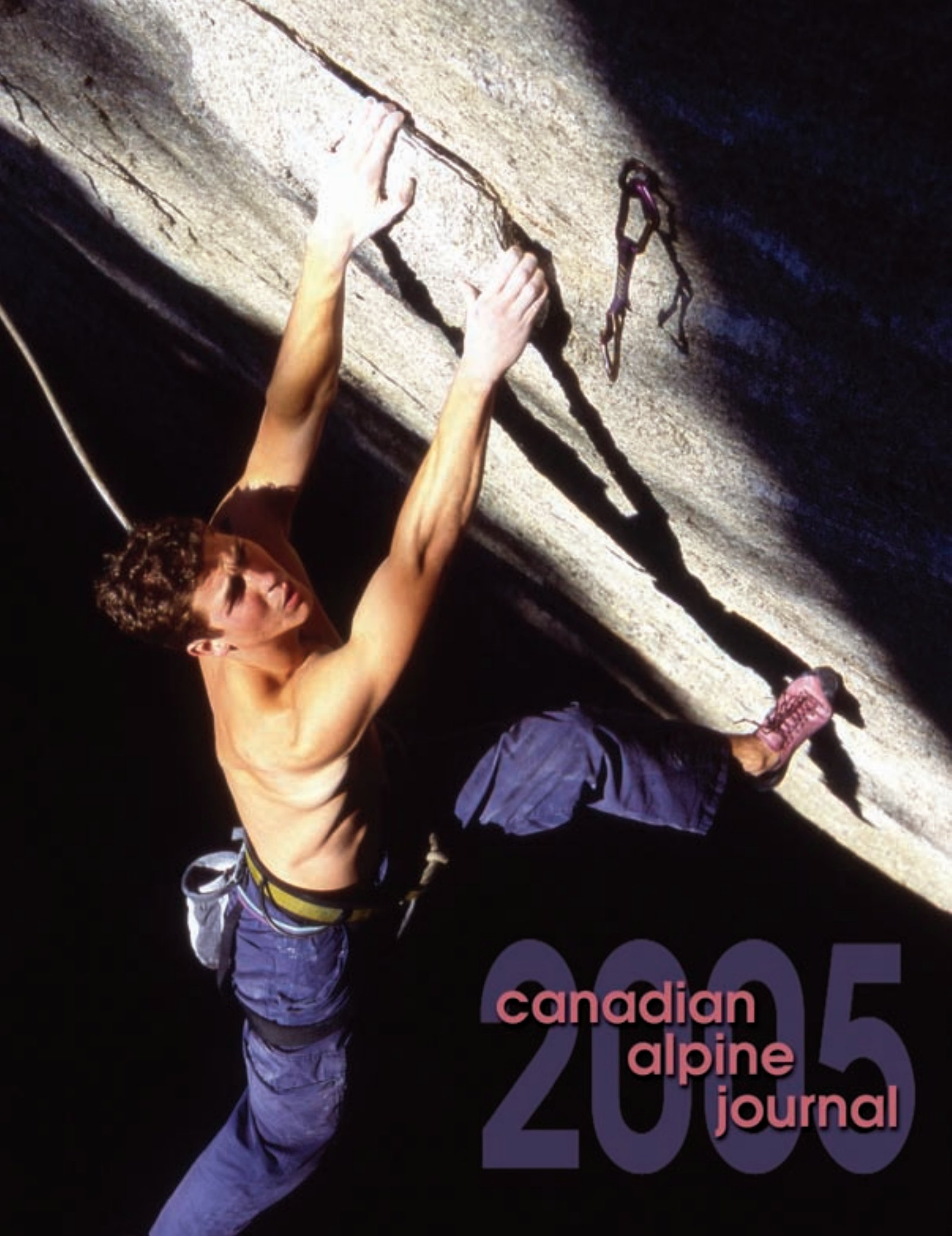

canadian alpine journal

2005

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the **canadian alpine journal**

Volume 88, 2005

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connecting with the mountains and passing it on

the ACC in 2004

lynn martel

Look at a mountain. Any mountain.

Look at its shape, at its slopes, follow its ridge lines to the summit and down the other side. Sometimes those ridge lines stretch outward, connecting one mountain to its neighbour, leading to another summit. Some ridge lines continue for dozens or hundreds of kilometres, connecting countless summits, forming great mountain ranges.

Other mountains seem to stand alone — volcanoes thrust up from the middle of oceans, granite spires jutting from glacial beds, solitary mounds rising from pastoral fields or barren deserts.

If you look closely, however, you will see that those mountains are connected not only immediately to other mountains but also to the forests, valleys, canyons and streams at their bases. Rainwater that falls on those summits flows downslope, forming creeks and pools that grow to fill rivers and lakes.

It's true. We are all downstream. We are all connected.

The climbing community too is connected. Canadian climbers probably realize that better than most; travel to any crag or alpine hut in the country and strike up a conversation with the other climbers there, and chances are good that you'll soon establish your six degrees of separation within the Canadian climbing community.

We are not only connected to each other, but also to time: to our past and our future, and — climbers understand this better than anyone — to the present moment.

Central to that connection is The Alpine Club of Canada. For nearly a century, the Club has produced this very journal, its pages filled with accounts of Canadian climbers who seized their moments and expressed their own existence through exploration of the unpredictable natural world, through physical challenge and mental vigour. To reach out and share information and inspiration and to educate the general public about the natural beauty and wonders of Canada's alpine has always been at the very core of the Alpine Club of Canada's purpose and ideals.

In 2006, the Canadian climbing community will reach a milestone as the ACC marks its 100th birthday. To celebrate this significant occasion, ACC members across the country are planning a wide variety of initiatives, including art exhibits, commemorative ascents, community parties and special publications. And while members of the climbing community, as they pursue their lofty goals, can often appear disengaged from the general non-climbing population, the ACC can proudly boast within its ranks not only bold and visionary alpinists who establish new routes and higher technical standards, but also members who are stepping up and leading projects and initiatives designed to enrich the lives of people across the country and all over the world, not just of their climbing brethren.

Some of those Centennial initiatives follow tried-and-true methods, such as the Montreal Section's plan for its members to climb a designated mountain and have businesses, families and friends pledge sponsorship money to go towards charities supporting children stricken with diseases like cystic fibrosis and muscular dystrophy — diseases that prevent children from experiencing the simple joys of climbing.

Other ACC members are looking ahead to honour the Club's past 100 years. Vancouver Island Section members Peter Rothermel and Don Cameron are spearheading efforts to have the Arrowsmith massif — which provides habitat to some 220 avian species, 100,000 water birds and every upland mammal species on the island, as well as watershed sources for five species of salmon — designated as a protected park.

Efforts by ACC members to give to the global community aren't limited to Centennial celebrations. With so many climbers feeling connected to Thailand and the other Asian countries devastated by last December's tsunami, Rocky Mountain Section members raised money through a section slide show for tsunami relief.

Not all initiatives are Section-driven, either; individual ACC members are leading their own teams and projects. Angus Taylor, whose uncle Jim Comfort led a personal initiative to celebrate Alberta's 75th birthday in 1980 by organizing climbing teams to place new summit registers on 75 Canadian Rockies peaks, is organizing his own celebration to commemorate Alberta's centennial this year. In addition to organizing for 100 Alberta Rockies peaks to be climbed by volunteers, however, Taylor has also created an on-line learning program focusing on the Rockies' geology, geography, human history, and importance in relation to the rest of the world, to be used by Grade 4 students throughout the province.

In an effort to educate Canadians about climate change, West Coast climbers Ian Bruce and Chris Joseph

have taken their *Melting Mountains* awareness program on the road throughout western Canada. Stopping in Edmonton, Calgary, Revelstoke, Vancouver and Canmore, they have shared information on how glaciers all over the world are melting faster than we can record on our digital cameras, and outlined steps that individuals, groups and businesses can take to become part of the solution and make a difference in their global community.

As the ACC nears its centennial, the Club is still about introducing people to the challenges, discoveries, pleasures and rewards of alpine exploration. It's still about sharing and exchanging information, topo maps, ideas and ethics central to the pursuit of alpinism. And it's still about recording tales of adventure and spiritual enrichment through publications, art displays, the practice of mountain craft and the fostering of solid leadership skills.

But even a hundred years ago, the Club's founders recognized that members of Canada's climbing community shared a responsibility to promote knowledge and understanding about the alpine environment with the general public — not just their fellow Club members — as set out in the Objects of the Club: the education of Canadians in appreciation of their mountain heritage; the exploration of alpine and glacial regions, and the promotion of scientific study thereof; the dissemination for scientific and educational purposes of knowledge concerning mountains and mountaineering through meetings, publications and a library; the preservation of the natural beauties of mountain places, and of mountain fauna and flora in their habitat. Those Objects are as important today as they were in 1906.

On the cusp of the Alpine Club of Canada's centennial, the Club's members are still connecting to the mountain landscape and to other people who appreciate the essence of that connection. And they're still passing it on.

margaret imai-compton

icefall brook

the 2004 alpine club gmc

Since its inception almost a hundred years ago, the ACC's General Mountaineering Camp has been about stories — of mountains summited, of climbers, of disappointments and triumphs, and of rewarding and enduring friendships.

The 2004 GMC at Icefall Brook continued the tradition of grand stories, thanks to the presence of some great Canadian Rocky Mountain legends. Leon Kubbernus; his wife, Kay; and Glen Boles of the famed Grizzly Group were attending, as well as Margaret Gmoser, who with her husband, Hans Gmoser, owned and operated the first Canadian heli-ski operation, Canadian Mountain Holidays. Roger Laurilla — a seasoned ACMG guide, a photographer, and co-author (along with Glen Boles and Bill Putnam) of *Place Names of the Canadian Alps* — was one of the week's guides. As well, there were two notable second-generation legends: Cam Roe, a second-generation Silver Rope recipient, and Brad Harrison, continuing his father's work as organizer and outfitter for the GMC.

The Grizzly Group, CMH and the history of the GMC were largely unknown to those of us coming from other parts of Canada and from the U.S.A. It was only after spending the week climbing, fossil gazing, and conversing over dinner that I came to understand the profound impact of these individuals on the history and evolution of mountaineering in the Canadian Rockies.

Glen's stories about the Grizzly Group were modest and unassuming. While he casually recounted his climbing adventures, my jaw dropped at the statistics. "My best season was when I climbed 25 summits," he said, and matter-of-factly added, "I guess I'm up to over 570 summits at this point." Although none of the campers could come close to the Grizzly Group's astounding achievements, we were treated to a stunning camp setting at Icefall Brook with climbing objectives to satisfy and challenge all levels of mountaineering abilities.

Lyell 5. Photo: Glen Boles

The 2004 GMC was located in the Lyell/Mount Forbes group, on the western side of the Canadian Rockies, near the headwaters of Icefall Brook. The sleeping tents were arranged on various gravel peninsulas surrounded by rivulets flowing from a grand waterfall that formed the backdrop to camp. We scampered and skipped our way across tiny islands and log bridges to reach the drying and dining tents, but the outhouses were a much more committing trek. By my calculation, a visit to the outhouse was 10 minutes round-trip, not counting the time spent in the structure!

Photo: Glen Boles

With the exception of snow and rock schools, daily outings involved glacier travel to the popular destinations of the five Lyell peaks (all over 3353 m/11,000 ft.); Mons Peak (3084 m/10,114 ft.); St. Julien Mountain (3132 m/10,236 ft.); and Division Mountain (3030 m/9940 ft.). For the experienced mountaineers in camp, Mount Forbes (3612 m/11,852 ft.) was a popular destination, though it required the earliest wake-up call of any of the trips (3 a.m.) and involved the longest day.

On the first climbing day at Icefall Brook, there was water everywhere. It poured down from the sky, it flooded the myriad rivulets near our tents, and it came crashing down the waterfall that framed the main part of camp. Three climbing parties turned back from climbing Mons Peak, defeated by zero visibility, fog, and lashing rain. Margaret Gmoser's reaction to the constant wet assault was cheery but philosophic and took the form of haiku poetry:

The beautiful, spectacular
Constant waterfall sounds
Obliterate your tent mate's snoring.

As the rain increased in ferocity, I took refuge in the tea tent and glanced through back issues of the *Canadian Alpine Journal*. My optimism for fair weather sagged when I came across James Given's article in the 1997 *CAJ*, recounting the 1996 GMC, which also took place at Icefall Brook. Describing the beginning of the camp, he wrote: "For the next three days it rained." Fortunately, in 2004 the rest of the week was bathed in brilliant sunshine so hot and relentless that many of us (particularly from Ontario) who undertook the long glacier slog to the five Lyell peaks suffered varying degrees of heat exhaustion.

The GMC, however, is not just about great climbs and stunning mountain terrain. A significant draw that keeps people coming back year after year is the friendships made and renewed during the GMC. I was reunited with my tent mate, Gerta Smythe, who was a fellow team member on Peter Fuhrmann's 2002 Rockies Panorama Traverse. Perhaps because Gerta was formerly a nurse in her working life, she became the unofficial dispensary for lotions, pills, drops and medical devices. More than once, I found a knee brace, a bottle of electrolyte pills or a tube of analgesic cream returned to our tent vestibule by a grateful camper.

Towards the end of the week, I had the privilege of spending an afternoon with Glen, Leon, Kay and Margaret as we rambled around the perimeter of camp, reminiscing about their years in the Canadian Rockies. I asked Glen to talk to me about his current perspectives on the mountains.

"The biggest change I've seen over the years is how fast the glaciers are receding," observed Glen, "and I've noticed that the nights are warmer in the Rockies. There's more postholing on glaciers and snow slopes, and there's more rain and bad weather in the Rockies compared to in the past. But there are other changes too. There are more people, and with more people come more restrictions. The gear is different, and the access to the mountains is so much quicker with helicopters and forestry roads. When we climbed Mount Robson in 1977, we took in pack horses to our base camp, but the camp here at Icefall Brook was basically flown in, including me!"

Then Glen shaded his eyes and looked up towards the expanse of the Lyell Icefield. He ended his thoughts with a simple and gracious comment that reflected a prevalent attitude shared by many campers. Glen Boles said, "As long as I'm out here, I'm happy."

Facing Page: *Mount Cook, NZ*. Photo: Paul Potvin.*see page 149*

the twin

a tale of epics

a 30-year burden

and a boot

marko prezelj

"First we climb this one, then we'll go for something more interesting."

That's how Steve began it. With a bantering smile, getting ready for Mount Chephren.

"Go for what?" I asked.

"North Twin," he said, as though expecting a reaction.

I honestly didn't have one to give. "What is this 'North Twin?'" I had to ask.

"The wall on the picture in Barry's room."

"And where is this wall?"

"In Canada."

I got the feeling that he was testing my reaction, so I shut up. The wall certainly looked interesting, but not exceptional enough that I had to know all the details. We observed Mount Chephren several times from the road, made a trip to the base of the wall, and with Vince waded through knee-deep wet snow in the middle of the night — but Chephren remained untouched. I had to come to terms with the bitter fact that the weather and the conditions "here and now" were not in our favour.

Just as we were due to leave Canmore and head south to Boulder, Steve came out of Barry's room with a piece of paper in his hand and a meaningful expression on his face.

"What?" I asked.

"Five suns," he replied and handed me the paper with the weather forecast.

"So?"

"We're going. North Twin."

"But what about my slide show in Boulder?"

"We'll be back in time. If not, we'll have a new route and we won't care about the slide show. Mark said the world wouldn't collapse because of it."

Okay. I didn't trust the weather forecast, but if nothing more I would see some new mountains.

Steve packed as if we were heading out on an expedition. I didn't participate.

"How many pitons, nuts, 'biners...?" he asked enthusiastically.

"Who knows? Let's go light — we can turn around any time," I "encouraged" him.

He agreed and continued sorting out the gear. Since I thought this was taking us too long, and probably wouldn't end up happening anyway, I suggested we just leave as soon as possible. Steve, meanwhile, still had countless tiny things to do; even in the van, he was dealing with the food and gear. Two hundred kilometres on the road just flew by, and I suppose I started to get caught up in the nervous excitement.

In the parking area beside the road, Steve entered the descent coordinates into his GPS while I tried to decipher the way to the narrow gorge that is the starting point for a steep ascent through a dense forest. Looking at the cloudy sky, I thought to myself, *Wrong again. Five suns? Yeah, right...*

Back in the van, I made pasta. A pound of it and a huge portion of sauce gave our stomachs a hard time, but we managed the last bite, thinking about the calories that would be needed in the near future. Still, my last thought before falling asleep under the cloudy sky was, *Are we going to turn around before we even see the wall?*

At 7 a.m. on the following day we grabbed our heavy packs and headed towards the gorge. Steve quickly put his skis on and rushed up the slope. Dense vegetation forced us to ascend straight up the hill. Now and then, snowflakes came out of the clouds. I thought of those "five suns" several times but said nothing. Just seize the day and get some exercise.

Soon we descended to the riverbed and noticed old tracks, all snowed up. The French guys had made them. Christophe Moulin and Sam Bie had been here ten days before. Their true intention had been lost in endless debates, but Steve was convinced that they had gone over to North Twin. "Who would come so far just to spend a night in a bivy? I'm pretty sure they headed up there."

(When we got back, we met the guys in Canmore. Christophe roared with laughter as he told us that they had taken nine hours to reach the bivouac. "Can you imagine? Nine hours! And we only saw the wall from a distance!")

We quickly started getting a sense of what the approach was going to be like; every time we strayed from the old track, we sank up to our waists.

"Thank God for the tracks." Steve tried to cut the silence.

"Thank the *Frenchmen*!" I mordantly suppressed the chat.

Our skis were sinking through the snow crust, and the tree branches made progress difficult until we reached the frontal moraine of the glacier. Big snowflakes whirled in the strong wind. We didn't talk. We each preferred different ways up to Woolley Shoulder, so we split up for more than an hour. High up below the shoulder, after I had been forced to make a long, unpleasant traverse, Steve happily pointed out how much better his route-finding skills were.

"I can't wait to see the beast," I said when we finally joined up again. Steve volunteered to wade the last fifty metres to the shoulder, where we would have our first view of the Twin. His trail was worthless. Sliding back, I ruined all the steps in no time at all. Finally, I took off my skis and used them as poles. Short of breath, I crawled to the edge, where Steve was already waiting for me, impatient.

"I can see you're having a bit of trouble."

