal slivers from entering one's flesh as one pulls oneself across. Another splendid trail then took us to below the Deville Glacier. The trail disappears below the glacier, but the terrain is fairly open. We made sure to make noise and to watch our step here, for large, fast-moving brown things lurk in the bush.

A day spent at the Glacier Circle hut is a day well spent. All day long we relaxed and hung out in the sun. Scott had three naps. I was sitting by a mossy quartzite block in front of the hut when I started to listen to the stream behind me. I turned to watch the water and noticed light softly touching a slow-moving pool. The light illuminated the sand at the bottom of the pool and reflected upward to cast light on the bottom of a branch overhanging the pool. The slow, rhythmic rippling of the water made the light on the branch dance with joy.

Our last day saw us get out of bed early. We wanted to be as far across the Illecillewaet N ev  as possible before the full force of the sun turned the snow to mush. We followed what were possibly wolverine tracks. The day seemed to go very quickly, for soon we could see the Trans-Canada Highway, a sight that created mixed emotions in me. A few hours of downhill saw Scott, Carol and me thumbing for a ride on the road. It seemed anticlimactic to be hitchhiking only 4 km from Rogers Pass after travelling all that distance. I felt sad.

I think that this may have been the finest backcountry trip I've ever done. It felt remote, had excellent weather for ten out of twelve days and has five huts en route; 95 per cent of the route is bush-free (a little bit on three days); and we're still all good friends — aside from Carol, for she got a free ride the whole trip and that's still a bone of contention. The only drawback was our knees. We all had severe knee pain for days on end. I definitely see the beauty of skiing this trip, but you just can't see all the intricate natural world when it's buried under snow. Chic Scott said that we were mad for hiking this route, and maybe he's right; but I'd rather smell fresh flowers than break endless trail in a whiteout.

NEW CLIMBS IN THE ADAMANT RANGE

Fred Beckey recruited and led our group from Squamish and Pemberton, B.C., into the Adamant Range this summer, which produced a couple of new, high-quality freeclimbs on good granite. Our first and main objective was Gothic Peak. Fred's photo of its aesthetic and virgin south face helped fuel our inspiration to board the chopper and do our duty of exploring the vertical world. Andre Ike and I found a continuous dihedral system that went for six pitches up the southeast corner before hitting the fat, white feldspar band that wraps the entire summit. An upward and leftward traverse through this feature led us to an exit corner and the summit, eight pitches later. The climbing went free at 5.11a, the crux being on the first pitch, although the 5.10+ off-width

section of the third pitch provided without doubt the most entertainment. A good variety of corner-crack and face climbing made up the rest of the route.

Later that week, John Chilton and Lisa Korthals climbed four new pitches up the south face of the Stickle. Their attention then turned elsewhere (basecamp in Thor meadows is a very distracting place), and they offered the unfinished Stickle line to Andre and me. We obliged; by late afternoon the next day, we were on its summit while Lisa and Johnny yodelled at us from the summit of neighbouring Adamant Mountain. The route followed a steep, crescent-shaped corner for three pitches of 5.10 to a ridge, giving two pitches of moderate climbing, and finally went up a beautifully exposed headwall giving two

more spectacular rope lengths of technical moves up to 5.11-. This put us in a little notch on the summit ridge, where we discovered a perfect 5.9 handrail that led us to the summit. We each led and down-led this pitch, as there was little available for an anchor on the summit and the notch was the ideal spot from which to start rappelling. Later that night and for the second time that week, we had to find our way through a sketchy maze of crevasses on the Adamant Glacier in the dark. It's amazing how fast snow bridges and footprints melt in thirty-degree weather in the middle of August!

For more info on these routes, check out Dave Jones' new guidebook Selkirks North, due out in spring 2002.

JON WALSH

GIMLI PEAK, NEW ROUTE

MIREK HLADIK



Gimli Peak. Space Buttress ascends the left skyline. The standard 5.9 route follows the ridge facing the camera.

It was late afternoon in midsummer, and my friend Dan Mack and I were sitting down after a great day of climbing. We had just come down from the classic Southeast Ridge on Gimli Peak in Valhalla Park in southern British Columbia. The sun was about to hide behind the Prestley group and was lighting all the west aspects in a deep red glow. It was hard to miss the prominent west ridge of Gimli with its invitation to go play on it.

“That line *must* be done,” we said almost simultaneously.

“Do you think there’s a continuous crack system?” Dan likes his cracks wide; I personally hate them (or, rather, don’t know how to climb them).

“What about that roof at the top?” I asked, as I prefer steep face climbs to unprotected squeeze challenges.

As dinner finished cooking, the sun gave us our last ten minutes of warmth. Our bellies full, we had a quick talk with John Jameson and were ready for bed. “One day we have to get on that puppy,” said Dan. The next day it rained and we went back to reality.

It took us another year to get our act together and find ourselves at the base with all the toys we needed. Gimli Peak is only an hour’s drive from our home town of Nelson. The hike to the camp takes two hours. We scoped a line just on the dividing buttress between the west and south faces — two crack systems with some blank sections in between. We invited the Bosch Bulldog to come along with us just in case. We could see a large notch directly above, which gave us

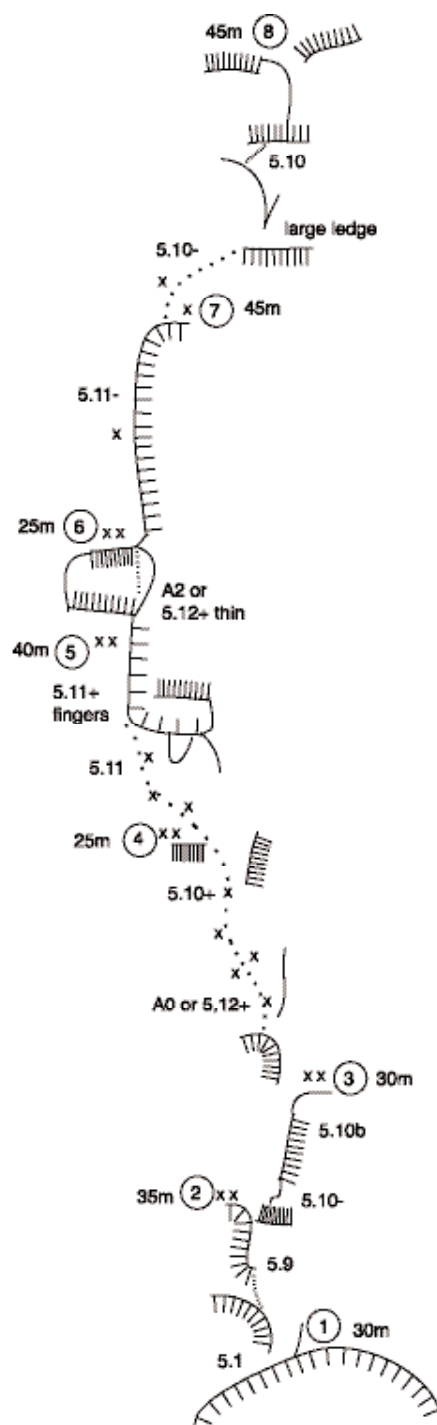
hope that we would be able to get through the final roof. “This thing is steep,” one of us mentioned.

The first section started with 20 m of fourth-class climbing to a stance. After a step left, Pitch 2 brought us into thin flakes and fun face climbing. We moved up clean, featured rock covered with horizontal dikes and 15 m of hand crack to reach a messy ledge. We let some loose blocks go, and now there are two bolts there for a good belay. To get on the next pitch, we had to climb through a 4-ft. split roof, which put us in a 100-ft. dihedral corner featuring a constant water drip — Chinese water torture? We went up left to a small ledge. The Bulldog came in handy here, and the first bolt on lead went in. I tried a free move on a small, rounded hold. It wasn’t good, and I went flying but not too far. “Time is ticking; let’s just aid it!” I said. I placed four more bolts into the left-facing corner, and finally I could stem. I saw that a blank section with no pro’ was coming soon, so I fired one more bolt in from an awkward position. Not much for my feet — oh, shoot... flying again, this time a 25-footer with the drill in my hand. “All OK?” “Yeah, all OK,” we yelled back to each other.

After resetting my head, I went back at it. The hole was half in when my damn foot went again; this time, luckily, I had a good handhold — the “Bulldog” drill bit was in 1.5 in. and bent at ninety degrees.

“Don’t hang on that for too long!” Dan yelled.

I managed to put a bolt in a shallow



Space Buttress (V, 5.11+ A2)
Gimli Peak,
Valhalla Provincial Park
F.A.: Mirek Hladik, David Lussier,
Dan Mack. 2001.

hole and to bend the bit back with a hammer.

“Good, we can carry on!” Dan called up.

It was time to get on a perfect ledge and switch leads. Two 3/8 bolts for a station will do. Dan followed the last pitch and was able to free almost everything. We had another 25 ft. of face climbing with no pro^o and then a large roof with a crack under it. Dan put in three more bolts and headed for a good 3-in. ledge that had a potential pin placement.

“I’m getting a little pumped here,” he said and laid a stack of pins on the ledge so that he could depump. “I think I’m gonna fly,” he called down to me.

Dan had some of my favourite pins on that ledge, so I suggested that he clip the pins onto himself before the departure. He didn’t find that funny!

We had had enough. “Let’s lower down!” Dan called to me, and we soon got back to earth.

It took us another two years before we went back to our line on Gimli — mainly due to work, and trips elsewhere, but also to Dan’s injuries (Mr. Off-the-couch 5.11!) and access trail building (Mr. Kill-yourself-with-a-machete). This next attempt started early; we

planned to clean the route as much as we could while climbing up to our high point from the previous visit. Dan continued past his lower-off carabiner and went under a roof with a thin crack. He made a hard move to get over it and climbed up to a left-facing corner and our first hanging belay station. After another overhang and a thin section of clean aid, we had a solid ledge to set up a belay — “nicely exposed”.

Now we could clearly see our final pitch, a large roof with a notch to get through. First we had to do the prominent, 45-m open-book corner featuring a promising crack for protection. It was late afternoon and we were concerned because the weather was approaching faster than we would have liked. Dan was about halfway up the pitch when we felt our first drop of rain. Not good! Neither one of us wanted to go down, but going up was not an option. So there we were again, rappelling off a super-steep wall that had a hard sideways section where we had to pull each other to the anchors.

Later that summer, Dan injured his wrist and was unable to go back to our route. We decided to ask our friend David Lucier to finish the climb with me. Dave and I went up

to fix the first two pitches and got ready for the next day. This was my fourth time yo-yoing up.

The early start helped us get to the high point quickly. David was climbing well and freed most of the hard sections. He took the lead on the crack corner where Dan had lowered off the previous time. David performed with great stamina on an overhanging open-book corner. My next lead started with a bit of run-out 5.9 face to the ledge, then I moved left onto a slanting, shelf-like ledge that had a monster flake balancing on it. How the hell would I go around this? If I pushed it over, it would cut my rope for sure. I managed to dance around it and get into a 3-in. crack above. After finishing this pitch with a perfect “lip” move, I was standing on top. When David climbed past the scary flake, I suggested trying to push it off. He gently touched it, and the whole thing went for a sail. We watched an explosion of rock and dirt at least one hundred metres out from the base. Cool!

David soon poked his head up from under the lip with a great big grin on his face. Now we just had to figure out the name — how about *Space Buttress*?

A SMART CHOICE KURT WERBY

As the weekend approached, the customary preparations were taking place. The usual Wednesday night call was made to one of my climbing partners and friends, Anthony Camazzetto. “So what’s up for the weekend?” I asked curiously.

He replied, “You know that peak about ten kilometres before Rogers Pass on the south side of the highway — the one you only get a look at from that key spot along the road?”

“That’s Mount Smart, isn’t it?” I asked.

“Yup. Kevin and I were scoping it out last weekend from the highway. The weather looks great, so we should go do it,” he shot back.

So the plans were made and on Friday after work I picked up Anthony and another friend and climbing partner of ours, Kevin Hanson. We grabbed a pizza for the road trip and headed for Glacier National Park. In between pieces of pizza, we thumbed through the guidebook in order to choose our route. With the information from *The Columbia Mountains of Canada — Central*, it was decided to approach up Smart Creek from the north and climb the north ridge / east face *Palmer Route*.

We arrived at the Illecillewaet campground full of pizza and full of hope for the route the next day. Saturday morning dawned bright and early. Following the information in the guidebook, we headed for the drainage below the north face of Mount



Approaching the northwest ridge of Mount Smart. photos: Kurt Werby

Smart — the Smart Creek drainage. The guidebook suggests crossing the Illecillewaet River on an old railway bridge. One small thing impeded our progress: the freaking bridge is gone! The tracks were rerouted to our side of the river. So we decided to find another way across. After a couple of hours spent thrashing up and down the north bank of the Illecillewaet, we abandoned our attempt to cross the river. Unless you have

some form of water transportation and knowledge of running rapids, there’s not much hope. We even followed a black bear up and down through the bush, thinking it might know a way across the raging river. No such luck. Back to the car and the guidebook and other options for our approach. Our next option was about 5 km west on the Trans-Canada Highway, where there is an abandoned parks trail that runs up the next



above: *Anthony Camazetto on the summit of Mount Smart*
 below: *Kevin Hanson topping out on the crux pitch of Mount Smart's Northwest Ridge*



mentioned ridge. We headed southward for the northwest ridge of Mount Smart. Some easy scrambling on sound rock with a few patches of snow and stunning views brought us to the base of our route, where an impressive gendarme marks the beginning of the technical climbing.

Kevin was the fortunate one to get the first and crux pitch. The guide recommends turning the difficulties on the left (north) side of the ridge, at 5.3. But given the dodgy snow conditions, Kevin climbed on the right (west) side and figured it to go at 5.6/5.7 without a whole lot for placing protection. He surmounted the pitch with excellent form and belayed Anthony and me up after him. A quality pitch with very solid quartzite and fine exposure. Next was a blocky chimney, which Anthony took — a solid fourth-class pitch. From there we used running belays for a few hundred metres to the top on mostly fourth-class rock that was generally

drainage to the west of Mount Smart. The *Palmer Route* was thrown out the window, as there is no access to the Smart Creek drainage from the Flat Creek trail.

We shouldered our packs and headed along the Flat Creek trail through pleasant forest for about 5 km to where we had to turn off and head for a ridge that parallels the trail. This ridge gives access to the northwest ridge of our chosen peak. With the trail at our backs, we started to climb towards the intended ridge. The bushwhacking can only be described as character-building! And it threw everything it had at us — extremely steep slopes covered in willows, alders, blowdowns and devil's club that I am still removing from my knees. After a couple of hours of thrashing, we broke out into beautiful alpine meadows covered in glacier lilies. We decided on a break; it was a great place to sit and reflect on the task at hand. After another hour or so, we reached snow and the previously

good. The position was incredible, with lots of exposure down both the north and the west faces. The route is comparable in character to the Northwest Ridge of Mount Sir Donald, though not as long.

We topped out quite late and quickly retreated back down the ridge using a mix of downclimbing and very sketchy rappels. Some pitons would be useful on the descent for rap' stations. We reached the base of the route and the remainder of our gear rather late, so our plan was to get as far down the approach ridge as we could before darkness fell. Out of water, very dehydrated and low on food, we could feel our morales sinking. But somebody was looking out for us that night: Anthony stepped into a hole in the snow and discovered the only water for kilometres. Stomachs and bottles filled, we quickly made our way down in the falling darkness to the saddle where we had gained the ridge that morning. As Yvon Chouinard says: "If you take bivy gear, you will use bivy gear." An unplanned bivy emerged, since we weren't ready to thrash back through the bush in total darkness. We sat in our bivy bags, eating the little food we had left and sipping Bushmills from Kevin's flask, before darkness put us to sleep — or was it the Bushmills?

A beautiful sunrise was our wake-up call to get up and thaw out some rather cold extremities after the crisp night's sleep. Going back down wasn't nearly as bad, maybe because it helped my cold body warm up. Upon arriving back at the car, we decided to head for Revelstoke and the Frontier Restaurant for a "Smart" breakfast.

If you are looking for a climb that doesn't see any traffic and offers spectacular views and quality climbing with great position, then go check out the Northwest Ridge of Mount Smart (III, 5.7). There's a pair of Arnette sunglasses for the taking at the saddle where we bivied.



the rockies

MOUNT OBELISK: FIRST RECORDED ASCENT

MATT REYNOLDS

ROOOCKKK! Dangling freely, I don't dare look up. Instantly I hear the zing of the stone whip past me and I think, Whew, that was a big one. Then comes the dull thud...

My companions and I are on our way down from the upper reaches of Mount Obelisk. Our camp is nestled in amongst sandstone and quartz boulders 2000 ft. below us. Even in June, the tarn beside our tent is frozen solid. For Keith and me it is our first visit to Kakwa Provincial Park.

It all began one rainy spring day when I got a call from Bryce: "Hey Matt, how's it going? So you got to check out this area in the Kakwa. You can drive all the way in there now. Awesome quartzite — looks like the next Grand Teton. Obelisk is unclimbed and there's no easy way up the thing."

Strangely, it wasn't until he mentioned "unclimbed" and "no easy way up" that I truly started to pay attention. Immediately after the phone call, I started looking for more information. I found out that researching this area was a bit tougher than for most other areas in the Canadian Rockies. The Sir Alexander group really hasn't seen much mountaineering at all. I did, however, find an article in the *Canadian Alpine Journal*. Glen Boles wrote about this area in 1979:

The objectives ... we had in mind were Obelisk Peak, Nilah Peak, Pommel Mtn., Mt. Kitchi, and of course Mt. Sir Alexander. Obelisk, the best prize, was a question mark, for it was a long way from our camp and we were not sure how accessible it would be.

Boles' party did achieve several first ascents, but Obelisk remained unclimbed. What really amazed me was that prior to this 1978 expedition, Mount Sir Alexander itself had only been climbed once — in 1929, by N.D. Waffl, Helen Buck and A. J. Gilmour. They climbed the west face, after travelling for weeks from the Jasper area just to get to the mountain. This place was really starting to sound like the hidden gem Bryce had described, and I was soon convinced that he was really onto something.

My great friend Keith strengthened our party to three. And so it was that in the darkness of June 19 Keith and I set off from Jasper to meet Bryce coming from Prince George, at the turnoff on Highway 16 for the Walker Creek road.

Access into Kakwa Park seemed great to start with. Other than noticing a steaming pile of bear shit every hundred metres, we found it to be a really pleasant and scenic drive. Unfortunately, the well-travelled logging road gradually deteriorated into a seldom-travelled logging road. We eventually arrived at a deep-looking puddle that seemed quite impassable. This "puddle" was about 100 m long. We could see where the road entered and exited, but for about half a rope length we could only guess at its path, hoping to avoid sinking to unknown depths. With a certain clairvoyance, Bryce manoeuvred us safely through this swamp, and after almost 100 km of back roads we finally caught our first glimpse of Mount Obelisk.

Immediately my heart sank and I thought, If this is the next Grand Teton, I don't even want to visit the real Grand Teton! We couldn't help but comment on how shitty the rock looked on that pile of dung, Obelisk. Surrounded by spectacularly glaciated peaks, Mount Obelisk kinda just squats quite demurely in comparison to its surroundings. Through binoculars, it soon became apparent that it had remained unclimbed for good reason.

We all really tried to be positive about the situation, but we could only look at overhanging dirt for so long before the reality of it gave us the old "Who's fucking idea was this anyways, Bryce?" feeling. So we kept on driving — another 15 minutes to the end of the road, that is. We contemplated options for a long time. In the end, we just couldn't believe it and had to drive back for another look: "Yup, still looks like shit."

I'm not entirely sure how or why, but we ended up deciding to give it a shot anyway. A quick journey in our leaky canoe got us across the McGregor River, and, with questioning thoughts, we were on our way.

Our objective was a small lake at the foot of Mount Obelisk. It appeared on the map to be a perfect spot for our basecamp. Only a short bit of ugliness through dense trees stood in our way. In just an hour we had gained some serious elevation. We also became pleasantly surprised at the ground cover. The ledges we traversed and surmounted on the way up involved some quality climbing. This raised our spirits and numbed the pain of alder bush up every orifice on my body! Maybe, just maybe, the rock wouldn't be that bad. Only three hours of steep hiking brought us to camp. An amazing place! We were tucked away in a small and private cirque. The crystal tarn showing on the map was located quite symmetrically in its centre and was still choked with ice even in June. Snow couloirs led from the tarn to the only other practical escape: a double pass separated by a 150-m-high rock tower. The tower just so happened to be the spitting image of Obelisk itself, so we dubbed it "Mini Me".

Since we had a few hours of daylight left, our next task was to actually find a route up this impossibly overhanging mountain. The map contours certainly didn't help much. The symbol for "rock cliffs at angles greater than 90 degrees" seemed to dominate the map on all aspects of this mountain. Having seen nothing appealing from our vantage point, we decided to wander up the snow couloir between Mount Obelisk and Mini Me. That's when things really started looking good. It became more and more apparent the closer we got that the overhanging dirt that we had assumed made up the cliffs on Obelisk was actually solid bands of quartzite. Arrival at Mini Me col was a celebration! We all became so excited at the quality of the rock that we kept deciding to climb higher on Mini Me to get a better look — only I don't think we really needed a better look. It was just good, fun climbing. Besides, I had long made up my mind that there was no way up this mountain without aid-climbing gear or the ability to on-sight 5.14! The pure enjoyment, however, of being with cool



above: *That high-quality Rockies stone.* left: *Bryce on the crux pitch*

people in such a cool place kept us all in great spirits.

As night loomed, we found two rock towers within Mini Me. Both were about 10 m high and were screaming for an ascent. Bryce summited the larger of the two and I attempted the smaller one. As I slowly made my way up this terribly exposed tower, I kept thinking of a picture I'd seen of Don Forest in the *Canadian Alpine Journal*, where he's climbing some tower in the Kananaskis, I believe. I just had to get the

hero shot of me standing atop the pedestal. After half an hour of tomfoolery, however, I never did stand on top of the pedestal as Don Forest and Bryce did. Nonetheless I felt quite content with our little playground. We then hightailed it down the couloir, mostly on our bums, racing the coming stars.

Back in camp and still without a definite route plan, we discussed returning with aid-climbing gear. We all agreed that it looked a little beyond our scope, but, hey, we were there, and why not just go for it and see what happened. We decided on the southeast ridge. After a good night's rest we started up over the intriguing sandstone and quartzite talus. By mid-morning we were climbing short, steep sections of beautiful quartzite and scrambling wonderfully exposed sections in between. Surprisingly, it wasn't the technical difficulty of the climb that put our tails between our legs on the ascent, it was Mother Nature. Having experienced wet quartzite before and knowing how much exposed fourth- and fifth-class terrain lay below us, we unanimously decided on getting a head start on the weather. Tomorrow is another day, after all. That was when the proverbial shit hit the fan.

There were 10 m of air below me before I would land on a snow-covered ledge from my free-hanging rappel. Our tracks in the soft snow in the small moat made the ledge we were rappelling onto a lot more secure. But in reality the ledge sloped at about 30 degrees for 20 m, and then there was space for 2000 ft. down to the lake below. It looked easy enough to walk casually along

this ledge to a big scree slope around the corner. This was where both Keith and Bryce awaited my arrival. As I came closer to the ledge, Bryce walked out onto the exposed perch to give me a hand with the ropes.

*

"ROOOCKKK!!!" There are several distinct sounds in climbing, and several different ways to shout warnings and obscenities. I know that Keith meant it when he yelled rock. And that thud — I also know that the rock didn't hit another rock, it hit something a lot less dense: Bryce.

After the two seconds that could have been an hour which it took for the situation to sink in, I look down. Bryce has taken the rock right in the biceps. With one arm he clutches his biceps and with his injured arm he clings to the rock wall, slowly collapsing from the severe pain.

"HOLD ON BRYCE — JUST HANG ON!" I scream.

Bryce's mouth is open in obvious agony, but the shock won't let anything come out.

"HANG ON!" I land and swing over to where he is now crouched and on the verge of passing out. I am able to grab the top of his pack, and a huge feeling of relief sweeps over me. Keith comes over to help out; gripping onto Bryce's pack, he walks him over to the scree ledge.

"Sorry, guys," says Bryce, "I think I broke my arm."

He's white as a ghost but quickly recovering; we discuss the gravity of the situation. The rain was a concern before, but now, after Bryce's unfortunate meeting with a solid

object, the weather is looking that much worse. Almost comically, Bryce suddenly becomes overly concerned about the guiding work he will have to miss, blaming himself for the random rock flying out of nowhere. Keith and I look at our meagre, ultralight first-aid kit. I grab a triangular, and Keith abandons the first-aid kit and goes to our repair kit: a couple of wraps of duct tape. We bandage Bryce up as best we can and plan our way down. I realize now how glad I am that Keith is with us. Our newly appointed porter transfers everyone's gear into his own pack and guides us down the mountain at the front of the rope. Bryce, I conclude, climbs better with one arm tied behind his back than either Keith or I can with both arms. Whenever things get tricky, I shout words of encouragement and keep the rope bloody tight. The mountains truly are forgiving! Quietly, the three of us make our way down the mountain, deep in thought.

About halfway down, memories of past climbs I have done with Bryce come flooding in. There was the time we had to descend unknown terrain on Mount Fryatt in the dark. Cold and wet, we traversed what I believe is the longest ledge system in existence; it was never more than 5 ft. wide as we walked, scrambled and downclimbed for close to a kilometre, praying the whole time that it would connect. Then there was the time we had to bivvy near the summit of Mount Kerkeslin in an electrical storm. At first I thought that the lightning would be our end. Then I thought that I was going to freeze to death. The topper was when we finally got up from a restless sleep to find that at least 60 cm of snow had dumped on top of us. We somehow managed an escape with our rope several feet shorter than when we had started. There was also the time our stove broke and we had no way to get water on a three-day ski trip. While I was in the middle of digging a snow cave, Bryce giggled nervously and mentioned that I shouldn't work up too much of a sweat. There was even the time we had casually driven up to Mount Norquay with his brother. After travelling the entire winding and twisty road, we turned into the parking lot and the bloody front tire fell off. Thank God the tire waited till we were going slow and straight in the parking lot and not going "the speed limit" on one of those steep switchbacks. I was really beginning to wonder if we should be climbing together.

Then I start to think fondly of how the two of us teamed up to get through all of these events, without even a mild disagreement. I can't think of a better person to have with me when the shit hits the fan — or the seat of my pants, for that matter.

Before we know it, the next day is dawning and Bryce is becoming more and more convinced that his arm isn't really broken after all. Regardless, it's time to get Popeye back home and to have his arm checked out by someone with a little more skill than either Keith or I possess. By early afternoon

only the river separates us from the trucks. Based on previous scouting, we plan on floating downriver half a kilometre and arriving safely on the other side at a nice big eddy. Closer inspection, however, reveals a grim reality. Just when you think it's over... Our options are to run a rock garden, attempt a small section of bigger rapids or try and hit an eddy the size of a bathtub on the outside of a fast-flowing corner. All of my river experience tells me that the bathtub eddy is bad news. But even with a dangerous log-jam below this bathtub, it appears to be our best option — especially since this is the quickest way across and we have discovered a leak in our canoe on the first outing.

Keith and I have done some whitewater canoeing earlier in the spring on the mighty Athabasca. We make a good team in the water, but even so the thought of launching into that river produces for me the same feeling as when I jumped off the high diving board as a kid for the first time. I try to psych myself up. I even count to three, but that doesn't work. Thinking back, I realize that I never did go off that diving board again. Sheer will makes me push off, and with a landing that jolts the canoe back a couple of feet, we finish our adventure. We came, we saw, we got our asses kicked!

The remainder of the summer is a busy one for me. It is the first year I decide to take the season off from work and to devote the next few months towards progressing as a mountain guide. I end up in many "classic" mountaineering destinations, but there really is something special about the Kakwa. My guide's exam, taken at the end of the summer, solidifies a great season but a frustrating one. In a matter of days my world comes crashing down. Another career setback! (I don't like to use the term failure). At the same time I also learn that my Grandma, who has been battling cancer, passed away while I was on my exam. After her funeral in Ontario, I have a day to pack up and move. My partner, Tracy, has quit her job in Jasper to go back to school, which means temporarily relocating to Prince George.

All of this has me in a bit of a funk, with not much ambition to climb. On the bright side, Bryce and I have a chance to hang out in Prince George. Bryce, by the way, has found out that his arm isn't broken; only a few weeks after the incident, he flashes a 5.12. Unbelievable! Like me, though, he becomes obsessed with Mount Obelisk.

Only a week after I move to "the Big City", Bryce gets me a job working in forestry, something I haven't done for almost 10 years. I am a beetle prober, and although I'm very excited to have an income after the serious debt incurred from the summer, it certainly isn't getting me out of my funk.

That's when the call from Bryce comes again: "I think we should climb Obelisk this weekend." Instantly I perk up. I am excited to go alpine climbing again!

There are very few times in my life when I know that I am in the right spot doing the

right thing with the right person. Climbing Obelisk on this weekend is one of those times for me. With light overnight packs, we ford the river, without the canoe this time. We fight our way through that fucking alder again, and then just keep on going up the same ridge. When darkness falls, we find ourselves on a perfectly flat, messy meadow that bumps up against a 5-m-high and 30-m-wide wall of solid quartzite. The splitter cracks look as worthy as any granite classic, albeit 5 m high. It truly is a unique spot.

After we dine on pizza and Shake and Bake chicken, Bryce pulls out the magic.

"I haven't smoked pot in years," I tell him.

"Neither have I," he replies, "but I just happened upon some and well ... you want to smoke it?"

Not even Bryce realizes what he's doing for me at this point. I remember a conversation that I had with my Grandma on a flight back from my sister's wedding just a couple of years ago. Somehow we ended up on the topic of marijuana. "For gosh sakes," she said, "I just can't understand why your Grandpa shouldn't be able to use it to help out with his back." The conversation surprised me at the time — after all, she is my Grandma.

It is really nice remembering that up on the mountain — knowing that she is still with me, knowing that she will always be with me.

"You bet I want to smoke it!" I exclaim.

It isn't exactly medicinal purposes the way Grandma and I were discussing on the plane, but for me it is the right place and the right time and, in a funny sort of way, it *is* medicine. In just a day and a night I am able to reflect on my summer in positive ways and to really think about the important things in my life. Here I am, pleasantly stoned at 8000 ft., camped in perfect conditions and set to make a first ascent with a true friend. Suddenly the most important thing in my life is tossing boulders down the cliffsides in order to watch the trail of sparks jump way down there under the black sky and the carpet of stars. We are giggling like little kids, and life is all good once again.

The next morning brings perfect weather and a magical sunrise. We trundle off and make good time over the terrain we covered on our first attempt. Bryce leads the more technical pitches, and other than a small glitch that stalls us, things go as smooth as silk. By midday we are looking onto Mount Sir Alexander, Mount Ida and the spectacular view of the most recent and best-looking summit cairn in the Rockies. It is a feeling I will remember forever.

In a mountaineering world of firsts — for speed, for seasons, for sexes, for youngest or oldest, or for this style or that style — and all the blah blah that goes with it, it is Keith, Bryce, Mount Obelisk, and our two short journeys almost five months apart which remind me what mountaineering is really all about. It's about your friends.

CRYOPHOBIA: THE FEAR OF ICE

SEAN ISAAC

Located on the edge of the mountains separating the peaks from the prairies, the Waiparous River valley overlooks the treed foothills sprawling to the east. The setting is one of pure wilderness: towering walls of grey and yellow limestone, dense spruce forests, and even wild horses galloping across wind-scoured grasslands.

The Waiparous is infamous for dishing up high adventure, especially in winter. Carcating snowdrifts, rutted jeep tracks, roaring chinook winds and heinous river crossings are just some of the obstacles one will encounter on a typical ice-climbing journey into this untamed valley. Now that ice climbing has become very popular, lineups on the classics are the norm. Not in the Waiparous, though, where it is very rare to bump into other climbers. *Kemosabe* (WI4), *The Ice Funnel* (WI4), *Marion Falls* (WI5) and the awe-inspiring *Hydrophobia* (WI5+) are three-star ice climbs that receive little attention due to their remoteness.

The local ice-climbing guidebook by Joe Josephson sums up *Hydrophobia* by stating: "This spectacular and continuous waterfall ... plastered at the back of a cirque amongst massive rock walls ... would be a widely sought-after and often-photographed climb if it were closer to the road." The epic tale of the first ascent of *Hydrophobia* by Frank Campbell and Karl Nagy clearly illustrates the challenges of winter climbing in the Waiparous. Frank has been one of the main new-routers in the Waiparous and in the nearby Ghost River valley, but it was *Hydrophobia* that almost killed him. As he and Karl were nearing the top of this beautiful, unclimbed waterfall, an inexplicable water surge released from the ice, dousing them for half an hour. A life-threatening situation ensued as they fought to rappel off. Severely hypothermic and encased in an armour of ice, the pair barely escaped with their lives. Undaunted, the ambitious duo returned the next weekend to complete one of the most aesthetic ice climbs in the Rockies.

Shawn Huisman is one of the few people who can claim to have climbed every ice route in the Waiparous. Not your typical climbing bum, this Monday-to-Friday stockbroker gives way to a super-motivated weekend warrior with an insatiable appetite for steep ice and mixed. It was Shawn who, after climbing *Hydrophobia*, phoned me one night to ask if I would be interested in attempting a less than obvious mixed line to its right.

The black-and-white photo of *Hydrophobia* in Josephson's guidebook shows a discontinuous smear of ice plastered to a dark, overhanging wall beside the main waterfall. Skimpy on ice and heavy on rock,

it had gone unattempted but not unnoticed. Its apparent difficulty and remoteness kept all would-be suitors away. Most of the big prizes having been done already, this outrageous line would not remain unclimbed much longer. Having eyed it myself for years, I immediately accepted Shawn's offer, and we committed without either of us honestly knowing how much work it would actually take to polish off.

Every weekend, "Team Shawn and Sean" made the epic approach from home in Canmore to the route-to-be. A typical Waiparous day would begin with Shawn picking up a semi-conscious version of me at 6 a.m. A quick stop at A&W for a cardiac-arrest-inducing breakfast of calorie-packed Bacon and Eggers and deep-fried hash browns would be followed by an hour of driving through the rough and desolate back roads of the foothills. Where the dirt road deteriorates into a narrow, unmaintained 4x4 trail, we would park, and then we would strap our packs to the ATV quad that Shawn had borrowed from his father's farm. An hour-long roller-coaster ride would have me bouncing around on the back, trying to hang on as Shawn blasted its 400cc engine through towering snowdrifts and boulder-strewn streams. This was followed by a relatively tame, one-hour bushwhack into the cirque that hosted our objective.

In total, the approach from Canmore to the base of the route would take about three hours one way as long as everything went smoothly. When it didn't go smoothly, the approach would invariably take much longer. The ATV ride was usually the most unpredictable stage of the approach. Once, we managed to get it so stuck in a swampy meadow that it sank past the wheel wells into thick mud. Another time, we broke through the ice covering a small river and thought for sure that we would not be retrieving it until spring. However, we always finagled a way to dig, push and luck our way out of these situations, all of which just added to the feeling of adventure and exploration.

From the base of the 240-m wall, we would have to crane our necks way back to see the top, as it overhung in its entirety. An ice apron at the bottom ended at a vertical wall and a series of roofs to gain an isolated splattering of ice in the middle of the cliff. This ice was fed by a skinny pillar that poured from the top of the wall 120 m higher. Every pitch looked to be mixed. Whether it be tapping up thinly iced slabs, hooking ice-choked cracks, or swinging from the rock to free-hanging icicles, we would encounter both rock and ice on every rope length.

These modern, multi-pitch mixed routes take enormous amounts of effort to establish. Climbing ground-up, we would drill bolts on

lead with a battery-powered drill. Due to the overhanging nature of the rock, we would establish the hard pitches aid-point-style. This means that one of us would aid the pitch first, drilling bomber 3/8-in. bolts every couple of body lengths so that we could return to work and redpoint it.

Shawn styled the first pitch onsight as he stemmed up a rock corner to reach a thick, mellow flow and the only comfy belay ledge on the entire route. The business began on the next pitch. After aiding up on tied-off knifeblades, Peckers and hooks, I worked the moves and returned the next weekend to lead it free. A short slab of verglas ended abruptly below a 2-ft. roof. Pulling the lip of the roof on basketball-sized ice splatterings enabled me to access an incredible 20-m seam that ran straight up the otherwise blank limestone wall. The seam would just accept the tips of my picks and monopoints. A perfect splitter slicing compact, stippled stone made this the most aesthetic climbing on the whole route — or on any mixed route, for that matter.

Not every day was so successful. Once, we did the entire approach only to run away at the base because warm temperatures had chunks of ice breaking away from the top and crashing around us. I have always prided myself in being a safe climber. I avoid routes with unjustifiable objective hazards such as seracs above. I even steer clear of classics such as *Slipstream* because of its menacing crown of glacial ice. In my opinion, these threats are blatant and hence avoidable.

However, a friend, Jeff Perron, said something that made me think differently about the risks involved. "I see no difference between climbing below seracs and climbing below giant, free-hanging icicles," he declared matter-of-factly. His observation is correct. Both can collapse without warning or reason, destroying anything and anyone beneath them. I have reached the base of ice routes on different occasions only to find the climb in pieces on the ground. Two young Canmore climbers, Aaron Beardmore and Rob Owens, almost got the chop when a 10-m icicle spontaneously broke while they were climbing the pitch below it. The chaos of falling debris missed them by an arm's length.

The gravity-defying pillar hanging precariously above our route always had us worried, especially because the weather that winter was unseasonably warm. Our fears never had a chance to materialize, because by the end of December the ice was gone. The warm chinook wind, known as the Pineapple Express, blew too frequently, bringing its temperate air from the Pacific Ocean. The third pitch, which looked to be the crux of the route, was bolted but not redpointed by

the time the ice disappeared. Without ice, there simply was no route.

Returning the next season, I felt much stronger and more assured of my abilities. Even though we had not been able to complete the route the year before, it had still ended up being my best season yet of mixed climbing. I had managed to flash a couple of M8+s and had established almost twenty new mixed pitches including an M9+. With these climbs under my belt, I knew that our chances of succeeding on this project were better.

At the hanging belay below the third pitch, which we had not had the chance to redpoint the year before, I checked my knot, made sure I was on belay and unclipped my daisy chain from the anchor. I looked down at the treetops 100 m below and absorbed the exposure.

“Forget about the view — focus,” I scolded myself. “Breathe and relax.”

I dry-tooled past the first three small roofs easily, but the lactic acid began to build in my forearms. Locked off on my right tool, I searched blindly over the roof for the microscopic divot that was to be the pitiful excuse for a pick placement. Just when my strength began to ebb and I felt my right arm straightening, my pick hooked into the hidden slot.

“Watch me,” I croaked as I committed my weight to a dime-sized edge. “I’m not sure if this will hold.”

“Hang in there. You got it!” Shawn urged from the belay, his positive energy boosting my confidence.

Surgically sharpened picks are a must; I tried to remember if I had filed them the night before. The placement held, and a few more rock moves had me over the last roof and beneath the anemic tongue of ice. Feet skating and arms flailing, I tried to gently tap at the featureless veneer of translucent, frozen water. My attempt at controlled, deft blows failed as I bashed my Cobras at the delicate, glassy surface with all the grace of chopping firewood. Losing style points rapidly, I pulled the strenuous moves onto the vertical ice in a fit of uncoordinated spasms. I was gasping like a fish out of water as I touched my face to the cold surface in order to regain control of my badly frayed nerves. Rated M8+, the equivalent of 5.12 rock climbing, the crux pitch was finally in the bag.

Working away at it once a week with no setbacks, unlike the year before, we made quick progress on the next two pitches. Each new pitch we completed brought us closer to the final pillar but also resulted in a longer and longer jumar session at the beginning of each morning. I had done a bunch of big-wall routes in Yosemite and abroad, so ascending ropes was no problem. However, Shawn was a total novice to the sublime art of jugging.

“Thrust up with both legs and slide up your top ascender at the same time,” I would coach from the belay as Shawn cursed and



photo: Brad Wroblewski

struggled, inching his way up the rope.

“I think I could reclimb the pitch quicker than this,” Shawn sighed in resignation, spinning in circles as his pack threatened to flip him upside down.

As with anything, practice makes perfect — and we had lots of practice. Before long, Shawn graduated from Juggy Academy and was sliding up the ropes like a pro. Still, we were always anxious about the fixed ropes, as they would hang all week, frayed by the wind and subject to all sorts of falling debris.

By February, we were in position at the top of Pitch 5 to finish the last two pitches and ultimately the route. With the Hilti slung over my shoulder, I quickly climbed the last section of rock to the final, 60-m strip of

sublimated ice, drilling four bolts along the way. From the last bolt, I lowered back to the hanging belay, knackered from the effort. I handed the sharp end over to Shawn, who flashed the M6 rock and swung onto the hanging dagger of ice. Pumped but able to recover just enough, he deliberately pecked up the thin smear, which would only accept stubby ice screws.

I followed quickly as dusk approached. We muttered a few belay commands and I launched out onto the final pillar. Its fragile appearance made me feel uneasy. Shivering but still shouting words of encouragement, Shawn patiently belayed at the hanging stance while I twisted a screw into the unconsolidated matrix of chandeliers.

The pillar was skinny and awkward, and the alarming exposure didn't help matters. With a solid screw in, I finally relaxed and got into the groove of systematically clearing bad ice and trolling for tool placements in the lacy structure.

Just below the top, where the ice tilted from vertical to horizontal, I pulled the bulge

into the gale-force gusts. I quickly spun in three screws and brought Shawn up. The frigid wind had chilled me to the bone, and I chattered away uselessly while Shawn constructed a V-thread for our rappel anchor.

Cold, thirsty and hungry, I was eager to escape this inhospitable wall of rock and ice. Almost 15 days spread over two seasons had

been required to establish this winter sport route. *Cryophobia*, meaning the fear of ice, is the culmination of ten years' experience and training for me. My rock, ice, aid and alpine skills all had to be called upon. It is an ideal example of a modern hybrid route combining sustained dry-tooling and ice climbing on a remote, mixed big-wall.

Cryophobia 230 m. V, M8+ WI5

Approach. From Canmore, drive east on Highway 1A to Secondary Route 940. Follow this north past Bar Cee Ranch and turn left (west) onto a dirt road signed "Waiparous Creek". Continue along the dirt road, following the creek, which is on your left. *Hydrophobia* can be seen in the distance from various points along here. Eventually, you will be forced to cross the creek. Once across, head up a cutline a short distance and then take a rutted jeep track going left. Only 4x4s with high clearance and ATVs should proceed beyond this point. The rough track winds up over a hill into a meadow. Cross the meadow and park in a dry creek bed. Bushwhack west for an hour into the cirque and to the base of *Cryophobia*.

Rack. In addition to 14 quickdraws, bring Camalots from #.5 to #2; ice screws including stubbies; load limiters; and two 60-m ropes (for rappelling).

Pitch 1: M4 WI3. A short, right-facing corner (1 bolt) leads to easy ice. Belay at a two-bolt anchor at the far right side of the big ledge.

Pitch 2: M7+. A slab (maybe ice, maybe rock) leads to a small roof and into a sustained seam. Twelve bolts.

Pitch 3: M8+. Climb past several small roofs to the thin tongue of ice that leads to a two-bolt belay on the right side of the ice ledge. Ten bolts.

Pitch 4: M7. Dry-tool the obvious seam out a juggy roof followed by an awkward bulge to a two-bolt anchor at a small stance. Ten bolts.

Pitch 5: M7+. Continue following the seam past some steep bulges and into a crack (#1 Camalot). Belay at a two-bolt anchor on top of an ice mushroom. Eleven bolts.

Pitch 6: M6 WI5. Four bolts lead directly above the belay to the dagger of ice. Thin ice ends at a two-bolt anchor on the right wall before the last steep pillar.

Pitch 7: WI5. Climb the final ice pillar to the top.

Descent. Rappel the route, first from a V-thread at the top and then from two-bolt belay anchors for the rest. Two ropes are required for the last rappel and also facilitate rappelling pitches 2 and 3 and pitches 4 and 5 together. If these pitches are rappelled individually, the first person down will have to clip some bolts in order to get into the anchors.

THEME AND VARIATION

GRAEME POLE

The mountains are mirrored — a mountain within itself, a peak within a range. If there is one pinnacle on a ridge, a dozen may block the path to the summit. If a mountain has a northeast-facing cliff draped with a hanging glacier, its neighbour probably will, too. See how the castellated Wapta Icefield summit of Portal Peak mimics those of nearby Peyto Peak and Ayesha Peak. Across the icefield, see the similarities in form in the concave southerly faces of Mount Collie and Mount Baker and in the lumbering ridges of Mount Daly and Mount Rhondda. But then see the exception to any notion of a local blueprint: Mount Niles — a thumb of rock, plumb vertical on two aspects.

In any mountain range, sift through the geology, the screes, the snows and the ice for a truth in creation: no matter how dominant the theme, the composer will attend to variations.

After following the Ram River for more than two days, some 42 km from the confluence of Hummingbird Creek, I was surprised by the blunt variation in the environs of the Ram Glacier. This because the Ram River valley is prototypical of the front ranges: a broad, glacial trough, its river of gradual gradient, stepped here and there with slot canyons. Graceful glaciated horns, sculpted from sandstone, siltstone and shale, group along sinuous ridges to flank the valley.



Icefall Mountain. photo: Graeme Pole/Mountain Vision

Grassy slopes reach towards the crests of those lowly ridges, providing range for sheep, goats and elk, and unlimited stomping grounds for would-be ridge walkers. In common with neighbouring valleys to the south — the Clearwater and the Red Deer — a reach of montane grassland, a true mountain prairie, fills one treasured section of the valley bottom.

These gentle enticements compound to defy the icy presence of the Ram Glacier at the valley's head. Before the trip, in my mind's eye, I had envisioned the glacier as a waning slip of ice, lightly crevassed, nestled in a gentle cirque, open to the peaks above. A prior consultation with reality, as depicted by the contours of the topographic map and by the shadings of the Geological Survey of

Canada structural-geology map, would have been instructive.

As it was, I made the detailed map inspections after the trip. The topographic hindsight confirmed my impression of the head of the Ram River valley on the morning we gained the toe of the glacier. The mountains surrounding the glacier suggest that, eons ago, a chunk of the main ranges was dropped into the heart of the front ranges, like a snare drum shot into a string continuo. Instead of dip slopes and walkable ridges, we were confronted by cliff, terrace and cliff — especially cliff. Nordic Ridge is not so much a traversable crest, as its name implies, as it is a series of distinct summits not readily connected. Icefall Mountain is a huge whaleback of tiered limestone, its namesake hanging glacier reminiscent of but much more severe than the Dragonback Glacier on Mount Thompson. Mount Heustis looms over the Ram Glacier as Cathedral Mountain does above Monarch Creek. The glacier itself is significant by front-range standards, with an impressive ice front that calves into a slate-grey marginal lake.

Despite the overtones of the geological arrangement, we hoped for grace notes: scree chutes, balconies, ramps. But by the time the performance was over they would have no major part in the score. Nonetheless, Rick, Bob and Arnold topped one of Nordic Ridge's summits, and Rick made it to the summit of Limestone Mountain much too late that same afternoon. The next day, I pulled out of the group attempt on Mount Heustis to drop south into a basin in the headwaters of Martin Creek. By gaining a little distance from the south face of Mount Heustis, I hoped to spy a route through its cliffs. From the new perspective, it appeared that a route could be constructed as far as the summit block, at which point a flourish of cliffs announced the return of the austere geologic refrain.

As I studied the face, I could see Rick, Bob and Arnold off to the west, where they

negotiated a sloping scree terrace sandwiched between cliffs. Their route dead-ended. They abandoned the attempt and I turned my attention to a lesser summit immediately south of Mount Heustis. The weather was changing and, although I knew that the others would be waiting for me in the shade, I selfishly made for the peak in a sidehill sprint on scree, a familiar theme. It didn't matter that this particular scree, the Stephen formation, didn't "belong" in the front ranges. It felt right beneath my boots; it brought back hundreds of mountain memories and sustained them. I topped the peak breathless — my first Rockies summit in more than three years — then spent five minutes absorbing the utterly wild view over the headwaters of Malloch Creek. In the sprint to rejoin my patient companions, I picked up a goat track that, for once, delivered on the promise of easier travel — a new variation on a trick theme.

By the time I had grovelled to the ridge crest above the Ram Glacier and tied into the rope, the sky was foul. Snow greeted us the next morning, a tentative rallying of winter. We abandoned our designs on Mount Heustis, knowing that to return by any route would require another three-day approach — the single theme of front-range travel that resists variation.

Our outing concluded with subadventures. There was the tow truck, the midnight breakfast at Rocky Mountain House, and the speeding ticket. During the drive to Calgary, minds thick with fatigue but kept active to thwart sleep, Rick and I solved a few of the world's problems, if only in conversation. We called it a day at 3:30 a.m. Less than five hours later, I was hauling mud-caked gear out of the truck when Rick hurried up from the basement to beckon me into the den. Picking up the TV remote, he said, "You're not going to believe this!" Twin flaming towers filled the screen. Those opening chords, ruthlessly hammered, were thick with echoes — ancient theme, new variation.

Ram River Laundry Day

Murphy visits out-of-the-way places. When he stops by in the backcountry and you're not home, he isn't shy to leave a calling card.

After spending the day in the jet stream, hammered by gale-force winds, I returned to camp hours ahead of the others. We had pitched the tents the day before on a gravel terrace on the south side of the upper Ram River, near the mouth of a canyon. I remember the phrase "It looks sheltered," being pivotal in the discussion when we chose the spot. I remember the phrase because I was the one who said it.

The next day, daylight was fading when I crested the brink of the canyon and looked down on our camp. The disorder was not immediately obvious. Both tents were present and upright, but after a few moments of study it became clear that the tents were too far apart. Rick's tent, which I shared, was in the river.

My waterlogged synthetic sleeping bag had kept the entire arrangement from barrelling off to Sundre. In its fifty-metre tumble, the tent had been damaged, and its contents — my sleeping gear and spare clothing, some bear bangers and a science-fiction reader — were soaked. Fortunately, Rick's sleeping bags, stowed inside a garbage bag, were merely dampened. I searched the river terrace for other items, finding them here and there until darkness prevailed. My pack cover was in the drink fifty metres downstream. Bob found a stove windscreen in mid-channel the next morning.

Thanks to my companions, who doled out spare clothing and an overbag, I had a comfortable night, although Rick bemoaned the apparent demise of his reading material. The next morning, as I dried my sleeping bag and other gear in the sunshine and an accommodating breeze, Rick's trashy reader dehydrated on a rock as the wind speed-read its pages. Not a word was lost. Apparently, Murphy, polite to a fault, is above pilfering the reading material from a laundromat.

THE VILLAGE BLACKSMITH

GREG CORNELL

Like a big-wall climber from Modesto who's never been to Yosemite. — Jon Jones

PROLOGUE: For years I have been condemned to a personal jail cell, and now I am on parole. Intense daydreams of creaking off flaky holds while eyeing the next disturbing placement — I never imagined a hobby would take control of me. It's the hunt for elusive Rockies aid-climbs.

Like what Mackenzie did down our rivers many moons ago, this is true exploration. Every splash that must have hit his gunwales is like a hook that isn't sitting well on a nubbin; however, you keep going onward, denying an outcome. You really get

to see what the wall is worth. Caressing it, dominating it into submission. Yes, it can be romantic.

SETTING: In 1996, on Canmore's Kanga Crag, I realized that long aid lines would never be in vogue due to our stunted cracks. However, by applying the same techniques and drive to conquer, I found that unveiling short, almost sport-like pitches can be consuming. *Chief Chiniki Burgers* (A2+) was my ground of conception. It's funny the effect a mere 20 m can have on you.

Recently, bolted mixed ice climbs prove that the Rockies is undeniably gargantuan enough to accommodate everyone's different

lust for adventure, and Kanga's many visitors prove that this minority is growing.

CHARACTER BUILDING: I'm not embarrassed to say that I have climbing gods. Back in the 1970s, we drove many times to pay homage to our grandparents. The bizarreness overwhelms me that, as a kid staring out the window of our metallic green Dodge, some of my inspirations later in life were battling their way up Bow Valley faces as we sped past. Billy Davidson is one of those men of a legendary, fabled status who inspires me and who may have heard the roar of our camper while suspended from Yamnuska. Over the years, I've sought out



every mountain journal for stories surrounding Davidson in order to recharge my spirit. One photo sparks my love for climbing culture à la campfire stories: that stirring, infamous shot of him in the toque as he traverses out on *CMC Wall's* A4 pitch.

Five days before my biggest pilgrimage, to siege the sea of El Capitan, I had to seek one last slither of Bow Valley romance. 'Twas the night before Hallowe'en that I lugged a haul-bag-sized knapsack to the base of Yamnuska. Cold and snowbound, the entire mountain was mine, and the eeriness of this magical place was once again overwhelming. My close climbing companion Gavin Macrae may have sought similar spiritual solitude out in another sacred strip of front-range expanse, the CMC Valley; he entered a solo ascent of *Weed* in the trailhead logbook.

From the first pound of the gavel sentencing me to the shackles of aid-climbing, I have dreamt of forging up a bulging micro-seam; luckily, Yamnuska allowed me to find it on this day. About 50 m right of *Red Shirt*, I took it down alone. Slotting in dinky RPs, I would stare over to *Yellow Edge*, visualize my "toqued" idol and then watch cars buzz below and see ravens soar. I have never met Billy Davidson, and the fact that he disappeared from the climbing scene in the 1970s cements him as a mythical figure. I'm sure that the guy who pumps his gas sees him as some guy getting gas — sorry, not on Yamnuska.

In the Spirit of the Toque 20 m. A2. A hammerless seam with 360 degrees of gorgeous views and emotions. F.A.: Greg Cornell (solo). October 2001.

RISING ACTION: Since *Chiniki*, other aid-routes have lightly touched the front ranges with an attractive, user-friendly lure of bolted belays. Linger on unpublished secrets:

Northern Solar 25 m. A1+. A steep chute on the rim of a water pool above the first impasse in the Ghost's Wully Canyon. F.A.: Greg Cornell, Greg Fletcher. February 2000.

Spelunker's Door 50 m. 5.8 A1 (or 5.10a). A corner at the right end of Goat Wall, above the unmistakable square scree slope seen from the high-way. The upper belay ends at the entrance to what may be a cave system. F.A.: Greg Cornell, Tony Devonshire. August 2000.

To Tame a Land 20 m. A2. A crack on superb rock just around the corner from Barrier Bluff's *Big Crack*

Attack. F.A.: Greg Cornell (solo). September 2001.

The correspondence course is over. Time to graduate. No more studying of topos, books, beta, pics, or historical accounts of aid-climbing's dark world. The Kanga days are elementary to what is about to engulf us. Dave Marra, a friend since grade school, will be the expedition leader, as he once succeeded on El Capitan. Sean Elliot, a Jasper cowboy, rounds out our Canadian team.

PLOT: The first major winter storm for Yosemite Valley was on the way, and we were in denial of its arrival. I was setting up a rope 20 ft. above Dave and Sean while they were concentrating on hauling the pigs up to the 1000-ft. ledge of El Cap's Mammoth Terrace.