"How does the beast look?"

"Come here, come here..." He grinned while taking pictures.

facing page: *On the "Delicate Traverse" Day 3*/inset *No comment*. Photos: Marko Prezelj

The vertical dimensions did not surprise me as much as did the distance we were going to have to cover to reach the wall. In addition, we would have to descend a ludicrous amount, especially after a half-day of ascending. Snow, wind and cloud covered the upper part of the wall, and it all contributed to a slight feeling of uneasiness. I was still curious, though, since the head of the beast was mysteriously hidden by the veil of cloud.

"A beautiful wall, isn't it? Let's go."

Steve pointed out the bivouac, far over on the right, and then put on his pack, groaning.

We descended about 50 metres on slate-y rock to reach the snow. As I put on my skis, the heavy pack hampered my balance. I grumbled to myself, "This is going to be a burlesque."

"What's a burlesque?"

"A kind of movie. A comedy."

I was right. It was a burlesque — at least for me. To begin with, the snow was hard and I was making nice progress. But as soon as I hit the crust, I performed the first of many tumbles. Every time I fell I had to take off the piggish pack to get up. But Steve had no problems with skiing and patiently waited out my comedy routine. When he decided that it was time to take the skis off, I was more than happy. We had a little snack while the snowstorm raged around us. I was sitting on my pack, staring back at the shoulder we had just descended.

"We'll go down there somewhere." Steve was planning the route.

"I think it's best to head directly towards the wall," I replied and started walking. Yet I soon noticed that familiar feeling: with every step, the wall was bigger and further away.

First we have to find out how to descend to the base of the wall, then we'll see, I thought to myself as Steve found a way through the stepped rock. Lower in the couloir, we jumped from one rock to another until we started to sink into the crusty snow. In front of me, Steve crawled on his knees. *A genuine worship,* I thought cynically, but shortly followed his example.

We soon got sick of this "pilgrimage", but we had opposing opinions on how to reach the edge of moraine most reasonably. As I was the one who was breaking the crust, I ignored "the convincing of the convinced" and somehow managed to reach the edge of the moraine. We sat down just short of where the steep moraine reached the wall. A snack, accompanied by some murmurs and indistinct grumbling, followed. Full stomachs released juices that softened our determination.

"Looks weird. Do we have enough pitons?" I smacked my lips while chewing a sausage.

"There's a lot less ice than I thought — none on the upper part."

"And so much fresh snow on the ledges."

above: *A-Lowe-Jones/B-House-Prezelj/C-Cheesmond Blanchard Upper part of N. Twin in clouds/*right: *on the Traverse* Photos: Prezelj

Then the wind blew my gaiters down towards the glacier. I swore, put on my crampons and descended towards the glacier down a steep, narrow and sandy gully, kicking up a fine, sticky dust that completely covered me. Mr. Clean — as Steve called me in my moments of exaggerated perfectionism — I was not. I found the gaiters. In the meantime, Steve silently moved on. When the crevasses shook his self-confidence, he stopped and waited for me. I gladly roped up with him. Above us, seracs broke off from time to time with an unbearable noise; we got a bit scared seeing the fresh blocks of ice at our feet.

"Do you think they can reach us?"

"It seems so. But they won't now. Let's proceed to the wall; it's safer there."

We had been staring for the past half-hour at a white streak on the upper rock section near the beginning of the wall.

"Hey, it's steep. And there's no ice! It looks like weird snow glued to the rock."

"The serac is also not as humble as it looked from a distance. Did you notice the cracks in it?"

"Maybe on the right?"

"Let's go further to avoid the fall line of the seracs."

"Let's climb up to that snow. We can bivy there, and make a decision about what to do in the morning."

Steve agreed and started to climb an attractive ice line

above the snow cone at the base of the wall. I followed him to a comfortable belay below the rocky step.

"I'll have a look around; maybe I can find a better place for a bivy."

Steve climbed more slowly than I expected. Intercepting my thoughts, he started to grumble that he too was tired. After twenty metres, he hung his pack on a big flake, made three or four more moves, fixed a rope and descended to the belay. I enthusiastically started to dig out a bivy ledge while Steve sorted the gear. When optimum comfort had nearly been achieved, I poked around in the snow a bit more and found an even better hollow between the snow and the rock. We had a small penthouse that provided everything necessary for lying down and cooking in relaxed comfort. A piece of nylon stretched over the snowy balcony offered modest protection from the snow. During supper we noticed that the sky had cleared. Mount Alberta was shining in the moonlight. Steve considered the view alone as reason enough to come to this place. No doubt about that.

"We should decide where to continue climbing after the snowfield," he said while we were having supper.

"Why?"

He grumbled nervously, "That way we can plan what to head for."

"We can decide about that tomorrow when we see the conditions," I replied, but deep inside me I knew that on the following day we would have to deal primarily with the conditions in our heads, not the conditions on the wall. Why bother making decisions about tomorrow when the conditions in my head are all about "here and now"? And right now the conditions were a full belly and a comfortable bivy.

I realized the difference in our approaches to this trip. For me, this was just another climb to test myself, whereas Steve carried a heavy load of epic stories told by our predecessors. These stories were the foundation stone for a heroic retreat that would require a complicated descent and would result in adding our names to a long list of failed attempts.

"When shall we get up?"

"At five."

"Why? It's dark until seven."

"OK, five-thirty," said Steve, ending the negotiations. I set the alarm on my watch and hung it above our heads. We covered ourselves with the sleeping bag and effortlessly fell asleep. Steve started snoring right away.

"Steve, Steve. We overslept the alarm." I shook him when I noticed the daylight.

"What's the time?"

"Nearly eight. I didn't hear the alarm." I started lighting the stove.

Steve quietly packed his sleeping bag. The question about our further plans floated around us until we finished our coffee.

"I think that in your head you've already decided we won't continue," Steve said with a noticeable snarl while he was shifting the gear.

"Where did you get that idea?"

"You overslept the alarm and you don't seem to be in too much of a hurry right now."

There was nothing of the sort in my head. We had both overslept the alarm, and the morning preparation was taking the time it would take.

"Don't exaggerate!" I shot back at him. "Let's pack and start climbing."

Obviously my relaxed state was not calming him.

We packed. Without haste, Steve prepared to finish the pitch he had started the day before. He ascended the rope to the point where it was fixed and then masterfully moved up to the belay. The initial rock section that Steve had climbed in the evening did not slow me down despite my heavy pack. I spotted Steve at the belay.

"Tie the pack onto the rope so I can pull it up," he said, leaning well out above me. He didn't need to say it twice, as I had already started to climb the vertical rock and was trying to find tiny holds for my ice tools.

This was fun. I tried to cheer up Steve, but I failed. We switched the gear and soon I was climbing a short traverse, followed by a thin icy streak disconnected from the wall. I placed a nut in the middle of the traverse and slowly continued towards the centre of the icy crust, where I hoped to find some good protection. I tried to place a tiny nut in an

Beginning the crux. Photo: Steve House

icy crack several times but failed, so I swore and carefully climbed an overhang to a small patch of snow where the picks kindly creaked. Now I was really enjoying the climbing; I detached the leashes from my tools, and that only made me more relaxed. At the first good belay, I pulled up the pack and belayed Steve, who respectfully followed. We then climbed a long, easy pitch to the edge of the serac and the beginning of the snowfield.

"Shall we unrope?"

"Of course." Steve was already on his way.

"I THINK INERTIA IS TAKING OVER NOW," I suggested later when we changed positions for breaking trail up the snowfield.

"I'm still a bit nervous," Steve admitted.

"Why?"

He'd seen it, too. "You just want to climb," he said. "I'm still full of legends and epics connected to this face, but you just want to climb."

"I thought your rucksack seemed heavier," I said sardonically.

Steve shot me a look that put an end to my wittiness.

Then I philosophized about how wise it was that we hadn't previously decided about where to climb. "Let's climb that chimney at the end of the snowfield. One pitch, and we are on the ledge. It doesn't look hard."

Steve agreed, already digging a small ledge for a belay.

"I'm not sure we'll manage it in one pitch."

"Yeah, it may take more."

Steve took quite a long time to reach the chimney and to climb to the belay deep inside it.

"This feels like M6," I whimpered sarcastically while struggling to find holds for my tools on an overhang where Steve had proved himself on lead.

"To me it felt more like M7," he said dryly and pulled me up next to him.

I decided immediately to leave my pack at the belay. "I'll scratch up these ten metres to the ledge, then haul up the pack."

After a winding sixty-metre search for the best route and protection options, I barely managed to set up a "pulling belay" with a few nuts and one piton. We couldn't hear each other, so I tugged on both ropes firmly. *How am I going to haul up the pack?* I wondered as the ropes slackened a bit. Steve started to move. I slowly pulled each rope alternately until Steve came into view, sobbing; he was climbing with one pack on his back and the other one dangling from his harness. I praised him as much as I could and apologized for an awkward pitch.

"Yes," he admitted, "I was a bit angry. But I understand now. I understand; you did a good job."

I took the heavier pack and belayed Steve while he traversed towards a snowy arête and a big ledge where we planned to spend the night and find the beginning of the line that would take us up the steep upper wall. With every swing and kick, we penetrated the snow all the way to rock, so our progress was slower than expected. Steve proceeded a bit further along the ledge just to have a look. When he got back I was ready for the last pitch of the day. "I'll fix the rope up there so we can warm up faster in the morning."

Without the pack, it went with considerable speed. I hooked my tools, strained my eyes looking for footholds, and now and then, concerned about my safety, placed a nut or a Friend. I rested a few times, hanging in my harness and trying to catch my breath. At the end of the pitch, I came across an old nut. "Yippee, we're in the right place!" We had obviously joined the *Lowe-Jones* route, established in 1974.

Before descending, I deliberately ignored Steve's suggestion to fix just one rope and bring the other one with me so that we could use it as insulation at the bivy. I didn't want it to get damp.

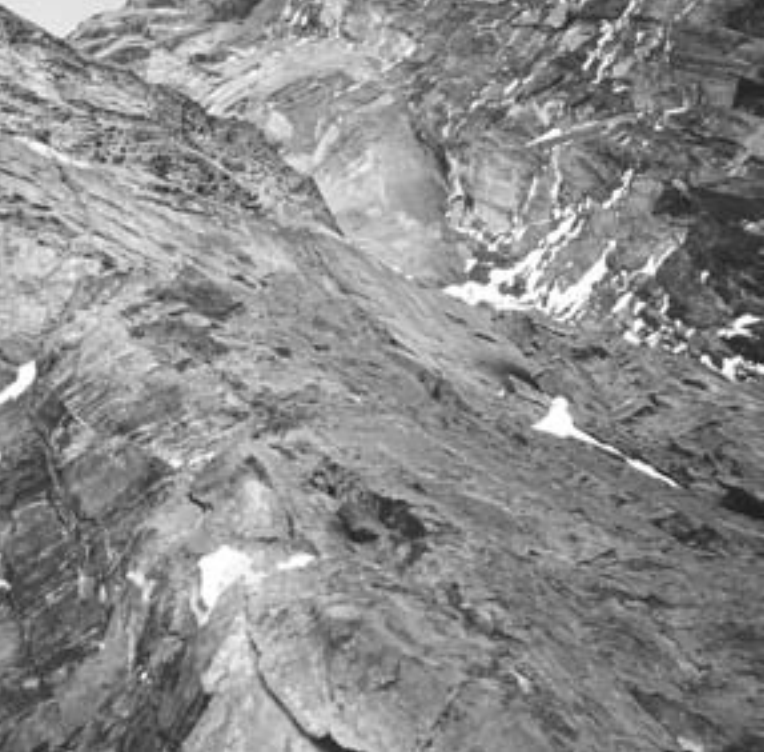
At the bivy, I tried to force my opinions as Steve dug out the snow ledge. "Be careful. Don't go too close to the edge."

"You're making me nervous," he groused. "Every time I have an idea, you have a different opinion."

He was right, so I shut up and focused on cooking.

The night passed relatively quickly; from time to time we jostled under the sleeping bag. We both heard the alarm clearly in the morning and so started to cook and get ready without hesitation. We agreed to "block climb" — one person leading four or five pitches and then changing places.

Since I was the one who had started up the next pitch the previous evening, the first block was mine. After descending a bit from the point where the rope was fixed, I climbed into steep, seemingly impassable rock. The first moves were clumsy, even difficult, but then my movements became smoother. The rock was more suited to hooking than I had expected. I became really enthusiastic about moving across this relatively demanding terrain. Surprises and interesting sections followed one another.



At the beginning of the fourth pitch, I became anxious since there seemed to be no possible way to continue: smooth slabs on the left, overhangs with no holds above us, and loose rock on the right. I climbed rightward, intending to just take a look and then come back. After 10 metres of awkward moves on insecure "holds", I reached a big, loose flake where I paused and looked around. I was not tempted to go back any more. I was about 10 metres of delicate moves away from a prominent corner, where I hoped to be able to place some good protection. I moved slowly; with every move, however, my faith in a rest at the beginning of the corner grew stronger. When I pulled myself onto a hollow-sounding block below a smooth slab forming the left side of the corner, I realized that all my hopes had been in vain. The corner offered no chance of placing a piton, not even the thinnest one.

I felt trapped. I couldn't go back because I had gone too far, and I had no good protection behind me. The rope wound around huge blocks that would hit me if I fell. When I became familiar with the loose stone I was standing on, I started to search for tiny holds for my picks. Soon I found enough of them to start hoping for an insecure way through the overhang up to a thin crack that cut a smooth slab. After some shifting from one foot to the other, I fully loaded the pick of one ice tool and, with my left hand, put a piton in the gravel under the overhang. At first that was all I did; then I shifted a bit so that I could hold the piton with one hand while hitting it with my ice tool. Judging that it would hold, I pulled myself up on it and tried to put a shorter piton in the narrow beginning of the crack. I hit it a few times and then felt the lower piton shift. Short of breath, I forced myself to make a move and reach the wide part of the crack far above me; the first tooth of the pick grabbed and creaked.

It'll hold, I thought, pulling on my ice tool with one hand and hitting the piton with the other. When both the piton and I got tired, I clipped myself in and searched for a special soft piton made in Slovenia and particularly useful in limestone. I had brought three of them with me, just in case. I drove it a few millimetres into the crack, wedging it enough that it didn't need to be held. A few hits with my ice tool were sufficient for me to hear the most beautiful sound: it sang, it yodelled! I drove it into the crack completely, listening to the high-pitched metal pings. Once I was hanging off it, I knew I was saved. The crack above me was climbable.

About half an hour later I shouted to Steve, "Belaying!" Pulling up the ropes, I helped him to follow quickly. "Sorry for being so slow. I just couldn't move faster. You must have been freezing down there."

"You climbed it, and that's it. Good job."

"Thanks. If you want, I can lead one more pitch," I said when I noticed him sobbing.

"Hey, no way. Leading's much more fun than belaying."

I agreed and started sorting the gear. The last pitch had exhausted me, so I was looking forward to some rest. Steve started the pitch decisively and then stopped below a roof with a snow mushroom above it and a loose block under it. "Can you get out of way?"

"No, there's nowhere to go," I whined, knowing that Steve mustn't touch the block.

HE ELEGANTLY AVOIDED THE BIG BLOCK, which I effortlessly dislodged when following the pitch. It crashed with a hollow bang onto the snow ledge we had started from in the morning. Interesting hooking led Steve to a tension traverse. He put in some protection and quickly climbed to a belay under an overhang. It took him a long time to pull up the ropes. Short of breath, I followed him to the uncomfortable hanging belay.

Steve decided to continue traversing to the right edge, where we hoped the steepness would ease off. While observing his precise movements and a lousy piton whose only job was to take care of the rope's direction, I felt as if I were climbing with Steve. Five metres above me in a thin crack, there was an old piton with two 'biners; I reflected that it would probably have been better to climb up there instead of doing the exposed traverse where Steve was shifting his feet.

"Watch me." A meaningful look accompanied his step around the edge. Soon I was no longer able to see him, but from the movement of the rope, I knew that he had reached easier ground.

"Great." I spent quite some time beating out the Slovenian piton, but then decided to leave it behind as a relic. The next belay was comfortable.

"I'm going to search for a good place for a bivouac," said Steve, climbing on. Fast and reliable. It wasn't completely vertical any more — just the right angle for hooking our ice tools. But still...

"How does it look?"

"Bad. I'm going a bit further." The conversation was always the same as twilight approached.

After forty metres Steve descended a bit and went to

take a look on the right. The quest for an appropriate bivy spot ended in total darkness in the middle of a vertical slab. "The best place is where you are."

Nice, I thought while waiting for Steve to make a decent belay to descend. I then occupied myself by trying to make a place to sit, chiselling out stones from a small corner, the only place where we could think of sitting. I made room for three buttocks while Steve collected snow from the ledges in the emptied pack. I lit a stove and put on some clothes. After finishing our first soup, Steve wanted to change his socks. Since the ledge was only spacious enough for one person, I stood at the edge and dealt with the gear, then looked over at Steve. The beam of my headlamp caught the shell of his left boot, which seemed to be oddly floating. For a long, almost endless moment, the boot hung in the air. I tried to grab it but couldn't move a single fibre. I could see the boot in the dark even after it had landed somewhere deep in the abyss of the "beast", far below us.

I looked at Steve; he held his head in his hands, and then exploded unexpectedly, "*%$#! *%$#! I'm the stupidest man in the world! *%$#!"

"Easy, easy. Tomorrow is another day." I tried to calm him down, and then shut up. The situation had changed completely in an instant.

I won't go back. We don't have enough gear for the rappels. Steve will manage somehow to follow me to the edge of the wall... It's mostly rock climbing, anyway... Tomorrow... We'll manage somehow... Thoughts flashed through me as we covered ourselves with the sleeping bag and leaned against the cold rock. I pulled a piece of nylon over our heads and tried to sleep. We drowsed, our butts jostling for space on the small ledge, and simply waited for daylight, although we were not eager to wake up to that dubious "another day".

The snow pouring down our backs was annoying us. I looked at the watch: half past five. After another half an hour of waiting, we started packing and got ready to continue. In the darkness, we couldn't tell whether it was snowing or whether the wind was blowing snow down the wall.

"We'll get some water later. Let's go!" That was all that was said.