The day before, I had gotten spooked huge, which was a failing grade in my discovery of big-wall climbing; this is not a monitored sport, and you are on your own, so good luck. I had just led the jumaring up the second fixed rope. A local said the ropes had dangled since April — in other words, they had been tortured for seven months. We decided to jug and haul up the eight or so fixed ropes to Mammoth in order to gain altitude fast but mainly because a party was clogging the bottom start of *The Shield* route. This set of laid ropes, informally named the Heart Rappel, falls from the huge heart-look-

ing feature on Mammoth's left side. The terrain under the ropes is *Jolly Roger*, an A4 slab that makes backup pro' somewhat useless should the fixed ropes fail. And should they fail, it is game over because the jumars wouldn't hold a plummeting mistake.

Two ropes hung from the second anchor; I chose to lead up on the red, as the black rope looked shoddy even from the start. Safety backup knots couldn't be tied: the person who strung the fixed ropes from anchor to anchor chose to mimic a guitar string. When I arrived at the second anchor, I hurried in fear to get off the red rope because I noticed a cut through the sheath which exposed the core. I couldn't stop staring, and remembering old anecdotes that climbing old fixed ropes can be very freaky, or regrettably fatal. The knot over the cut was not textbook and I honestly couldn't believe that fixed lines like that were still in use. Another local quipped later that it is Valley bravado. Once Dave and Sean got the bags up, I left them in a panic, taking my essentials with me for the days ahead, alone on the valley floor. I insisted that they continue and let me accept my fears and reevaluate my goals.

That night, they rappelled and met me back at Camp 4 for another luxurious sleep in a cave we had found in the forest. After a few beers I was back on the team. The next morning, I was above the nasty ropes. One side of my brain got a short-term kick out of hauling three bags, an olive container of food, a poop tube, and a portaledge up a mountain. The other side of my brain couldn't see the point at all in struggling for five minutes just to watch the capsule train lunge six inches. It was painful to imagine repeating this for 30 pitches and actually trying to get away with saying to friends that I enjoyed California. After years in an aid frenzy, I found it hard to admit to myself a third of the way up El Capitan that I was losing my passion.

For fifteen minutes I watched Dave and Sean haul up to Mammoth. Years of hype and learning were destroyed in the next ninety minutes.

CLIMAX: The storm gave little warning, and in minutes an onslaught of wind-blown, freezing tsunami waterfalls fell hard from the summit. Dave and Sean anchored the bags into a corner, and it was every man for himself after that. They both had on their summer fashions, but soon it wouldn't matter; the severity of the storm broke through all the layers of my winter gear.

I had to down-aid the extra 20 ft. of fixed rope, passing many knots, and when I got to the base of the Heart, the wall was a vertical river channelling onto the 1000 ft. of fixed rope below. High on El Cap, with four carabiners, I was now left alone to make the solo escape of my life. This was the finest example of nature's brute force that I've witnessed.

Twice I got stuck at the anchor because the jumars froze onto the icing ropes. They swelled like yeast rising. At one point, the rope bulged up in my belay plate and I risked breaking the device from forcing the rope out. The unrelenting rivers dousing me diminished my confidence. At the next hurdle, I became a born-again sport climber. Clipping in, I stared in horror and got choked up. I ignored my flooded clothes and began to scream Dave's and Sean's names as I scanned the treetops poking through the moving fog.

No answer.

After a deluge of empty replies, I wrestled with my overworked brain. The red rope previously complained about was the only one attached to the anchor. The black rope was gone. Tears formed as I prepared myself for the horrible scene below. Dave and Sean

had opted for the black rope instead of the red one and it had snapped, dropping them the last two pitches to the forest. I had been Dave's friend since elementary school and now I was seeing him end in a terrible accident.

My boots skittered uncontrollably down the A4 blankness as I wept for the entire rope length down to the last set of bolts. Everything was abysmally tragic until I noticed the black rope and the red rope side by side tied to the anchor. I was dripping with joy inside, for life had let us off easy once again.

When I heard Dave screaming for me, I felt the depth of a twenty-year friendship shine through uncertainty. Despite signs of hypothermia, he waited for me to touch earth.

We had made it. He gathered me up

with a hug, and once I could control the tears, we ran together back to the road, boulder-hopping the trail-turned-river. Along the way, I kicked myself for letting a hobby come to this.

EPILOGUE: That night, the storm dumped a foot of snow in the Valley. A few days later, Dave and Sean juggled back to Mammoth and retrieved the bags. We abandoned Yosemite's claustrophobic tightness and spent the bulk of our trip discovering the addictive fun of bouldering in the deserts around Bishop. Slowly it became a California trip.

I put my new haul bag up for sale, as the zest to do El Cap had vanished. Parole is over, but the shackles are back on. The hunt for the ultimate 25-m aid line has yet to set me free.

KILL KEISHA KILL KILL

GLENN REISENHOFER



Every time I've been to Waterton National Park in winter, I've spied this tiny dagger of ice which hangs upon the heights of Mount Crandell. On a very snowy day in February of 2001, Myles Dickinson and Keisha dragged me to the base of this fine, albeit short route. A 2-m-wide pillar barely touched the ground; where it did,

it was only 20 cm thick at its bottom. A feeling of insecurity crept up my spine.

A bit of rock gear placed high up on the left side gave me a false sense of security. Gingerly I stemmed between the rock and the ice until I could swing around to the front of the pillar. Once I was near the top of the pillar, I thought that I was home free. I swung my left tool solidly and, to my horror, a gigantic crack formed and I almost pitched over backward. The whole top-left piece of the pillar had cracked; luckily for me, however, it stayed in place. (Still sends shivers up my back.)

A little higher, a short dry-tooling session began. As we all know, Waterton is not well known for its good-quality rock, so needless to say I was a bit gun-shy after the above-mentioned episode. There was lots of moving up, checking things out and coming back down. Eventually the top was reached and a sense of relief washed over me. Myles came up and resorted to aid tactics. He grabbed a sling that was

loosely thrown over a small horn, and away he went, swinging sideways. Now he was forced to climb a harder variation (serves him right for grabbing the sling).

Keisha was roaming the countryside, sniffing and searching as all dogs do. I remembered what a friend once said about this fifty-pound hound. He joked about her

bringing down elk with a single bound. He used to say to her, "Kill Keisha Kill Kill." The funny thing is she can't even catch flees.

To get there, drive to the warden's compound and then along a gravel road for a few minutes to a non-driveable road on the Mount Crandell side. Following this road will deliver you directly into a creek drainage. Ascend the creek up to below the route and continue up steep scree to its base. *Kill Keisha Kill Kill* is located at GR 877396 on map sheet 82 H/4. It took us about one hour. Fun, fun, fun.

Kill Keisha Kill Kill 30 m. WI4 5.7. F.A.: Myles Dickinson, Glenn Reisenhofer, and Keisha (on the lookout for dinner). February 2001.

route and dog photos: Myles Dickinson



RAMBLES IN (AND OUT OF) THE ROCKIES

THE OLD GOATS REPORT 2001

RICK COLLIER

1. *Jumping Pound, Forgetmenot, High Rock, Plateau. Winter 2001.*

What do Old Goats do when a winter is too dry to ski? They go backpacking instead. During various trips, members hiked from Sibbald Flats in the north, over several intervening summits, to the south end of Plateau Mountain. *Mardy Roberts, Christine Grotefeld, Michael Myles, Rick Collier.*

2. *Mount Logan (19,850 ft./5959 m). May 10–20, 2001.*

Although this mountain, the highest in Canada, has its West and East summits climbed with some regularity, the Old Goats team ascended the infrequently attained Main Summit. The group's summit day was 22 hours long (the top was reached in twilight at 11:45 p.m.) and included storms, whiteout, wind chill factors to -65°C , and a democratic apportioning of minor frostbite. Three of the group were over 50 and obviously in their dotage. *Bob St. John, Mark Sowinski, Arnold Westberg, Rick Collier.*

3. *Kishenina Ridge (8850 ft./2682 m); first ascent. July 3–5, 2001.*

Kishenina is a very remote ridge whose high point is difficult of access. We drove the Flathead logging roads and then up Kishenina and Akamina creeks to Grizzly Creek, where we hiked an outfitters' trail to Starvation Pass at 7200 ft., contouring northwest to Starvation Lake. On the 4th, we ascended the south slopes of the objective and climbed the walls of the final summit block (5.4); a short scree walk brought us to the higher north summit, where we built a cairn and left a register. *Mardy Roberts, Paul Roberts, Rick Collier.*

4. *Mount Peck (9583 ft./2921 m); second ascent of southeast ridge. July 10, 2001.*

Jerre Skvaril, Manrico Scremin and Brian Spreadberry made the first ascent in 1978; Larry Farmer ascended the south ridge in 1994 from the valley west of the massif. The Old Goat party accessed the southeast ridge from the valley east of the peak, itself gained from Crossing Creek trail. Excellent scrambling features two 5.2–5.3 sections, the most difficult being just before the summit crest. *Mardy Roberts, Rick Collier.*

5. *Mount Vanbuskirk (9250 ft./2820 m); possible second ascent. July 15, 2001.*

A 4WD track leads up Weigert Creek out of Elk Valley for 12 km, and an excellent (but unmarked) trail continues south up the valley east of the objective. The 7200-ft. col in the southeast ridge is easily gained and the ridge

itself followed with sections of moderate scrambling until a wall forces a sidehill scree bash into the south cirque. Scree, slabs and a short, scrambly gully lead to the extensive summit crest. The high point (by only a few feet) requires a long traverse to the west. *J.A. Owen, Marion Owen, Mardy Roberts, Rick Collier.*

6. *Mount Mike (10,829 ft./3300 m); another infamous benchmark. July 21, 2001.*

From Blackfoot Creek, a good trail in the drainage south of the objective leads to a small meadow next to the stream, a fine place for tents. Easy scree and gully scrambling for 2000 ft. took the group to the southwest ridge. Then scree, crumbling towers and a series of exposed friction slabs led to the summit, which was gained in the midst of a vigorous thunderstorm. Rick's ascent of this peak gave him the dubious distinction of being the first to climb all 29 peaks in the southern Rockies over 3300 m (10,824 ft.). *Rick Collier, with Arnold Westberg and Elizabeth Westberg (to 10,200 ft.).*

7. *Mount Herchmer (8550 ft./2591 m); first ascent. July 28, 2001.*

On the 27th, we hiked up Boivin Creek to the west of the Elk valley and, on a good hunters' trail, around the southwest corner and into the upper valley, where we camped near the intermittent stream. On the 28th, we hiked up to the col and followed game trails along the west slopes of Phillips, eventually descending steeply into the bowl that connects west to the objective. Of the three summits of Herchmer, the middle is the highest; we accessed it by ascending the scree and slabs between the middle and north summits and then by traversing south up to the final cliffs. Some loose rock climbing (5.4), and then easier ledges led to the summit crest and the uncaired high point on the south end. *John Holmes, Rick Collier.*

8. *Ascents in the Starbird Ridge/Catamount Glacier Area of the Purcell Mountains. July 30 – August 1, 2001.*

Glacier travel, snow slopes to forty degrees, talus, and granite blocks with climbing up to 5.4 characterized the ascents of four of the peaks in this area: Mount Guendolin (10,310 ft./3124 m), Pen Point (9045 ft./2740 m), Mount Griffith (9130 ft./2766 m) and Mount Harmon (9705 ft./2941 m). *Doug Brown, Sandra McGuinness.*

9. *Mount Pétain (10,440 ft./3183 m); variation on the classic 1930 Gardiner/Harrison/Feuz route. August 1, 2001.*



The northwest ridge of Mount Pétain

From a camp at 8300 ft. in the Mangin glacier valley (northeast of Joffre), we pounded south up the rock-strewn gorge and remnant glacier towards the 9500-ft. col. Partway up the glacier, we turned east and headed straight up the west face — scree and ugly shale outcroppings leading to the impressive towers of the northwest and south ridges. The *Gardiner* route traverses south and then follows the south ridge back to the summit; we chose a shorter traverse to the northwest and a scramble through a notch in the northwest ridge, then easy ledges back south, now on the sunny side of the arête, with a couple of slimy, exposed sections to reach the summit. *Alistair Des Moulins, Alan Law, John Holmes, Rick Collier.*

10. *Kaufmann Peaks, south tower (10,200 ft./3110 m); possible second ascent. August 4, 2001.*

Although the higher south tower of this twin-summitted peak was originally ascended in 1927 by D. Duncan and the guide Ernest Feuz (the lower and more difficult north peak not being climbed until 1970, by King and Tanner), Kaufmann is sufficiently remote and demanding that it may not have been climbed in the intervening 74 years. This was, in fact, the fourth attempt by the Old Goats. We approached via the standard route for Sarbach, making a long traverse on the side of the Sarbach-Kaufmann massif to access the north couloir. Scree, snow and ice

for a thousand feet brought us to the base of the north tower, where a wet, slippery and exposed (but not difficult) freeclimb up the walls opposite this tower took us to the convoluted rock and ice col between the north and south towers. We rappled into the couloir below the south tower, after which a long, loose and occasionally exposed scramble including several notches finally brought us to the uncarned summit. On our descent we attempted to retreat down the south couloir into which we had earlier rappled, but this was not a good idea. Unlike its twin to the north, this couloir fails to drop all the way down to the west benches; two tricky two-rope rappels were required to descend cliffs to the easier ground below. *Darren McNeil, John Holmes, Rick Collier.*

11. Mount Marconi (10,190 ft./3105 m); first south-north traverse. August 11, 2001.

One kilometre east of the Maiyuk Pass trail-head, an outfitters' trail (intermittent higher up) leads into the unnamed valley west of the Minton-Marconi-Lancaster massif. We camped at the shallow lake at GR 320850 (Mount Abruzzi). On our ascent day, we climbed scree and scrambled to the Minton-Marconi col, from which Marconi's south ridge was followed to the summit (5.2). After lunch, we scrambled 700 ft. down the east ridge (loose and occasionally exposed) to the obvious notch, from which more scrambling, three two-rope rappels and 300 m of steep snow and ice, including a serious 'schrund, led down to the pocket glacier north of Marconi. We crossed the glacier to the north, ascended a wall to the Marconi-Lancaster spine and scrambled down a long and tricky couloir back to a point a kilometre south of our camp. *Bob St. John, Bill Hurst, John Holmes, Rick Collier.*

12. Mount Oke (9581 ft./2920 m); new route. August 16, 2001.

We approached from Moraine Lake and Wenkchemna Pass, descended to Eagle Eyrie and then hiked south down Tokumm Creek. On our second day, we bushwhacked (fierce at times) up to the valley running southeast from Misko Pass and ascended Oke via the

cliffs of the east face, enjoying some excellent and exposed scrambling. It is likely that the Betts-Dalglish descent of 1931 was further to the south. *Martin Krippel, Rick Collier.*

13. Curtis Peak (10,010 ft./3051 m); second ascent. August 17, 2001.

While my climbing partner enjoyed a day of R & R, I rambled from our camp at the head of Misko Creek over two intervening ridges to the northwest cliffs of the ridge running southwest from the objective. Scrambling, friction slabs, and climbing up to 5.4 brought me to the crest of this ridge (it is simpler by far to follow this ridge up from Misko Creek). Scree then led for a thousand feet to the summit block, which is characterized by slanted tiers of smooth slab; cracks, friction and a layback or two up the right-hand side brought me to an exposed col between two crumbling towers. A delicate scree bash across the col and up the north tower took me to the summit for exhilarating views of Wenkchemna Pass and Eiffel Lake. Bob Saunders made the first ascent, up the left-hand side of the summit block, in July 1990. *Rick Collier.*

14. Ascents from Monica Meadows in the Purcell Mountains. August 29–31, 2001.

Snow, glacier travel and modest granite scrambling set the tone for climbs of the following three peaks: Aten (9858 ft./3000 m), Glacier Dome (9858 ft./3000 m) and Osiris Peak (9455 ft./2865 m). *Doug Brown, Sandra McGuinness.*

15. Ram River Expedition; second ascents of two peaks. September 6–10, 2001.

After years of lurid dreaming, the Old Goats finally had their caprine lusts for the remote meadows and peaks of the Ram River partially satiated. On the 6th, four elderly Goats were off — (if you can imagine this) by bicycle! — from the Hummingbird staging area, making their way up the ATV track and hiking trail. Thirty kilometres of mud, hills and river crossings brought them to a ruined trapper's cabin near the intersection of the Ram, Whiterabbit and Indianhead drainages for Camp 1. On the 7th, they continued by

hoof for another 12 km up the Ram — a beautiful, wide valley that becomes increasingly rugged to the west. On the 8th, they grazed through meadows to boulder fields for 2.5 km from Camp 2 to the old glacier survey station 0.5 km from the Ram Glacier. Easy scree to the west, but under winter conditions, took them to the south col of Nordic Ridge (9880 ft./3011 m); a traverse on the west side, and then snow, ice, and slippery couloir scrambling led to the summit before noon. They then crossed the Ram Glacier and ascended to the col southeast of Icefall Mountain (10,570 ft./3221 m). Reaching the summit of this peak involved complex routefinding but no technical climbing; the Goats contoured on scree on the west side of the objective below huge cliffs, ascended to 10,000 ft. up a broad couloir set against a second file of cliffs, turned a scree corner to the left, dropped down west on a bench along a third line of cliffs, crossed these cliffs at a notch and then ascended back east up scree and buttresses to the broad summit. On the 9th, three Goats made an unsuccessful attempt on unclimbed Mount Huestis while Graeme completed an ascent of nearby Peak 9450 (82 N/16 573430). On the 10th, bad weather and goatish smells forced them into a miserable retreat out the entire 42-km length of the upper Ram River. *Graeme Pole, Bob St. John, Arnold Westberg, Rick Collier.*

16. Minor Peaks and Major Passes — A Cycling Adventure in the Southern U.S. September 27 – December 18, 2001.

In autumn 2001, a group of one Old Goat and three Kids cycled through eight of the western and southern states of the U.S. During this odyssey, which started in San Francisco and ended in Jacksonville, Florida, they climbed minor peaks and rode over several high passes — Tioga (9945 ft.), Townes (4956 ft.), Travertine Point (4317 ft.), Union (3600 ft.), Needle's Eye (6295 ft.), Piños Altos (7200 ft.), Gila Wilderness (7400 ft.) and Emory (8228 ft.), among others — for an overall distance of nearly 7000 km, a total elevation gain of 131,307 ft., and three million right-left pedal strokes. *Paul Roberts, Dan Meeking, David Roberts, Rick Collier.*

PUNKS IN THE GYM

MARGO TALBOT

It's Christmas in the Canadian Rockies and I'm out looking for the punks. Will Gadd and Kim Csizmazia are visiting his folks in Jasper, which happens to lie conveniently close to their respective projects at the "Cineplex" on the Icefields Parkway. Kim is working on her new line, and Will and Ben Firth are working on their sick invention. Rob Owens has gone to Saskatchewan to nurse his freshly broken ankle, a casualty from a fall while bouldering at Haffner. Eamonn Walsh and his surgically attached dog, Cusban, are off to Prince George for

rum and eggnog with the parents. Scott Semple refuses to interrupt his training schedule for a long-dead guy's birthday, and nobody ever knows what Raph is doing until he calls to make climbing plans

Two days before Christmas, the largest non-guided group ever is sieging Grotto Canyon. There are four ropes up on the *His and Hers* wall, and none are lying idle. Gadd and Firth are doing speed laps on ice and mixed to train for the upcoming World Cup events; Csizmazia, Semple and Lacelle are readying themselves for the competition at

Ouray; meanwhile, Eamonn and I are laying bets on how far I'll fly if he comes off the wall. Golden residents Rich Marshall and Abby Watkins are also training for the World Cup, on their own stomping grounds. Raphael Slawinski will be joining the Canmore contingency at Ouray, but no one is sure if he ever really trains. Sean Isaac and Dave Thomson would like to be out flaming their biceps but declined the invite and asked to borrow my rhyming dictionary instead.

The day after Christmas, Will gets his psyche pumped after he sends *Musashi* and

rates it M12. Kim sends *Veggie Combo* at M8, and Lacelle calls it “the best line at the Cineplex”. Scott’s monomaniacal focus pays off as he establishes *Troubled Water* (M9–) behind *A Bridge Too Far*. Shortly before he broke his ankle, Rob Owens and Jason Billings freed the bolt ladder to *Suffer Machine*. They gave it a grade of 7– and claim that it is destined to become a classic. These same two teamed up for the first one-day ascent (also the second ascent) of *Nightmare on Wolf Street* (175 m, V, M7+ WI6+). Eric Dumerac, Jeff Nazarchuck and Shaun King climbed *Nemesis* on October 15 to access the mixed hanging dagger on the top left-hand side of the route. They called their third-pitch variation *Aquadisiac* (M7–). Eric and Raphael added two pitches of mixed climbing to the beginning of *Acid Howl* and called it *Stairs and Flowers* (320 m, M8+ WI5+). Paul McSorley and the French Connection of Canmore (Louis-Julien Roy, Jyoti Venne) get a thumbs-up for their new crag up the drainage behind Mount Edith. Sporting four mixed lines — *Christmas Chopping* (M8–), *Scratch and Win* (M8), *Unnamed* (M7) and *All Canadian Torque* (M9–) — as well as two pillars of water ice, this venue is a great contribution to the local mixed scene. And last but not least, all of Sean and Dave’s research paid off as they called their new route *Phyllis Diller* (M10–), located in the cave immediately left of *Thriller* and directly behind *Killer Pillar*.

If you feel that you made a significant contribution to the local mixed scene and you don’t find your route in this article, it undoubtedly means that you haven’t flirted enough with the author or done tequila body shots with her at parties.

New Mixed Routes

Musashi. M12. Located to the right of *Panther Falls*. F.A.: Will Gadd, Ben Firth. December 2001.

Veggie Combo. M8. Located in the Panther Falls amphitheatre. F.A.: Kim Csizmazia, Raphael Slawinski.

Phyllis Diller 18 m. M10–. In the cave behind *Killer Pillar*. F.A.: Dave Thomson, Sean Isaac. December 2001.

Bad Actors. M7 WI4. Good new route right of *Curtain Call*. F.A.: Dana Ruddy, Sean Elliott. December 2001.

Troubled Water. M9–. Located behind *A Bridge Too Far*. F.A.: Scott Semple, Eamonn Walsh. December 2001.

The Cineplex 30 m. M9–. To the right of *Panther Falls*. F.A.: Jim Gudjonson, Grant Meekins. March 2001.

Haunted by Waters 45 m (165 m). V, M8 WI5. This is the direct start to *Sea of Vapours*. F.A.: Rob Owens, Scott Semple, Mike Verwey. January 2001.

Broken Bridges 30 m. M6 WI4. F.A.: Rob Owens, Joe Buszowski, Steve Pasmeny, Graham MacLean.

Under the Bridge 30 m. M8– W4+. F.A.: Rob Owens, Joe Buszowski, Steve Pasmeny, Graham MacLean.

Aquadisiac 160 m. VI, M7 WI6. This is a mixed variation to the classic route *Nemesis* on the Stanley Headwall. Climb the first central pitch of *Nemesis* to a cave, then traverse to a bolt belay left of the ice pillar. One mixed pitch (nine bolts) leads to another pitch of ice. F.A.: Eric Dumerac, Shaun King, Jeff Nazarchuck. October 2001.

Stairs and Flowers 200 m. V, M8 WI5+. *Stairs and Flowers* is the mixed version of *Acid Howl* on the Stanley Headwall, bypassing the two frequently unformed pillars on that route. The rock sections are bolt-protected, and a rack of 15 draws (including some long slings), and screws will suffice. Double ropes are recommended due to the traversing nature of the mixed pitches, as well as for the rappels. F.A.: Eric Dumerac, Raphael Slawinski. January 2001.

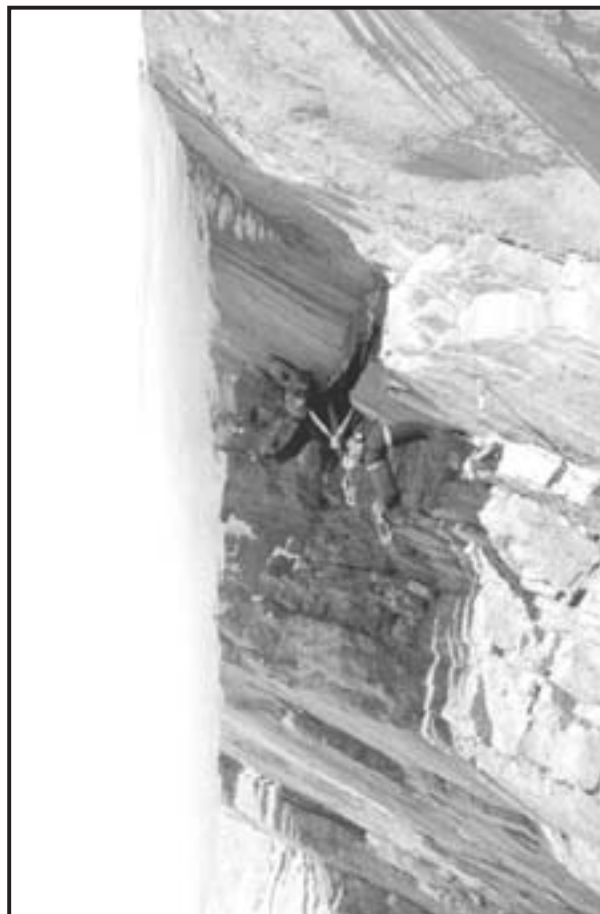
Call of the Curtain 120 m. III, M7 WI6. This two-pitch climb is located to the right of *Curtain Call*. Climb a thin smear off the big ledge for 30 m to a two-bolt belay beneath the roof. Climb the roof on four bolts and a good pin. Descend either via the gully to the right or off a two-bolt station on the left. A 60-m rap puts you back on the ledge, from where another 60-m rope stretcher reaches the ground. F.A.: Roger Chayer, Kim Csizmazia, Will Gadd.

Mixed Emotions 145 m. IV, 5.9 A1 M5 WI6. This route trends up and left from the prominent snow ledge of *Teardrop* (on the upper Weeping Wall) towards the dagger that hangs above the right-facing corner.

Pitch 1: Climb the first pitch of *Teardrop*, heading for the left-hand side of the prominent snow ledge. It may be necessary to simulclimb to reach a sheltered belay.

Pitch 2: 20 m, M5. At the left end of the ledge, climb a short, steep corner onto ice. Rock and ice blobs lead up and left to a two-bolt anchor below the right-facing corner.

Pitch 3: 30 m, 5.9 A1 WI6. Climb the chossy crack/corner on gear to the first of seven bolts. Power through the bolts out to the dagger. Continue up funky ice to an ice belay



Kim Csizmazia on Slaughterhouse.
photo: Klaus Krannebitter

on the right side of the final pillar.

Pitch 4: 25 m, WI5+. Make a short, airy traverse out onto the front of the pillar and climb up ever-improving ice. Stop where the ice turns to WI2; you can rap to the bolted belay from there. Continue rappelling the route.

Gear: 60-m ropes, screws (including stubbies), long slings, draws, pitons, medium to small stoppers, Camalots #0.4 to #3. F.A.: Rob Owens, Scott Semple. January 2001. F.F.A.: Raphael Slawinski, Ben Firth. January 2001.

Brown Star Cosmonaut 150 m. III, M7 WI4. At Boom Lake, after the first pitch of *Red Commie Star*, climb to the awesome hanging dagger. F.A.: Dumerac, Holeczi, Walsh. Winter 2001.

Atmospheric Burn-up 40 m. M8. At Ranger Creek, it is the direct start to the thin ice and dagger of *Thin Universe*. F.A.: Eric Dumerac, Shaun King. December 2001.

Astroturf 40 m. M8. At Ranger Creek, a steep nasty found a few metres right of *Thin Universe*. F.A.: Eric Dumerac, Shaun King. December 2001.

DSB 45 m. M7–. In the Ghost, climb a first bit of ice in the centre of *GBU*, then this mixed route. Choice of three different exits.

F.A.: Eric Dumerac. 2001.

American Triangle. Pitch 1 (M8–). F.A.: Eric Dumerac, Dave Thomson, Patrick Farel. 1999. Pitch 2. F.A.: Will Gadd, Kim Cszimazia. 2001.

Backwards 30 m. M8. At the Back of Lake Louise, pass the last bolted summer routes and continue up the trail to the teahouse. At the top of the first hill, there is an avalanche slope with hanging ice on the cliffs above. Go up the slope to the mixed routes, where *Backwards* is the rightmost route, starting on ice and ending up on steep, excellent-quality quartzite. F.A.: Eric Dumerac, Dave Thomson. February 2001.

Aromatically Correct 30 m. M6 (natural gear to 2.5"). At the Back of Lake Louise, pass the last bolted summer routes and continue up the trail to the teahouse. At the top of the first hill, there is an avalanche slope with hanging ice on cliffs above. Go up the slope to the mixed routes. In the middle of the crag, find an obvious left-arching line that leads to a bolted station. F.A.: Eric Dumerac, Guy Edwards. 2001.

Lowe Impact 25 m. M8. This sweet line climbs out the back of the cave on the right of the lower pitch of *Louise Falls*. It gains the same ice as *Captain Hook* (M7+). Good natural protection, steep climbing, and the obviousness of the line combine to make for one of the (dare I say it!) best mixed pitches at this grade in the Canadian Rockies. Climb 10 m of ice just left of the main corner

until below a huge rock roof. Traverse a few metres to the right (fixed nut?) and then follow the corner for 10 m (fixed nut and pin?) until below another large roof. Traverse a few metres right, using the large horizontal crack, in order to gain the final ice dagger. Gear: Cams from #1 TCU to #3.5 Camalot. A few pins and wires may be useful. Screws for lower and upper ice and the belay. Many long slings and perhaps a Screamer or two for the marginal gear. The route name pays tribute, obviously, to the talented pioneers of modern ice and mixed! F.A.: Rob Owens, Eamonn Walsh. April 2001.

New Ice Routes

Virgin No More 130 m. IV, WI6 R. The route is on the north side (climber's right) of a large bowl between Kauffmann Peaks and Epaulette Mountain. This is the first valley north of *The Reality Bath* and is accessed from the west side of the Icefields Parkway. (*The Bath* access valley runs to the south from this point, whereas this valley heads straight west.) Park approximately where you would for *Murchison Falls*. You should be directly across from the buttress forming the north boundary of the bowl containing the route. Look for a faint drainage on the west side of the Parkway. Head down the drainage, cross the river and thrash up beside the creek draining the bowl, eventually arriving at moraines and small cliff bands. Avoid cliffs where possible; climb small ice steps where you cannot. The approach takes

three to four hours. This route is similar in nature to *Curtain Call*. Climb 40 m of mushroomed ice to a fixed belay on the right side of the pillar. Climb the pillar for 50 m to a belay ledge; 40 m of Grade 4 ice leads to the top. Rappel the route. F.A.: Josh Briggs, Eamonn Walsh, Virginia Buckley. October 2001.

Choksondik 225 m. VI, WI5. Located to the left of *Virgin No More* on the same buttress. F.A.: René Côté, Jon Walsh, Doug Sproul. November 2001.

Smothered Hope 120 m. IV, WI5. This climb is located in a gash 200 m right of *Mon Ami* and is not obvious until you are below it. Walk into the gash and belay on the left side of a steep curtain. Climb the curtain and continue on easy snow and ice to a shield of good ice. Climb the shield and continue on moderate ice for the full length of the rope, passing under two chockstones. Rappel the route. F.A.: Grant Meekins, Raphael Slawinski. November 2001.

Guinevere 160 m. V, M4+ WI5R. Located 200 to 300 m further right is another climb, possibly the best of the three routes on the cliff. The bottom ice and the top pillar can be seen from down the valley, but the mid-section remains hidden until you are below the route. A cool line with lots of varied climbing. Bring 60-m ropes, a rack of screws (including lots of stubbies) and a small rock rack of Tri Cams and pitons. Rappel the route. F.A.: Grant Meekins, Raphael

FIDDLE RANGE TRAVERSE

MARK STOCKBURGER

I could see it on my way home from work. It dogged my imagination. I had wanted to traverse the Fiddle Range for a year or two already. I thought about doing it solo, as it didn't appear to be technically difficult. Still, it would be more fun to do it with some friends. Without question, it would be a long day out — 25 km, and 2000 m of elevation gain. There would be a pot of gold waiting at the end of our rainbow of a day: Miette Hot Springs.

June 22, 5 a.m. We meet at Dave Fehr's house. None of us has slept very much because we are so excited. Dave Wiebe slept the least, maybe three hours total; a youth pastor, he was up late trying to keep up with forty high-school students. He and I will now spend the better part of 17 hours trying to keep up with Dave Fehr and Randal Holwerda.

I was hoping to do this later in the season. I don't feel in shape for a day like this. However, this is literally the only day of the summer that will work for all four of us. Hopefully, adrenaline will be an adequate substitute for proper conditioning.

5:30 a.m. The weather is perfect as we say a quick prayer and head up the north

ridge of Roche Perdrix. The most popular route up the mountain is the *Chimney Route*, well travelled by local climbers. Unfortunately, of our foursome only I have any real climbing experience beyond some top-roping. We elect to climb instead the gully route on the west face, a fun scramble up a water-worn gully involving a few short rock steps of easy-fifth-class terrain and lots of short-roping.

The air remains calm as we climb. The guys do remarkably well, and we are on the summit at 9:30 a.m. Dave Wiebe lets us dig into his nearly bottomless bag of M&Ms as we look to the route ahead. *The Guide to Scrambles in the Rockies* mentions some exposed scrambling to gain the next two subsidiary peaks and then, cryptically, says that we can go as far as we are able before eventually returning on the same route. We're hoping for Hot Springs or bust! Because of the route description and what we actually see as we look ahead, we remain roped up for now. Some nasty weather is brewing over Roche Miette to the east, across the Fiddle River valley.

A beautiful, broad ridge leads us to some typically loose scrambling and the next minor

summit. After a brief walk, we find ourselves at a rock step below the next peak. The weather has started to change, and we end up in the middle of a snow shower as I make a short traverse right around a corner and out onto a solid ledge about 12 in. wide above a 200- to 300-ft. drop. I go up steeply on good holds and belay my chums up. Due to the snow and the sudden exposure, this is the psychological crux for Dave Wiebe.

The snow squall ends and we're back in brilliant sunshine. We stay roped up for a while as we move towards the last subsidiary summit before Fiddle Peak, passing some narrow sections of ridge which aren't terribly exposed. Next time we'll off-rope sooner.

We break for lunch at the next summit, awash in the sun and the glory of a great day out. Next it's down further than we want to go and a long grind back up to Fiddle Peak, highest point on our traverse. Dave Fehr is there a good half-hour before me, a tiny silhouette against the pale, early-summer sky. What a huge country. The summit cone is a pile of flagstone pavers — pure choss. The view, however, is fantastic. Randal phones his wife on my cellphone. Perfect reception back in Hinton. I didn't really want to bring it

along, but I am consoled by the knowledge that it will soon be useless as we drop down into the Fiddle valley. It's 2 p.m. as we leave Fiddle Peak, two hours later than I had hoped.

A few weeks back, Dave Wiebe and I scrambled up Mount Shuey near Miette to reconnoitre the descent; it appeared straightforward, except perhaps the final section along the end of the ridge. The pictures we took at that time didn't lie, and we are able to enjoyably amble down the ridge in fine weather with minimal routefinding difficulty. Before the end of the ridge, we drop down into trees to the east and contour around to the Fiddle valley on scree slopes. This adds at least an hour to our day, but the certainty that it will go is worth it.

As we hit the dry creek bed, a solitary flash of lightning strikes a tree several hundred metres up and left and thunder roars. This day has a little bit of everything. We eventually join the Fiddle River and find that we have to wade the east shore in multiple places over the ensuing few kilometres before we join the established trail that aims for Mystery Lake to the east. There are no good places to ford the river, although Randal seems to think so (not enough to try it, mind you). Further upstream, my efforts to find a safe crossing earlier that week are rewarded as we cross in knee-deep water moving very fast. This traverse would normally be impossible this early in the season, but a dry winter and



South along the Fiddle Range from Roche Perdix. Fiddle Peak proper is hidden by subsidiary peaks in the foreground.

spring make it reasonable. Close by the river, there are some huge overhanging walls that would be a sport climber's paradise almost anywhere else.

It is 8 p.m. as we put the last major obstacle behind us. We still have 4.5 km to cover and 300 m of elevation to gain before we can join our wives in the healing waters of Miette. The only problem is that the hot springs close at 9 p.m. We resign ourselves to an imperfect end to an otherwise sublime day. As we slowly grind uphill, Dave Wiebe and I clearly suffering the most, Randal is gallingly fresh: "Sometimes, when I move

slowly it just makes me more tired." Dirty bugger.

The Fiddle traverse is not particularly difficult, and I'm sure it has been done before. Still, for us it was a perfect challenge — all the more satisfying because we did not know whether we would succeed, not having spoken to anyone who has done it.

We arrive at the hot springs to find the pool still open. They switched to summer hours the day before. Our wives are happy to see us (I think), and we are happy to see the foot-long subs they brought with them, as we ease into the water. Ahhhhh...

MOUNT TEMPLE, POSSIBLE NEW ROUTE

This classic line ascends the buttress between the Aemmer Couloir and the Sphinx Face on the north side of Mount Temple. It compares in quality to and is only slightly more technical than the classic East Ridge. Most of the technical pitches have amazing rock quality and are well protected. The route hits the upper East Ridge below the "Black Towers". The objective hazard is low, and crampons/ice axe are not needed until the East Ridge is intersected. It is probably the first route on the north side to dry up in summer.

Traverse east from Lake Annette, staying low and moving past the start of the Greenwood/Jones, and the Sphinx Face. Ascend the col that marks the crest of the buttress between the Aemmer and the Sphinx. Start climbing (up to low-fifth-class terrain) on the left side of the buttress and aim for the right-leaning gully that situates you behind a prominent pinnacle, eventually reaching a large ledge just to the right of the crest and below the start of the steeper climbing. Climb a steep, 20-m section that gains another large ledge. Move left on the ledge until a weakness in the headwall is found immediately right of

the crest. (The stunning overhanging face left of the crest can be viewed from this ledge and is an obvious barrier.) Climb three and a half pitches, mostly 5.7 or 5.8, following the obvious weaknesses on the right side of the crest. A fifth pitch (5.8) on the crest proper provides amazing exposure as one looks down the steep face on the left. A short sixth pitch on loose, black rock gains fourth-class terrain that is best climbed on the right side. Several short, steep sections are negotiated until a final steep wall of horrendous rock is encountered. Climb easily left of the steep wall and gain the upper East Ridge below the start of the Black Towers. Either follow the ridge to the summit, or bypass the Black Towers by traversing the east face and gaining the popular East Ridge route.

Take a set of nuts and cams up to 3". No pitons were used, but a couple may be useful for the Black Towers.

Briggs/Owens (a.k.a. *Squashed Bones*), east-northeast buttress of Mount Temple. IV, 5.8. F.A.: Josh Briggs, Rob Owens. Aug 5, 2001.

ROB OWENS



DUSTING OFF THE OLD TICK LIST

GREG CORNELL

Every year around March, when Alberta stretches from hibernation, my tick list of obscure climbs for the summer gets revised. Unfortunately, some of the aged routes appearing yearly on the tick list get the boot for lack of an attempt or because the spontaneity of life has me go elsewhere. It is like the miracle of birth. This mad scientist works feverishly late into the night — flipping and folding maps, cross-checking old notes from old journals, turning page upon page in one guidebook after another as if the equation is lost — until the info creates a monster that consumes me: the tick list.

A forgotten list came back from the dead in 2001. My friend Geoff Langford and I snowboarded down Mount Hector in August, and my buddy since elementary school, Dave Marra, took me on the best rock climb I have ever done — *The Fold* on

the east face of Mount Kidd in the Kananaskis Range. But it was an ignored cliff in the same range which required the most tick-list dusting. In 1994, when I first moved to the area, I examined it; after looking at the rest of my new wilderness faces, however, I became disinterested. From the ground, many cliffs don't look appealing or challenging. Yet, after blazing three paths upward, this thinking soon changed. Nicknamed "Desert Dome", the cliff is visibly located above the Kananaskis highway, 500 m south of the Galatea parking lot. This concave wall is sure to keep trad climbers fretting in spots; the upper forest awaits as you scour ninety metres of sustained and pocketed slab.

All three routes meet at the same bolted anchor before going their separate ways to different trees via narrow, facing corners. Ditch the pins and load up on Tri Cams and

gear to 3" in order to protect the cracks, which are hard to see until ventured onto. The few bolts installed, some on lead, protect the insane run-outs.

Dam Workers (leftmost) 85 m. 5.9.

Ten metres right of a weedy corner; follow the odd bolt. F.A.: Greg Cornell, Tony Devonshire. May 2001.

Where Eagles Dare (middle) 90 m. 5.10a.

Twenty metres of .10a to the first bolt, or 5.8 up the crack, which slips in and out of 5.8/9 ground to the top. F.A.: Greg Cornell, Tony Devonshire. May 2001.

Handrail Highway (rightmost) 55 m. 5.7.

Follows a discrete, left-arching groove from a resting pinnacle. F.A.: Greg Cornell, Tony Devonshire. January 2001.

ROOM WITH A VIEW

CHARLIE GORTON

The route was first spotted by Kevin and Lee from Highway 93, above the valley southwest of the Stanley Headwall. The tight chimney/gully feature chock-full of rock/snow and ice leading to the ridge looked enticing. Kevin broke trail to the upper valley, from where he could see the entire route. He told Lee and me that he thought it might go, and the next day we were off.

After a two-and-a-half-hour slog to gain the upper valley, the whole party witnessed the magnificence of the route. Deciding to ante up, we climbed the final, avalanche-prone slope to the base of our endeavour. Our first problem was the 14-ft. overhang to gain the ice in the back of a large chimney. The choices were to either aid the 30-ft.-long roof or devise a more strategic method. With Kevin and I braced together like a radio tower, Lee ascended us while displaying as much grace as an elephant. After seemingly endless minutes, Lee was standing on our shoulders and was able to plant a couple of tools in the ice. He returned to the ground to put on his crampons before aiding up to the lip, and then he was off into the continuous spindrift that poured down that morning. Lee spent the next two and a half hours stemming up a difficult (M6+) but well-protected chimney of ice, snow bulges and rock to a cave belay 30 m up. Kevin and I then took an hour seconding up to him.

Kevin led the second pitch (M5 R), which included two overhangs, and a chimney clogged with large snow bulges. He used small wires and TCUs in a flake, placed one bolt, and aid-climbed with pickets. At the top

of the 60-m pitch, Kevin put in a bolt and a pin as an anchor and fixed the line. At this point, darkness enveloped us and we rapped down the fixed lines. We would return.

Two days later, we left Canmore in the snow at 3 a.m. By the time we reached the Castle Mountain junction turnoff, there was 15 cm of new snow on the road. By the time we reached the upper valley, it was 25 cm. At the bottom of the steep, avalanche-prone slope, the height of new snow was at 1 m. Kevin's ropes would have to stay a while, as we decided to fold that round.

Early January brought rain but not much new snow; it was time to ante up again. Kevin and Lee broke a new, more direct trail to the upper valley on the 10th. On the 11th, we left Canmore at 3 a.m. and were on the trail at 4:15 a.m. With no new snow in the last few days, we were hard with anticipation. The initial roof was now filled with snow, and we jumared the fixed ropes to the top of Kevin's pitch. I led off on the third pitch, the majority of it a snow ramp, before tunnelling under a chockstone and moving up a short mixed section to a small snow ledge (5.6 yd.). Lee finished off the rest of the technical climbing with another 15 m of 5.6. From there we alternated leads for another six pitches up a snow gully ranging from thirty to fifty degrees. The gully was lined with high walls and widened into larger pockets. At this point we only experienced short, easy rock steps.

As we finished the route, darkness was approaching. We followed the lead of the snow ramp into a room with a view. Its massive ceilings and roof towered above us while

the entrance window outlined the massive landscape below us. In the back of the house-sized room, a long slit allowed us to break on through to the other side. And thus *A Room with a View* was discovered.

We rapped the route and made our way down as quickly as possible. We arrived back at the highway at 11:20 p.m. This is an outstanding alpine route; give it a go.

Approach and Route Description

Coming from the Marble Canyon parking area, climb the treed slope above the first avalanche-zone sign. Bushwhack to the upper valley, following flagging on the right-hand side of the ravine, to access the upper valley directly to the southwest of the Stanley Headwall. The route is the second major gully feature on the southwest side of the valley. It is easily recognized by the tight, steep chimney off the start.

Climb a 45-degree snow slope to gain the start of the route, which is 550 m long and involves approximately 110 m of technical climbing, all taking place in the first four pitches. The rest of the route is a tight snow gully featuring an outstanding keyhole finish. Take a standard alpine rack including a couple of pickets; overall, there are great gear placements and good belays available throughout the technical climbing. The only water ice we encountered was during the first pitch. This winter route is avalanche-prone, and caution should be taken.

A Room with a View (GR 644698) 550 m. III, M6+. F.A.: Lee Johnston, Charlie Gorton, Kevin Embacher. 2001.

the east

NOVA SCOTIA ICE

MIKE DORSE

There is a lot more to Nova Scotia than lobsters and the *Bluenose*. We've got fantastic surfing, especially in winter; quite a few superb granite crags; and top-notch bouldering areas — but, more importantly, we've got ice.

Nova Scotia basically comprises two regions: the mainland and Cape Breton Island. I have been in touch with the park wardens at Cape Breton Highlands National Park and they were unaware of any ice routes within the park. Based on the topography and climate, however, I am sure that there must be some great lines; it is just a matter of finding them. I have heard of ice routes of “a couple of hundred feet” on Cape Smokey. This comment came from a non-climber, so I don't know how much validity it holds. Unfortunately, this is the sum of my knowledge of Cape Breton ice.

Mainland Nova Scotia is less of an enigma. This is mainly due to the pioneering work of a few individuals in the recent past. There is a small guidebook (10 or 20 pages) available at some of the outdoor stores, particularly in Halifax. The route descriptions lead me to believe that the year in which it was written was particularly great. There is also some on-line information available on Climb Nova Scotia's Web site (www.peak.ca/CNS/index.html). This is, in my opinion, the more reliable of the two. The publisher, Chris Goble, was well on his way to documenting our frozen goodies; unfortunately, he left the province before his work could be finished. This article is by no means a comprehensive listing of what Nova Scotia has to offer; it's more of a glimpse of what is available. There is still a huge amount of ice awaiting first ascents.

Bay of Fundy, north-facing coastline: The most popular area right now is probably Hall's Harbour, about an hour's drive from Halifax. A twenty-minute walk in either direction will bring you to the bottom of five to ten routes ranging from 25 to 40 m in length and graded WI3 to WI5. Other documented areas are Canada Creek and Morden, which both feature a multitude of moderate ice. The tides of the Bay of Fundy

are reputedly the highest in the world — up to a 53-ft. difference between high and low. These tides have eroded the mainly sedimentary shoreline to dramatic effect. Large sections of the coast have been carved into steep cliffs. The ground is very moist, producing plentiful seepage, which in turn transforms into abundant ice climbing. If first ascents are your thing, peruse a few topos, find some steep shoreline contours and then go climbing. One important note of caution: In the Bay of Fundy, a tide table is a necessary piece of safety gear. A beach looks a whole lot different under 53 ft. of water.

Moose River East: The Moose River has managed to carve a fantastic canyon. Each year, this canyon produces some truly spectacular lines. Getting there is a different story. Its location is N452640/W641037. There are two ways to get there: a 2-km walk up the river (the best option when the ice is good) or a 3-km trudge through snowy forest from logging roads to the west. If the snow is deep, plan on overnighting to get the best bang for your buck. Once you've found it, you'll be suitably impressed. Above the falls, there are four or five climbable pillars about 10 m high. The falls itself offers three or four 20-m-long lines ranging from WI2- to WI3+. The real deal is on the west-facing wall, where there are two alpine-type ribbons of ice, both about 60 m high, from WI4 to WI5. There is also a 50-m-high, 20-m-wide “ice flow” that offers up three or four lines, one of which starts with a 10-m detached pillar. The grading of these lines is WI3 to WI4, with the pillar route being around WI5.

Cape d'Or: This area has recently been preserved as an ecotourism reserve. There is an old lighthouse, a tea room and a guesthouse. The only one of these currently in operation during the winter is the lighthouse. However, I have spoken to Darcy Snell, the operator, and he seemed intrigued by the possibility of opening his facilities to ice climbers. He's not, as yet, an ice fiend, so I don't think he'll be up on the lingo. Maybe dropping him an e-mail asking him about the facilities would speed up his development. His address is capedor@hotmail.com.



Moose River ice. photo: Pete Everett

This area is on the south-facing shoreline of the Bay of Fundy, so it's best visited a little later in the season compared to the southern coastline. I've only been there once; the rest of what I know comes from the writings of Chris Goble. It was late April when I got there, so most of the ice was rotten. What I saw made me drool. This is definitely the best ice that mainland Nova Scotia has to offer. There are over 15 lines ranging from multi-pitch, couloir-style stuff to 70-m-high WI6 ice. It is also a gorgeous setting — rugged cliffs, ocean waves crashing on the rocks, and a quaint little lighthouse. Note: Once again, a tide table is a necessity.

These are the main attractions, as far as I'm concerned. Many other, smaller areas can be discovered by putting postings on the Climb Nova Scotia discussion page. There is an organized climb every Sunday which has been going on for the last two years; once again, check the Web page. What else is there to say? Come on down; you can't lose. Friendly people, cold beer, great seafood and lots and lots of ice.

foreign

MONGOLIA: HALF THE JOURNEY IS GETTING THERE

PHILIPPE GAUTHIER

The storm blows strongly for forty hours. When Nick wakes up at three o'clock to check the weather, the sky has cleared and the wind has stopped. It takes us a short period of time to get ready, cross the icefield below Camp I and reach the slopes leading to the northeast ridge of Khuiten Uul. Today, we know we will make the summit! At this very moment, however, climbing unroped, I am stuck up to my chin in a crevasse.

Our objective was to travel to the remote province of Bayan-Ölgii and climb the highest summit of Mongolia, Mount Khuiten (meaning "cold") at 4374 m. Hosted by the Mongolian Alpine Club, the expedition was composed of three Canadians, one American and seven Mongolian climbers. The team was led by a very fine middle-aged local woman by the name of Master Ch. Purevee and included experienced climbers of all ages. With a climbing career spanning five decades (mostly with former Soviet Union-aligned nations), Naidan was the veteran, while Tavna, in his teens, was the youngest member of our eclectic crew.

Now, with my head barely sticking out of the hole I've just created, the snow around me seems awfully rotten and suspect. Several days ago, during our climb on the Potanii to Camp I, our young interpreter also fell into a large, snow-covered crevasse. Although he was roped up and well protected in the middle of the "cordée", he was still shaking several hours later. Despite being one of the less experienced climbers, Tavna was a valuable member of the expedition as the team's only interpreter. I rapidly found out that Mongolian is an extremely difficult language to learn!

Albeit one of the highest countries in the world, with an average elevation of 1580 m,



"Pyramid Peak" (c. 4100 m) from Khuiten Uul summit. photo: Nick Ranicar

the democratic state of Mongolia is best known for the Gobi Desert and its endless steppes, not for its mountains. Nonetheless, remote mountains cover the western area of Mongolia, several massifs reaching 4000 m above sea level.

Shouting for help, I can see Nick, Sugi and Naidan slugging up the slope a few hundred metres below me. What a fool I was! Half an hour ago, I proposed that we continue unroped; everyone agreed. Taking the lead and adopting a steady pace, I was feeling confident as I climbed up the hard-packed slopes. Now, as I remain trapped in this hole, elbows locked against the snow around my head, the only thing preventing me from sinking deeper is a precarious balancing act. Breathing slowly, I am too scared to move.

Our Russian plane landed aggressively on the dirt strip of Ölgii Airport, capital city of Bayan-Ölgii province. Unlike most of Mongolia, which is dominated by Buddhist Mongols, ninety per cent of the population of

Bayan-Ölgii is Muslim Kazakh. Not a single paved road leads into this remote province of Mongolia, separated from Ulaan Baatar, the capital city, by over 1600 km of harsh, deserted steppes. To the north, west and southwest, Bayan-Ölgii province is isolated from Russia, Kazakhstan and China by the Altai Mountains. This isolation has allowed the Muslim herders of Bayan-Ölgii to keep their traditions, language and identity as Kazakhs for the last three centuries. In fact, landing in Ölgii City is like travelling back in time.

Luckily, Nick saw me fall into the crevasse and is running up to my rescue. Although he is moving up the slope as fast as he possibly can, I have the unpleasant feeling that I will disappear into the hole before he reaches me. Self-rescue is necessary! With a gentle swing of my ice axe, I catch the icy lip of the crevasse, pull myself halfway up and gently roll over to safer ground. Done! In retrospect, my position in the crevasse looked

more desperate than it really was — but is this not typical of such situations?

It did not require any persuasion for us to leave the dusty town of Ölgii for the remaining journey towards basecamp; everyone was happy to be departing on the road trip. In fact, apart from the dozen or so brown eagles circling above the Muslim bazaar, the city had little of interest to offer our climbing party. Thus, for the next two days, we would slowly travel a total of 200 km along bumpy tracks in four-wheel-drive Russian vans to reach the western-most corner of Mongolia. As we gained altitude and got closer to the Altai Mountains, the scenery was enlightened with green steppes, wild camels and pure, silvery creeks. At any moment, if one looked closely enough, one could always see white spots sticking out of the green and blue landscape. These were in fact ger, or tent camps, a sure indication of the presence of nomadic herders, from whom we would get food and directions.

Clouds are now moving rapidly from the west, covering the blue sky. Most of the route up the ridge has completely disappeared from view when Nick and the two Mongolian members of the summit party catch up with me. After a brief attempt at explaining the crevasse incident to Sugi and Naidan (in a blend of basic English and sign language), the four of us head up the slopes towards the ridge in increasingly poor visibility.

Our arrival at the Tavanbogd National Park boundary was filled with excitement. A greeting party of smiling Kazakh kids and adult herders came out of the ger. Soon, invited by the local chief, we were inside a richly decorated felt tent, drinking fermented horse milk, eating yak cheese and sipping goat-meat soup. Following tradition, a few rounds of vodka were poured and gifts were exchanged. Although my memories of the climb itself may fade, I will never forget the people I met during this journey. Once all the ceremonies had been carried out, Master Ch. Purevee talked business with the elders. We needed a strong camel to carry our equipment to the basecamp and a few horses to carry the rest of us.

At the base of the ice ridge, Naidan decides to break from the team, saying that he is too slow. At age 73, he is still going strong; several decades ago, in 1952, he was part of the first party to climb Khuiten, and he has reached the summit a dozen times since. Encouraged by Naidan's detailed route description, Nick, Sugi and I start up the icy ridge in stormy conditions. We all know that it could get worse, and we pick up the pace.

Unfortunately for the horses, business discussions did not get settled between Master Ch. Purevee and the elders. The official story was that no camel was available. The camels were reserved for a guided expedition and a larger Korean group scheduled to reach the Park in the following days. My impression was that even in the most isolated places the old saying

“Money rules,” was still valid! While several Kazakh herders were ferociously loading all our 20-something bags onto two smallish horses, I started riding my mount slowly up the boulder-filled glacial plains. He did not have irons and struggled on the rocky terrain.