No words were necessary to come to an agreement about how to continue. I started ascending the fixed rope; Steve packed and got ready to follow. I waited for him at the end of the rope. As he reached me the day broke. The daylight and the fact that we were moving strengthened our lame optimism. Steve even smiled when I took pictures of him.

First, I traversed to the left over very loose rock until I found a suitable place for a belay. I worried about Steve: how would he manage to follow me, carrying a pack and climbing with only one boot? But he did a good job. On the next pitch, Steve lowered me diagonally to the left. I put in more protection than would normally be necessary; I was worried that the "invalid" would take a swing while traversing. Somewhere in the middle of the traverse, he did, but then he quickly reached me.

top*: Pulling the crux/The first bivi.* Photos: Steve House

While I was handling the ropes, I noticed that somehow the sheath of one of the ropes had been cut. We patched it up with tape. Steve lowered me to the icy crust ten metres to the left. "This is the exit ice gully," we encouraged each other enthusiastically. But standing on a patch of ice, I could clearly see that the gully was dry — just steep rock covered with snow. I wanted to take a look around the edge on the left, but Steve persistently persuaded me that we were on the right track. Since he had already similarly persuaded me in the morning, I returned to the ice patch and set up a belay.

Once he reached me, I took the gear off his harness.

Since he didn't have much of it, I soon noticed that the biggest cam, which I had used at the previous belay, was missing. "I need the big Friend."

"I don't have it."

"What do you mean?"

"I left it at the belay."

I was astonished. How could he just leave such an important piece of gear? We still had some rock above us where it could be useful. Steve just smiled and explained that he would rather leave the heaviest piece of gear than the lightest one. I mentioned its cost, but he just grinned and explained that this was North America.

"You're the man — I'm just the belay jacket," Steve said when I started climbing again. He encouraged me to climb fast.

"I'm tired," I wailed after 20 metres, then put in a nut and hung off it. Any thought of an enjoyable and quick pitch was drowned in a big avalanche of powdery snow. A long time later, I finally managed to reach a patch of ice where I hoped for a good belay.

Short of breath, I put an ice screw into corroded ice and, relieved, shouted to Steve to take out the screws at his belay so that I could pull them up and use them for my anchor. We managed to work this out quickly, the avalanches of powdery snow creating a sense of urgency, and Steve, using only one crampon, was soon beside me. The next pitch looked to be the last on rock. But since our expectations had been dashed so many times already, we just respectfully hoped that the steep rock would end soon. After twenty metres I reached the snow, which stretched into the fog. I yodelled, quickly set up a belay and then pulled in the ropes.

"We did it, the beast," I smiled to a weighted-down Steve when he arrived, puffing.

"Yes. We escaped," he grinned.

We shook hands even though it was still a long way home.

Unusual, I thought. Never before had I shaken hands with my partner in the middle of a climb.

ENDLESS PITCHES FOLLOWED up a steep slope of snow-covered ice and rock. Several times I sunk in up to my waist. I wondered why we hadn't been killed by avalanches. I tried to set up the belays in the ice so that I could help Steve by pulling on the ropes. He surprised me by climbing relatively fast without too much moaning or self-pity. He had somehow managed to attach the crampon to his boot liner, so he was able to reliably follow my carefully made steps.

Below a small col, we realized that our progress had slowed. It was snowing lightly, fog surrounded us and we were hungry and thirsty.

Finally, the inevitable. "We're really slow. Let's find a place to bivy."

I continued climbing into the fog, causing a bit of tension to creep between us. Steve shouted a few times for me to stop since it was going to get dark soon. Ascending from the col between the spire and the summit, I stopped at the first serac and started to prepare for the fourth bivouac of the climb. Steve melted snow and cooked while I made a shelter. As night fell we covered ourselves with the sleeping bag. Dehydrated, we soon fell asleep. We frequently woke up, coughed, and battled for the sleeping bag.

In the morning, we slowly started to cook and to sort the gear, which was covered in white frost. It took us two hours to get ready for the descent. Steve entered new coordinates into his GPS. It was clear that we wouldn't be returning to our skis, since Steve was missing a boot. Instead we

left: *The traverse on Day Four*/right: *again, no comment*.
Photos: Marko Prezelj

chose a longer descent that promised more epics for Steve's footwear but made the most sense — the Columbia Icefield traverse. We chose a few trigonometric points together, but Steve did the majority of the navigation. I busied myself with packing and tidying up.

At around 10 a.m. we marched into whiteness. Steve led, using his GPS all day. Frequently, he wound through the fog and the snow as if he were drunk. The GPS was our saviour, but it also agonizingly counted down every slow metre. In the late afternoon, we came out of the clouds onto the Athabasca Glacier and with relief and impatience descended to the flat and safe part of the glacier.

We spotted a small group of people on the ice and approached them; after five days of genuine solitude we hoped to descend using their tracks. They were all dressed up, wearing the latest (or even the next) fashion, and were visibly enthusiastic about greeting two untidy newcomers emerging from the fog.

"Hi guys."

"Hi."

"The road's down *there*," one of them pointed, trying to be witty.

"Yes, we noticed — thanks," I hissed and slouched off.

"Where've you been?"

"North face of North Twin," Steve said with an appropriate emphasis and a realistic expectation of what their reaction would be. I figured these tourists wouldn't have the slightest idea where we had been, as North Twin was pretty far away from our meeting place — like an entirely different world.

"Wow! Really?"

"Yes. We'll keep walking before we get cold. Bye."

My steps gained confidence with the feeling that we had become friends with the famous "beast". Until that moment, I had felt that the beast was still chasing us. Now I knew we were safe.

After nine hours of descent, we got to the Icefields Parkway. "The last challenge — the hike to our van," I grinned. The van was parked ten kilometres away from where we had reached the road.

"No problem. It'll go fast," Steve comforted me.

It did not. After half an hour of determined hitching, we were still standing at the Columbia Icefield Centre, freezing.

"I'll try something else," said Steve triumphantly. When the next vehicle approached, he leaned towards the centre of the road and waved his hands. No way. After another depressing hour of hitching, he managed to persuade a driver turning into the parking lot to take him to our van.

When Steve returned, he went straight to the phone booth, called Barry and then came to the van, sporting a meaningful smile.

"What did he say?" I asked curiously.

"He was speechless." Steve's face turned into one big relaxed smile that stayed on his face even after he had fallen asleep in the van. I drove, slowly sipping beer, and getting infected with that same lasting smile. Over the following days, the entire circus caused by our ascent among various "reporters" and "connoisseurs" did not make the smile any less perfect.

I thought I was dead. Not in some metaphorical, hypothetical sense, but literally.

dead

ian welsted

Or rather, I felt dead. Before my mind could process a thought, I realized that I was seeing stars against a black backdrop — that the mid-morning light had been extinguished, as had any desire or care as to my destiny. Standing in a chossy limestone coffin, I reckoned that being hit by rockfall a second time was to be my last memory. It took a few seconds for my mind to refocus, at which point I understood that I was indeed alive, but that my toes were tingling. *I've been paralyzed,* was the next thing that came to me. Like a hypothermic animal caught in a leghold trap, my subconscious decided to accept its fate and simply not care.

To give up like this two thirds of the way up one of the biggest faces in the Rockies is not a good survival strategy. Or is it? Maybe not caring was the key to my fortunate outcome. In reality, though, my continued existence as a living human is due to the effort of my best climbing buddy, Chris Brazeau. Like a knight in shining armour, here he came from above, rapping our single fifty-metre line to arrive at my presumed death stance with less than his usual smile. How was it that Chris could chuckle about what had just happened to him while fixing that rap? "I thought I was going for the big one," was his comment as he described the ten-foot fall he had taken while jugging to free our stuck rope. A calm mind, that was the differentiating factor. It was not the first time I realized that there was a difference between Chris and me: he enjoyed the thrill of danger while I all too often did not.

But let me leave the lessons learned till later and describe how we had gotten into our predicament and how Chris got us out of it. As Dave Cheesemond wrote, "It would be an impressive and expensive descent ...." (*Pushing the Limits*, p. 209).

Really, it all centres around a keen climbing and personal friendship. Chris and I began climbing at around the same time. When a couple of years later Chris moved to Squamish to slum it at "the River", it sounded like such a riot that I couldn't resist. But while I kept working and maintaining some kind of material quality of life, Chris would do such things as work 17 days in a year so that he could climb as much as possible. Over subsequent summers, I got rope-gunned up the three hardest "multi-pitch routes of quality" in Kevin McLane's guidebook, always feeling sheepish when leaving the ground with either the unspoken or even the explicit understanding that the crux pitches would not be mine. After all, I only lead 5.10. On our first trip to the Rockies, we figured we would train for the hardest route in the book "'cause it's only 5.10." Luckily, we were kept from our intended goal by a snowstorm. So, in the summer of 2004, when we decided to slay dragons and attempt the unrepeated Blanchard-Cheesemond route [North Pillar] on North Twin, I was not in the least surprised when Chris offered to lead what he figured from the route description was the crux of the route. That we didn't "flounder in the first rock band" was not of my doing.

Our preparation was complete after seeing North Twin on the way to doing Alberta's Northeast Ridge. Perhaps we didn't have a full "training diet of big limestone rock routes", as Dougherty suggests, but Chris had on-sighted *Astro Yam* without the aid of the #4 Camalot (I'd forgotten it in the car) at the beginning of the season. With my impatient, now-or-never attitude and Chris's skills, how could we fail? That we didn't wonder after avoiding the North Face of Alberta due to its reputation for rockfall in the summer is a bit of a mystery, but obsessions are obsessions. We'd been e-mailing about strategy, getting psyched. The fact that the Eiger had been climbed in four hours, combined with my recognition that I couldn't lead .10d with a pack, somehow made me agree to the suggestion that we go for it in a day. "Light is right," they say these days, so we took a tarp, two puffies, one rope and a five-millimetre shoelace pull line "'cause we're not going to use it, anyway." Never mind that we'd tried the *Salathé* in a day the previous fall and it had taken us two and a half; *hitch yourself to a madman and see what happens,* I figured.

So it was that we headed over Woolley Shoulder — and promptly headed away from our objective and to the shelter of the Lloyd McKay hut. Chris had spent the day before humping loads for pay in to the Elizabeth Parker hut, where his girlfriend, Kitt Redhead, was cooking. Similarly, I'd jogged into Berg Lake to retrieve a pair of sandals from the base of the Emperor Ridge as an excuse to visit my girlfriend, Paula Martens, who was finishing the Great Divide trail that day. Being slightly shagged both, we figured the one-day push would require all of our energy, so we might as well start well rested. The extra day gave us the chance to enjoy the beautiful meadows below the north face of Stutfield, eye

up a 3000-foot waterfall for future winter reference, and be psyched for the 3 a.m. start.

Yup, he's a madman, I was thinking. We'd just trundled some rock at our first belay, promptly chopping our rope to fifty metres. And here he was, run out maybe eighty, maybe a hundred feet, already a good way up the face, since we'd soloed the easy choss. I couldn't watch, only looking up to take a photo, because here we were on the pitch that had drawn my attention after seeing the photo from the first ascent in the *American Alpine Journal*. It had looked so stellar that I promptly sent a copy c/o Poste Restante, Chamonix, trying to lure Brazeau back to Canada. Our belay had taken a #2 and a #3 Camalot, so all Chris had left for the wide crack was one #2 and a #4. Problematically, the crack was wet and, after taking the #2 twenty feet from the anchor, it didn't want to swallow the #4, which only got put in at the overhang at the top of the pitch. So on that pitch there were two pieces a long way apart. Later, friends and those "in the know" (e.g. Don Serl) suggested that the epic to follow was due to our being on the face when it was too hot. Well, wet limestone a hundred feet run out is one thing; maybe sopping wet it's another.

From my vantage no real problems were encountered for a while, although Chris was twice hit by rockfall. Interesting how, until it happens to you, such objective hazards can be dismissed. My inexperience showed when, crossing the "sinister gully", I stopped to build an anchor and Chris called up to just hip belay, after the second missile from above hit him on the lip. Pitched-out climbing on the left side of the gully led through some enjoyably solid cracks to an overhanging wide crack (.10d) mentioned in the route description. My conscience got the better of me at this point and prevented me from pulling my usual gambit in such situations. Many times before, I have simply stopped my lead blocks before such cruxes, handing over the sharp end to my rope-gun friend. Somehow I talked myself out of it. As I climbed up to the overhang, I had to manoeuvre around a loose block my own size perilously hanging out from the wall. Later I would read Steve House's description of a loose killer block on their ascent, and of his climbing past it with equanimity. I, on the other hand, was terrified. *What the hell am I doing up here; if I fall we'll both die,* was my overwhelming thought. Never mind that I'd read the Buddhist text *No Death, No Fear* in preparation. In hindsight, I realize that it is the "mind of the observer" that separates those who send these biggest of routes from those, like me, who are haunted by their failures months or years later.

Wanting to build an anchor just above the block, I called down my intention to Chris. An encouraging response came from below, and I resorted to aid. At that point our upward progress slowed considerably, like a climax before the foregone conclusion. Finally, the rope-stretcher pitch ended and I was rewarded with the opportunity to try a classic Rockies technique that I had only read about before: for want of a solid anchor, Chris jugged the line off my harness.

Being two working-class non-locals with little Rockies experience, we figured that 8 p.m. was a good quitting time for the day. When the next party gets to this point, they will be amazed that two thinking people could choose a bivy away from the face, unprotected from falling rock, for the night. Perhaps as amazed as we were when we found a Knifeblade in the left-hand wall at the base of the final headwall — the only sign of human passage in the 3000 feet of the route which we completed. Later, I came to believe that the pin was put in only as an anchor for a bivy up against the rock, safe from rockfall, unlike our sandy ledge fifty feet out. Luckily, the mountain gods didn't hurl anything down on us in the night, although they did treat us to some amazing scenery.

The next morning, entertaining me in one of our usual debates over route finding, Chris obliged my fancy for a first pitch straight up from the pin. You see, I always claim that I complement Chris equally in our partnership with a greater "mountain sense" even though I've spent much less time in the mountains. "Oh, the number of times he would have started up the wrong crack if I hadn't put him right," is my line of reasoning. I now know in my heart that we would have been safer on the steeper ground to the right which Chris favoured. Rereading the route description has made me realize my conceited error. Mostly, however, it is the continued reality of recovering from breaking my arm while seconding only three pitches after "winning" our debate that makes me aware of my mistake.

Thus it was that we began our epic 30 hours after leaving the ground. Reinhold Messner wrote in *Big Walls* that he believes that climbers at the peak of their game avoid such eventualities, while others — let me say "imposters" — fall victim to the same forces. Does the "mind of the imposter" act as an attractor, a black hole that draws in negative energy? I think it does, for I will never forget looking up and seeing those missiles curving in towards me from perhaps six or eight pitches up. "I can only think how different the outcome would have been if the rock had been a foot the other way," I wrote in the hut book on the way out. But which way? Left, and we would have continued with the climb and, hopefully, completed the second ascent. Right,

and the rock would have hit my helmet. And what if we had gotten an earlier start that morning and finished one more pitch by the time the sun was hitting the upper slopes of the mountain? For we were within one pitch of the overhanging portion of the upper headwall, where we would have been protected from above. All rather conjectural when one is an El Cap height off the ground with a broken arm.

An unenviable choice stared us coldly in the face. Our first decision was to make an effort upward, for the easier terrain above was definitely much closer than the ground. As I jugged the next pitch, I could not balance properly and raked the rope across a loose block while swinging after removing a piece. Like a sitting duck, I hung on as the block floated past me. After two hours, I reached Chris and we reassessed our decision. A list of factors: two hours to jug one pitch; Chris would have to lead every pitch; if he got hurt, I wouldn't be able to help; overhanging jugging to come; pain... Down we went.

The editor of the *CAJ* said, "I'd like to know how you got down." What can I say other than that Chris engineered a retreat with all the care and experience that he could muster. The first few raps to our bivy spot went well. Next we had to go off the ledge where the previous day I had found no solid anchor. Using a V-thread and a few slung loose blocks, we made it down to my "death stance". Let it be known that "light is not right" if you ever have to retreat and use a five-mil accessory cord to pull a knot over a loose edge. At least take Spectra or static or something, which we two dirt bags figured we couldn't afford. No kind of pulling would get the knot to move. To remedy the situation, up went Chris for his free fall when the knot slipped back against the anchor. And down he came to rescue me from my fatal fear with one 50-metre rap line to rap let's say 750 metres. Thirty raps sounds about right.

Rapping, I am told, is statistically more dangerous than climbing. That we made it attests to Chris's great ability and his love for life. Only once did I wonder — no, make that twice. The first was when we seemed to be rushing to make it to the lower ledge system on the face before dark. We had crossed to climber's right of the sinister gully on a loose ledge system. Some of North Twin's vertical cracks are impeccable, but the low-angled ledges are definitely choss. Out of these little bits and pieces of shattered rock, Chris had made an anchor of two pins, in part to conserve our dwindling rack. As he rapped off, he said something about "direction of pull", but I missed it; upon weighting the anchor, I found myself leaning back on one very dubious Knifeblade. To my undying shame, I yelled at Chris for his (read my) recklessness as I rapped over the edge.

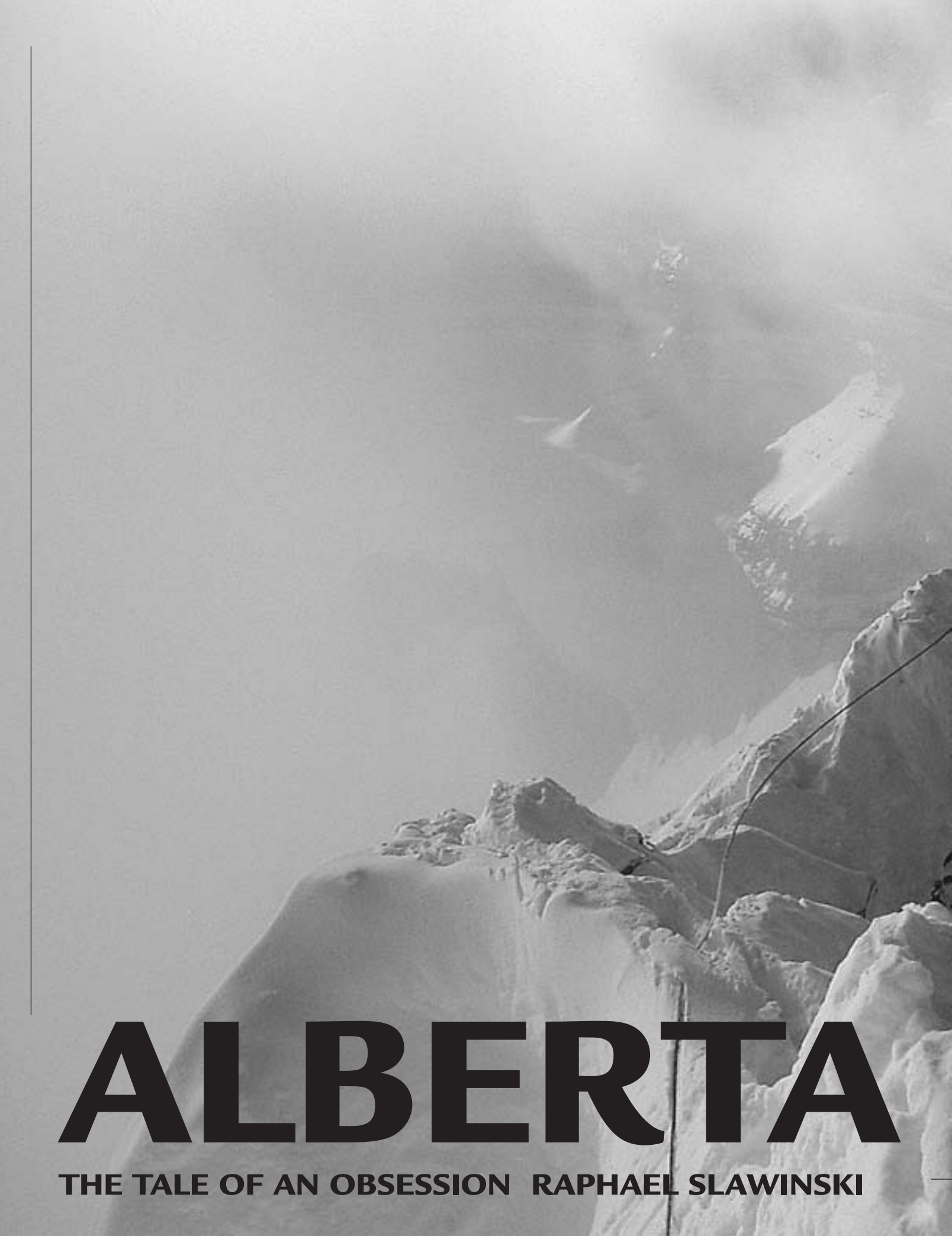
By that time I had become completely dependent on Chris for my rescue. When he asked me for my input on our final rap in the dark that night, I did not understand what he was asking. He had rapped to the ends of our rope and could find no good anchor. As I was coming down second, he asked me to build an anchor, tie off, pull the rope, and then continue down to him. It was such a shock to be asked to take responsibility for myself, and I was enjoying being babied so greatly, that I simply refused. After I rapped to Chris and the ends of the rope, we spent our second night on the face on a non-existent ledge. Throughout the night, we would wake to air-tearing, screeching volleys from above and flatten ourselves as much as humanly possible. Sheltered only by our tarp, I found myself scared by this sound like no other. A breakfast of chocolate-covered coffee beans greeted us in the morning — the last of our food.

The second time I wondered about Chris was when we had reached the safety of the northeast ridge by the middle of the third day. There was finally no mountain looming over us, ready to let loose a barrage of limestone. My idea was to wait it out for the wardens to fly in and rescue us, as friends would phone to report us missing in three or four days. What was Chris thinking? He was worried that Kitt would have to hitchhike back from her work, since he had borrowed her truck to drive to our trailhead. A thousand feet up, with a rinky-dink leftover rack, and he was worried about someone else. It was all I could do to refrain from saying, "F--- Kitt, my arm hurts and we're still not down." A better friend you couldn't ask for.

On the third night, we lounged in luxury on a large ledge system to the north end of the mountain. After we had considered all kinds of traverses off that would have been possible for able-bodied climbers, I finally convinced Chris that I was unable to function at a level that would allow for downclimbing. Some wild hanging belays in a waterfall below a hanging glacier brought back the fear factor, but they also brought us to our ledge. The impending darkness led us to delay our ground-coming until the next day. Chris claims that he was never so jealous as when he heard me snoring that chilly night away after I finally unfolded my emergency silver bivy bag now that we only had one night to go.

When we finally reached non-technical ground the next day, I think that Chris was more relieved than me, for he no longer had the responsibility of caring for an invalid. This thought occurred to me as I let out a great "whoop" of unbridled joy when I knew our epic was behind us. Having not shown any outward signs of stress during our descent of two and a half days, Chris suddenly called out, "Ian, how do I get down?" All that remained between Chris and a scree slope was a ten-foot-high chimney that even I had down-climbed. Now that he knew we were down and safe, Chris could finally show some weakness and ask me for help. How he handled the stress, I don't know. Probably the same way he deals with the soloing and the wet, 100-foot run-outs — with the calm mind of the pure climber. After all, as he put it, "Death was on the mind a lot."

My many thanks to Chris, Kitt (for not asking for her rack back and for insisting that I go to the hospital when I was in delusional denial) and Dr. Mark Heard (for fixing me up).



ALBERTA

THE TALE OF AN OBSESSION

RAPHAEL SLAWINSKI

September 1995

My very first view of Mount Alberta comes when Cody Wollen and I climb *Humble Horse* on Diadem Peak. The sustained ice and mixed ground is some of the hardest alpine climbing either of us has done. But what I remember most is the moment when, after plunging an axe into vertical snow and pulling over the summit cornice, I find myself staring at the black bulk of Alberta. I am looking straight at the Northeast Ridge — with the long east flank on the left, and the awesome north face on the right. Then more immediate concerns take over, such as getting down before dark; but I have a feeling I will be back.

August 1999

My obsession begins in earnest. Laden with gear, Jim Sevigny and I cross the chilly waters of the Sunwapta, intent on the north face. It is the only time I do not curse the tedious scree below Woolley Shoulder, as I race up it in anticipation of the fabled scene from the col. And in spite — or perhaps because of — the clouds obscuring most of the landscape, the view across the Black Hole at Alberta and North Twin does not disappoint. Later that day, we walk over to check out the north face. Thick clouds shroud the headwall, fresh snow blankets the yellow bands, and meltwater runs down the icefield. We turn our attention to the *Japanese Route*; since it was first climbed in 1925, we reason that we ought to be able to get up it under any conditions. The

All Photos: Raphael Slawinski

following morning it does not take us long to get lost in the mist amid the labyrinth of gullies on the east face. Finally, sometime in the afternoon, after much wet climbing, traversing of snowy ledges, and soggy rappelling, we find ourselves halfway up the right gully. But by then we are soaked and miserable, and so we run away and keep running all the way to hot showers in Jasper. The forecast is for better weather, and after a couple of days we are back, intent on redeeming ourselves by at least bagging the peak via the normal route. But it is not to be: when the alarm goes off and we look outside, we are greeted by a summer blizzard instead of starry skies. We sleep in, then posthole out through the snowdrifts on the Shoulder.

September 2000 and 2001

The next year, I cross the Sunwapta to climb the north face of Cromwell; the following, it is for the east face of Woolley. From their summits I can see the hulking mass of Alberta, but for three years I do not set foot in the magical land beyond Woolley Shoulder.

August 2002

Will Gadd and I are once again trudging over that notorious col. Our packs are relatively light, since with only one good day in the forecast, we have settled from the start for the *Japanese Route*. The mountain is far different from what I remember: where Jim and I front pointed up an icy gully or traversed across exposed snowfields, Will and I scramble up a dry chimney and hike across rubbly ledges. Running water and falling stones in the Japanese gully have us rope up, but we still make good time to the summit ridge. There begins the most spectacular part of the trip: a tightrope walk across a narrow spine — here of rock, there of snow — with airy drops on both sides. We keep waiting for the notorious notch, where tradition dictates that one leave a rope for the return journey, but unexpectedly we find ourselves on top, posing for silly pictures with a Japanese paper parasol.

August-September 2003

The next time around, I turn my attention to the Northeast Ridge. Dividing the sunlit east face from the shadowed north face, it rises in two graceful tiers straight to the summit. While I am captivated by the aesthetics of the line, if truth be told I also cannot resist the gauntlet thrown down by the guidebook description of loose, unprotected 5.10 climbing. Having climbed more than my share of choss, I reason that I ought to be able to handle this particular pile. On my first attempt I am joined by Ben Firth, a fellow limestone junkie. Arriving at the base of the ridge just as dawn is breaking, we are greeted by a cold wind whipping across the crest. Even after pulling on every layer of fleece and shell we have brought, we are still shivering. We decide that frozen digits and 5.10 run-outs do not go together, and retreat across the glacier and over the Shoulder.

My next few outings do not involve anything more strenuous than the hike up to Acephale, and they help dull the memory of the slog into Alberta. Two weeks later I am back for another attempt on the Northeast Ridge, this time accompanied by my compatriot Peter Smolik. Even though it is already September, the weather is mild, the skies sullen and red from forest fires burning out of control. In the morning, we make good time up the easy lower ridge and eat an early lunch at the base of the headwall. As is almost always the case, actual difficulties prove far easier to surmount than imagined ones. The climbing on the headwall is a real joy: steep, solid rock and sound protection, with the sweep down the north face on the right and the rubble of the east face on the left. Not long after donning rock shoes, we have changed back into boots and are sharing the one pair of crampons we have brought to save weight, as we negotiate the icy summit ridge.

August 2004

The older I get, the more impatient I become; and hard climbing requires a lot of patience. I still enjoy pushing my technical limits, but there are days when nothing beats covering miles and miles of mountainous terrain in just a few hours. A penchant for extreme hiking may explain how the next Alberta adventure comes to pass. Ever since first climbing the peak with Will, I have thought of attempting it as a day trip. On this occasion, Alberta is not Plan A, but Plan A is nixed in the bud by an impassable river crossing. Tim Haggerty, Dana Ruddy and I debate alternatives, even writing up a list that we whittle down until only one objective remains: Alberta in a day. We have never before tied into a rope together, but we all have alpine climbing on the brain and get along just fine.

We crest Woolley Shoulder as the sky is turning pink in the east, and arrive at the hut just over four hours after leaving the parking lot. The mountain looks bone-dry, and I relax about my choice of running shoes as alpine footwear. In fact, with almost no snow left, the normal route resembles an overgrown scramble more than it does an alpine climb. As a result, the ropes never leave the packs, and some 10 hours after leaving the Parkway we are posing for yet more silly summit pictures with the legendary parasol. Once we have had our fill of lounging in the sun and taking in the scenery, we retrace our steps across the ridge and finally break out the ropes for the tedious rappels down the Japanese gully. It is still light when we recross the Sunwapta, its waters brown and swollen after a hot summer day. For some strange reason we run the last stretch, arriving back at the parking lot 18 hours to the minute after leaving it.

February 2005

Ever since first scampering across Alberta's precipitous summit ridge, I have wondered what kind of experience it would offer in winter. My imagination conjures up visions of double cornices and snowy knife-edges. Then there is the matter of how to even reach this nightmare, as winter turns the open screes of the lower east face into huge, dangerous snow slopes. I speculate that on both counts the Northeast Ridge might offer a more technical but perhaps safer way to the summit. Yet another problem for a weekend warrior such as me is free time: Alberta in winter is unlikely to be a day or even a weekend trip. It has to be reading week or nothing. As the time approaches, I keep careful track of weather and avalanche forecasts. Both are good — exceptional, in fact. Conditions like this demand action. Scott Semple, Eamonn Walsh and I discuss objectives, but this is a mere formality, as we are all thinking of Alberta. The prospect of a backcountry winter alpine adventure has us fired up; the fact that the mountain is apparently still unclimbed in this most unfriendly of seasons just adds fuel to the fire.

It is afternoon by the time we finally sort out the gear, drive up the Parkway, and step into our skis. Winter strangely transforms the familiar approach up Woolley Creek, the wide stream bed somehow seeming hemmed in by the snowy conifers. But travel is pleasant — until we come to the Shoulder. The slope leading to it is blown clear, and we teeter up frozen scree, arms aching from poling with our skis. Daylight is fading when we crest the col; all we can see of Alberta is a pale, cloud-enshrouded shape to the west.

Not having had a proper look at the peak in the evening, we leave the choice of route for breakfast. This also gives us an excuse to sleep in, setting the tone for the entire trip. The cold lilac glow of a cloudless dawn reveals a mountain absolutely plastered in snow: even the headwall on the Northeast Ridge is white. We discuss the conditions and

quickly decide on the *Japanese Route*. As the first rays of the rising sun light up the summit, we are already skiing down to the base of the east face. The recent avalanche cycle has pounded the gullies and snowfields; we boot up the debris, making a beeline for the elephants' asses. The air is cold but the sun is out, and I strip down to a T-shirt.

After lunch on a snow fluting below the asses, we continue soloing up the Japanese gully — still mostly on snow, with small ice steps thrown in for variety. We rope up just below the ridge, turn right and start weaving our way along the crest. Eamonn keeps a straight face as he tells Scott that if one of us falls off, the others should jump off the opposite side. "Is that safe?" Scott asks. I am both pleased and disappointed at the absence of the expected double cornices. The ridge makes up for it with delicate knife-edges that have us shuffling sideways like crabs, with snowed-up rock steps where crampons skate disconcertingly on black limestone, and with a bitter wind that arcs the rope over the east face and at every step whips our faces raw with ice crystals.

The evening sun is beginning to paint the clouds a delicate pink when at last we stand on top. I promptly punch a leg through the summit cornice; the parasol is nowhere to be seen, and we are not about to dig for it. With the wind trying to knife right through the belay parkas we have donned over all our other layers at some point along the ridge, we do not stay long — just long enough to thaw Scott's frozen chin back to life — then we turn around and head down. A small scoop half an hour from the summit offers one of the few windless spots along the ridge, and we gratefully accept its shelter for the night. Three people in a Bibler make for a tight squeeze, especially if one of them is Eamonn, but at least we are warm. It snows during the night, and in the morning we are surrounded by clouds. Not until we are descending the slopes below the elephants' asses do we walk out into sunshine and realize that Alberta's summit cap is the only cloud in the sky. Back at the hut, we decide to stay one more night on this, the magical side of Woolley Shoulder. The following day we are back at the road in a mere three hours. The adventure is over. Or rather, *this* adventure is over. Though unseen beyond the Shoulder, Alberta is still there, beckoning.

ferris wheels & grizzly byways

why mountains don't start at 10,000 feet

by roberta holden

An old cartoon pasted to a bathroom wall in the Aleutian town of Unalaska declares: "It's not that far if you have long fingers." Like this small, smiling caricature with his thumb and forefinger stretched across a globe, my imagination grows inversely to the scale of the map. A small-scale map can be a dangerous thing: it's how little dreams turn into big adventures. In degrees of latitude, each representing a day of travel by sailboat, my fingers walk a 5000-nautical-mile route along the British Columbia and Alaska coastlines. For thousands of kilometres, the Coast Mountains parallel our route, and a sailboat is our key to accessing this higher ground. From sea level, we will climb Mount Fairweather, towering 4663 m (15,300 ft.) above the Gulf of Alaska, before continuing west, enticed by the snow-capped volcanoes of the Aleutian Islands.

The mountain dictates our schedule as we race north from Vancouver in mid-April to make the narrow climbing window. The final preparations are rushed, the boat and crew not quite ready. Long hours of sailing are interspersed with stops at hot springs, First Nations villages and creepy, abandoned canneries. Schools of dolphins play off our bow as we head up narrow channels between islands of dense forest. We gather on deck to watch a pod of whales or listen to the grumbling of a sea lion rookery. Another kettle of water is boiling on the gimballed stove to warm our bellies and counter the constant dampness. Dripping foul-weather gear steams next to the kerosene heater; before sitting down, we wipe the condensation off the ceiling above us.

Another three bodies squeeze into our cozy 35-ft. sailboat in Juneau, Alaska, for a total of seven. Don, Hamish and Panya will sail the boat around to Lituya Bay to meet us, while Cecelia, Vance, James and I climb Mount Fairweather via an original traverse from Glacier Bay to the Gulf of Alaska. The remaining space is crammed with skis, sleds, packs, food and bulky sailing and climbing gear. The boat sleeps five if we pile all the duffle bags on top of the skis and under the chart table. There's room for one more person on the floor of the narrow passageway, and the last can bivy ashore.

It's May 9 by the time we step ashore at the head of Tarr Inlet, the northernmost finger of Glacier Bay, but it feels like high summer. The mountain's name seems to be holding true, but many a climber has warned us that Fairweather is a misnomer. We wrestle our unwieldy packs onto our backs and stagger up the rocky moraine at the foot of the Grand Pacific Glacier. Things become more manageable once we are able to put our skis on and can transfer some of the load to our sleds.

A disconcerting rumble echoes all around us. We wind our way up to the head of a deep valley surrounded by precipitous faces, brought to life by the hot sun. No one, to our knowledge, has ventured through here before. We plan to climb a ridge at the head of the Ferris Glacier to gain the Grand Plateau and then the summit. As our route is not obvious, Vance and James gear up late at night to do a recce. A massive chunk of the Plateau Glacier,

hanging 1200 metres above the route, releases just as they are about to head off. For several minutes, our tents shake violently under the force of the blast. Tiny ice pellets bombard our shelter, though we are camped a kilometre and a half away. We peek in awe through a gap in our tent fly as a bolt of lightning illuminates the cloud of snow, sparked by rock striking rock.

It would be just a ride on the Ferris wheel, this three-day detour up and down the Ferris Glacier. Our risk thresholds tested, we decide to turn around, a decision made easier because we have a contingency plan. After retrieving the cache of food we have left ourselves at the Ferris–Grand Pacific junction, we now head for the summit via a long, corkscrewing route up the Grand Pacific Glacier — to join with the Grand Plateau Glacier, near the Gulf of Alaska coast. The terrain is much gentler in this broad valley and we are finally free to travel unroped.

When long evening shadows stretch across the snow, I stop to scoop up the first of several iceworms in my Lexan spoon. I shake the snow off it and eventually drop five iceworms into a blue vial of ethanol and five into a red-capped formalin mixture. As they sink to the bottom, I divert my eyes from their final death throes and remind myself, *They're just worms.* They will be sent home to be dissected for molecular and taxonomic study. The surface of the glacier is a mass of tiny black squiggles for as far as I can see. Iceworms escape the direct sunlight of the day by burying deep within the snow, and migrate to the surface to feed at night. We try to do the same. We have not managed to get onto a completely nocturnal schedule, though we ski late into the bitter-cold night.