The final push for the summit is made through knee-deep snow. The wind is blowing steadily, reducing visibility to about 20 m in any direction.

Everything is glowing white! Even though the poor visibility prevents us from assessing the distance separating us from the summit, we can tell that we are getting close due to the substantial decrease in the angle of the ridge. Young Sugi, the only Mongolian member of the summit team since Naidan's departure, is particularly excited. It is his first visit to the Altai Mountains, and summiting Khuiten would make him a respected alpinist within his community. Slugging up through the light snow, Sugi is pushing the pace.

Several kilometres of horse riding brought us to the grass-covered slopes and the alpine meadows, by which time my skinny mount had become stubborn. For the previous hour or so, I had had to kick him with my heels so that he would keep walking straight and not divert his course towards every single patch of lush grass in our vicinity. He was starving! My butt hurt from the wooden Mongolian saddle, and the lead riders were far ahead. As we descended a steep lateral moraine to reach a flat opening, the carved saddle got pushed over on my horse's neck and, soon after, I bit the ground. That's when I decided to give my horse a break and hike my way down to basecamp, supper and warmer clothing.

As fast as the weather turned into a blizzard only hours ago, the cloud cover starts to break rapidly, revealing our position on the summit ridge, and the prospective panorama. Sugi is ecstatic! Only 300 m separate us from the summit, and the blizzard has become a memory. Our luck is amazing indeed and I make no attempt to deny it; nor does Nick, the team photographer.



As I strolled down the last hill, pulling my horse by its lead, I could clearly see the snow-capped, granitic Altai Mountains standing tall before me. The narrow, flat and grass-covered area hosting the basecamp looked like a very good site indeed. Roughly 16 km to the north, Khuiten Uul was visible along with half a dozen similarly interesting climbing objectives. Lying in a north-south direction below these fine peaks was the relatively flat Potanii glacier, the largest glacier in Mongolia. In a few days, we would start ascending the 19-km-long Potanii to Camp I. From there, in a one-day push, we would attempt to reach the summit of Khuiten, where one can stand simultaneously in Mongolia, China and Russia. That day, the whole route seemed relatively straightforward and the Potanii glacier free of crevasses. Easy stuff, I thought; why bother carrying a rope?

The panoramic view on the summit is truly exceptional, as is our luck. The sky is infinitely blue again! To the northwest, west and south, we can see hundreds of glaciated peaks stretching over extremely remote regions of China, Russia and Kazakhstan. We can look down and follow the Potanii glacier all the way to basecamp. Far away, beyond the Potanii and the green meadows, we can trace back our journey through the steppes and the brown-coloured Mongolian desert. Later, but still on the summit, Sugi tells me that he can see the brown eagles circling above the Ölgii City bazaar. I think he was joking...

Thanks to Dava for making this trip possible

LAND OF THE MAKAKAJUIT

KAREN MCNEILL

Murphy was a prophetic man, for my experience has repeatedly confirmed his maxim. Bad events always happen at the worst possible time. This was the case in Greenland last summer. We were three rappels from the ground after being on the go for 42 hours when our rope jammed. We had succeeded in climbing a new route on east Trillingerne Peak, part of the Switzerland Mountains. The eternal Arctic daylight had tricked both our bodies and our minds the previous day, and so we had climbed through the night without realizing our exhaustion. Our persistence was rewarded with a summit and spectacular views. Hundreds of virgin peaks surrounded us, glaciers calved into distant fjords, and in the far-off distance winter pack ice still covered the Greenland Strait. On our descent the trickery became apparent when overhead clouds and nearby rock walls took numerous shapes as our tired minds began to hallucinate. Katy had to jumar the stuck ropes twice before the problem was finally rectified. Two hours later, Katy, Andrea, Dave and I staggered across the glacier to our waiting sleeping bags. Instantly we fell into a deep, exhausted sleep.

My route to Greenland was a circuitous one. I had travelled around the globe while deciding to visit this unknown land. As a small child in New Zealand, I was intrigued by the idea of a country named after a colour that it wasn't. There began my wanderlust. It was two decades later while in India that I finally resolved to visit this island. Ironically, we had just made the successful ascent of a peak and, momentarily contented, I was reliving the climb in my mind. Sometime during my daydream I began to think of new projects, the travel itch being too great, and started planning my next expedition.

The organization of the expedition was a monumental task. Finding information about the rarely visited country was like trying to discover the needle in the haystack. After months of demoralizing research, I got a lead. Several phone calls later I had the required information. Greenland was a reality! The last obstacle was finding a yacht to sail us there. This mode of transport catered to my sense of adventure. Further e-mails led me to the *Vagabond*, a 47-ft., French-owned yacht that had been reconditioned for travel in ice-infested waters. The *Vagabond* was sailing into the exact port we needed to reach.

On July 3, the *Vagabond*, with Katy, Andrea and me aboard, sailed into Tasiilaq harbour after four outrageous days at sea. My companions are both biologists, and they excitedly identified various species of seabirds



Fox Jaw Cirque. photo: Karen McNeill

and whales as we encountered them during the crossing. Seeing Greenland's rocky, mountainous coastline from the yacht was enthralling. The pinnacle of the trip came when a Danish icebreaker arrived to clear a path through the impenetrable ice pack. The colour drained from our faces as the *Arctica Krista* charged through the pack, spitting huge chunks of ice off to each side. She headed straight for us, turning at the last possible moment. We followed the clear water in her wake to town.

In Tasiilaq, we met our photographer, Dave Thomson, then did the final shopping. Our climbing destination was Fox Jaw Cirque, at the head of Tasiilaq Fjord. Although newly loaded with tourists, the *Vagabond* took us up the fjord.

After ferrying loads, the four of us spent the first week making a reconnaissance of the various ranges. We were in paradise, camped on the vegetated valley floor beside two tarns and below towering gneiss spires and perfect blue skies. Bright pink *niviarsiaq* (French willow, the national flower of Greenland) gave a cheerful atmosphere to the area, and the thunderous roar from melting glaciers kept us company.

During the first week, I had my nose in numerous novels at every possible moment. This escape was a way of de-stressing from the previous months of intense organization. Outside my tent, the "Burly Girls", with bodies of pure muscle, combed the surrounding area in search of anything of interest. Andrea squealed in a childlike delight with each and every find. Katy kept her gaze skyward for birds that fascinated her. Both

recaptured the images in their diaries with the utmost care.

After our 44-hour ordeal on east Trillingerne Peak, chosen because it is one of the highest peaks in the area, standing guard over Fox Jaw Cirque, we eat tons and rest. Soon everyone's gaze returns to the mountains. Katy and Andrea want to climb something "hard" to test their limits. My strengths lie in mountain travel and knowledge of the mountains. I know that their ambitions are above my technical skills. All morning prior to our departure to the cirque, I find myself battling inner voices. Long ago I decided that it was more important to do routes at my own level. I don't want to be dragged up something just to say I did it. So I decide to stay behind.

Five days later, when Katy, Andrea and Dave return due to rain, their news is somewhat disappointing. The route is indeed difficult; after "working" the first pitch, they have yet to free it. Two days later, when the skies clear, it's time to return. The girls convince me to go with them. Tenacity pays off, and with a clear, determined head, Katy climbs her hardest lead ever. Andrea, with her gutsy attitude, shares the workload, and more pitches are fixed. Dave leaves us, as he needs time to kayak out to the island of Kulusuk.

The morning after Dave's departure, we jug to our high point and "go for the top". The remaining pitches challenge us continually. At one point the rope repeatedly dislodges loose rocks that come close to hitting our rope, and us. The route abruptly ends at a huge horizontal roof, as does our daylight. The Arctic night has begun its rapid



return. The darkness aids our decision to “call it good” and descend. Finally, after days following Katy’s and Andrea’s butts, I take the lead and get us down. As I descend I sing nursery rhymes and songs from New Zealand. Safely on the ground, I am surprised that neither of my companions has attempted to put a muzzle over my mouth. Even I find my repertoire monotonous.

Back at basecamp our food supplies are becoming depleted. We lack high-calorie foods. In Tasilaq we accidentally bought six pounds of lard, thinking that it was butter. At first we kept the lard in a dark corner, untouched. Now our starving bodies can’t get enough of the stuff. Everything is cooked in a thick layer of lard. At least we have two varieties of the stuff! In order to complement our low supplies, I take a hike down the valley to our cache and retrieve the last of the food. The sunshine has played havoc on the glaciers, and now the valley floor is awash in silty meltwater. Our usual crossing

places seem treacherous due to the deep, swiftly moving currents. I take my time and find new places to wade the frigid water. At the cache I devour half a salami roll, then I return for a feast.

After three days of lard ingesting, Katy, Andrea and I return to the Trillingerne Peaks. This time we intend to climb the western peak. Our bodies haven’t recovered, and we cross familiar ground more slowly. The Burly girls and I fall into a rhythm and reach the day’s objective with time to spare. Since nighttime darkness is beginning to return, we have brought a tarp and a stove so that we can sleep on the mountain. During the night, I fight off the Burly Girls as in their sleep they attempt to muscle me off our tiny ledge. Early the following morning, we begin “the up”. I lead something that is challenging for me. From my belay stance I realize that the summit is still days away. Below, Katy and Andrea are having similar thoughts. As they reach me we talk about our options. We haven’t budgeted for the extra days, and our brains scream out for us to take it easy. We spot a lonely buttress nearby, and it becomes our new goal.

The top is reached by mid-afternoon. We celebrate our success with the last of the coveted Nutella, eaten off a nut tool. During the descent, we spend another night on the

mountain. This is wise, as the last few rappels are complicated and take a long time.

Although we still have time for another climb, we opt for a cultural experience instead and collectively decide to spend a week in the village of Kuummiit. The stars align in our favour and we find a fisherman with a boat. For a fair price we are transported into another world. The five days we spend in this tiny coastal village are incredibly special. We are allowed a small insight into Inuit life. After a whale is caught, locals invite us into their home to share the catch. New friends visit our tents, bringing gifts of freshly caught fish that they eat with us. We buy locally made crafts such as carved *tupiluks* to chase away our enemies.

For me, the highlight of our stay comes during the last night in the village when the school principal visits our camp. His presence encourages the children to satisfy their own curiosity about us. During the evening, we are treated to songs, games and laughter. Tomorrow we leave this village, but tonight I go to sleep knowing why I need to travel to these distant, exotic lands.

Lithographic 16 pitches. 5.10 A0. F.A.: Andrea Kortello, Karen McNeill, Katy Holm, Dave Thomson.

Glyngore 9 pitches. 5.11C A0. F.A.: Andrea Kortello, Karen McNeill, Katy Holm.

Calleditas 13 pitches. 5.9. F.A.: Andrea Kortello, Karen McNeill, Katy Holm.

Special thanks to Mountain Hard Wear, the Canadian Himalayan Foundation, Serratus Mountain Products, Five Ten, Clifbar, Doug at Black Diamond, Valhalla Bob, and, of course, Visa, MasterCard and AMEX — the

PLEASE NO MORE VODKA! THE WEST KOKSHAAL-TAU

SEAN ISAAC

“If we even get to *see* the mountains, this trip will be a success!” Scott Decapio sighed as he resigned himself to endless setbacks. Being the neophyte Asian traveller, my climbing partner was not fully expecting the amount of delays en route to our hoped-for basecamp at the foot of the West Kokshaal-Tau range in Kyrgyzstan. Transportation screw-ups in the capital city of Bishkek and permit problems in the military-outpost town of Naryn quickly became trivial matters as soon as our tiny, Russian-made Lada Niva got mired down in the soft mud of the high steppe. Getting stymied by wet bogs for the fourth time in only 24 hours had us believing that digging and pushing might be the only physical activity of the trip.

The West Kokshaal-Tau is a remote, military-restricted region of the Tien Shan. This little-known thrust of jagged peaks is located on the mountainous border separating China to the south from Kyrgyzstan to the north. If all goes as planned, it is only a

two-day drive from Bishkek to basecamp. Invariably, it takes much longer. I had experienced exactly the same frustrations when I climbed here in 1998, but, as usual, time and a selective memory had allowed me to forget these unpleasant details. Three years of staring at photos had inspired me to return and attempt the stunning, unclimbed, 1400-metre southeast face of Kizil Asker, also known as Pik Red Soldier.

Of course, everyone thought we were crazy for even thinking of going to Kyrgyzstan after the kidnapping of four American climbers in the Ak-su the previous summer. However, as I insisted at home and confirmed once arrived, Kyrgyzstan is for the most part safe and secure. The previous year’s troubles occurred in a completely different region that is geographically and culturally isolated from the rest of the country.

Kyrgyzstan is an ethnic stew simmering *On the Komorova Glacier, with the 600-m Ochre Wall behind.* photo: Sean Isaac





Scott Decapio scratching up thin ice on Beef Cake (M5 WI4), Ochre Walls. photo: Sean Isaac

with Uzbeks, Tajiks, Kazakhs and relocated Russians in addition to the Kyrgyz population. This cultural melting pot has been repeatedly plundered over the centuries by infamous conquerors such as Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan and, most recently, Stalin. After almost a century of Communist oppression, Kyrgyzstan has emerged as an autonomous republic struggling to stand on its own two feet with the crutch of a new democratic government. However, Soviet ways are hard to dismiss as both Islam and capitalism rush in to fill the void left after Moscow's withdrawal in 1991.

Despite these apparent problems, Kyrgyzstan is an alpine dreamland; ninety per cent of its area is mountainous, much of which remains unexplored. Unlike its neighbours Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, this small country lacks major stocks of natural resources. It must therefore rely heavily on the newly developing tourist trade. Beautiful mountains, lakes and rivers, in addition to an ancient and interesting culture, attract adventurous travellers from all over the world to this wild corner of central Asia.

Half of the attraction of Third World expeditions is the cultural immersion. Getting the jeeps stuck near Kyrgyz encampments allowed us a first-hand look into an ancient way of life that has remained relatively unaltered since the Silk Road days. Nomadic tribes roam the barren grasslands on horseback, dwelling in yurts and tending to their flocks. Stepping into a yurt is like entering a time portal and being whisked back thousands of years. Inside, the felt walls and dirt floor are layered with vibrant, hand-made rugs called *sherdaks*. Antique muskets, still warm from hunting Marco Polo sheep, lean near the entrance. A shrivelled old woman squats in the corner dishing up bowls

of fermented mare's milk called kumis. The children are like children anywhere in the world — curious, playful and rambunctious. However, these youngsters are practically born on a horse and are skilled bareback riders by the age of 6. The sights, smells and tastes overload the senses and remind me that there is much more to be experienced on these climbing trips than just climbing.

In the end, Scott and I did manage to get to basecamp; unfortunately, however, we were unable to even try our objective on Kizil Asker due to extremely unstable weather. It snowed every day but one during the three weeks we spent in the mountains. As a consolation, though, the high levels of precipitation created incredible summer ice conditions. Neither Scott nor I have ever been to Chamonix, but we have both drooled over photos of its iced-streaked granite. What we discovered above the Komorova Glacier in the West Kokshaal-Tau was a veritable untouched Chamonix, minus the crowds, cafés and *téléphériques*. Stunning, ephemeral lines hung everywhere, allowing us to snag three new alpine mixed routes.

Our warm-up climb made the first ascent of the east face of Pik Gronky. We named our route *Silent Bob* after the Kevin Smith character in such movie hits as *Clerks*, *Mall Rats* and *Dogma*. *Silent Bob* consisted of a 250-m Grade 4 ice gully that we simul-climbed to a fifty-degree ice face. This was followed by an elegant snow arête to the 4950-m summit.

Next, we made the second ascent of the 600-m Ochre Walls. A long couloir with seventy-degree bulges split the lower section of this vast, orange-hued rampart. Where the couloir pinched off, we found three stellar mixed pitches. Stoppers and Camalots conve-

niently protected narrow ribbons of thin ice lacing smooth granite slabs. Splitter cracks would appear just when needed to swallow up bomber protection — a welcome relief from the compact and shattered limestone of the Canadian Rockies. *South Park*'s chubby second-grader, Eric Cartman, provided the inspiration for the name: *Beef Cake*.

Between climbs, much time was wasted hanging out in our tiny Integral Designs tent at high camp, acclimatizing, feeding, and sitting out storms. Lying in a cramped head-to-foot arrangement, Scott and I would spend inordinate amounts of time just staring at each other, listening to snow slide down the outside of our shelter. On occasion, we would have whole dialogues just by quoting lines from our favourite movies and TV shows. *Austin Powers*, *Pulp Fiction* and “The Simpsons” all provided hours of nonsensical conversation

that alleviated tent-bound tensions. Sometimes, after particularly long periods of silence, Scott would blurt, “I hate alpine climbing!” — an odd statement coming from someone who has lived out of his VW Fox for almost five years just so he can climb mountains full-time. Regardless, I understood his predicament. Being stuck in a fetid, undersized tent with yours truly is a bad replacement for a warm, cozy bed next to your girlfriend. Luckily, we never had to endure prone positions for too long, as the weather would usually let up enough for us to dash up and down a peak at the rate of one new route per week.

Our last climb was the type of line I had always dreamed of finding: a 700-m *goulotte* of ice slicing up an unclimbed granite buttress. In the inky darkness of pre-dawn, we cruised up into the gully on easy snow, moving together until the ice steepened. I took the first lead up Grade 4 water ice. Scott followed through, negotiating thin runnels pouring over short, steep steps. Upon reaching his stance, I shot back a GU and stared up at my next lead. A metre-wide vein of grey foam was smeared in the back of a vertical corner. Stemming up the strenuous pitch, I gagged repeatedly with dry heaves brought on by the altitude. Our altimeter watches registered us at around 4800 m, which was high enough to have us both feeling ill and lethargic. Calves quivering, forearms flaming, my oxygen-deprived muscles cramped up from the exertion. Halfway through the lead, I stole a peek down between my Sabretooth-clad feet to see our pair of super-skinny, 7.6mm Ice Thongs snaking from my harness down through a series of stubby Express screws — a sobering view that made me focus hard to make sure

that each pick placement was 100-per-cent solid. The possibility of a tool shearing out of the frothy ice was a real concern. Moving steadily upward, I stretched out the 60-m ropes in order to reach slightly thicker ice and drilled two long screws for the belay. Physically and mentally spent, I felt that it was one of my most memorable and aesthetic leads in the mountains.

More moderate terrain led to a body-width pillar tucked in the back of a chimney. Scott gently tapped up the loosely adhering column with controlled precision and pulled over a scrappy chockstone capping the slot. Above this last crux, we simulclimbed five pitches' worth of sixty-degree ice punctuated by a few short-lived cruxes over rock steps plastered with sun-rotted snow.

We tagged the top of a small, unclimbed peak on the jagged ridge of the Pik Unmarked Soldier massif, then immediately began the descent. A menacing black sky was rushing in from the southwest, and snowflakes were already swirling around with the wind. Our exposed position on the summit ridge would not be a great place to experience the violent electrical storms that plague this area.

A long traverse put us above a broad

couloir that looked as though it would deliver us down to the glacier. Scott made the first of many V-threads just as the dark storm clouds began to boil overhead. Multiple rappels spat us out on the opposite side of the mountain from our high camp. In blustery whiteout conditions, we slogged through waist-deep, isothermic slop and crawled over hidden crevasses back around to our tent, arriving 17 hours after leaving. Exhausted and famished, we collapsed into our sleeping bags and fantasized about big, greasy cheeseburgers, resulting in the route's name of *Royale with Cheese*. We christened the minor summit Pik Mikhail (c. 5100 m), in honour of our guide and basecamp cook, Mikhail "Misha" Cyhapykov.

Less than a week later, we were back in Bishkek at Misha's apartment. He lavished food and drink on us as we celebrated our new routes with toasts of vodka, the Russki elixir. Heads spinning and guts churning, we did not want to offend our gracious host, so we toughened up and subjected ourselves to shot after shot. Misha would shout "Na zdorovye," ironically meaning "To your health." That was our cue to pound back a glass full of throat-burning alcohol. "Death by hospitality" I've heard this called. No

proper expedition to Kyrgyzstan is complete without spending a night kneeling over a less-than-sanitized Third World toilet, hurling until sunrise.

Silent Bob 700 m. IV, WI4. First ascent of the east face of Pik Gronky (c. 4950 m). F.A.: Scott Decapio, Sean Isaac. July 10, 2001.

Beef Cake 600 m. IV, M5 WI4. Second ascent of the Ochre Walls. F.A.: Scott Decapio, Sean Isaac. July 17, 2001.

Royale with Cheese 700 m. V, M6 WI5. On the southeast buttress of "Pik Mikhail" (c. 5100 m), on the Pik Unmarked Soldier massif. F.A.: Scott Decapio, Sean Isaac. July 22, 2001.

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THE HAUNTED MOUNTAIN BEYOND THE TOURIST TRAIL ON MOUNT KINABALU BRENT RAYMOND

... that incredible backdrop of teeth and fangs, gully, precipice, cliff, plateau, gorge, peak, projectile, point — you name it, Kinabalu has it, up there above you, black and tense-looking as if forged in iron and dropped into place as a vast casting. Surely this is the most complete statement of "I am a Mountain" made anywhere on this earth.

— Tom Harrison

Rising 3000 ft. above its jungle-covered neighbours, Mount Kinabalu (13,455 ft./4101 m) is the undisputed king of the Borneo subcontinent. Having long endured the "tourists only" tag, Kinabalu today attracts climbers from around the world to enjoy unique climbing in an exotic alpine setting. Long, striking slabs of glacier-polished granite sweep down the mountain and plunge gracefully into the high jungle. Great spires, like quiet sentinels, stand stochically on the barren summit plateau, the morning mists shrouding them in preparation of afternoon rains. Far below, the Crocker Range undulates like a great green carpet to the shimmering South China Sea. The mountain exerts a powerful force over the land and its people. It is a presence that captivated me during my first visit in 1997 and it is the reason I returned in February

2001 for a two-month expedition centred on the mountain.

At first appearance, Mount Kinabalu is simply a spectacular tourist hike requiring good fitness and a reservation at one of the hostels at 11,000 ft. There is no snow or ice, only cold, driving rain, and the highest point is a blocky scramble of little interest to rock climbers. And yet a wonderful dichotomy exists: despite thousands of visitors annually, much of the mountain remains a rarely visited wilderness of high alpine jungle and endless clean granite. Mount Kinabalu lies in a World Heritage Site and boasts a unique assemblage of plant and animal life and a world-class climbers' playground. It has a colourful history of ascents by botanists, zoologists and geologists in pursuit of science, but the earliest recorded rock climbs did not occur until 1960. This is hardly surprising given the effort required to attain the summit by even the easiest route. Sir Hugh Low's expedition in 1851 consisted of 42 people and took 19 days to reach the summit region. In the hundred years following Low's first ascent, only 53 recorded visits were made to Kinabalu. By 1965, the number had reached 700. The majority of these ascents were made by the easiest route possible; only a handful of specialists — scientists,

photographers, mountaineers — attempted alternate routes. Today, the climb is routinely done in three days by tourist parties, and Kinabalu's rock-climbing potential has achieved international recognition.

Our team arrives in Kota Kinabalu, the capital of Sabah, from the dry cold of the Canadian Rockies. We are instantly overwhelmed by the heat, humidity and smells of tropical Borneo. Each day, we take several cold showers in between organizing gear, buying food and preparing for the expedition. It is with relief that we finally board a van and begin our journey to Kinabalu's more temperate climes. In a few hours, we are at a comfortably cool altitude of 5000 ft. It is Aaron, Brandon and Heather's first chance to see the mountain, but it keeps to itself behind the clouds. In the morning, we haggle with porters and weigh packs amidst a crowd of curious onlookers as we prepare our gear shuttle to Laban Rata. We gain 5000 ft. over 6 km, carrying 35-kg packs loaded with the ropes, food and equipment we will need for the various phases of our expedition.

The expedition is divided into four distinct phases. In Phase 1, we will attempt the first traverse of the Mesilau Pinnacles. Phase 2 consists of a two-week rock-climbing spree based out of the Gurkha hut on the West



Mount Kinabalu (4101 m) rises far above its neighbours. photo: Brent Raymond

Plateau. In Phase 3, we will attempt the second descent of the infamous Low's Gully; a grand history of spectacular failures precedes us. Lastly, we are offering a 10-day rock mountaineering course for Sabah Park guides and local Outward Bound staff as a service to the local climbing community.

We reach Laban Rata, unload our gear and settle in for the night. The next morning, we gather at sunrise to launch our expedition with the sacrifice of seven white cockerels. The Dusun people believe that the spirits of their dead reside on Mount Kinabalu, and they have many legends about the mountain. With Low's ascent in 1851, ceremonies were created to appease the ghosts and to prevent expeditions from stumbling into misfortune. Our *bobohigan* (Dusun priest) speaks to the spirits and uses his assortment of charms, sacrificial eggs, and betel nuts and leaves to ensure that our expedition meets success. The sacrifice concludes with the swift and artful plucking of the cockerels' necks and the slicing of their throats. Being of a practical temperament, the guides and the *bobohigan* boil the birds into a rice gruel complete with necks and chicken feet. The meat is pretty tough.

After descending from our "sacrificial feast", we head off to the start of our Mesilau Pinnacles adventure. Two Sabah Park rangers, John and Kuyun, are joining us. John is a quiet man who works at the Poring Hot Springs park. Despite my year of negotiations and planning with Sabah Park, he only found out yesterday that he was joining us. Kuyun is a model of fitness. He has represented Malaysia in several Eco-Challenge races and has run the gruelling Mount Kinabalu Climbathon. Both John and Kuyun have some climbing experience, but it is their knowledge of the jungle that will most benefit our expedition.

The truck stops outside a deserted resort complex on the Pinosuk plateau. We unload

our packs and set off on a good trail up the Mesilau River. After about 15 minutes of hiking, the resort trail loops back towards civilization and we step off onto faint local hunting trails. Kuyun forges ahead, parang in hand, blazing a trail through the thick jungle. The parang is a superb instrument of destruction, honed to exquisite sharpness by the locals. In its wake it leaves a cleared path and an army of sharp bamboo spears and pack-snagging branches. Less than one hour into our expedition we are faced with our first injury. A loaded piece of sharp bamboo slices deep into Aaron's hand as he attempts to dislodge it from his pack.

"Arrrggghhh!!" he yells, "it's a pumper!"

True enough. I arrive on the scene, trusty syringe in hand, and forcefully irrigate the throbbing wound.

"Let me do it!" says Aaron between clenched teeth.

"No way," I say. Years of first-aid training have turned me to the dark side; in some sadistic way, this is "fun".

We apply Steri-strips, dress the wound and move on. Aaron's yells and curses reverberate through the jungle each time he slips and weights his injured hand.

Fact: Borneo maps suck eggs. We consult the map and decide that walking will be easier on the ridge above. High ground should be drier and more exposed and therefore have thinner vegetation. Wrong. Kuyun, dubbed Jungle Master for his routefinding prowess, leads us up from the river into what can only be described as "the Dagoba System". A thick network of gnarled, rotting trees claws at our packs as we slither through mud, collapse through dead branches into large pits and crawl up steep, vegetated slopes. We emerge several hours and 1 km later onto a rocky clearing at the top of the ridge, where we camp. Nestled amid the rock and jungle, we enjoy the serene beauty of the place and survey the complex ridge ahead.

Although it rains most days of the year, water is difficult to find on the flanks of Kinabalu. We are in the strange position of praying for rain to meet our water needs and for clear weather to complete our climbing objectives. Large rivers rush tantalizingly close in the valleys below, but a trip to fill the water bags would be an epic of cutting and wrestling through steep vegetation. Instead, we collect rainwater in large tarps. Given the time we spend worming through mud and wet vegetation, it's hard to believe that we aren't absorbing water by osmosis.