By morning our tents have turned into saunas and we're eager to get moving despite the inefficiency of slogging through heavy midday snow. It's perfect "ice cream" weather. I was skeptical when I first watched Cecelia mix this dubious concoction of snow, GU, hot chocolate and milk powder in her four-cupper, but the ingredients soon moved to the easy-access compartment of my pack.

A harmonica breaks the silence precisely at midnight to the tune of "Happy Birthday". We break out the chocolate and move on. Unsure as to which time zone to adhere to as we crisscross the Alaska-B.C. border, we celebrate Cecelia's birthday again an hour later. I begin to lag behind, and compose new verses to my old elementary-school walkathon song. I count up the choruses at the top of my lungs: "*X kilomètres à pied, ça use, ça use, X kilomètres à pied, ça use les souliers,*" to distract myself as my boots bore deeper into my ankles with each step. We awake later that morning to a three-layer no-bake pie and play the birthday jingle on the tin whistle.

It's a fast ski down from the col of the Grand Pacific as we race against our kamikaze sleds, which threaten to take us out if we slow down. A low, dense stratus layer hugs the Gulf coast below us; we reluctantly descend into it, leaving the bluebird skies behind. We tie into our umbilical again and work on our synchro-skiing, struggling to maintain our delicate, top-heavy balance each time the rope jerks taut. "Stop!" James yells frantically behind me as the rope, which he has just skied over, wraps around his leg and pulls tight through his crotch as though he were a dog tangled in a leash. At other times, I pick up speed in order to cruise easily over a small rise, but suddenly get yanked backward, and end up grumbling as I'm forced to herringbone up the slope instead.

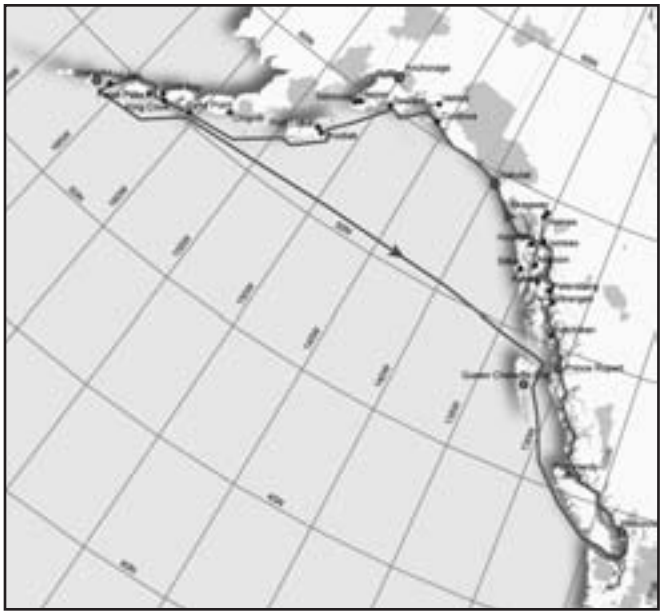
The air and snow are noticeably damper when we join the lower Grand Plateau Glacier. I cringe at the sound of rock biting into my ski bases as we traverse a small ice ridge and choose to step onto a more appealing patch of snow. The snow quickly gives way beneath me. I drop into a slot and fall until my hips and my pack wedge me tightly in place. At the other end of my rope, James can't hear me call "Falling!" He thinks that I've just stopped on the other side of the rise. A tug on the rope threatens to pull me tighter and deeper into the narrowing ice. I swing my skis through the air to keep warm, and take pictures of my little world. From a distance, Vance and Cec see two poles waggling in the air, extensions of two hands poking above the surface. Cecelia deftly throws in an ice screw and hauls me out by my pack straps.

The crux of our approach is negotiating a thousand-metre-high icefall in a whiteout in order to gain the upper Grand Plateau Glacier. We weave amidst the ghostly silhouettes of seracs and cross sketchy snow bridges, moving steadily upward through the day. It's getting dark now and we've chosen a bad line near the top. The route has to go, because we can't reasonably ski down what we've come up

and we will surely punch through if we take off our skis. Vance's pole slides into the belly of a large crevasse as he kicks steps across a steep slope. He has clipped his sled and Cecelia's to the middle of the rope; as he pulls them across, they slide into the same hole and catch under a lip. We have food, fuel and essential gear at stake in these sleds and are highly motivated to get them back.

It's dark by the time we're all across with the sleds, but the sky has suddenly lifted, and with it, our spirits. We can now see our zigzagging track winding through the heart of a steep serac field; nearby, meanwhile, a smooth snow slope appears alongside our route. Duh.

We establish our high camp at around 3000 m (9842 ft.) and enjoy our only rest day in 18 days. A large lenticular caps the mountain, and the high winds have turned back a guided party that flew in to 10,000 ft. The sun is shining again, but it no longer offers much warmth at this altitude.



We rise at 2:30 a.m. and head off before the short night has ended. After caching our skis below the col, we continue with crampons to join the West Ridge. It feels good to be free of the sled and walking without skis. Our second tools prove unnecessary, though they're handy as extra pickets. The gusts reach 80 knots (100 kph), and we place running belays, primarily to avoid being blown off the mountain.

The energy in the air is intoxicating; the views below, stunning. A soft, cottony blanket covers the Pacific Ocean, broken only by a dramatic, shear line we've never seen before. The giants of the St. Elias Mountains command the western skyline — Logan, St. Elias, Hubbard, Alverstone and Vancouver — while, below, the Alsek River winds towards Dry Bay. Most importantly, we get our first glimpse of our route out. The rapid recession of glaciers in this area has made our maps and aerial photos nearly obsolete at lower elevations, and there are still a number of unknowable challenges along this route. We confirm the drainage we have chosen in order to exit Desolation Valley, and see the 45-km stretch of coast we will walk to Lituya Bay.

We don't pause long on top. I dig deep into my pack and emerge with Wayward, a yellow plastic duck — perhaps the first of his kind to summit Mount Fairweather. We take the requisite summit shots and then quickly descend to escape the wind and cold. I was feeling clumsy on the way up and my head was throbbing. Is it the altitude? The wind and lack of sleep? Cecelia stops me at a belay on the way down and asks me to walk in a straight line. I concentrate to touch heel to crampon point, and blame the wind when I wobble and step sideways. I haven't heard of ataxia before, but accept Cec's guidance for the rest of the descent.

Elated by our success, we now turn our thoughts to the challenges of getting out. We avoid the icefall, descending the steep snow slope in the early morning, when conditions are stable. However, we need not have awoken so early; the slope is still a sheet of ice. We sideslip down, ice axes tensely in hand. It would have been more fun in soft snow, but we're down quickly enough and head towards Desolation Valley. We negotiate a stretch of nasty moraine and ski across slush-covered blue ice before taking our skis off for the last time.

Overconfident, we calculate the time it will take us to cover the home stretch, and ditch our emergency rations (no plastic) down a crevasse in order to lighten our load. We soon regret it. We skirt the north side of the lake via a horrendous scree slope and hit a wall of alder and devil's club. We tear through a web of branches, pirouetting to free our skis from the tentacles above, clamber over logs, and grab hold of devil's club thorns in moments of imbalance. It takes us two days to cover just 12 km, and we're back to rationing our food.

We finally emerge on the far side of the lake. The open shore is paradise. We linger, though it's too early for a rest. No one wants to be the one to suggest that we head back into the bush. When we do, we find a bear trail — a well-worn path as good in places as a city-park trail. A carpet of moss, soft underfoot, leads through lush, open forest. The canopy towers overhead, only occasional low branches snagging our skis. The joy of walking has returned to our steps.

According to our map, we have 23 rivers to cross. We measure our progress, not in kilometres, but by ticking off each river as we cross it. Some are easily wadable and some have long since dried up. Others present formidable obstacles to our progress: James and Vance stand on the far shore, wet and cold. James's feet are swept out from under him, and Vance pulls him back up. Vance is knocked down next, and James holds him against the churning water. "Throw us the rope!" they shout. Cec and I scoff — not likely we can throw that far. We pick up rocks and, laughing, hurl them across to prove our point. They fall far short. Over the noise of the rushing water, we're not sure who's calling who a cowboy: the boys for the cowboy heroics that got them stuck on the far shore without a rope; or us, as we windmill

a rock tied to the end of the rope in something of an offset cowboy style. After a number of tries, we find a narrowing upstream and manage to snag a fallen tree on the opposite bank. The Tyrolean is born. The boys are shivering by this point, and the first gear we can get to them is Cecelia's spare clothes. At 6 ft. 3 in. and 5 ft. 11 in., they do well to squeeze into clothes meant to fit 5 ft. 4 in. Vance builds a fire, and after all our gear is successfully on the sandbar, Cec and I monkey across and pull the rope.

We are ecstatic when we finally sight the coast. A huge, grey expanse of beach stretches endlessly in both directions. The ocean swell pummels the shore relentlessly — a surfer's paradise (though I guess the word isn't out yet). It's easy walking over the soft sand and we're moving fast: 6.4 kph according to our GPS. Although we know better than to calculate our ETA by this, we can't resist. The exposed rocky point of Cape Fairweather soon slows our progress dramatically. We move inland to the bear trail, hooking our skis in the branches once more.

We have been anticipating "the Slough" with foreboding. Where we first encounter the Fairweather Glacier's runoff, a large standing wave forms as the torrent flows into the incoming surf. We walk upriver in search of a route across. A large grizzly lumbers down the far shore, considers us briefly and swims towards us. He is swept downstream, but crosses unfazed. We don't make it look quite so easy. Where the wider lake water is calmer, James swims across and sets up an anchor at the top of a high embankment. Vance heads across the rope to help tension it. The rope is still too slack for a Tyrolean and too tight for a handline: Vance's body drags in the water, but the rope is too high for his feet to touch bottom. He fights to pull himself across the river and then prusiks up the slope.

With the rope now taut, Cec and I salvage every sketchy piece of tat from our kit and tie the pieces together to extend the retrieval line, which at 60 metres won't quite span the river. I'm now despondent with hypothermia as I dismantle the anchor and let the other three pull the rope from the far shore. We've been standing around in the rain for a long time; I'm wet to the core and getting progressively colder. I put the clothes I've been wearing and my ski boots into my dry bag and tie it over my shoulder before slipping into the icy water.

The cold water gets my heart pumping again. It feels good to be swimming. After every few strokes, I glance at my bearing on the far shore as I take a breath. The others are shouting at me; I can't hear what they're saying. I raise my head again, but my bearing is gone. I'm moving fast, disorientated. The roots of a large fallen tree hang over the water downstream, and I'm going to grab them as I'm swept past. I'm swimming hard again. My hand closes around something. It must be a submerged branch. I'm still moving. Now it feels more solid and the water is rushing over me. I pull my other arm around to grab the branch and find a rope in my hand. With miraculous precision, Vance has tossed the rope directly into my hand. I pull myself ashore and stand naked on the bank, grinning from the adrenaline rush and shivering as the cold sets in again.

We haven't had direct contact with *Eliris*, our sailboat, since we left Tarr Inlet. The possibility that for some reason our teammates haven't been able to make it into Lituya Bay lingers at the back of our minds, though we don't want to consider it yet. At our radio sched, we try again to call *Eliris*.

This time, Hamish's voice crackles over the VHF. We are excited to hear him and we prattle on as if we've never before talked to another human being.

It must be a hunger-induced mirage we see walking down the beach towards us the next day, bearing a picnic lunch of fresh-baked bread and other treats. We were none too subtle in our declarations of hunger over the radio, and Hamish has hiked out to meet us. Not only did we make the state of our bellies known to the *Eliris* crew, but a fishing boat in Lituya overheard our conversation and has generously left us three large snappers for our homecoming feast.

Scars from the infamous tsunami that swept through Lituya Bay in 1958 are still faintly visible at the head of the bay. Early the next morning, we head for Yakutat, ninety nautical miles to the west, along a coast we have come to know quite intimately from its other perspective. Through the mist, we get a final glimpse of our mountain sitting high above in persistent fair weather.

Panya flew out of Gustavus before we got off the mountain, and now Hamish, Don, Vance and Cecelia leave us in Yakutat. While James and I await Isabelle's arrival, I borrow a kayak and explore Harlequin Lake, which is filled with large icebergs that calve off the Yakutat Glacier, and paddle through small islands along the coast.

We take *Eliris* up into Disenchantment Bay, where the Hubbard Glacier once again threatens to cut off the entrance to Russel Fjord as it advances. The ice is thick, and we leave blue streaks of bottom paint on some of the small bergs after pushing through. The Hubbard is very active; our boat rocks in the wake of calving ice. I have been asked to do a survey of the Turner Glacier for the Foundation for Glaciological and Environmental Research, but the ice is so thick in the bay today that we can't get anywhere near the glacier. As the tide changes, we are carried towards the 600-metre-wide gap into Russel Fjord, and the thick brash ice makes it difficult to fight the current.

When Isabelle arrives in Yakutat, we head off for Icy Bay at the foot of Mount St. Elias to survey the termini of the Tyndall, Yahtse and Guyot glaciers. I last sailed with her in the Antarctic, and the landscape here is very similar. We watch the depth sounder carefully as we head into the unsurveyed waters of Taan Fjord, where the Tyndall Glacier has receded several kilometres since our charts were published. I keep the Zodiac at full throttle to hold our position against a river running off the glacier, determining GPS positions while Jacqueline, a park ranger from Yakutat who has joined us for two days, takes pictures. We go ashore at the other end of the glacier to do more of the same. The next morning, we drop off Jacqueline on the beach, where a Parks Service plane will pick her up before continuing on to survey the other glaciers.

The ice is much thicker here at the head of the bay. Much of the loose brash has congealed into semi-solid floes, which we break through at low speed while doing our best to avoid the larger bergs. Our progress is painfully slow. Seals pop their heads up through the ice and watch us with inquisitive eyes; others, lounging on large, flat icebergs, roll over and ready themselves to slip into the water should we come too close. After many hours of slow progress, we stop the engine and let the ice close in around us, listening to the steady popping and tinkling of ice filling the silence while we have lunch. The Yahtse Glacier looks so close, but with several more kilometres of thickening ice to push through, our objective proves unattainable.

The largest commercial fishing port in all of Alaska, Kodiak is a bustling working town tucked into an otherwise remote island wilderness. Treeline, once terminating at the southern tip of Afognak, just north of Kodiak, has been moving south at an impressive rate of 1.6 km every 10 years and now extends over half of Kodiak Island. Beyond a field of brilliantly coloured wildflowers, a Kodiak bear eats his catch on the beach. Offshore, a massive humpback launches into the air and crashes down on its side, then repeats this more than a dozen times. We sail down the east coast of the island and discover an unexpected mix of Russian and Aluutiq, past and present. A traditional Orthodox Russian priest rides a motorcycle down a dirt road to nowhere, and off Atilak we explore ancient petroglyphs etched into the rocks.

The pilot guide for the Aleutians reads like an "Enter at Own Risk" sign: strong and unpredictable currents, violent storms, thick fog, treacherous coastlines, unsurveyed waters. This only rouses our curiosity further. On July 12, James enters in the ship's log:

> No suitable anchorage in Pavlof Bay. Tried north of Cape Tolstoi, but no luck. Engine failed to start: air in fuel caused by low fuel and rough seas. Shortly after being restarted, the engine stalled — caught genoa sheet in prop. Roberta dived on prop and freed the sheet. Wosnesenski Island: tried anchorage on north of island. No shelter. Decided to push on to Cold Bay overnight.

Cold Bay, population seventy, looks as desolate as its name. A woman here gives us some insight into the weather: "You have to check the flags before parking your car. If you park at a bad angle to the wind, you'll have your doors blown off when you open them."

The Aleutians are a volcanic island chain separating the Bering Sea to the north from the North Pacific Ocean to the south, and stretching from mainland Alaska to Russia's Kamchatka peninsula. There are a few small communities dotted along the chain — Aleut villages and cannery towns. We wonder who would want to live out here year-round; they think we're the crazy ones to sail up here in a small boat. The fishermen are very generous to us. We often struggle to eat all the fresh fish we're given before it goes off, as we have no refrigeration on board.

Dora and I cringe at the crude jokes. Three women and one guy on a sailboat is obviously not something seen every day. With his bushy red beard, James has developed quite the salty-dog look and gets the captain's treatment wherever we go. "So what's the longest you've ever been at sea at a time?" a fisherman asks him as we sit around on his boat, waiting out some bad weather.

"Uh, two days." (The recent crossing from Kodiak to the Shumagin Islands.)

The silence is awkward. Finally, Dora suggests that perhaps he should ask someone else the same question.

The fisherman looks to Isabelle.

"One hundred and nine days." (Single-handed, non-stop around the world.)

The girls grin inwardly.

The Bering Sea is grey and desolate. Somehow, this is as it should be to my mind. There are large volcanoes on the islands to the south of us, but we see only fog. The air is filled with pelagic seabirds — shearwaters, storm petrels, albatrosses and fulmars — skimming over the surface of the waves or drafting behind our sails. James and Dora are seasick again. Dora still manages to smile after sharing her stomach with the sea.

On Unalaska Island, only the peaks of the Aleutian volcanoes poke through the clouds below us. We hike ancient Aleut trails over soft tundra hills and don't want to leave. Looking back at the globe, we feel as though we are only at the starting point to more adventures further north. Soon, however, we will sail east for ten days across the Gulf of Alaska, to Haida Gwaii. From there, we will head down the west coast of Vancouver Island to arrive back home in Vancouver four months after we left.

The crew of Eliris *is grateful for the financial assistance of the Alpine Club of Canada's* Jen Higgins Fund. *Nor could we have done it without* Eliris*, the sailboat generously loaned to us by Tony and Margaret Repard. Bluewater Cruising loaned us nearly 200 charts, and Sally Holden supplied the essential safety equipment and sails.*

The *Eliris* Crew

Full trip: Roberta Holden, James Floyer, Wayward the Duck
Vancouver to Petersburg; Kodiak to Vancouver: Dora Repard
Vancouver to Yakutat: Hamish Millar, Don Chandler
Juneau to Yakutat: Cecelia Mortenson, Vance Culbert
Juneau to Gustavus: Panya Lipovsky
Yakutat to Unalaska: Isabelle Autissier
Yakutat to Icy Bay: Jacqueline Lott
Cordova to Kodiak: Verena Blasy
Unalaska to Vancouver: Eric Holden
Unalaska to Haida Gwaii: Rod Savoie
Haida Gwaii to Vancouver: Shannon MacLachlan

manless

karen mcneill

Today I hate Sue because she has collapsed with HAPE. She is lying in the medical tent at 14,000 feet on Denali, with elongated plastic tubes feeding oxygen through her nose to her depleted body. She could have died. How dare she do this to me.

I hate her because I missed the diagnosis. I hate her because I am scared of losing her. Alone in the tent, I cry. I cry for Sue, I cry out of self-pity and I cry for Gary, who died on Dhaulagiri many years ago and to whom I never got to say goodbye. I was stranded by a southerly in Pioneer Hut after climbing the South Face of Douglas Peak. Gary left for Nepal, knowing that I had climbed my route and was awaiting the arrival of calmer weather to get back home. He died high on Dhaulagiri. What a waste.

During my roller-coaster ride of emotions in our tent, I feel mad that we might not even get to climb, let alone climb our route. A route that was never on my checklist until Sue mentioned it to me. I'm mad that thoughts of climbing are even entering my mind when Sue's situation is precarious. I should have known it was an altitude illness and not a cold. I castigate myself. What an idiot I am.

This is my third expedition with Sue. During all the time we've spent climbing, I've never known Sue to be ill. In fact, I've never known Sue to lag behind me. I'm usually the one to come down with a bug, and I'm always looking at her small figure in the distance, wishing for her strength and stamina. Days prior to Sue's collapse, we had a heated argument. When I noticed that Sue was coughing hard, I suggested that we stay behind to rest for a day. Viewed in retrospect, her behaviour was irrational, and the coughing a symptom of the HAPE. But my response of angrily throwing a snow stake onto the ground was also irrational. Once we had quieted down and come to an agreement, we continued up to our next camp, at 14,000 feet. I led the entire way!

Sue and I have come to Denali to attempt the Cassin Ridge. The route is not technically difficult and goes at Alaska Grade 5, 5.8 AI4. It follows Denali's South Ridge to within 300 feet of North America's highest summit, 20,320 feet above sea level. First climbed in 1961 by Riccardo Cassin and his three Italian teammates, the route is considered by some to be a test piece. Grade aside, success often lies in the hands of the weather gods, who like unstable, cold weather. The predominant westerly air flow often brings huge amounts of moisture from the Arctic and Pacific oceans and the Chukchi and Bering seas. Some seasons pass without a single ascent of the Cassin, because of the bad weather. The thinning of the atmosphere due to "atmospheric squash" at this northern latitude makes the effects of any given elevation equivalent to being 2000 to 3000 feet higher than at the equator. This can make the "easiest climbing" much more difficult.

Since its first ascent, the route has been climbed by 468 climbers. The statistics also suggest that once on the route, 75 per cent of climbers top out. The records are somewhat confusing when it comes to distinguishing gender in the list of international names; approximately 25 women have climbed the Cassin to date. These women all climbed with male partners. When Sue and I arrived at Kahiltna Base Camp in the spring of 2004, the route had yet to be climbed by a team of women, although three teams of women had previously attempted it. In 1998, Kim Csizmazia and Julie Faure went with three objectives, among them the Cassin. Unfortunately, they didn't get the necessary weather window; instead, they climbed the West Buttress. In 2001, Amy Bullard flew in to meet a friend who was guiding, with the intention of attempting the Cassin. Unfortunately, they never got to the base, as Amy's friend fell ill. During the spring of 2002, Anna Keeling and Nancy Feagin got the weather window but arrived at the base of the route with packs that were too heavy. Tenaciously, they re-climbed the West Rib, which they had just descended, and climbed to the top of Denali. The latter attempt was something I would remember, resulting in my efforts to adhere to the principle of "Light is right."

After three days and nights on oxygen, Sue spends a night in our tent without any medical aid. The following day, under the guidance of a group of park staff, we descend to 11,000 feet to complete her recovery. Our days are like a Caribbean holiday. The sun shines each day, and we feel warm and eat Jello and chips.

It is a true testament to Sue's strength and will when we make our way back to 14,000 feet three days later. This time I'm back in the rear. On our arrival the staff are happy to see us but are distracted by the season's second rescue. The morning following our arrival in camp, we're enlisted to help lower a semi-conscious, frostbitten Korean climber from 17,000 to 14,000 feet. Ironically, Sue's medic is pleasantly surprised when he arrives at our belay station. Days before, Sue was his patient and in need of his expertise. Now Sue the rescuer attaches herself to the litter with Steve and helps guide it down a thousand feet to the next anchor.

Photos: Karen McNeill.

As the rescue winds down, we begin to notice the "white board". Until now, jet-stream winds have continued to blast the summit, preventing climbers from reaching the top. Daily, the rangers write a brief weather synopsis on the board and place it outside the "mess" tent for all to view. Most climbers make their decisions based on what is written on the board. For two days in a row, Sue and I have observed that the weather forecast has been wrong. The weather appears to be more settled than was predicted. It is time to face the Cassin.

We have an inauspicious beginning. Thick, quiet mists move down two hours after our departure from camp, hiding the crucial cut-off point to the West Rib, our descent. This approach will allow us to avoid travelling up the death trap that is the northeast fork of the Kahiltna Glacier. This alternative access is a treacherous narrow valley capped with frequently calving seracs. We erect our tent to stay warm while we wait. At around 11 p.m. the mists lift and we are able to distinguish the descent, so we try again. This time we make it to 14,000 on the other side before the mist descends once more and obscures all landmarks, halting our slow progress. Eventually, 31 hours after our initial departure, we arrive at the base of the route just behind a team of three German climbers who have arrived minutes before us. Their plan is to "fix" the climb. Luckily, Sue's charm works wonders and we get pole position.

Our first couple of days on the route are uneventful. Using our topo, we navigate our way through the initial rock band. Due to the "age" of the climb, the route tends to follow the path of least resistance. Our first section of rock involves traversing around rock on ice. My calves ache from the strain of being continually on my front points. Below the second rock band, we are able to dig a fairly level spot on a narrow, snowy ridge, where we camp for the night.

The next morning, our brains are still engaged in the thought of "traversing". We traverse right on a snow slope past the entry point to the second rock band. By the time we realize our error, Sue has discovered an alternative route. We will downclimb through a mixed section, then continue up and around more mixed terrain that will lead us back to a snowy ridge and, hopefully, put us back on route. As Sue leaves our belay, the wind picks up, swirling spindrift around and throwing it on our exposed skin. We are shivering even when moving and will need to find a protected bivy site.

Earlier in the morning, while attaching my crampons, I wasn't able to tighten the strap on my right crampon to its usual tension. I thought it would be okay. Now, as Sue pulls the rope taut, I get ready to climb. When I step out from my stance, my right foot suddenly feels lighter. My tardiness has been rewarded with a crampon gone AWOL. Feeling ill, I watch the very unnatural metal object rolling easily away from me. It is headed towards a drop-off. As I watch it, my brain races with potential solutions to a lost crampon. Miraculously, the crampon stops at the exact point where another roll would have sent it flying into space.

As I yell up to Sue, the noisy wind makes communication virtually impossible. She imagines that I've been hit by falling rock. Finally, with slack in the rope, I carefully descend, moving off to the side so that the snow dislodged from each step won't tip my crampon over the edge. After what seems like wasted precious hours, I am next to the crampon. As nervous energy surges through my body, I reattach the crampon and race anaerobically back to a teary-eyed Sue.

After several more pitches, we find a storage-shed-sized boulder perched just below the snowy ridge. Here we will be protected from the howling wind. Still feeling the effects of the adrenaline rush, I carve a deep tent platform from the

snow and ice, then push Sue inside and continue to organize and re-stack our gear. By the time all the gear is neat and organized, it's after midnight. The clouds have parted and I look across at Foraker, wondering who is climbing her. The scene is so beautiful. The cloudless mountains are shaded but not coloured. My mind imagines a photograph, but I don't have the energy to reach into the tent and retrieve my camera. Once I move inside, all I crave is sleep. Unfortunately, the arduous task of melting water consumes many more hours before we are finally allowed to rest our weary bodies.

Minutes before the slab releases, we're laughing as we sit having a bite to eat. The base of the rock we've come across the morning after my crampon incident is littered with numerous old ropes. We're back on the Cassin Ridge proper. Up until this point we've been belaying every pitch. Ironically, we're now moving without the security of an anchor. I stand beside a large rock that has potentially perfect #2 cam placements, my tools patiently waiting in the snow beside my feet. Sue steps onto the slope and comments that the snow is bad. At the same moment, I'm thinking to myself that we should be weaving our way though the rocks. The release is silent. As I watch Sue sliding past me, I brace with my legs in an attempt to stop her. The act is futile and I too am catapulted down into the moving mass of snow.

I've heard that a lot of people in similar situations see their lives flash before them. Not me! I like to chat to inanimate objects. On one hand I plead with the snow, *Please stop now, please now, please slow down, please slow down*. On another level I puzzle over the thought that this can't be happening; I was sure we were going to climb the route.

The release is inches deep and carries us about fifty feet towards a cliff. When the momentum stops we race back up to the rock and place two equalized cams. Nervous and shaky, we continue climbing, once again belaying every pitch. Our bodies are drained of energy by the adrenaline we felt after the slide, so we camp earlier than usual. That night my body decides to do some of its own releasing. My period begins early. Of course I'm unprepared.

When planning our climb, we knew that if we were to succeed we would have to "go light". I had learned this from Anna and Nancy. To shave weight off our loads, we've taken only four days' worth of food, knowing that it could be stretched to feed us for six days. We've brought over eight days of fuel. Climbers can go without food for short periods of time, but not water. At altitude, hydration helps prevent frostbite and aids acclimatization. During the day, I've sucked back one of my last Clifshots and given the other to Sue. It's now our sixth day on the climb and we have no food left. I don't allow myself the luxury of thinking about this situation; it would only make me feel worse. Our job is now to get up the mountain, and we will!

Adverse weather continues to impede our progress, bringing either thick fog or violent winds. At first the wind usually appears to be whispering in our ears. Later in the day, its velocity picks up to the point that it slaps us around and tries to push us over. Each day, when this begins, we begin looking for a place to spend the night. Inside the protection of the thin tent walls, we speculate that once we reach the summit we'll be able to quickly descend. Each evening, we think the next day will bring us to that summit. Close to the top of the route, we're forced to camp again. I beat the snow furiously, wasting energy and begging for a reprieve.

On June 2 we awake to quiet. Dense, pea-soup-like fog has replaced the wind. We creep tentatively along the narrow, camouflaged snow ridge. Up ahead I notice a snowy pyramid. When I stare for long enough I can make out a wand on its peak. We've made it; this signifies the top of our route — Kahiltna Horn. I'm elated. From the Horn, a mere 300 feet of ridge travel will take us to the summit of Denali.

I notice more wands. Concentrating on discrepancies in the snow, I make my way along the ridge from wand to wand. At the third, another wand much further down the slope momentarily distracts me. Caught off guard, I take a large step and land in a divot. My pack lurches forward, throwing me to the ground. As I fall, I feel a sharp pain in my right knee where I partially tore my ACL several years ago. I come to rest facing down the slope. My knee aches and I feel woozy. I quickly right my body and rest my head on my knee. Then I pass out. I've never experienced this before, and my mind takes me to a warm, colourful place. This beach-like scene may be my body's way of masking the pain, or it may be a trick to lure me into unconsciousness. Sue's squeaky voice brings me back to our cold, desolate reality. When she asks how my knee is, there's only one possible reply: "It's fine."

Later that day, at 6 p.m. — eight days after leaving the ranger camp at 14,000 feet — Sue Nott and I reach Denali's summit. The only indication that we have reached the top is the row of flapping flags embedded in the firm, windblown snow. The flags represent the various nations of the climbers who've made it to this point. We can barely see each other, let alone the flags, through the fog that has been encasing the upper part of the mountain all day. Accompanying the fog is the usual afternoon breeze.

Standing on the summit, we discuss the descent. We each think we should go in the opposite direction to the other. As we cautiously begin descending the path of least resistance, the wind "kicks it up a couple of notches". Minutes later I stop; our efforts seem futile. I don't want to get lost or become frostbitten. Our only reasonable option is to spend a night on top of Denali. The thought doesn't scare me.

Dressed like Michelin women, we need a lot of concentration to pitch the tent without the wind stealing our only means of shelter. Several times we take off all but our thinnest gloves to do fine motor tasks. Once the tent is finally erected, Sue and I crawl inside. We're about fifty feet

below the summit. Ironically, this spot is one of the flattest bivy sites we've had on the entire climb.

All that protects us from the maelstrom outside is the tent. Inside, we feel instant warmth. Although we haven't eaten for two days, we still have a canister and a half of fuel. We begin the lengthy task of melting the dry snow for water. When the gases in the canister mix together, a thin film of frost forms. We counter this with a lighter held next to the can, making the flame burn hotter. As the stove chugs away, one pair of hands hovers, ready to catch the pot and its precious contents which could easily overturn. Outside, the winds continues to hammer the tent, often attempting to force opposite walls together.

Meanwhile, the other set of hands withdraws all the frozen contents from our packs, stacking them behind our heads. Frozen, round blobs in stuff sacks are removed. From two of these stuff sacks, sleeping bags are retrieved and spread out. Crystals of ice fall to the tent floor. Our bags have been on a sun-less diet for eight days. We slide inside them so that they will begin to defrost.

Karen McNeill (l) and Sue Nott (r) at 17,000 feet

To celebrate our success, Sue and I brew hot water bottles with the extra fuel. We position the bottles all around our bodies inside the bags in order to get warmth. Sometime during the raucous night, we both fall asleep. Later, South District ranger Daryl Miller will comment: "Your decision to bivy on the summit was bold and risky, but it turned out great, and given your situation it was necessary."

June 3, 10 a.m. The unmistakable throb of a "Parks" Llama breaks into our silence. As the helicopter nears, my initial thought is, *Wow, it's been a bad night — I wonder who they're looking for.* During our time at the 14,000-foot camp, Sue and I developed strong bonds with many of the Parks Service workers. We've taken longer than anticipated to climb the route, and people are now concerned for our safety. Before departing the 14,000 camp, we discussed our strategy with the rangers. They thought we had five days' worth of food and seven days' worth of fuel. It is now Day 9. Daryl later writes of the incident: "Typically, 48 hours after a realistic due date, Parks employees have an official responsibility as a federal agency to respond."

Realizing that the helicopter is probably looking for us, Sue reaches out of the tent into the –35°C air and gives a gloved thumbs-up. Inside, I toil over what this all means. In our world, we've come to the mountains to be self-reliant and we're fine; however, no one else knows that. I feel bad and embarrassed for potentially putting other people, such as the pilot, at risk. But in hindsight, I realize that if we had needed their help, I would have been cheering to see them. Nowhere else in the mountain world is the same infrastructure in place. While some climbers go expecting assistance, others don't want it unless it is absolutely necessary. As a result, the Parks employees are often left with difficult decisions to make and, in Daryl's words, "the sad and painful task of telling family and friends when someone is lost or dead in the backcountry".

The Llama, which is swaying in the wind and fighting the altitude, returns, then departs once they see us both outside. While laboriously packing, we jump up and down and vigorously shake our hands in an effort to warm our limbs. Our brains feel taxed and our bodies feel empty.

On the Football Field, Sue discovers a square of chocolate. She carefully bites the minute piece in half and hands one section to me. As we continue our descent, the air warms and fills with oxygen, and finally we're allowed the luxury of taking off some of our numerous layers of clothing.

Just above Denali Pass we begin encountering climbers heading up. Most guess who we are, incredulously asking, "Are you the girls who slept on the summit?" To this, we wearily smile, then walk on. At 17,000, rangers Rob and Dexter await our arrival. We are fed and we make phone calls telling all we're safe. By the time we reach 14,000, it's getting late. John, Sue's concerned boyfriend, comes out to meet us. Our last few steps into camp are overwhelming. Many climbers come out of their tents, cheering and clapping. We're safely down, with no frostbite or other injuries. In a season when fewer people than normal have reached the summit of Denali, we've made the first "man-less" ascent of the Cassin Ridge. It has been quite a climb.

Special thanks to mountain Hard Wear, Metolius and Montrail my main sponsors. Thanks also to Clifbar, Outdoor Research, Gregory, Vasque, Adidas Eyewear, Petzl USA, and Farmer Tan Designs

COMBATANTS

MATT MADDALONI

PHOTOS PAUL BRIDE

We (John Furneaux, Paul Bride and I) flew in with White Saddle Air at Bluff Lake and were dropped off below the Incisor on Combatant Mountain, in the Mount Waddington Range, on July 11, 2004. Three loads of gear were ferried up a steep icefall, a 120-metre couloir and a final 10 metres of 5.11 crack to reach our base camp on a remote ledge directly below the 450-metre Incisor.

From the ledge, we spent four days fixing ropes up the wall. We quickly climbed *Day Trip* three pitches to its high point, with new variations at 5.11. From here the wall became dramatically steeper, the next two pitches being quite overhanging.

I aided the first pitch at A3+ and over the following day was able to free all the moves without linking them at 5.13a. John Furneaux aided the next 55-metre overhanging off-width, which was soaking wet from previous rainfall. The next day saw both of us get close to sending our pitches free. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to clip into a fixed pin at the 5.13 crux and fell, ripping both sides of my finger from a mono-pocket. John was able to free over the crux off-width roof, but rested on a 3.5 Camalot just above at 40 metres out before finishing to the end. I also on-sighted a 5.11c 55-metre crack above John's off-width, and it was here, at a third-height of the Incisor, that our fixed ropes came to an end.

Paul Bride — a professional photographer, very good friend and past expedition co-member — was able to take stills and video of these pitches and camp life throughout the week, using our fixed lines to his advantage.

John and I took one day of rest before committing to the route. We brought with us one rope; a small stove and one canister of fuel; lots of power go for food; a lightweight tarp; synthetic down jackets each; a radio in contact with the helicopter at White Saddle and with Paul Bride at base camp; two sets of cams; a couple of pitons; and two ice axes. We decided that an extra rope and our mountaineering boots were too heavy to allow us a fast climb. So we figured out how to put down booties over our rock shoes and duct-tape crampons over them for the descent!