On our third day of travel, we reach the pinnacles. In a heinous downpour and low visibility, we drop our packs to scout. Scouting turns up nothing resembling a camp amongst the maze of granite blocks and jungle gullies, so we retreat to a small clearing on the approach spur. John and Kuyun build a fire against all odds, and the smoke imparts a unique chemical barbecue flavour to the water collecting on the tarp above. Heather and I sleep in the tent while Brandon and Aaron carve out jungle bivies from the vegetation. I am woken by the occasional shout and thrashing from the bushes as they are visited by numerous rats hoping to share their hard-won bivy holes.

The Mesilau Pinnacles are nothing like we imagined. The ridge is a labyrinth of massive granite pinnacles surrounded by deep, vegetated gullies and ledges — a veritable alpine fortress of jungle and rock. Negotiating these obstacles requires extensive routefinding, so we spend Day 4 cutting a trail to where rock prevails over vegetation and the travel becomes easier. Brandon, Kuyun, Aaron and I cut, claw and slither through the terrain. We fix lines down several jungle rappels and climb to a never-before-reached point on a rocky knob. We return to camp exhausted but with good news: the open, rocky portion of the traverse can be reached with another half-day of trail cutting. We plan on moving to our new location in the morning.

The next day, Brandon, Kuyun and I leave early to continue scouting and to find a new camp. We quickly reach our previous high point; as we find a site, we hear Aaron shouting to us from across the valley. We have no idea what is wrong, but it is not the time for questions and so we move quickly to rejoin the others. I am hoping for the best, expecting the worst. Once the team is together, my fears are confirmed: we cannot continue via the Mesilau Ridge. John has a severe infection from a pre-existing leg injury. Despite the warm temperatures, he has been shivering intensely and is nearly hypothermic. As a team, we make the decision to abandon our objective and to get John out to a medical facility. The quickest way is Koutal's Route, a rarely travelled trail leading to the Eastern Plateau. From the plateau, it is two hours to Laban Rata and the tourist trail.

Koutal's route is no cakewalk. Abandoned for many years, much of the trail

is overgrown and difficult to find. Ascending to the plateau requires the frequent use of moss-covered handlines down slippery slabs and multiple exercises in climbing vertical vegetation. It takes two gruelling days to reach Laban Rata. On the second day, we emerge onto the slabs of the Eastern Plateau in cold, driving rain, wind, and swirling mist. The team divides as Kuyun, Brandon and Aaron forge ahead and Heather and I plod behind with John. We are all soaked to the skin. By the time we reach the advance group, they have erected the tent in an effort to stay warm; there is no shelter on this barren sea of granite. John, Kuyun and I know that the comfort of Laban Rata is only hours away and we do not relish the thought of a night out on the exposed summit. Brandon and Aaron are exhausted from waiting in the cold and decide to stay the night. The rest of us find Bowen's Route through the mist and reach Laban Rata by nightfall.

Brandon and Aaron arrive the following morning. We eat, relax, and spread our equipment out across the deck of the hostel to dry. We pull out our stashed packs and switch into rock-climbing mode as we pack food and equipment for our two-week climbing blitz on the Western Plateau. We have learned a lot about the jungle in a short time but are looking forward to the comfort of a hut, to warm, sunny climbing days and to first ascents on clean granite. John and Kuyun head back to park headquarters while the rest of us labour under heavy packs to the Gurkha hut at 12,000 ft. The scenery is stunning. Multi-pitch granite faces rise in every direction. The alpenglow is spectacular.

Twelve days of dry weather allow us to make full use of our time. Each day, we divide into teams and climb both new and established routes. We carefully record the beta for the purpose of writing Kinabalu's first rock-climbing guide. Our success is beyond my expectations: 12 new routes from 5.5 to 5.10+ and from 30 to 300 m in length, all on high-friction, high-quality granite. Due to its equatorial position, Mount Kinabalu is unaffected by freeze-thaw erosional cycles. Consequently, cracks are shallow and flaring, protection is difficult, and face climbing predominates.

Most of the established rock climbing on Kinabalu is centred around the Gurkha hut due to the hut's accessibility and comfort. Rain drains off the roof into large cisterns that store water for when the mountain is dry. My original goal was to establish routes on the Western Plateau and in Easy Valley, but there are enough quality lines around the Gurkha hut to keep us busy. Aaron and Brandon put up *Welcome to the Rockies* (5.9 A2), five pitches of varied climbing on West Dewali Pinnacle. Heather and I scrape up *Shredded Panties* (5.10 X), a new route on St. Andrew's north face; two steep pitches lead to a technical traverse around several pinnacles before reaching St. Andrew's prowed summit. One day, Brandon and I explore a new area and hand-drill rappel

stations down 300 m of slabs on Kinabalu's southwest face. We call the new area Whiskey Wall and are able to establish four new routes there over two days. The potential for more is overwhelming.

After 12 days of perfect weather and perfect climbing, we depart from the Gurkha hut unsatiated and longing to return. We have left many amazing lines untouched, and I promise myself that my next trip here will focus solely on exploring the vast climbing potential in Easy Valley and on the Eastern Plateau. We are tired and retreat down the mountain for a well-earned rest before schlepping loads into Easy Valley for our descent of Low's Gully. Well-acclimatized, we zip down the tourist trail and into the village life of rural Sabah. Our experience in the jungle has taught us the usefulness of the parang, so we buy one in Ranau. Brandon spends the rest of the expedition proudly wearing the large knife on his belt; his Texan roots are showing. We spend our "night off" bingeing on beer, fried chicken and ice cream. We buy packages of betel nuts from a group of giggling old ladies, and an animated local shows us how to properly prepare and use the local chew. One: smear pea-sized portion of ground shell onto betel leaf and insert into mouth. Two: plop betel nut pieces into mouth and chew the bitter wad until you can spit great streams of brown fluid out onto the street. We are hacks, but we manage to get a good buzz off the stuff before switching back to beer and ice cream.

Our loads into Easy Valley are insanely large due to park stipulations on the style of a Low's Gully descent. We must have an escape route available at all times, so we are hauling hundreds of metres of static rope for fixing lines through otherwise irreversible sections. The successful 1998 expedition fixed 3000 m of rope, but we are a smaller party and are attempting a simpler, lighter descent. Two days of shuttling loads brings us to Lone Tree, a camp perched on a large boulder at the end of Easy Valley. From here, the riverbed falls steeply into the gully bottom.

Low's Gully drains the greater part of Mount Kinabalu and was carved into the northern flanks of the mountain by a massive ice cap that disappeared 3000 years ago. Shrouded in mist and legend, the gully is "the most dominating, awe-inspiring and unassailed feature of the mountain" (*Kinabalu: Summit of Borneo*, 1996). The area was first explored by British commandos in the 1960s, but the first complete descent was not achieved until 1998. During an unusually dry period, a heavily equipped and sponsored British expedition applied siege tactics to the gully and conquered its lower gorges.

The British needed a success in Low's Gully. In March 1994, to the embarrassment of the British military, an army expedition of eight soldiers and two officers had unsuccessfully attempted the gully. During the descent, the team split several times, ran low



Heather tops out on the first ascent of Rare Malts. photo: Brent Raymond

on morale and food and resorted to desperate means to escape the gully. The strongest team crawled — injured, exhausted and starving — to the village of Melangkap Kappa. The second group was stranded on a large boulder, water raging around them, for many days with little more food than a package of Polo mints. They were rescued by helicopter after a massive Special Forces rescue operation was launched to find them. Needless to say, the British had something to prove in 1998.

We need good weather to commit to the gully, but it rains for several days. We spend two days clearing a sinuous path to the first major obstacle, a 100-m waterfall rappel, and now must decide to continue or retreat. The risk of flooding in Low's Gully is high during periods of rain, but we are confident that we can safely reach New's Pools, where the narrowest and most technical part of the descent begins. After New's Pools, one is totally committed and completely at the mercy of Kinabalu's fickle weather. We decide to continue.

We leave Lone Tree and descend into the mist. One day of rappelling and steep bushwhacking brings us to the floor of the gully. The routefinding is simple here, but movement is treacherous because of the massive boulders we have to negotiate and the slippery mosses and lichens underfoot. Getting injured here is not an option, and we must move slowly. Our pants take a huge beating as we butt-slide down wet slabs; our packs become accustomed to bouncing down short cliff bands. In late afternoon, we find a

large, flat rock by the river, set up our tarp, slip into our set of dry clothes and bivy for the night.

In the morning, we struggle into our wet clothes and continue downstream towards Battleship Cave. A 30-m free-hanging rappel lands us beneath the overhang of a gargantuan boulder where we discover evidence of past expeditions. Two teams attempted the gully in 2000, one British and one Flemish, and both expeditions ended in failure. Low on food and with one member injured, the British called for a helicopter evac. It became apparent that the Flemish also required evacuation, but the pilot was prepared for four people not eight. "It's the Flemish or your gear," he said. We arrive one year later to eight packs of rotting clothes and smelly equipment. Like kids at Christmas, we ransack the abandoned gear for anything of value, cut patches off the packs to repair the seat of Brandon's pants, and pile the rest into a sodden heap at the back of the cave. This is a dry camp, safe from floods, although a note left by the rescued parties makes for sober reading: "... one hour of rain on the summit and there are Class V rapids in the gully ..."

We reach the top of New's Pools on our third day from Lone Tree and camp in a squalid patch of jungle beside a waterfall. It has been raining on and off for days, and we know we cannot go on without a minimum of three days of dry weather: one day for the river to go down to reasonable levels, and two days to negotiate the last and most technical section of the gully. Only 2 km lie between us and the end of the gully — the beginning of the overland journey to Kampung Melangkap Kappa.

Aaron, Brandon and Heather spend a day exploring the narrow canyon below us. It is an exhausting effort due to the high water levels. Swimming with a pack in cold water makes it even clearer that we need dry conditions to continue. They use handlines to cross the larger pools. In the process of negotiating one pool, Aaron's helmet is lost in the depths. They stash ropes and bolting equipment and return to camp shivering and drenched to the bone.

It is now a waiting game between the weather and our dwindling time, rations and energy. A day is spent playing hearts as the rain continues to patter down on our tarp and the jet-engine roar of the waterfall intensifies. Our only hope of success dwindles as the rain refuses to stop. Our rations are stretched and dinners consist mainly of broth. Forced to retreat, we pack up camp and begin a gruelling, three-day ordeal back up the gully to Lone Tree.

The problem with descending as an objective is that retreat naturally means returning upward. With our packs and gear waterlogged and the river swollen, we grind our way up the gully, taking to the steep, vegetated slopes when water or boulders block our way. Going down, we butt-slid down sections that we cannot now ascend due to the higher water. We make it to our

first campsite in one long push and set up our tarp on the large, flat boulder. As night progresses and the rain continues, the waterfall near camp begins to pour down on our shelter and water spits at us from between frothing rocks. Aaron blazes a trail into the jungle and we reluctantly move camp to a vegetated, 45-degree slope of broken rock, where we endure a soggy jungle bivy. In the morning, we are exhausted from the ordeal but set off upstream again. We slog and cut our way up through the jungle for several hours and finally reach the base of the last serious objective: the 100-m waterfall.

We are elated at having reached the waterfall before noon, as from the top it is only about one hour back to Lone Tree. The combination of heavy packs, weary limbs and the rigours of ascending and hauling, however, slows our progress to a crawl. Heather and I pace at the base of each pitch for six hours, shivering as we scarf down the last of the food. At the top, Aaron hauls packs while Brandon also paces and wishes he had food to eat. We top out at 6 p.m., darkness threatening, and stagger off towards Lone Tree.

About 45 minutes from basecamp, Brandon and Aaron decide that a second jungle bivy is safer than thrashing around in the jungle at night. Heather and I continue upriver, hit the rhino trail we cut during our scouting missions and reach camp by 9 p.m. I whip up hot lemonade, scarf down a dinner of crackers and margarine and snuggle into my sodden bag for a well-deserved rest. Our hands are covered in cracks, cuts and scrapes from grabbing jungle vegetation and from slashing at it with the parang — a condition we call "parang hand". Nine days of wet and dry cycles have also taken their toll on our hands, and they burn fiercely as they dry in our sleeping bags. We sleep only after taking a liberal dose of ibuprofen.

The next morning, we rise lazily and start breaking camp. Brandon and Aaron arrive at around noon, and together we head down to park headquarters. We check in with Martin, the head ranger, and tell him that we are all accounted for. "All of you?" he replies with surprise. He explains that during our 10 days in the gully, Borneo has been deluged by record rainfalls causing mudslides in Sarawak and major flooding in Kota Kinabalu. A witness to numerous epics in Low's Gully, Martin was braced for another due to the severe weather. In hindsight, we realize that retreating from the gully was not a choice, it was our only option. To continue would have been suicidal.

Despite not completing our objective, we are proud of our accomplishment. We have had no injuries and we are one of only two expeditions into the lower gully that have not been evacuated by helicopter. It is one of the most gruelling things I have ever done.

The final phase of the Mesilau-Low's Gully Expedition is a mountaineering course for Outward Bound and Sabah Park staff. After two nights of calorie replacement in Ranau, Heather and I join four Sabah Park

rangers and two Outward Bound Sabah staff for the course. Brandon and Aaron plan to return to Low's Gully and make an attempt to retrieve our gear. Over 10 days, the students learn to belay, top-rope, and build anchors. Each student also participates in a short multi-pitch climb. We climb each morning until the rains start, and then we retreat to the Gurkha hut for theory sessions in broken Malay. On the final evening, the guides and Outward Bound staff leave Heather and me alone to savour our last night on the mountain. The next morning, we reluctantly shoulder our packs, lock the Gurkha hut and head down. Kinabalu has been our home for almost two months and we are sad to leave; we drop our packs, climb one last route on a prominent pinnacle called Donkey's Ears and mentally prepare for the knee-jarring descent to park headquarters.

Back at headquarters, things are bustling. The park guides have arranged accommodation for us at the warden's house, and rumours of a party are in the air. Sinte arrives with a huge TV screen and a karaoke machine. Hot on his tail is Yrus with several 10-lb. bags of chicken wings, and two large pails and four red gas containers full of a suspicious liquid. The secret to Dusun hospitality is in the buckets. Both are full of *tapi* — rice wine — which is scooped off the top of the fermenting rice below. The gas containers contain the higher-octane, distilled version of *tapi* called *montukut*. Serious stuff and the catalyst for the ensuing multilingual karaoke extravaganza. This is the best party I have been in in years! I stumble out of bed at 2 a.m. to find Sinte and Yrus slouched together and croaking out some Dusun hit amidst a greasy carpet of chicken bones. I turn the sound off and return to bed. This night of festivities with the local rangers is the perfect ending to our Borneo adventure.

Overall, our expedition was a great success, even though we did not complete all our objectives. We explored a great deal of terrain on Mount Kinabalu, including high jungle on the Eastern Plateau; the bare alpine summit; and the chasm of Low's Gully. We made lasting friendships, worked closely with the local community and learned a small fraction of the secrets that Kinabalu holds for climbers. During the planning, I thought that it would be my last trip to the mountain, but I realize now that it has a hold on my consciousness which I will never shake. I will return to the hospitality of the mountain Dusun, to the sounds, smells and tastes of Sabah. I will return to explore and climb through jungle and over rock. I will return to the mysterious Low's Gully. I will return.

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CLOSE, BUT NO CIGAR

GRAHAM ROWBOTHAM

I am utterly exhausted; 30 m down and to my right, Simon is waiting at an ice screw. It's the only piece of gear on the rope between us. A little below him, Adam and Phil are also waiting. Beneath them the face sweeps down for 800 m to the bergschrund. In the distance, I can see the tents at basecamp, now nearly 2.5 km below us. We're at 6500 m on an unclimbed peak called Raksha Urai, in the far northwest of Nepal. The summit is less than 150 m above us. Since our 3 a.m. departure from our high camp above the bergschrund, it has taken us 13 hours of continuous climbing to reach this point. As we near the ridge crest, the ice on the face has given way to unconsolidated snow. Off to our right is a fracture line where a slab of snow has broken away. I pull a snow stake from my pack and push it into the slope in front of me. It's completely useless.

"What's it like?" someone shouts up.

"Well, it's climbable," I reply, "but the snow up here is totally crap."

There's some discussion among the others, then I hear another shout: "Could be time to bail."

The decision about when to bail is always hard. It's also what keeps you alive. I recall going to a lecture by Doug Scott, the veteran British Himalayan climber. At the end of the presentation, someone asked him to

comment on why he had survived whereas so many of his climbing partners had perished. He talked about the yin and yang of climbing, and the need to strike a balance between the aggressive "masculine" qualities that push you on in spite of the risks, and the intuitive "feminine" qualities that tell you when you're crossing the line. I turn to look upward again. Although the top of the face appears tantalizingly close, I know that the true summit is set back a fair distance. It will be dark before long. Given the snow conditions, our physical condition and the late hour, I know that the others are right and that the only sane decision is to turn around. I reflect on what has brought us here.

* * *

Eleven months earlier I'd received an e-mail from Simon, a friend in the U.K. "Interested in climbing a virgin summit in wild-west Nepal?" he asked. "Yes, send the brochure," I replied. The "brochure" comprised a copy of an article describing an unsuccessful attempt by an Austrian party to climb Raksha Urai in 1997. Raksha Urai is in the Api-Saipal Himal, in the extreme northwest corner of Nepal. This remote area was only opened to mountaineering by the Nepalese authorities in 1997 and has seen very few Western visitors. The article was full of descriptions of "steep faces" and "extremely

corniced, long, wild rocky ridges". The pictures, even in the poor-quality photocopy, were impressive. I was hooked.

I flew out of Vancouver on the evening of September 10, 2001. The timing proved to be fortunate. After an overnight stop in Singapore, I was waiting in the departure lounge for my flight to Kathmandu when images of planes crashing into the World Trade Center flashed onto the TV screens. The world seemed to have changed dramatically since I'd left home. When I arrived in Kathmandu, the other members of the team were already at the hotel. It was Jim's 30th birthday. Predictably, the birthday celebrations derailed our plans for an early departure by bus the next morning. A landslide blocking the road leading out of the Kathmandu valley delayed us further. It took three days of butt-numbing bus and truck rides to get to the trailhead. That evening, three figures walked through the village with guns slung over their shoulders. In hushed voices, our hosts informed us that they were Maoist guerrillas. The incidence of attacks by Maoists groups has been increasing in Nepal; fortunately, however, this was our only encounter with them.

After the bus and truck ride, the 12-day trek to basecamp was a joy. We quickly adjusted to the rigours of being served



left: *The southeast face of central Raksha Urai Peak.* bottom: *Climbing the southeast face.* photos: Graham Rowbotham



the morning, I was greeted by a circle of faces peering curiously inside.

Many ups and downs later, the trail began gaining elevation more steadily, following the Seti Khola northward. Our last campsite before basecamp was located beside a cluster of empty yak herder huts, not far from the Urai Lagna pass, which leads into Tibet. It's here that we got our first glimpses of Raksha Urai. There are four peaks in the main Raksha Urai group. As had the Austrian party, we elected to attempt the central snow peak. Its most striking feature is the 900-m southeast face, which tops out at a ridge leading to the summit.

Having established basecamp, we then spent several days acclimatizing and load carrying up to 5400 m. Our route circumvented

“bed tea” in our tents at 6:30 a.m. each morning, and three cooked meals a day while on the trail. The lazy Westerners and their entourage of 57 porters, sirdars, cooks and assistants never failed to draw the crowds at the villages we passed through. On several occasions when I unzipped the tent door in

an active icefall on the lower part of the mountain and then cut back into a snow basin above the ugliest section of seracs. Once we reached the basin, however, the way ahead did not look inviting. The Austrians had planned to climb up to the col between this peak and its neighbour to the south,

located at around 6200 m. Establishing a high camp at the col and then ascending the south ridge certainly seemed to be the most logical option. But the Austrians had been turned back by an excess of snow, and our problem was the opposite. The lack of snow had caused the slope leading to the col to rot out completely, and it was now bombarded constantly by rockfall. Going that way was out of the question. The only alternative was to climb directly up the southeast face. The angle of the face is a fairly consistent sixty degrees. The problem is that there are no intermediate places to stop. The last spot to camp is on a large serac 100 m above the bergschrund. We would have to climb almost the entire face in one push, without prior acclimatization. There was one thing we were all agreed on: summit day was going to be one heck of a workout.

* * *

I yank out the snow stake and yell to Simon that I'm going to start downclimbing. After only a few metres, the muscles in my forearms start to cramp up. I begin to wonder if we should have turned around earlier. I can barely manage to make it back down to the security of the ice screw. Once reunited, we set up a V-thread anchor for the first rappel. While waiting for the others to descend, I watch the alpenglow on the peaks opposite us. As darkness falls, the temperature plummets. It soon becomes impossible to clean out the ice screws in time for the next rappel. We're forced to abandon the V-threads and to sacrifice some titanium ice screws that we bought in Kathmandu. The ice becomes so hard that we can only manage to get the screws in part way. Each rappel is from a single tied-off screw, but every one is bombproof. While we were climbing the face, Bryan and Jim have moved up to high camp. We're thankful for their headlamps, which give us something to aim for. We're even more grateful for the hot drinks they've prepared for us on our arrival back at the tents after a dozen rappels. As I gulp mine down, my alarm goes off, signalling the end of our 24-hour summit attempt. Back at basecamp a day later, we crack open some beers. Phil sums up our efforts: “Close, but no cigar.”

Members of the Raksha Urai 2001 Expedition: Phil Amos, Jim de Bank, Bryan Godfrey, Graham Rowbotham, Adam Thomas and Simon Woods.

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SHISHAPANGMA

ANDREW AND SHELLEY MCKINLAY

WARNING: The following article contains graphic details of life at high altitude. Reader discretion is advised.

We looked like a group of drunks, staggering from side to side, struggling to stay upright in the calf-deep snow. Spread out at even intervals and connected by the familiarity of a climbing rope, we had set out an hour before from Camp II. Now, our hoods were battened down tight and we pushed our way forward against the gale-force wind. Snow blasted us and stung against the skin of our exposed faces. Step by slow step, we shuffled forward. Breaths came quickly but didn't seem to bring much oxygen. Our heartbeats pounded in our heads as we stumbled forward. Slowly, slowly — or, as they say in Nepal: “Bastati, bastati.”

There was no way we were going to make it to Camp III that day. When we came across an abandoned campsite that was relatively flat, we dropped our packs and got out the tent. Keeping it still bundled up, we managed to find a corner and peg it down with an ice axe. Even then we didn't trust the wind not to snatch it away from us. We knelt on our North Face VE24 and threaded the poles through the sleeves as quickly as our awkward, mittened hands would allow. The others had a Bibler Bombshelter; from the cursing and yelling we could hear over the wind, they seemed to be having a battle of epic proportions getting the internal poles into the wildly flapping tent.

But don't get the wrong idea: the weather wasn't that big a surprise — after all, we were at almost 7000 m in the Himalayas and we're masochistic enough to actually enjoy it!

This was our fifth trip to the Himalayas, and this time we decided to choose an “easier” 8000er, both technically and logistically. The non-climbing, bureaucratic and logistical problems were no longer the interesting challenges they once had been! Shishapangma seemed to fit the bill. At 8046 m (26,398 ft.), it is the 13th-highest of the 14 peaks over 8000 m. The Chinese made the first ascent in 1964, making it the last of the 8000-m peaks to be climbed. It wasn't climbed again until 1980, mostly because it's the only 8000-m peak entirely within China and access was restricted. Shishapangma (also written Shisha Pangma) is the mountain's Tibetan name, meaning “crest above the grassy plain”. Its Sanskrit or Hindustani name is Gosainthan, meaning “place of the saint” or “abode of the god”. The Chinese came up with the name Xixabangma, which they say means “bad weather”.

We quickly assembled a team of six: the two of us, plus four other friends who had all



been on previous 8000-m climbs with us. Later, a seventh person joined our group, planning to climb independently.

By its standard route, Shishapangma is known as one of the “easiest” 8000-m peaks and is popular with commercial expeditions. The normal approach is overland from Kathmandu via Zhangmu and Nyalam. You can drive all the way to the Chinese “basecamp” at 5000 m. In the past, the Chinese assigned an interpreter and liaison officer to each team. Now, a single liaison officer stays at the lower basecamp for the entire climbing season and is responsible for all the teams. From there it's a one-day walk to Advanced Basecamp at 5700 m. This is pretty high for a basecamp, and we noticed the difference from other trips in our lack of appetite there.

As we settle into basecamp, the rest of the world fades away and other concerns and thoughts come to the fore. They are so similar to those on previous trips that there is a sense of déjà vu, almost a feeling of returning to another life.

[Andrew] Of course, not all of these new thoughts and concerns are pleasant! Some of the first long-term symptoms of going to altitude show up in your nose, strangely enough. There seem to be two states your nose can be in — dripping and plugged. I'm not sure which is preferable. When it's dripping it's a nuisance: you can either let it drip, or blow it all the time. Either way, pretty soon the end of your nose is raw and sore. Which of course isn't helped by the high-altitude sunlight, which does its best to fry all exposed flesh, especially noses. Or you can adopt the native technique of plugging one nostril with a finger, leaning over, and expelling the contents of the other nostril

with a sharp blow. In addition to having a reluctance to blow my snot out on the ground, I've never been able to master this method. Either nothing emerges, or I manage to expel it onto myself. Besides, it seems a dangerous habit to acquire. I can imagine forgetting where I am and leaning over to blow out a large booger on the boardroom floor. The other problem with a dripping nose comes when you lie down. Now it runs down the back of your throat, a sensation not especially conducive to sleep. The alternative, a plugged nose, is not much better. It is less of a nuisance, but it means breathing through your mouth. This isn't an especially good idea in the cold, dry, high-altitude air. First, your lips dry out and crack painfully. Next, your throat gets sore, often leading to a cough. There is always the option of excavation, but this is a rather disgusting pastime that seldom does much to unplug your nose. It can, however, yield an amazing crop of yellow, green and bloody red boogers. This activity is best left for storm days when you are trapped in your tent and have run out of reading material — preferably further into the trip, when everyone's civilized veneer has worn away.

Basecamp life seems at times to resemble what life might be like in a small village. At home, in “civilization”, we lead very “isolated” lives. Here we are all close to each other, both physically and in our routines. We see each other healthy and sick, happy and concerned. We are conscious of everyone living, eating and crapping around us. Sometimes it feels uncomfortable; at other times, paradoxically, it is quite comforting. Of course, unlike in a village, we are all here with a common purpose, which perhaps



helps to draw us together — even though, again unlike in a village, most of us don't speak the same language. In our little basecamp community, we are next door to the Hong Kong Chinese. These guys talk non-stop and are very loud. At least not being able to understand what they are saying makes it easier to tune them out. We tend to take turns talking, but these guys seem to prefer talking all at once.

SukBai, our cook, came to the dining tent this morning and sat down to talk as we were relaxing after breakfast. He hasn't said too much to us so far. Maybe it was less intimidating with only the two of us instead of the whole group. His English is not very good, so it is hard to communicate. Even when you do manage a "conversation", you're left wondering whether you actually understood each other. He is from the Sulu. He works as a cook on expeditions in the spring, and on treks in the fall. He has been to Cho Oyu twice, Shishapangma twice and Everest twice. In the winter, he goes home. We lead such hugely different lives, and they happen to cross at this strange place. It must be as hard for him to grasp what our lives are like as it is for us to envision what his life is like.

[Andrew] Adrian, the Romanian from Utah who works in Alaska, comes to visit us regularly since we are among the few English speakers around. (You may remember him from Jon Krakauer's *Eiger Dreams* — an infamy he still resents.) He is on his own with Asian Trekking's mixed group. He seems to have adopted the "American" habit of being loud and outspoken. This is his second year on Shishapangma after being weathered off last time. We told him that we prefer to move on to new mountains even if we don't reach the top. He asks if we are married and compares his "loyalty" to a mountain to his "faithfulness" to his wife. After all, you don't

keep moving on to new partners! An amusing analogy, but not necessarily applicable. In other respects his attitude is refreshing. He wants to summit, but if not, that's okay too. You get the sense that he'll be back anyway. He enjoys the familiarity. He likes to get to know his mountains. I comment on my constant doublethink. Should we be going up? Should we be going down? Am I more or less fit than the other members? Am I ahead or behind on acclimatization? On doing my share of work? Am I in a good "position" to summit? What is today's guess of my odds of success? Adrian dismisses all this. Don't think about it, he says. Climb when your health and the weather allow. Otherwise rest. It's as simple as that. I guess I'll have to stop thinking so much. I didn't even realize that I was doing it! Another habit carried over from "civilization" which is unnecessary or even negative up here. In the end, Adrian doesn't even make a summit bid — in fact, doesn't even go to Camp III. He leaves basecamp without saying goodbye.

[Shelley] I found our first carry to Camp I to be an especially long and tiring day. We got started late due to heavy snow first thing in the morning. The route through the penitentes, leading to the snow slope up to Camp I, was a maze of up and down, in and around. With the sun beating down and snow and ice surrounding us on all sides, it was incredibly hot! As we moved up the long and crevassed snow slope to Camp I, the wind started to pick up. We finally gave in and put on our Gore-tex, but we didn't take the time to stop and drink. A big mistake! Four of us quickly set up one tent while trying not to freeze our hands, secured it with some ice screws, threw the gear we'd carried up inside of it and high-tailed it down the mountain. Almost four hours to get up, half an hour to get down! Another half an hour up and down and around through the penitentes, and we were on the 5-km hike along the moraine, which brought us back to basecamp just as darkness was setting in. I felt pretty good going up, but by the time we got back to base camp I was totally wasted. After collapsing outside our tent, I eventually got up the energy to head over to the dining tent. Unfortunately, on the way there I had to pass the kitchen tent and one whiff of food smells assured me that my gag reflex was still in fine working order. I took a few steps and promptly lost the contents of my stomach. I moved a few more steps and lost some more. My ski pole, still in hand, kept me from toppling over. That was the start of a few days of feeling wretchedly horrible and wondering from which end of my body things were going to start spewing next. I finally figured that a good dose of Cipro (the travel sickness cure-all) might do me some good; sure enough, it did.

At about this time, I was keeping one of our next-door neighbours awake at night with my developing cough and he came to my rescue with a "special" cough candy.

"Secret Chinese recipe," he said when I asked what was in it. It looked like a compressed yak turd. It tasted like what I imagine a compressed yak turd would taste like.

Our first night above basecamp is a pleasant change. We're only at our cache, halfway to Camp I, but it's great to finally be on our own, independent. Basecamp is a larger world with other people and a schedule of meals, destroying any sense of being "out there".

What a wonderful spot to camp. It's not high on the mountain, but the mountain looms above and the penitentes stand guard silently. Light snow drifts down, making a familiar patter on the tent. The rocks above us gleam wetly from the melting snow. The light is gradually fading into evening, and the temperature plummets once the sun goes down behind the ridge. But the stove purrs away, melting snow and warming the tent — though this benefit is limited by having to keep the tent doors open for ventilation. The thin air is bad enough without carbon monoxide poisoning as well! As we cook, it's amusing to read the warnings on the tent: "No flames inside." And the warnings on the hanging stove: "Do not use in enclosed areas such as tents." Right! Where else are you going to use a hanging stove? We continue to perform the ritual of melting snow, filling water bottles and making drinks. We know that we have to drink lots, but we also know that if we do we'll be up umpteen times in the night to empty our bladders. Since this means crawling out of a warm sleeping bag and going out into the wind or snow, it's not our favourite activity. There is an alternative: the infamous "pee bottle". But it's not so easy for women and there are enough stories of spills, and pee bottles confused with water bottles, to make us leery of the idea. After all, if you move fast you can be back inside your warm sleeping bag before your half-asleep brain even realizes that you left it.

[Andrew] One of the hardest days for me was our first trip from Camp I to Camp II. As the slope steepened, we slowed to a crawl. None of us was fully acclimatized yet; it was early in the climb. I ended up leading our rope part of the way and it was all I could do to keep moving. A friend of mine joked once, "How hard can it be? It's just one foot in front of the other." Well, as anyone who has been to altitude knows, it can be pretty darn hard! I could hear my blood pounding as I struggled to catch my breath between steps. A monster headache lurked, threatening to attack. Whoever had broken trail either had legs that were a lot longer than mine or had a nasty sadistic streak. I alternated between making extra steps to fill in the gaps and struggling to stretch between them. The slope finally eased off as we reached the plateau leading to Camp II. And the nice thing about altitude is that you do acclimatize and it does get easier. Later trips to Camp II were much more enjoyable!

I've been especially conscious, this trip,

of whether I'm enjoying myself. That might seem strange, but there are definitely components of these trips that aren't very pleasant. So it's important to remember that most of the time you are actually having a good time! The enemies of enjoyment seem to be fear and discomfort, and they tend to play on each other. You can often handle fear by itself. You can recognize it and examine it and usually keep going. Similarly, discomfort on its own can be withstood. You know that it won't last forever and that it's not going to kill you (unlike many other things up here). But strange things can happen when the two combine. You say "Why am I doing this? It's unpleasant," when what you really mean is, "I'm scared." But hiding the fear behind the discomfort means that you don't really examine the fear and thus don't overcome it. Of course it's unpleasant! You knew it would be before you started. And that same discomfort didn't stop you on previous trips. It's always surprising how much of a "head game" climbing really is.

At our forced Camp 2.5, the storm left as quickly as it had come and by afternoon the weather was fair again. The route to Camp III looked straightforward, and the next day we headed up. Surprisingly, given the commercial expeditions, the only fixed rope was old and intermittent. However, the route wasn't too steep or icy. We crested the ridge and found Camp III perched right there. There was lots of room but not much shelter on the exposed ridge. Another group had already grabbed the best spots. We stomped and dug out a couple of platforms and set up camp. We (and the other group) hoped to go for the summit the next day. Unfortunately, the weather didn't co-operate and we were hammered by the wind all night. When our alarms went off we took one look and went back to sleep — or at least what passes for "sleep" at 7400 m in a storm.

[*Shelley*] The funny thing about altitude is that each time is different. You never know for sure how your body is going to react. The consistent thing is that it's inconsistent. As we got higher on the mountain on this trip, I initiated each new camp by throwing up. I wasn't fond of this new tradition. By Camp III, even my gourmet supper meal,

consisting of a cup of hot water, made me quickly reach for a barf bag. It didn't seem to faze Andrew and Monika, who were eating their soup not more than a foot away from me.

Due to the uncertain weather, the other group headed down. Staying this high too long isn't a good idea, but we decided to wait a day with the hope that the weather would co-operate. The day passed slowly — not much to do and nowhere to go. When our alarms went off this time, the air was still and the sky was clear. We set off just as the horizon began to lighten. Expecting the brutal cold that is the norm up here, we were wearing every piece of clothing we'd brought with us. But as the sun came up and we began to sweat, we realized that it was amazingly warm. Unfortunately, the going turned out to be very slow. There was a lot of fresh snow and little fixed rope, only remnants from previous years poking out of the snow here and there. We were on our own that day, so there was no one to share the trail-breaking and routefinding. This was a nice change from the crowded conditions of popular routes. The ridge was steeper and more complex than we had expected. At several points we lost time choosing between bare ice, deep snow and loose rock. As we got higher, the view opened up and we could see Everest and Cho Oyu and other peaks in the distance. Times like this make it all worthwhile.

The day stayed mild, but the clouds began to close in and snow began to fall, reducing visibility. As we approached 8000 m, breaking trail through deep snow became increasingly difficult. The top was close — only 150 vertical m to go. But we had only averaged 50 m an hour so far that day. It was hard to believe that we could have been moving that slowly. But it was also hard to imagine going any faster. It was almost 2 p.m., and at the rate we'd been moving we had another three hours to go. That would put us on top at around 5 p.m., leaving only two hours of daylight to get down. The proposition was a little riskier than we would normally choose, but it seemed doable. Meanwhile, however, the weather was closing in and we could barely see each other. The

snow was starting to accumulate. Fred was trying to persuade us to go just a bit farther, only could someone else please break trail. With a sinking feeling, we turned and started the long trip down. Fred and the others followed.

Much to our disgust, the weather had cleared somewhat by the time we got back to camp. But for some of us, turning back was probably the right decision anyway. Monika was really struggling, which wasn't surprising since she'd been nursing two cracked ribs for the previous week and it had taken a lot out of her to keep going in spite of the pain. When we got back to camp, she sat down in the snow, too tired to move any more. We helped her get her equipment off and settle in to the tent.

The next day, we headed down, accumulating larger and larger loads as we picked up each camp, none of us wanting to have to come back up to collect gear. Unfortunately, one of our tents (and several from other groups) was completely buried at Camp I and we were unable to retrieve it. But other than that, we removed everything we'd brought up — unlike some of the other groups, who seemed to think that it was okay to leave their garbage outside their tents for the wind to distribute.

We were pretty happy to have had our whole group together for our summit attempt. It's fairly unusual for an entire team to be healthy and acclimatized at the same time. This was the first expedition we'd been on where this has happened. One factor might be that we'd all been on 8000-m climbs together before. If we had made it, it would have been very satisfying for us all to succeed together. Despite not reaching the top, we had a fun, safe trip, in a reasonable style. As on our previous trips, we had no "guides", no oxygen and no Sherpas (apart from our basecamp kitchen staff). From Camp II we made a single "alpine style" summit push.

The team: Andrew and Shelley McKinlay, Saskatoon, Sask.; Grant McCormick and Monika Bittel, Vancouver, B.C.; and Fred Ziel and Erik Erikson, Los Angeles, Calif., U.S.A.

RINGS OF FIRE: VOLCANO BASHING IN C. AMERICA

STEVEN TOBER

Towering above us, their perfectly shaped cones reflected in what Aldous Huxley describes as the most beautiful lake in the world, rise three volcanoes: San Pedro (3020 m), Tolimán (3158 m) and the lake's namesake, Atilán (3557 m). It has been eight years since I pedalled my bike along the Pacific coast, from Puerto Vallarta to Panajachel, Guatemala, and stood on the summit of San Pedro. Now I'm back with two friends from previous bike/scramble

adventures — Alan (Studley) Jones, an Australian, and Volker Spundflasche, a German — to continue the journey from Panajachel to Panama City, with the added attraction of trying to bag a volcano in each of the six countries we will cycle through.

Why volcanoes? Because I'm a scrambler at heart and most volcanoes, due to their relatively gentle slopes, are just that — scrambles. As a result of this predilection, I've always thought the title for the climber's

bible, *Freedom of the Hills*, to be a bit of an oxymoron since it is filled with page after page of details on how to complicate one's experience in the mountains — ropes, harnesses, knots, belays, and practising in gyms and on crags (both of which require a lot of non-aerobic standing around) — as opposed to actually making your way up a peak. A scrambler needs only some sturdy footwear along with a light pack of common essentials, and he or she is moving.

After doing most of the peaks in Alan Kane's scree gospel *Scrambles in the Canadian Rockies*, I headed off in 1996 to southern Colombia to teach English for a year. The geographical diversity of the northern Andes and the warmth of its people made me feel as if I were living a dream, and it was there, at the foot of the active volcano Galeras, that I met my future wife. Together we climbed several volcanoes, the highlight being a 10,000-ft. ascent on Christmas Eve including a bivy in the crater of Tungurahua (5023 m) in Ecuador (it has since blown its top). I was hooked.

With no fewer than 37 distinct composite volcanoes in Guatemala to choose from, the three of us decided that Atilán, a strikingly beautiful, dormant volcano covered with forest, would be our first objective (January 20–21, 2001). On fresh legs, we blasted up the 2000 vertical metres in just under six hours. On the summit crater, we were enveloped in towering cumulus clouds and we hastily erected a rock-wall shelter and collected bits of old, wind-tattered plastic for a lean-to roof. The pungent smell of sulphurous vapours from the fumaroles couldn't match our bean stew flatulence as we gassed ourselves to sleep, laughing under the star-filled sky.

The crisp morning presented us with mesmerizing views of Tajumulco (4220 m) — the highest volcano in Central America, near the Mexican border — and of the coastal lowlands of El Salvador and the brooding shadow of Atilán stretching out before us. Making our way through the coffee bushes, just before the village and the main road, we were confronted by four men. No, not the Juan Valdez type with coffee-laden burros and offering us fresh cups of java, but four masked banditos brandishing sharp, gleaming machetes. Hmm... your life or your gear — not a difficult choice. We'd hardly blinked and they'd disappeared with our packs back into the bushes, like elusive spirits in a surrealistic Gabriel García Márquez novel.

Except for one. And since he was now separated from his speedy compadres and was having trouble managing Studley's pack, we easily ran him down. Ryan, an American from another party whom we had taken on board, broke his hand as he pounded on the thief's head. I raced down to get the police; in the half-hour it took to return, Studley, Volker and Ryan had brought the culprit, head covered in a sweaty T-shirt, nearly down to the village, where he was surrounded by a mob of locals eager for a lynching, a common form of justice in Guatemala. Sanity prevailed, and the thief begrudgingly divulged the names of his accomplices. During the following days, with the help of the local Tzutujil Mayan population, we managed to get our gear back. Anxious to ride, we hit the road early on the first possible morning (January 25) — and so, with a healthy dose of Central America's harsher realities, we began again our adventure.

Still feeling somewhat apprehensive, we decided on the 26th to join a group of tourists, escorted by four armed guards, for our next objective, the active Volcán Pacaya (2552 m). The moody Pacaya has erupted almost continuously since 1965 and as recently as a year before our arrival and one month after our departure. As a result, its flanks are lined with recent evidence of pyroclastic flows. Starting at 3 p.m., after having biked some 60 km including 5000 ft. of elevation gain, we hiked up to the crater in three hours, arriving at the rim in time for a glorious sunset. Between roaring bursts of sulphur gas, we caught occasional glimpses of the red glow of lava bubbling up 100 m below. Stupendous! A quick boot-ski by headlamp down the ash and cinder delivered us back to our bikes and our posh digs for the night, the floor of a half-built visitors' centre.

On January 28, two weeks after the earthquake that left hundreds dead and thousands without shelter, we arrived with some trepidation in El Salvador; in Guatemala, we had been experiencing aftershocks powerful enough to shake us out of our beds. As we pedalled our way up to Cerro Verde National Park, which contains three volcanoes, we passed many families camped on the side of the road and waiting for emergency assistance. No assistance was in sight, however. Further up the paved road leading to the middle summit, we were escorted by four policemen equipped with M-16s, pistols and bulletproof vests. They told us that a few weeks previously they had killed the leader of a gang of thieves that had made its hideout in the park, and they were continuing to search for the others. Thieves, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions — no lack of excitement in these parts. Unfortunately, the policemen didn't have any extra bulletproof vests to share.

On the 29th, we arrived at the nearly deserted summit at sunset, free of bullet holes and in time to watch the fog from the Pacific drift in, filling the valleys far below. Only a few military personnel remained to guard the communication towers and the remains of a once posh government-owned building, the Hotel de la Montaña, which now lay in ruins. The government had built the hotel in the early '60s in the hope of attracting some tourist revenue, as the building was perched on a cliff with a direct view to one of the world's most active volcanoes, Izalco (1920 m). Beginning in 1770, Izalco, known as "the Lighthouse of the Pacific" due to its frequent eruptions, had produced a 650-m cone within two hundred years. However, as the fate of this unfortunate country would have it, Izalco finished its own "construction" and stopped erupting just as the hotel was completed, thus greatly diminishing its appeal as a tourist attraction.

The next morning (January 30) — accompanied by James, an eager Italian, and Jorge, a machete-brandishing local — we armed ourselves with pepper spray and made

our way past thickets of century plant to the highest volcano in El Salvador, Santa Ana (2365 m). Jorge, having been to the summit many times, was shocked by the appearance of two large steam vents spouting sulphur gas out of the stadium-sized crater. He surmised that the recent earthquake must have reactivated the volcano. Exciting times to be scrambling, for sure. Off in the distance, we could see our next objective for the day, the perfect black cone of Izalco. Back at Cerro Verde, after a second breakfast — this one consisting of beans and thick tortillas — two heavily armed soldiers joined us for the 300-m climb down to the col, where they waited for us while we grovelled for an hour up loose blocks mixed with basaltic ash to the shallow summit crater of Izalco. After taking in views that nearly encompassed the entire country, we boot-skied our way back down to the soldiers in a sizzling five minutes and marched back up to Cerro Verde — a roller-coaster day of scrambling.

The long, exhilarating bike ride down from Cerro Verde got us well on our way towards Honduras and our next volcano climb (Isla del Tigre) on February 5. Tiger Island is situated in the steamy bay of Fonseca, a short boat ride from the mainland. One of only four volcanoes in all of Honduras, its perfectly shaped, dormant cone takes up the entire island and rises all of 760 m out of the Pacific. A straightforward albeit hot ascent up an overgrown road that later turned into a densely vegetated trail was made easier by the use of Volker's recently acquired machete (thankfully, we only had to use it for its intended purpose of whacking jungle, rather than banditos). The summit was adorned with abandoned U.S. military structures, supposedly used in the 1980s as a base from which to stop the Nicaraguan Sandinistas from smuggling arms to the leftist FMLN rebel group in El Salvador which was fighting wealthy, U.S.-backed landowners. A little cleanup by Uncle Sam would have been nice, though. However, the stunning views of two more volcanoes — Chaparraspique (2130 m) to the west, in El Salvador, and San Cristobal (1745 m) to the southeast, in Nicaragua — more than made up for the lack of summit aesthetics.

Our next objective was even more straightforward than Isla del Tigre. Across the border into Nicaragua — just outside the capital, Managua — lies the active Masaya, barely a bump on the horizon at all of 550 m. On February 10, we pedalled up a steep, well-paved road to the enormous (6 by 11 km) basaltic caldera and an equally humungous parking lot. The epitome of volcano-bagging simplicity. Still, it could have been worse; only two months after our visit, a major eruption occurred, its bomb-laden plume of ash setting the parking lot on fire.

The Nicaraguan volcano we were really looking forward to was on the dumbbell-shaped Isla de Ometepe in the middle of Lake Nicaragua. The twin summits of

Concepción (1610 m) and Madera (1394 m) had been crowned with lenticular clouds during the few days we spent relaxing in the colonial city of Granada (February 10–11). But on the 12th, with gale-force winds now pounding the lake, we finally braved the ferry from Granada and, after five gut-wrenching hours, arrived on the island after sunset, only to endure a pitch-black ride down a road of deep sand to the next town.

On the morning of the 13th, with the wind still raging, we headed up the lower yet much more tropically lush of the two summits, Madera. Almost immediately, Cosmo, a Rambo Yank armed with a butcher knife strapped to his side and a cigarette hanging out of the corner of his mouth, joined our group, providing a kind of ominous comic relief. The unsettling screams of the howler monkeys quickened our pace up into mist-enshrouded cloud forest. Again, Volker's machete proved invaluable as we slashed our way through the thick undergrowth. From the crater rim, we bat-manned down a greasy hemp rope into the caldera and, surrounded by hundreds of bromeliads in the dense, ancient rain forest, revelled in the eerie haze. Hours later, we slip-slid our way back down the muddy trail. After that it was straight to the shower to scrape off layers of putrid mud,

and then to the hammocks on the huge veranda overlooking Lake Nicaragua. Life was again sweet.

Costa Rica! Ah, the promised land of Central America: 27 per cent of its territory is protected as national parks and forest reserves; well-paved roads and greater personal safety abound; and here were three more tourists about to join the thousands already there. Rincón de la Vieja (1700 m) was our first objective (February 16). However, after we had biked 800 m up a white, hard-packed volcanic-sand road, a ranger informed us that the volcano was closed because of high winds. Costa Rica was obviously also a land with officials, and rules to be enforced. But perhaps the rule that prevented us from summiting was reasonable, since a few weeks previously a Canadian tourist had, in similar conditions, fallen into the crater. We had no choice but to resign ourselves to toughing it out in the nearby hot springs.

Our second attempt, this one successful, of a Costa Rican volcano was Poás (2704 m), a broad, well-vegetated shield volcano (February 21). In addition to the long cycling grunt up 1600 m, the real challenge was to stay ahead of the tour buses. Zipping back down the road while belting out our

best rendition of Van Halen's "Panama", we decided that we would bag Costa Rica's highest volcano, Irazú (3432 m), as well. And so, on February 23, we slogged another 2300 m up a steep road to a beautiful, turquoise pool of sulphur-laced water. From this vantage point, we could just barely see our final objective, Barú, far off in the steamy lowlands of Panama.

Straddling the border between Costa Rica and Panama, Barú is easily the highest point in the country, at 3455 m, and nearly as high as our first volcano, Atitlán (3557 m). An alpine start on February 27 got us safely through the coffee bushes just above the town of Boquete at 1600 m, bandito-free. A mud road covered with a patina of gravel then led us through forests populated by flocks of quetzals (a gaudy yet shy Central American bird) and by hundreds of parrots and brightly coloured butterflies. Four hours later, like Keats' Cortez upon a peak in Darién, we staggered up to a magnificent summit view of two oceans — the Caribbean and the Pacific! A fine conclusion to an incredible trip through Central America which included 11 volcanic summits, 14,000 m of climbing and 3000 km of cycling in two months. Team Endorphin Adventures strikes again!

NADA ES SEGURO

KAREN MCNEILL

The bus rolls into Cohoni at 11:30 a.m., only half an hour late. By South American standards this is considered on time. A single glance at the vehicle, which appears to be splitting at the seams, suggests that our journey back to La Paz may indeed be the crux of our six-day ordeal. We have just climbed a new route on the south face of Illimani.

* * *

I came to Bolivia to visit my friends Sheila and Bruce Hendricks. Together they had packed up their belongings and come to South America with their two sons, Kern and Logan, on a year-long sabbatical. My arrival in mid-April was early for the climbing season, but a full schedule dictated my luck with both the mountains and the weather. After the wettest season in fifty years, the rain literally stopped as I disembarked from the plane. This stroke of good luck with the weather continued for the next two weeks while we rock climbed on the outskirts of Mallasa and in the Quisma Cruz on excellent granite.

The looming threat of a "blocka" by the Cocaliros became a reality the day we were scheduled to leave for Illimani. The capital city shut down and no vehicles moved. Antsy, we all hoped that the strike would only last the predicted 24 hours. Traffic sounds woke me the following morning. Sheila greeted me as I walked into the kitchen. Her news was not so positive.

During the night, Logan had fallen ill; now Sheila would remain behind to nurse him back to health. This didn't feel right, as I had come here to spend time with Sheila and now on our main objective she wouldn't be there. During our friendship I have always known Sheila to happily put her family first. Selfishly, I wanted her along during the climb.

Bruce and I nodded in disbelief as the dispatcher informed us that the 9 a.m. bus wouldn't run that day. It appeared that someone didn't want us to climb the mountain. Feeling dejected, we returned to Mallasa. In hindsight, the morning's events were perfect: Logan now felt better and Sheila felt comfortable about leaving the boys with their friend Tim.

Happily we took our seats on the bus at 3 p.m. It slowly chugged through the narrow, overcrowded streets of La Paz. Women in colourful, layered skirts scampered about with either children or vegetables on their backs. Men huddled together talking and laughing. On board we were all lost in our own thoughts. When I looked up, I noticed Sheila sitting at the front of the bus. With her large, welcoming smile and a solid grasp of the Spanish language, she had attracted a number of Bolivian suitors. All the men wanted a chance to talk with the turista. The conversations were beneficial, for Sheila discovered a boy whose

brother owned horses that we could hire in Cohoni.

Bruce is meticulous when it comes to details. Before departing, he sat with the horse owners and carefully explained our need to go to the south side of the mountain and not the west side. To emphasize the idea further, Bruce showed both men a map of the area. Repeatedly he pointed to Cohoni, the west side of Illimani and then the south side of the mountain. Our campesinos nodded in acknowledgement as though they understood our request.

The journey to Minera Mesa Kala, a dilapidated mine at the base of the south face, was a confusing and exhausting eight-hour trek. Initially, the morning air was crisp; it felt great to be moving. We climbed higher and higher into thinner air. Cohoni fell into the distance. We arrived at the top of the hill after a couple of hours. All around, you could feel space. The hills were blanketed with a green carpet, and in front of us loomed Illimani — looking huge. It seemed a long way to go in a day. I felt happy and free; the mountains felt peaceful. After hiking for some time, we realized that our campesinos had misunderstood Bruce's instructions. They were taking us to the west side of the mountain. The problem was rectified after a three-hour detour.

As the proposed route was ice and snow, our plan was to ascend the 1000-ft. face



The south face of Illimani. The route ascends the gully system on the left.

during the cool of night. We would then descend the regular route during the day, when we needed the light for routefinding.

The three of us left Minera Mesa Kala at 3 p.m. We traversed scree slopes and crossed granite slabs, avoiding a receding glacier that had tossed ice fragments about like garbage. A glaciated snow cone took us to the base of our route. This was reached as the last rays of light disappeared and darkness blanketed us. The initial pitches of climbing provided the technical crux of the route. The darkness seemed to absorb our fears; all we could focus on was the area illuminated by our headlamps.

Daylight found us only 10 pitches up. We were moving more slowly than we had hoped. We continued up as the sun's rays fanned the upper slopes. Once we had climbed the water ice, the route took on a new identity. Unconsolidated snow slopes became interspersed with bands of rock and smatterings of ice. During the afternoon, the blue skies were replaced by descending grey clouds. By the time we reached the southwest ridge at the top of the face, a storm raged about us. Its ferocity halted our progress. We dug a cave in the snow for shelter. Despite our lack of sleeping bags, we felt warm and comfortable inside. Our stove provided heat, as well as fluids for hydration and food to refuel our starved bodies.

When I pecked out the following morning, the clouds still hung around like hungry hyenas. Our options limited, we began to ascend the ridge. Whiteout conditions gave poor visibility, so the lead would have to use markings in the snow as a guideline — all the time being careful to avoid cornices and ensuring that we didn't walk off the ridge into the surrounding space. By the time we reached the summit, the weather had deteriorated. Hailstones stung our exposed skin, and the wind tried to rip the clothes from our bodies. There were no feelings of summit jubilation but rather a strong desire to be down. Lacking landmarks to guide our descent, we became confused and disoriented. And so we "dug in" for a second night. Excavating the cave was a prized task. The exertion kept our tired bodies warm, and the cave provided shelter from the wind. While we were digging the cave, the clouds parted, allowing us to see the route down. All our thoughts turned to descending, but at basecamp there would be little snow in which to dig a cave. Without sleeping bags we would be exposed to the wind, snow and rain. We stayed put in our cave.

Again we awoke to low-lying mists. Soon after we began the descent, however, Sheila, Bruce and I got below the cloud layer. Basecamp was still hours away, but we began to relax a little now that the route was visible. On our arrival at basecamp we were greeted

with cups of warm, sweet tea, and bread and cheese. Bernardo, a Bolivian mountain guide, had spotted us during the night. He had sent his clients down the mountain in the morning and was waiting for our safe arrival.

Feeling slightly revitalized by the food and the lower altitude, everyone continued down the mountain after a break. At this point our party was two days late. Sheila and Bruce wanted to get down to the town of Cohoni in order to phone Kern and Logan. Porters told us that a bus would leave for La Paz at eight that night. We didn't need further motivation to descend, although our tired bodies complained.

It was dark when we arrived in the town. Silhouetted against the night was the bus, for anyone who cared to notice it. To our disappointment we discovered that it would not depart until ten the following morning.

In our tiny room decorated with posters of voluptuous, scantily clad women, we were awakened from a deep slumber at 7 a.m. We all heard an engine cough to life, we all heard the warning horn and we all heard the vehicle drive away, but neither Sheila, Bruce nor I dared to acknowledge that it was our bus. It was!