John and I woke up at 5 a.m. and were simulclimbing the first three pitches by 6 a.m. I was able to free the whole of my 5.13a pitch except for one move in which my tattered fingers needed to pull on a fixed bird beak in order to reach through the dyno to the final crimp before climbing another 12 metres of overhanging bulges to the belay. The pitch rating settled at 5.12d with one point of aid. John was able to completely free his off-width at 5.12b for 45 metres to a no-hands rest, where he re-racked his gear and continued on through the next pitch, stretching it out to 70 metres!

To save energy, we jumared each other's pitches and continued in this style through the next unknown two-thirds of the Incisor until we reached the summit at 10:30 a.m. From here we rappelled two pitches and simul-climbed and pitched out the next ten pitches, or 440 metres, of climbing over the Jawbone, which took us to a huge snow shelf below the final summit of Combatant. Along the way, I took a huge 10-metre fall after pulling off a loose block, bouncing off three ledges before coming to a halt. I badly cut my fingers, bruised my knee and butt, and slammed my shoulder hard enough that it was excruciating to use my arm. I did manage to slow myself down enough in the fall that I didn't pull out my one piece of gear, which was preventing the rope from potentially cutting over many loose blocks lying in a notch.

We understood the severity of the situation and knew that we had to make it to the snow shelf 220 metres up 5.11 cracks in order to reach the first opportunity of retreat. John took over the lead and I either jumared or hobbled through the next five pitches to the Shelf. By the last pitch, I was feeling somewhat better and led the final 60 metres (5.10) to the Shelf.

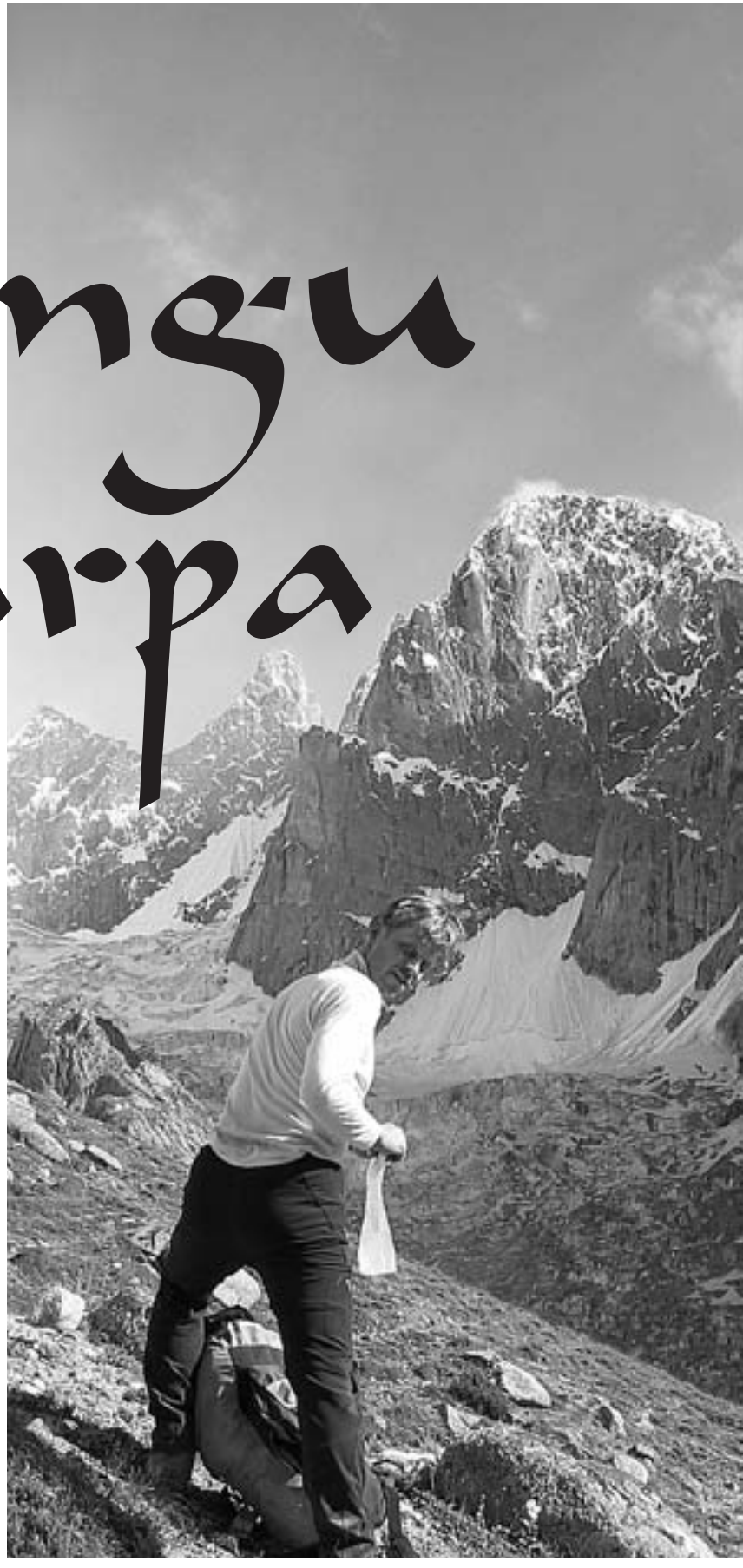
We were still doing great for time, and topped out on the Shelf at 3 p.m. Considering that the first-ascent party on *Belligerence* took eight days to climb the less steep back side of the Incisor to the top of Combatant, I figured that if I could withstand the pain of my injury for another 720 metres of climbing on easier 5.6 to 5.10 ground, we could complete one of Canada's greatest rock climbs. We brewed up on the Shelf and rested for twenty minutes before continuing on. I led the way while John carried the heavy pack. We simulclimbed for three more pitches to a ledge halfway up the toothless tower. From here John led on across the couloir separating that tower from the summit tower. We

kept to the rock beside the gully for four more pitches, most of them 70-metre rope stretchers, until we reached the col at the top of the couloir. I led the final 5.10 pitch in sobbing pain to a saddle 90 metres below the frustratingly hidden summit. Here we unroped, threw down our heavy cams, ropes and packs and climbed solo to the final summit of Combatant for a total time of 11 and a half hours.

Time to get back to camp! We rappelled three pitches of rock in total and the rest down ice. John would lower me 70 metres with our one rope while I placed one or two pieces of gear as protection on the descent. He would then down-climb the couloir while I kept him on belay. We repeated the process for six more rappels until we reached the Shelf and were able to walk out in our rock shoes and down booties with duct-taped crampons.

In the Combatant-Waddington col, we met Katie Holm and her partner Peter in their tent. From supplies left by another party, they gave us three beers to take for base-camp celebrations. John and I continued on down the 600-metre icefall. Tricky route finding around massive holes, ice blocks and crevasses brought us to the base of our little 120-metre couloir. Here we kicked steps up towards camp; and in the dark, after 16 hours of climbing, John led the final 10 metres of 5.11 crack, using his ice axe to mantel the crux while Paul watched from above, all of us knowing that he could easily just throw a rope down. I jumared up behind John, and we enjoyed our only beer for the entire trip before collapsing into our tents with big grins and sore bodies.

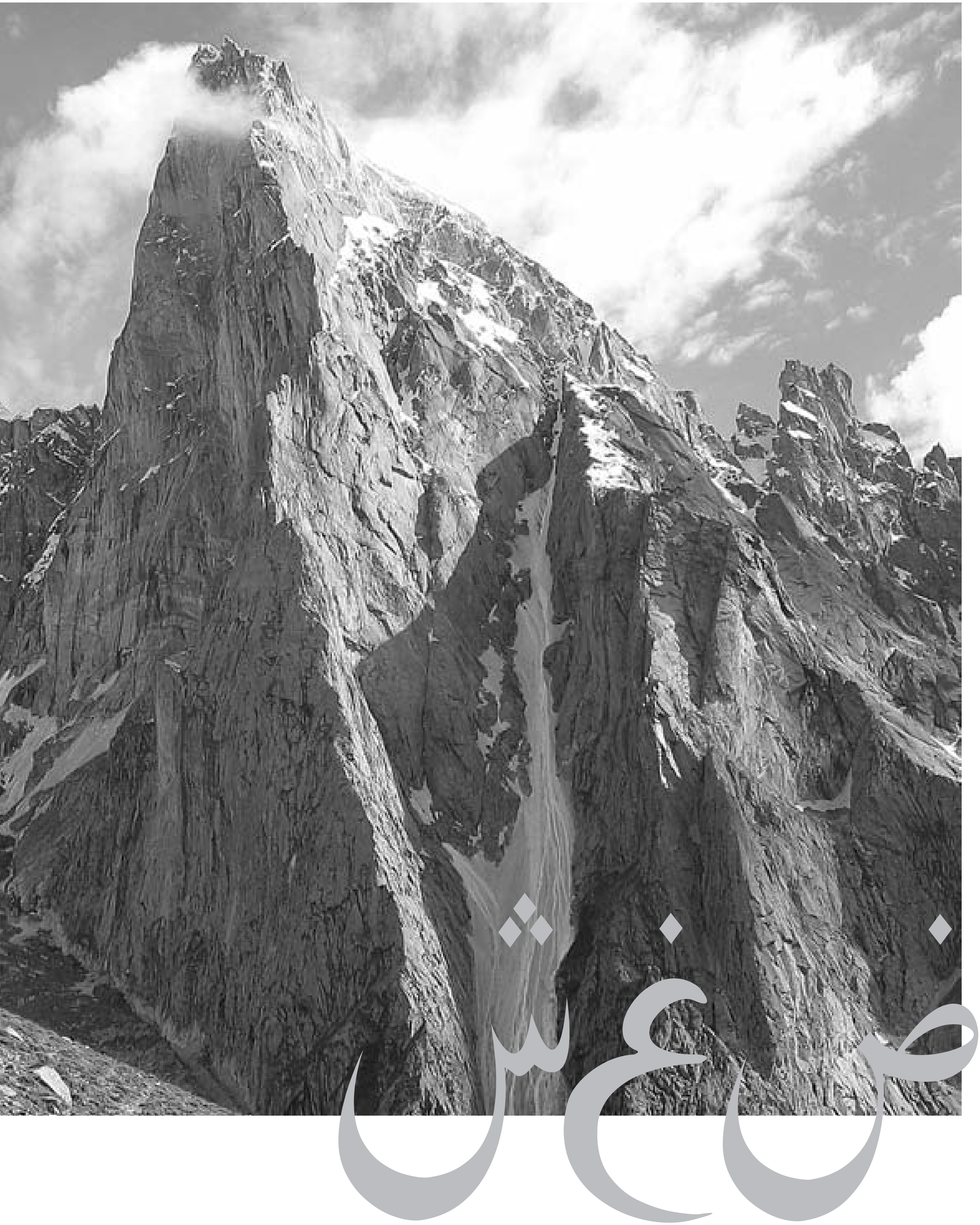
Shjingu Charpa



This past summer Dave Edgar and I travelled to northeastern Pakistan to visit Shjingu Charpa (Great Tower), a peak with a visually stunning and impressive north ridge, found near the Chinese border in the Nangma valley. After considering many objectives in the Himalaya and the Karakoram over the previous decade, we decided to team up for this one.

The logistical complexity of the ridge meant that endless fixed ropes would be required for a typical month-long big-wall endeavour. Given the low summit elevation of 6000 metres, there is no water to be found on the lower 4000 feet, and hauling enough water up for a prolonged attempt would be nearly unfeasible. We believed that climbing alpine-style would be the only answer.

story by chris geisler photos by chris geisler and dave edgar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Weeks before our planned departure, friends and family thought it ridiculous to be travelling to this part of the world in light of the current political clashes. After speaking with others who had been to the area over the previous two years, as well as locals, we felt that it was worth seeing for ourselves what was going on. Ultimately, we met only hospitable, helpful and kind people. We found that while there exist some spots of concern in Pakistan, travel is generally fluid and problems are rarely encountered. There are also local groups currently petitioning the Pakistani government to open the border valleys of the Kondus and Siachen glaciers to foreign travel. Conflict between India and Pakistan in this area has calmed considerably, and talk of arrangements to resume trade and travel in the region is rumoured.

We made logistical plans with Blue Sky Treks and Tours, to whom we could not be more grateful. They made everything easy, all at a very reasonable cost. The head of this locally based organization, Ghulam Muhammad, is from the region in which we were travelling, and he has made a practice of hiring local, reliable people, often from his extended family. This ensures that porters, cooks and drivers are all paid a reasonable wage. If we needed any assistance, they were always well able to help us out, and we highly recommend them to anyone travelling to the Karakoram to climb or trek.

A four-person Korean team had reached the summit of Shjingu Charpa via a steep 3000-foot ice couloir, followed by a weakness in the 2500-foot rock wall above, using fixed ropes. Then an American team of four had attempted the north ridge, climbing about 2500 feet over five days before descending when one member broke his leg. In addition, they had found it to be logistically too much to carry the water required for a big-wall ascent. We were hoping to climb the ridge in two to three days by moving through the night without stopping, hence leaving behind sleeping gear.

After settling into our base camp, we immediately began making forays up the nearby snow slopes and doing short climbs in order to acclimatize. Our first rock-climbing objective was the south ridge of Denbour Brakk, a low peak across the valley from us and to the northeast of the much-travelled Brakk Zhang. We thought that beginning the ridge at its base would make for an easy start. However, we soon found ourselves dealing with poor belay anchors, tricky freeclimbing, huge, loose features and scaly rock. This led to my simultaneously ripping out a cluster of three cams and falling onto a suspect pendulum point. We opted to go down and begin the ridge from the side, which went far more smoothly.

We spent the rest of the afternoon negotiating gendarmes along the ridgetop via a mixture of off-widths, rappels and aid-climbing. At a certain point we could find no obvious way to carry on, and so we descended roughly three pitches before the summit. Of course, given the almost horizontal nature of the ridge by then, our descent was simply achieved with three rappels and some scrambling.

Since our arrival in base camp, a week had passed with generally poor weather that prevented a serious attempt on the ridge. By this point, though, we had taken a good look at our intended line. We then noticed that the weather seemed to be improving. We were keen to gain as much experience on the ridge as possible, as any first-hand knowledge would better prepare us for a serious attempt on the whole ridge if we got a real weather window later on. Our intent was to reach the American high point and then descend as they had done off the left side of the ridge. We hoped to do this in one day round-trip from camp, which would be necessary if we were to have any luck at climbing the whole ridge quickly.

We approached the base and stowed our packs, allowing for an approach in the darkness of the following morning. Once the climbing began, everything went well. However, we quickly found the cracks to be vegetated and shallow, often making protection difficult. For the first eight pitches or so, we came upon anchors left behind by the American team, after which we saw no sign of travel. Working our way through a steep section, we had to use short pitches in light of the route finding. Unfortunately, this also meant that one of our belays was not ideal and would have failed had the leader fallen on the tricky opening aid moves of the following pitch. We managed to negotiate this A3 section quickly, partly freeclimbing, and with a couple of piton placements. A tension traverse from a bolt placed during the earlier ascent then put us back on moderate ground. Some difficulty finding a straightforward route meant another suspect belay and flaky rock. Having again passed an overhanging portion of the ridge, we were back on moderate ground and making good time.

Unfortunately, we became stymied by route finding three pitches short of the American high point. By this time it was dark and I was leading. With no good protection for quite a distance below, and no obvious route ahead, I opted to build an anchor and descend in order to join Dave on a

small ledge. We had brought an insulated jacket each, and we rigged a small tarp over our heads. We then settled in for the long night, with much close contact in an effort to keep warm. Our set-up proved helpful, as it seemed to protect us somewhat from the wind, and from the snow that began to fall through the night. We decided that a small tarp was not an ideal compromise in weight given its inability to completely cover us, and that we would opt for the double size next time!

Morning dawned and we poked our heads out to note our Eiger-esque predicament. Everything was covered with snow, the wind was blowing, and we had no gloves. Thankfully, however, the temperature had not plummeted. We could not go up and we could not go sideways, so we had to head down the ridge. This was daunting, as we had used pendulums and tension traverses on the way up. Right away, jumaring to our high point of the previous evening proved interesting. As I approached the upper anchor, one of the three pieces, a medium nut, popped out. Some easy bounce testing of the remaining two, a medium and a tiny cam, released the medium cam from its confines. This left only the purple TCU in an expanding flake. Without a bolt kit and with no other gear placements in sight, I positioned the rope to pull around a corner and then rejoined Dave via a slow and cautious rappel. We headed down the ridge without incident, and returned to base camp 10 hours later, relieved.

The following weeks were punctuated by several bouts of stomach sickness in various shapes and forms, as well as some crack climbing nearby, a solo attempt at the first ascent of Lobsang Peak, washing, much reading and many newly created games.

Finally, heading into the third week in base camp, we had another go on the ridge. Though the weather didn't seem as if it would stabilize for long, we thought it might be good enough for a one-day outing. We were right. Our prior experience on the route meant that at times we could move faster. At other times, we investigated alternative options in an attempt to solve problems we had experienced the first time. This of course led us to other problems — meaning one 85-metre pitch and an opportunity for me to jumar on the rope weighted directly off Dave's waist. We pushed through these moments, trying to logically decipher the best solution, and made notes of the better solutions for our next attempt.

At our previous high point, Dave was able to find a suitable route; we made it to the American high point with an hour and a half of daylight to spare. Here we left some water, pitons and fuel before quickly descending. We had obtained detailed information about the descent off the left side of the ridge, which proved invaluable as we navigated the rappels, the considerable downclimbing, and the glacier travel by headlamp back to camp. We had reached our desired height, and returned to camp in 21 hours. The next day was a torrential downpour.

Many told us that the weather this year was unusually poor, and we agreed. The rain continued into our last week in base camp, when it seemed to be letting up. We knew that we would have to leave in four days in order to catch our flights back to Canada. Although apparently improving, the weather was not quite stable, but we had to begin our final attempt. If the weather held, this would leave us just enough time to summit and descend. Again we stowed our gear at the base of the ridge and woke up at midnight. This put us on the climb with three hours of darkness remaining, which worked out perfectly given our comfort with the initial pitches.