* * *

So when the second bus rolls into town at 11:30 a.m., we know that it isn't leaving without us. Strapped to the roof is over a ton of hay. Inside, the bus is all but bursting with people, and hessian sacs full of vegetables to be sold at the market. We buy the last available space: a tiny spot between the driver and his backup, behind the stick shift and above the engine. As the unbalanced bus departs, heavily rutted dirt roads cause it to sway precariously from side to side. The road then begins to descend thousands of feet. At each tight hairpin, the bus feels as though it will topple over and fall into the abyss below. On board, no one dares to speak and all colour drains from our faces as our fate is put in the hands of the driver.

Safely down in the valley, on wider roads of higher-quality soil, I know that the bus ride has indeed been the crux of our climb. Across the valley, Illimani stands alone, looking majestic. No clouds cling to her summit and no one else knows of our adventure. I think to myself "Nothing is for sure."

Nada Es Seguro 1400 m. V, WI3. South face of Illimani, Bolivia. Sheila Hendricks, Bruce Hendricks, Karen McNeill. April 27–30, 2001.

ERIC BROOKS 1902-2001

Eric Brooks died very peacefully in Point Grey Hospital, Vancouver, on May 17, 2001, at the age of 98. From a family of six, he is survived by his brother Drummond and sisters Gertrude Hudson and Mary Ledingham. During his long life, he contributed much to The Alpine Club of Canada and he would always go the extra mile to help anyone he could. His desire to help others was a characteristic that was common to his service to the ACC, his work in the teaching profession, the causes he supported, and his relations with friends. Eric and his wife, Emmie, had no children, but they always kept in touch with their large extended family.

Born in England, Eric had two brothers and three sisters. In 1911, his family emigrated from Tunbridge Wells in Kent to the village of Rimbey in Alberta. They moved to a dairy farm in the Fraser Valley in 1919, and in 1923 Eric began teaching at the Lister-Kelvin School in New Westminster, which had a staff of 16, one of whom was Emmie Milledge. When Eric mustered up the courage to ask Emmie what she did on weekends, she replied that she went climbing. Thus romance was initiated, and with it Eric's climbing career, which began in 1925 when Emmie invited him to go with her on a Vancouver Section trip to Forks Peak on the North Shore. His love of the mountains and his enthusiasm for climbing and hiking lasted for the rest of his life.

After several years of climbing with the Vancouver Section, Emmie joined The

Alpine Club of Canada in 1928 and Eric joined in 1929, the year they both attended their first ACC camp, at Rogers Pass. In succeeding years, they attended many more of the Club's camps. They married in 1935, and on their honeymoon they attended the ACC camp at Mount Assiniboine and later climbed Mount Louis. In 1938, Eric and Emmie, with Fred Parkes, climbed Mount Robson. The camps got Eric interested in the Club — in how it functioned and in its objectives in providing climbing experiences for young people and encouraging the appreciation and preservation of the mountain environment. These interests led to his being elected President of the ACC in 1941, a particularly challenging task during those wartime years.

From 1954 to 1964, Eric was Honorary President of the ACC, and as such he represented the Club in 1957 at the centenary of the Alpine Club in London, of which he was made an Honorary Member. At this celebration, where the guest of honour was Tenzing Norgay, he met mountaineers from all over the world and developed a friendship with Tenzing that lasted until the Sherpa's death. He also mentioned that it was a great thrill to meet Geoffrey Winthrop Young. Eric's last major task with the ACC was his appointment as chairperson for the 1967 Yukon Alpine Centennial Expedition selection committee.

In 1969, Eric and Emmie moved to the house they had built at Madeira Park in the Pender Harbour area, and that beautiful house in a lovely situation was their base

during a very active retirement. In 1970, Eric did his first trek in Nepal. He came back so impressed that he wanted Emmie to see that country, too, and they fitted Kathmandu into their round-the-world travels in 1971. Sadly, Emmie's health was failing towards the end of that trip. A few winters spent in Hawaii helped her. Though she could no longer travel extensively herself, she urged Eric to continue his treks — which he did, visiting Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, China, Tibet and Ethiopia.

After Emmie's death in 1989, Eric continued to live alone at his Madeira Park home and to travel extensively, although he was losing his sight to glaucoma. He visited Britain, and climbed Snowdon from Betws-y-Coed on his 89th birthday, and I think that he went back to Britain and climbed Scafell on his 90th. He also went to the Antarctic, and to the Arctic on cruises, and in 1993, at age 91, he went to Nepal to visit a remote school that he had co-sponsored.

The ACC awarded Eric Brooks the Silver Rope for leadership in 1937. Honorary Membership was conferred upon him in 1969, and in 1995 he received the A.O. Wheeler Legacy Award "for Outstanding and Varied Contributions to The Alpine Club of Canada".

It was a privilege to know him and an honour to be counted among his friends, and it is good to know that his work for the Club will continue through his bequest for a continuing fund for the CAJ.

JOHN S.T. GIBSON

BRUNO ENGLER 1915-2001

Like so many who come to the Rockies, I heard about Bruno long before I met him. There was this mountain guide, photographer, filmmaker, famous romantic, storyteller and bon vivant whom you simply had to meet if you wanted to qualify as a local in Banff. I had heard so many stories about him that I felt as though I knew him well before we met.

When Jon Whyte first introduced me to Bruno, it was at the Paris Restaurant in Banff. I must admit that I was surprised. Here came Bruno shambling to the table, talking to himself. He went on simultaneously about a dozen unrelated subjects. In the same breath, he complained that he had forgotten his mail somewhere — several days before, and had yet to recover it — and announced a bear sighting, the first of the year. Then, without adding any punctuation, he declared that the end of the world was coming due to some unfortunate but pending future alignment of the planets. All of these events, it seemed, were interfering with his capacity to concentrate on his work.

Bruno sat down and a waitress brought him lunch, apparently without him having to order. Telepathy, I guessed. Then we all started to talk as if we had known each other all our lives.

A huge number of people had the same kind of experience with him. The old man of the mountains comes along, he sits with you, you are instantly included in the expansive geography of his life and his experiences, and, suddenly, you belong. You are part of it all — all the adventures and all the stories. You suddenly become one of the characters in the grand tradition of these peaks.

Bruno's considerable legend was founded to a large extent on the gracious way he opened himself to others. He had an irresistible presence. It was as impossible to resist Bruno's sincerity and warmth as it was to resist the joy and humour of his stories. I worry sometimes, however, that his storytelling will overshadow his more tangible accomplishments, which were many indeed.

Bruno Engler was a very good skier. If you look at the old footage of Bruno at

Sunshine, you can tell that he had style, he had fun and he shared his sheer pleasure with everyone around him. Bruno was also a good teacher. He taught more than just technique; he taught hundreds to ski and to love the mountains. In this way he influenced the lives of a great number of people who will never forget the gift he gave them.

Bruno was a good climber as well. He was a guide of note who worked with early guiding legends such as Edward and Ernest Feuz and Rudolf Aemmer at Lake Louise. Among his clients were some of the greatest mountaineers of the 20th century. He climbed with Oliver Eaton Cromwell and Georgia Englehard. When the great British mountaineer Frank Smythe came to the Rockies in 1946, he chose Bruno as his guide.

Bruno also climbed and skied with a great number of mountaineers whose names are now household words in the mountain community of the Canadian West. Hans Gmoser. Rudi Gertsche. Lloyd Gallagher. Tim Auger. The list goes on and on to

include three generations of local skiers and climbers.

Nowhere, however, was Bruno's contribution to the culture of the mountain West more tangible than in photography. Bruno had an almost uncanny sense of composition. His images endure because they are composed in the innately engaging and enduring manner of a classical painting. You can hang one of Bruno's photographs on the wall and never tire of it — something which cannot be said of the work of less-accomplished photographers. Like great paintings, his photographs continue to thrill and engage the viewer.

Bruno will also be remembered as a photographer of record. His life extended over most of the 20th century. He photographed on two continents and in two of the world's greatest ranges of mountains. His images span more than half a century of skiing and mountaineering history in Canada.

In addition, Bruno worked as a cinematographer and film-location consultant on at least 36 feature films, dozens of television specials and scores of commercials. He knew directors, producers and Hollywood stars. His experiences in the film industry are the stuff of popular legend and constituted some of his best stories. However, it will not just

be the stories we remember, but the man.

Bruno Engler was more than just a character. He was a force. It was through his spirit that others came to know and love and care for these mountains. He was an embodiment of sense of place in the Rockies. He taught that if you stayed around long enough and did the right things, the mountains might transform you. The mountains might grant you grace. If you were lucky, the mountains might even grant you the grace and the joy Bruno possessed and the love he shared with everyone he met.

R.W. SANDFORD

FRANCES CAROL FROST 1970-2001

My good friend Frances loved the outdoors. Anything that had to do with being outside excited her — hiking, skiing, drawing, even acting on an outdoor stage as an interpreter in Kananaskis Country.

The day Frances was fatally wounded by a cougar on the Cascade fire road, she was doing exactly what she loved. Frances spent a lot of time alone in the mountains. If she couldn't find anyone who would "play" with her, she would just go alone. In the autumn before her death, she had even bought a Unishelter to go backpacking by herself.

A few weeks after buying her little tent, she wanted to put it to use. I had been telling her that the Bugaboos were a wonderful

place, so we planned to hike in and do a little trekking in the area. On our first morning in Boulder Campground, while I was snoring away, she lay awake and watched the pikas play peekaboo with her. This innocent inspiration led her to start writing a children's book called *Anika the Pika*, which lies unfinished.

When I look around the mountains, I am constantly reminded of my friend Frances. I think of her quietly writing in her journal. When I'm hiking on a trail, I look behind me and see her there.

*Do not stand at my grave and weep
I am not there, I do not sleep*

*I am a thousand winds that blow
I am a diamond's glint on snow
I am the sunlight on ripened grain
I am the gentle autumn's rain
When you awaken in the morning's hush
I am the swift uplifting rush
of quiet birds in circled flight
I am the soft stars that shine at night
Do not stand at my grave and cry
I am not there, I did not die.*

— Author unknown

We all miss you dearly, Frances, all your friends and family.

BRIGITTE FRANYO

Cyclone Cabin

**Meadow snowmelt sunshine trickle
from the roof, leaves waver
in peripheral, branches jump
release burden of snow to earth.
Crisp air bites moist
scent of autumn breeze
mingles with internal hum.
This paper rime-encrusted
cliffs of Oyster Peak
trickling damp.**

Monica Meneghetti

REVIEWS

Selkirks South
by David Jones, 2001
Elabo Press, Squamish

The past year was a watershed in the history of Canadian mountaineering guidebooks, marked by the appearance of Kevin McLane's *Alpine Select*, Don Serl's *The Waddington Guidebook*, and David P. Jones' *Selkirks South*. The three authors agreed to adopt the same format in their books, to attempt to be reliable and consistent in their route grading, and to make use of European alpine grades. In the following lines I will give an overview of Jones' book and address the somewhat controversial topic of the use of European grading. But first, a bit of history about Selkirks and related ranges guidebooks.

Jones writes that Thorington's *The Purcell Range of British Columbia* (1946) was the pioneer in listing first ascents throughout the range. W.L. Putnam's *Interior Ranges of B.C.* (1971), which revised and updated Thorington's effort, was later divided into two volumes, *North* and *South*, and appeared with revisions in the mid-1970s. *The Columbia Mountains of Canada: Central* (1992) by J. Kevin Fox, W.L. Putnam and Earle R. Whipple and *CMC: West and South* by Whipple, Laurilla and Putnam (1992) added necessary new data on approaches and routes, omitting the Purcells, probably because by this time it would have been a Herculean task to assemble all the information. The appearance of Green and Bensen's *Bugaboo Rock* in 1990 is indicative of the inevitable fragmentation. Of this roundup of guides, Putnam's 1971 effort is the most comprehensive geographically, ranging from the northernmost Cariboos south to peaklets in the Norns Range near Castlegar. In an understandable effort to limit scope, *Selkirks South* covers the peaks south of the Trans-Canada Highway down to and including the Badshots near Trout Lake. A second volume, covering the northern Selkirks, is to appear in the near future. Climbers venturing into the Purcells outside the Bugaboos are still relying on the 1977 *Interior Ranges of British Columbia: South* by Kruszyna and Putnam.

In assessing *Selkirks South*, I first asked myself, "What constitutes a good guidebook?" Obviously, the author himself should be knowledgeable about the area. This David Jones certainly is, as he grew up in Revelstoke in the heart of the Selkirks and has spent over thirty years climbing in the range. Although now based in Richmond, he has for years regularly spent four to six weeks of every summer climbing in the Selkirks, range by range. As well, his background as a cragsman and as a climber in the Himalayas, the Yukon and South America lends perspective to his guidebook writing. Next I asked, "What do climbers want in a guidebook to this region?" One school prefers details on access and a minimum of information on routes, its members preferring the joys of puzzling out a climb for themselves. Another welcomes as much detail as possible to increase chances of success in the face of the vagaries of Selkirks weather and to provide some sense of security in visiting what is still a

remote area. Other elements the reader will find useful are photos, maps, sketches, and sections on geology, flora and fauna, climate and weather, and huts, as well as a history of the region's climbing.

Jones provides all these and more in a guide that attempts to be a comprehensive survey of every peak in the region over about 2500 m. And make no mistake about it, he has stood on the shoulders of his predecessors to produce a work that is, as it should be, the benchmark for Interior ranges guidebooks. After all, improvements in travel, communication, mapping, equipment, technique, knowledge, printing and graphics lead naturally to the expectation of a better guide.

In his treatment of the groups from north to south, Jones introduces each range with a multi-page section on access, followed by recommended routes, a sketch map, and a thorough treatment of each peak, detailing all known routes and adding the depth of the European grading system. Let's look at a popular route, the Northwest Arête of Sir Donald, to see how this plays out. The entry includes the first-ascend date and party, references in the climbing literature, an arrow indicating that this is a preferred descent route, and the grade — in this case "D-, 5.4". The text apprises the climber of the hazards of underestimating this popular climb and dispenses sage advice: "Parties who require belays on the first few pitches out of the col are best advised to gain experience on less demanding routes.... To complete the northwest ridge safely, parties must climb quickly and efficiently, paying close attention to the weather." As well, the author provides eight photos of the peak, showing all routes with dotted lines and numbers cross-referenced to the route entries. Jones is equally attentive to detail in his treatment of less-visited regions. Just have a look at his write-up of the fine Nautilus Mountain in the infrequently visited Nemo group.

Yes, there are errors in this book. No writer, however indefatigable, could avoid mistakes in coralling so much data relying on the fallible memory of humans over so many years. Yet in terms of accuracy and detail of approaches (by road and on foot) and routes, *Selkirks South* sets an enviable standard. Throw in sections on mapping and navigation, air access, amenities in Revelstoke and Golden, regional traverses, and a most thorough article on Selkirks geology by J.O. Wheeler, and you have a guidebook the climber can rely on for years to come. *Selkirks South* sells for a reasonable \$40. Climbers eagerly await the appearance of *Selkirks North*, since Jones is, if that is possible, even better informed about this half of the range.

KIM KRATKY

Alpine Select
by Kevin McLane, 2001
Elabo Press, Squamish

Kevin McLane's *Alpine Select: Climbs in Southwest British Columbia and Northern Washington* marks a fundamental change in the nature of alpine climbing in the region. Historically, mountaineering on the Coast has been primarily exploration-based,

known more for problematic approaches and hard work than technical objectives. This has been due in no small part to remoteness and a critical lack of information. With the exception of a few key routes, previous guidebooks to southwestern B.C. treated massive amounts of terrain with broad strokes and offered few photographs to inform or stir the imagination. Approach information was often inadequate or dated due to the changing nature of logging-road access. Knowledge tended to be spread by word of mouth, creating a situation where those outside a small active alpine climbing group, newcomers or visitors found themselves at a distinct disadvantage. More than a few trips have ended without a party getting near their objective, diminishing motivation to continue hauling big racks into the alpine. With *Alpine Select*, McLane places incredibly detailed information into the hands of climbers for the first time and, in doing so, is challenging the local mountaineering community to shift its focus from being exploration-based out of necessity, to applying technical skills to more difficult climbs. *Alpine Select* also serves as an invitation to the wider rock-climbing community to explore some of the region's bigger terrain.

The guide is a study of 158 fourth- and fifth-class summer routes within a weekend's radius of Vancouver. The selection sensibly covers both sides of the Canada/U.S. border, but American focus is limited to climbs that are popular with Canadians or are accessed directly via Canadian road systems. The most notable feature of the guide is its use of 350 photographs — many taken from the air — to illustrate routes and their approaches. Given the lack of photos in previous guides and the fact that many objectives are not visible or prominent from roads, *Alpine Select* provides many of us with a striking first impression of just how much high-quality terrain we have been missing. Among the listed selections are 50 rock climbs of 15 pitches or more, 42 routes graded TD or above, and 34 alpine ice climbs. Lines are accurately drawn on clear images, and written information including descents is concise without being so detailed as to confuse or detract from the experience. One hundred eleven pages are set aside for approach information that stands in stunning contrast to the historic norm. The guide simply leaves some of us wondering why we have been travelling east for all these years.

My criticism of *Alpine Select* is very minor. It does not cover winter or spring routes, which is unfortunate because written information on these very condition-dependent lines is almost impossible to find; failure once, usually means failure for the year. I question the inclusion of the *McDonald-Mather* route on Mount Baker in a select guide; it just seems daft to wander about below so much objective hazard. Finally, it would be beneficial to include GPS reference points in the approach section. Anyone who has wandered up and down a logging road in the dark while looking for a trailhead or a specific spur will understand the request. Overall, however, *Alpine Select* is an exceptional guidebook that finally sheds light on the high-quality climbing in our own backyard.

GORD BETTENIA

Aware of the Mountain
by Gil Parker, 2001
Trafford, Victoria

This autobiography records some of Gil Parker's milestones and epiphanies in life: "While my chosen highway was mountaineering and my vehicle yoga, the experiences could relate to many different activities, physical or otherwise."

Gil's rural upbringing (the Peace River district of Alberta) developed his love of the outdoors and led him to seek higher challenges in the Rocky Mountains. Later, as family and job pressures were thrust upon him, he began questioning the way he reacted to other people and to various situations. When his wife, Jean, booked into the Yasodharma Ashram in the Kootenays for a summer session, Gil felt threatened at first by the thought that his marriage was under scrutiny. That summer, he visited the ashram many times with Jean and their two boys and gradually became more involved in the ashram life and philosophy. Eventually he stood back from the yoga to look at what was happening in his daily life and in his mountaineering and he realized that there were parallels in the way they were taught. As time went by, he began to make a connection between all of life's different aspects — relationships, work, play and spirituality.

As a mountaineer, Gil has a climbing record that for many is hard to match. In thirty years of mountaineering (four as vice-president of the ACC), he has climbed a number of challenging routes; what is important, however, as Gil explains, is that he did not climb mountains with the singular ambition of seeking fame in the alpine world. Anyone could have written about his or her climbing experiences, but Gil has attempted to write a thoughtful and personal book that analyzes and describes the people and events that have influenced his life. He admits that mountaineering and yoga fit together perfectly for him, but he writes: "... this book is not written in a perspective, self-help format. My purpose, via the book, will be complete if you find even a few tools for your own search within my story."

My only gripe concerns his references to some of the people and climbers in his life. He mentions climbers whose names we associate with British Columbia's mountains, such as Roger Neave, Don and Phyllis Munday and Fred Becky; when it comes to the Vancouver Island mountaineers, however, he only mentions their first names: Rafe, Rick, Rob or Diane. These climbers have, in their own right, had an influence on his life and they deserve equal ranking along with the Mundays and Neaves.

LINDSAY ELMS

REVIEWS FROM THE CAJ BOOK CLUB

Mount Everest Massif
by Jan Kielkowski, 2000
Explo, Warszawa (Poland)

This book, one of a remarkable series of guidebooks little-seen by English-speaking readers, should be declared pornography. It's the kind of book that sets a climber dreaming about forbidden fruits, keeping him socially isolated and disconnected from daily life.

On a quest to produce a series of guides to the great ranges of the world, Kielkowski is a master of research, and it shows in this volume (covering Everest and its satellite peaks west to Makalu) and the others he's completed so far (K2, Makalu, Cho Oyu, Kangchenjunga). He has the beta on every route and every ascent team on all the peaks, and he has mapped them out on sketches of the mountains which betray years of work.

Hidden beneath the bare-bones (and sometimes humorously translated) presentation of the facts (team name, route, date, line drawing, brief comment on difficulty) is a fascinating picture of Himalayan climbing history and ethics. Look, for example, at the number of ascents of the guiding routes on Everest versus just about any other line and see if you still think Everest is "crowded". Step onto the other side of the mountain and you'll be on terrain that hasn't seen a team for twenty years. Better yet, look at the possibilities of unclimbed peaks just two kilometres away; you'll be amazed.

This little volume and its brothers (if you can find them) are nothing short of miracles.

From Everest to Arabia
by Jamie Clarke, 2000
Azimuth Inc., Calgary

It ain't easy being an adventurer these days. It seems as though every great trip has been done and every magic place tracked out, and that the gadgets available remove the hassles that create most adventure literature. And most of us have been so deluged with adventure writing in books and magazines that we've become picky — and even cynical — readers: "What's so special about this trip?" we demand. "How does it compare with what has already been done?"

Jamie Clarke, the Canadian writer of *Everest to Arabia*, certainly faced all the hurdles, but in the end — to the Book Club's surprise — he acquitted himself quite well, in terms of both the adventure and the writing about it. Clarke is a Calgarian who, as the title suggests, made a name for himself with a climb of Mount Everest, and has since built a career speaking about his adventures to public and corporate groups. He has been successful enough at this to continue to have subsequent adventures — in this case a crossing of the Empty Quarter of the Arabian peninsula.

Anyone interested in making such a journey — and especially writing about it — will have to measure their journey against the remarkable standard set by Wilfrid Thesiger's crossing fifty years ago. More so, they will have to measure their book against Thesiger's opus about the journey, *Arabian Sands*, which is simply one of the very best travel books ever written.

The worry amongst the members of the Book Club was that Clarke might try to obfuscate the very obvious differences between his and Thesiger's travels; repeat books of this ilk often imply that journeys were the "same" just because they covered the same ground. (And, unfairly to Clarke, this pre-conceived worry came from the fact that Clarke was accompanied on Mount Everest by Alan Hobson, author of the excruciatingly self-glorifying *From Everest to Enlightenment*, one of the worst books ever about the mountain.)

Thankfully, Hobson and Clarke seem cut from

very different cloth, both as adventurers and as writers. Although there are moments in the tale in which it is unclear just how different Clarke's and Thesiger's journeys were (Thesiger risked a great deal more physical harm from both geography and people, travelled several thousand kilometres more and had virtually no technological gizmos, in contrast to Clarke's backup systems), for the most part, Clarke is reverential, humble and quite frank about the difficulties faced by a modern-day adventurer looking for a challenge. The writing is open and often funny, and offers good insight into the differences and similarities between the human worlds travelled by Thesiger and by Clarke and his team. Altogether, a good and honest read.

Vice et versant
by Angélique Prick, 2001
Éditions Glénat, Grenoble

Readers of the CAJ might recall the author's name; over the past three years, ACCer Ms. Prick has published a number of French poems in the journal, and this year Glénat has published a book of her short stories. If you can read French, get this; it's a fun collection of quirky stories that have climbing as a thread running throughout — though often only subtly.

Therein, however, lies the strength of the book: like most good climbing writing, these are human stories in which the mountains are simply vehicles for the intriguing foibles of the characters, and paths along which the plots run. Prick uses language with the subtlety of every good poet, and this adds immeasurably to the fun of the book.

Some of the stories take place in our mountains; we would love to see this get published in English as well.

Kiss or Kill
by Mark Twight, 2001
The Mountaineers, Seattle

Simple: You love this guy or you hate him. You think he's the oracle of pure climbing, or you think he's a pompous ass. Either you believe that his writing digs deep into profound human truth, or you think that it has the intellectual sophistry and moral relevance of the Columbine kids' journals. Yep, Dr. Doom is back.

Kiss or Kill is The Mountaineers' anthology of American alpinist Twight's essays — some published, some not — between 1985 and 2000. Several of the pieces are included here in their original, uncut forms, and all include retrospective notes by the author, in which Twight evaluates both his psyche at the time of the writing, and the current relevance of the piece.

The Book Club was divided over this one — along some interesting grounds: if the reader felt that risk lies at the heart of climbing, he/she loved this book for its cut-the-bullshit attitude (captured in Twight's oft-quoted TALK - ACTION = 0 mantra). If the reader thought that climbing should be about personal joy without judgements, then the reader hated the book. Most of the women hated it; more of the men loved it.

Whatever you think of the book, it will probably jar you — either by resonating so well with you that you feel you've found a kindred spirit in

Twight, or by irritating you so much that you throw the thing to the floor and complain about it to your climbing partners. Either way, the thing did just what Twight probably wanted it to do: provoke. The jury at the 2001 Banff book fest seemed to see the point, awarding it the best book on climbing.

Fifty Favorite Climbs
by Mark Kroese, 2001
The Mountaineers, Seattle

If there's one book that everyone always talks about needing to be redone, it's *Fifty Classic Climbs*, the 1980s compendium of North American routes which people blame for the overcrowding of a number of great routes and the overpopularization of some lousy ones. *Everyone* seemed to have an opinion on how the thing needed to be different.

So when *The Mountaineers* reprinted that book, virtually unchanged, a few years ago, there was a loud moan: isn't it time for something a little different?

Well, here's something different — sort of. Mark Kroese sacrificed a few years of his life to complete this ambitious project. He tracked down many of the continent's best climbers and interviewed them about their favourite routes, jotting down their life stories and their thoughts about the climbs, and adding in brief route descriptions. The result is a fine — if scattershot and somewhat inconsistent — tour of the climbs and climbers of the continent.

In a couple of great ways, *Fifty Favorites* is similar to *Fifty Classics*: the book is a candy store of projects to do, many of them reasonable for the masses (though some are pretty out-there recommendations), and includes some intriguing history.

But in other ways, the book also suffers from some of *Fifty Classics*' unfortunate problems. There's still a need for a really comprehensive "best of North America" book because the contributors here were specifically prohibited from picking routes that were in *Fifty Classics*. This seems to have led to some odd suggestions from people (Steve House choosing the Southwest Ridge of

Peak 11,300 in Alaska; Mark Wilford choosing *The Pugilist at Rest*, Kluane — surely both have done *more* favourite lines than these) and to the absence of some obvious selections. The flip side of this, to be fair to Kroese, is that unusual suggestions like these might lead to expanding the consciousness of climbers much more effectively than did *Fifty Classics*.

And this book suffers another of *Fifty Classics*' most grating problems for a Canadian: the Yanks just don't get us straight, even when they've come here to climb. For example: No, King Peak, which is an outlier of Logan, is *not* in the Rockies. The reason that Mount Babel has "unusually colored" limestone is that it's *quartzite*. And yes, there *are* accents in French.

Having said all that, it's great to see so many top-end climbers, especially Americans, list Canadian climbs as their favourites: fifteen out of the fifty are on our turf. Now let's just keep our fingers crossed that such a fine selection doesn't mean that all *these* routes will also become "Fifty Crowded Climbs".

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BY PEAK/FEATURE

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A black and white photograph of two men in winter climbing gear. They are wearing heavy jackets and balaclavas. Both have headlamps mounted on their foreheads, which are turned on, illuminating their faces and the surrounding snowy environment. The man on the left is looking slightly to the side, while the man on the right is looking directly at the camera. The background is a bright, snowy surface.

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Waiting on first light for the summit push; Steve House and Barry Blanchard take a break after 24 hours straight climbing, Mt. Fay, Canada.
Photo: Steve House © 2001 Patagonia, Inc.

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