Our prior experience allowed us to gain height quickly; however, by early afternoon it was snowing again. At this point Dave was in the lead. He felt confident to continue, so we made it to our previous high point by mid-afternoon. The weather had improved, and we headed up an immense chimney with car-sized chockstones. This landed us on a huge perched platform, at which point the skies opened and a healthy blizzard erupted. But rather than stay on the comfy ledge, we dug ourselves a cave below and again rigged the small tarp so as to block the wind tunnel on one side and the blowing snow on the other. Perhaps the tarp was only partly successful. We then brewed up tea and a meal before settling into our cramped quarters for the night.

The night did pass slowly, but the snow let up a little. We each got a total of about 20 minutes of sleep, meaning that we weren't feeling as robust as we would have liked the next morning. However, after drying out our gear and treating some water the Americans had left behind, we headed up and leftward on easy terrain. This brought us to a small ledge offering a view upward at over 3000 feet of vertical to overhanging terrain. We had climbed about 22 sixty-metre pitches to this point. Above us we were faced with similar terrain to that which we had already experienced, but a bit steeper. In other words, the climbing would consist of poorly protected pitches and belays and would follow discontinuous features connected by thin aid-climbing, at best in shallow, densely vegetated cracks. None of these characteristics were conducive to moving smoothly over the thousands of feet of steep rock above our heads, let alone achieving this within 48 hours. The weather remained unstable and seemed as if it could break at any time. In light of our exhaustion from the climbing, we believed that if we were to suffer through another inclement and sleepless night, we would be putting ourselves at risk of falling off. The chance of this was something we could not face. We decided to go down. Later that afternoon we reached the glacier below the ridge. Accepting the fact that we would not be getting anywhere near the summit soon made it difficult to put one foot in front of the other; worn out, we dragged ourselves back to camp.

The following two days seemed to extend forever as we yearned to escape the valley and see what was going on in the outside world. Porters finally arrived and we packed up our camp. Wandering down the valley, we found that the strain we had been carrying with us for many weeks dropped from our shoulders. Returning to Skardu was effortless. There we rode bikes, watched our first matches of polo and field hockey, visited with local people and shopped for carpets and gifts to take home to our friends. Without proper weather for a flight to Islamabad, we took the 21-hour drive on the Karakoram Highway and found magnificent landscapes and interesting towns. Our return to Islamabad brought us another step closer to home, and more of our tension evaporated. Walking around the part of the city near our hotel was casual and carefree. We ate different foods, watched people, began telling stories to those at home and wandered. We were soon off to the airport for our flight to London, and it was a sad moment when we said goodbye to Pakistan. Finally, our good friends and family welcomed us on our return to Vancouver.

We both now have many new realizations and abilities to bring to our lives and future climbing adventures. We are grateful to the supporters of the Mugs Stump Award and the Helly Hansen / Alpine Club of Canada Mountain Adventure Award for these extraordinary times. We are especially thankful to the numerous people at Mountain Equipment Co-op who, knowing in advance about our trip, would offer us a kind smile and helpful advice. Many a discussion was had about our approach to the ridge, and our strategy evolved through these. Also, as recipients of financial support through MEC's Expedition Fund, we were able to embark on this adventure properly prepared. We are exceptionally grateful for MEC's vision and its belief in us.

On the summit of Devils Thumb. Photo: Jon Walsh

The Witch, the Cat & the Devil

andre ike

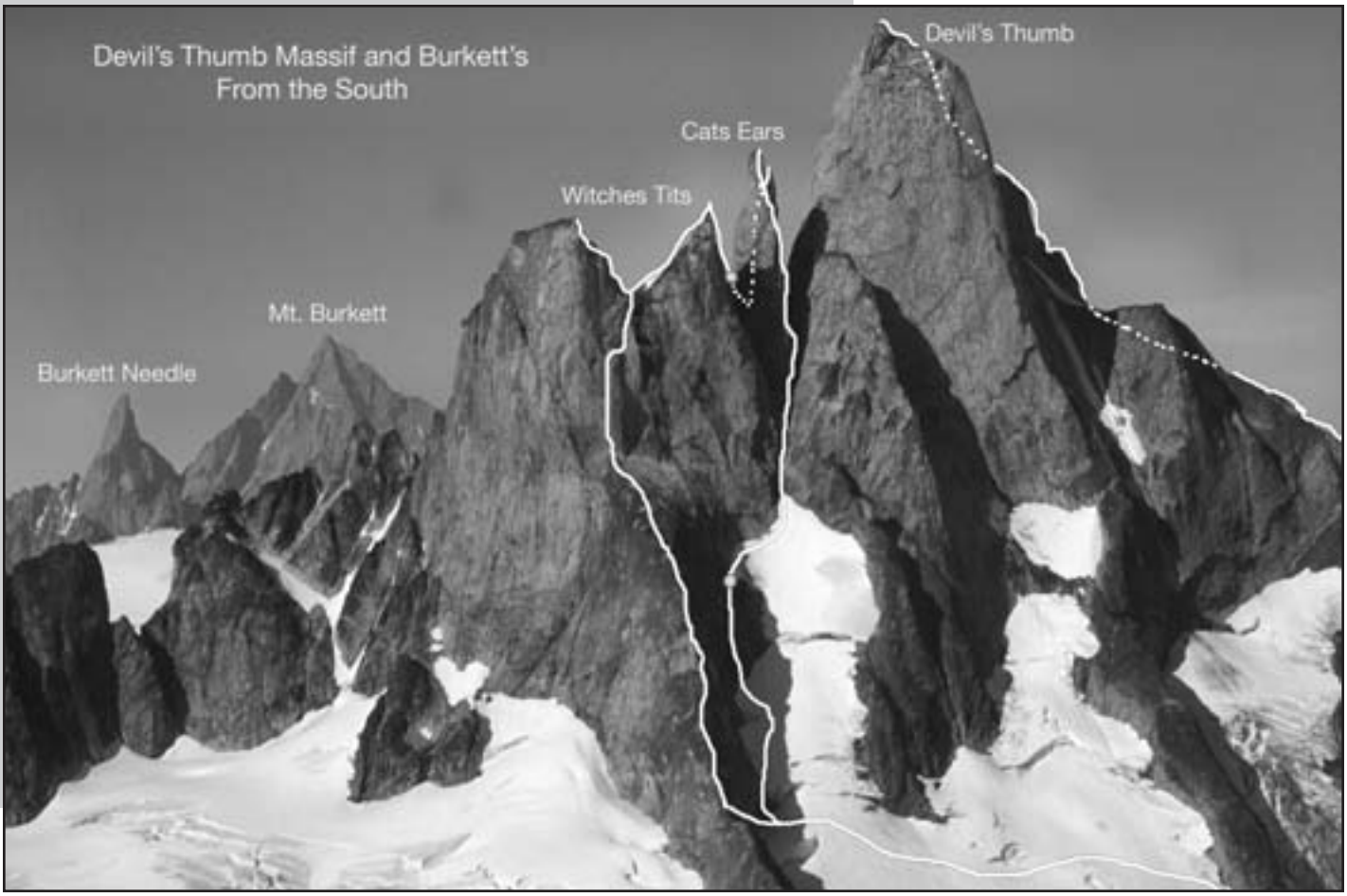
When you think about the best granite alpine climbing in North America, several obvious areas come to mind — Bugaboos, Sierras, Lotus, Waddington, Baffin — all high on every alpinist's list. These areas see a fair amount of traffic, and deservedly so, but how about the Stikine? Many have heard of the famous Devils Thumb and its unclimbed northwest face, but they know little of its satellite spires and even less of their few ascents.

I first discovered the area while reading the famous *Fifty Classic Climbs of North America*, and I was intrigued by the nice-looking spires in the photo. Equally impressive was the effort involved in the first ascent of the Devils Thumb, by Fred Beckey in 1946. After an accident on his first attempt, Beckey coaxed two friends from Seattle to come up and join him.

Fifty-four years later, the coaxing continued; Fred was trying to round up partners to go back to the Stikine. Like a wizard of the mountains casting a spell on young climbers, he has a way of luring us in — using, as always, a first ascent for bait. And such was the case in August 2000 when Jon Walsh and Kelven Vail were talked into a trip to the area (*CAJ* 2001). Fred claimed that "a huge granite monolith on the Coast called Oasis Peak" had seen several attempts but had yet to be climbed. The addition of a few photos to the sales pitch was enough to whet any climber's appetite. After their successful ascent, the three celebrated with Dieter Klose back in Petersburg, and a seed was planted. The objective: a traverse of the massif, starting with the Witches Tits, then going over Cats Ears Spire and up the West Buttress of the Devils Thumb before finally descending the Southeast Face.

Dieter, a local Petersburg climber and a foremost authority on the area, is the one who enlightened the trio with the wild idea. Always hospitable to visiting climbers, and a valuable source of info since little or none is available, he keeps a black book at home with topos, photos and journal entries from virtually every climber who passes through.

In 2001, Kelven and I applied to the John Lauchlan Award for this "Grand Traverse", but nothing came of it and the dream was slowly forgotten. A brief rekindling took



place at the Brew Pub in Squamish one night while we were having beers with the late Guy Edwards. I vividly remember the surprised look on his face at the mention of our ambitious proposal. He had just returned from climbing the Witches Tit and Cats Ear Spire, both via new routes. His rambles of "the best alpine granite I've ever climbed and the sharpest spire in the Coast Range" had me drooling and feeling somewhat envious.

Thanks to Jonny's motivation and resourcefulness and to help from the grant, the trip became set in stone. However, a weird turn of luck would be in my favour; I was invited at the last minute because Jonny's original partner injured his wrist in Yosemite.

Sorry but thanks, Eric.

July 15

A morning departure from Seattle on Alaska Airlines had us arrive before midday in the small, scenic fishing town of Petersburg. Located in the southeastern corner of the Alaskan panhandle, the town is dominated by views of the Thumb.

Dieter was at the airport to pick us up and we conveniently moved our bags fifty metres to the TEMSCO heliport. After running a few errands in town, we were soon flying over Frederick Sound, this time in a Hughes 500. We circled the south side of the spires twice, but it was clear that the only safe place to land was the East Ridge base camp, at 2100 metres.

Access to the south face of the massif was going to be challenging, as global warming had taken its toll; the glaciers looked downright ugly, many new crevasses and bergschrunds having opened; there were cliffs to negotiate; and we would be exposed to rock and icefall to get on the routes. On the flip side, the mountains were the driest in history and the climbing looked great.

The following morning had us packing our bags and getting ready to face our first crux — establishing an advanced camp. A twenty-minute walk on the glacier led to a scramble down boulders and a 60-metre rap on greasy, compact slabs. We fixed the line for return trips and started the sprint across the glacier and between crevasses. Looking up beside me only made me go faster; we dubbed this passage "the Bowling Alley" due to its continual exposure to hanging ice and regular rockfall. At a rock rib, Jonny led a bold, 50-metre pitch of mid-fifth in boots on wet, compact

slabs with no pro' and a big pack.

As I fixed a second line on this section, I heard "*%$#!" and saw something falling out of the corner of my eye. The Bibler was tumbling down a steep snow slope, off a big cliff and into crevasses below. It seemed clear to me that it was gone for good, but Jonny would have none of it. After downclimbing the snow and scrambling to the cliff's edge, he rigged an anchor and rapped a full 60 metres out of sight. Fifteen minutes of searching the bottom of multiple crevasses later, I heard the distant cry "I found it!"

We established our advanced camp at 1640 metres on a safe rock rib directly below the South Buttress of the Thumb, the only flat spot big enough for a tent on this whole side of the massif. From our scenic perch, we watched the icefall 50 metres to the side of us continually fell apart, crashing thousands of feet down the slabs and into the Witches Cauldron — "a rare glacial feature where all the surrounding rivers of ice meet one another in a stagnant sinkhole", as described by Jim Haberl. It was a loud and ominous place indeed.

The typical rainy coastal weather of the Stikine prevailed and we spent the following day scouting the glacier, scoping the walls for its weaknesses and formulating the logistics of the traverse. Not wanting to waste our advanced-camp supplies, we quickly returned to the luxuries and spaciousness of base camp and waited for our break.

After several more days of rain, the Devil was testing our patience. We had 20 days of food, and a week had gone by with no climbing. Doubts about the trip lingered in my mind, but after a few shots of Scotch, Jonny had me fired up again. Our latest forecast via VHF with TEMSCO base called for a clearing in two days' time. Anticipating the good weather's early arrival, we set out that evening for advanced camp and another round of "bowling".

July 22

Dawn brought stars, and by 4:30 a.m. we were hiking up the glacier — armed and ready with three days of food and fuel, sleeping bags, one short ice hammer each, eight pins, two screws, a double set of nuts and cams, lots of tat, and a small film container holding the ashes of a very big man named Beeker.

An hour up the glacier, a convenient fourth-class ramp placed us on a buttress that rose from the valley floor and joined the massif higher up. We traced the footsteps of Guy and John (Millar), sharing their start to the Witches Tits, since this was obviously the most direct line. Our rock shoes

The Traverse pitch of the The Witches Tit .Photo: Jon Walsh

came out right away as the ridge immediately sharpened. There were chickenheads the size of doorknobs, and cracks galore; it felt great to be finally climbing. We had decided that the most efficient and fastest method of attack would be to lead in blocks. The leader had a small pack that got hauled on hard pitches, and the second would jug with the big pack.

Seconding with the pack was tricky as I followed 5.8–5.9 cracks that paralleled the steep ridge. Six pitches later we arrived at 9 a.m. on a terrace directly below the white, vertical headwall of the west Tit, shining in the morning light. This was what it's all about!

Jonny racked up for his block as I found a seep of water and sucked on the rocks. Two pitches had us on a ledge and into virgin terrain as we deviated from Guy and John's route. Jonny started up a steep crack and then downclimbed, opting for a crack on the right, where he shook out before pulling a 5.10 bulge. I jugged and cleaned as fast as I could. We did a block change, and a 5.7 traverse led me to an obvious dihedral between the Tits.

Feeling like a kid on Christmas morning, I got closer, anticipating the treasure hidden around the next corner. It turned out to be a 40-metre pitch of 5.10b fingers and thin hands; I was continually amazed by the quality of the rock. A burly but short overhanging 5.11a corner brought us to the col between the two Tits. We dropped our packs and sprinted to the top in two 60-metre pitches of 5.8 for the third ascent of the west Witches Tit. We aptly named this 14-pitch, 700-metre route *Witches Cleavage*.

Back at the col, a north-facing glacier provided runoff to fill our bottles and we enjoyed the heat. T-shirt weather at 2500 metres and not a cloud in the sky! A real gem lay ahead: we climbed three full pitches to 5.8 up the west ridge and were the first to stand on the east Witches Tit. We soaked up

The Lower Cats Ear .Photo: Jon Walsh

the views of the Pacific Ocean and surrounding icefields before continuing on our traverse.

Short, tricky rappels down the knife-blade east ridge in fading evening light landed us in the tight notch between the Tits and the Ears. It was a cramped bivy, but it had the key ingredient: ice on the north face for melting water.

July 23

Morning brought a 45-metre rap off a V-thread down the cold and dark north face of the Cats Ears Spire — a rude awakening, to say the least. Fifteen hundred metres of exposure down to the Witches Cauldron, and spectacular views of the northwest face of the Devils Thumb had me in awe.

Despite knowing that a previous route (*Elias-McMullen*; 1996) had been climbed from the west side of the notch, we had little info to go by and went for the obvious crack system on the north face. After we had pulled the ropes, I slipped on my rock shoes, led two pitches of cold 5.10 jams and roofs, and eventually asked for a block change one pitch later. In a run-out 5.9 chimney with ice in the back, Jonny called for an ice screw on the tag line. Classic! Another pitch of 5.9 face cracks put us in the notch between the Cats Ears, otherwise known as "the Cats Brow".

Starting with the lower east Ear, Jonny fired its second ascent. From the summit, we both stared at the West Buttress of the Devils Thumb, not more than a couple of hundred metres directly in front of us. This bird's-eye view enabled us to truly understand that this could be one of the best climbs we would ever do. Having studied the topo (Haberl, Down, Forman; 1990) for days, and now clearly seeing how featured the rock was, we were confident that we could free the 5.9 A2 pitches of this still incomplete route — especially considering the cold and snowy conditions in which it had been put up.

It would be the icing on the cake of this grand traverse, and we could taste it!

When we looked back the other way, the higher west Cats Ear was equally impressive — a vertical monolith rising 60 metres from the notch. Guy's description of "the sharpest spire in the Coast Range" was no exaggeration. We slung the pointy summit and rapped back to the notch; it was my lead.

Knowing that the west Cats Ear had first been climbed in 1972 (Culbert, Starr, Douglas), I was impressed by this tour de force. A stout 5.9, it had to be the best pitch on the route so far. Adorned with jugs, cracks and chickenheads and featuring lots of stemming, it was sustained at the grade and extremely exposed. The third ascent — and a pitch I will never forget.

We descended the Spire via the steep south-facing chimneys, eventually tensioning on a diagonal to get as close to the Thumb as possible. Our hoped-for bivy at the col between the Thumb and the Ears was close at hand. Jonny set off on the last rap and I impatiently waited for the familiar "Off rappel." When I got to the bottom, I saw that he had fixed the ropes to an anchor and had soloed up a steep, chossy gully to investigate the col.

"How does it look?" I shouted up the windy corridor.

"No bivy!" was the frustrated response as he looked over the edge to a sheer plunge down the north face.

Once Jonny had carefully downclimbed to the belay, we pulled the ropes and discussed our options. The West Buttress topo showed a bivy ledge two pitches up, and this

would give us a good head start for the following day. I got a belay to cross the icy gully, then built an anchor and began pulling the slack across. Suddenly the ledge Jon was standing on collapsed under his feet. Blocks tumbled onto our ropes and started a rock avalanche that roared down the gully. We both stared in disbelief at the sight of a core shot at the midpoint of our lead line!

The dream was shattered and there was no option but to descend the heinous, melted-out gully. I coiled our ropes carefully, attached them to my sides and set off. Looking up, I said goodbye to the beautiful West Butt, red in alpenglow. I cleaned as I went, triggering more rock avalanches, and the strong smell of broken rock filled the air. I put a bight in the rope after passing the damaged section and built a V-thread in mud-covered ice. Six raps and a lot of down-climbing later, we arrived on the steep, firm glacier in the dark. Wishing for our crampons, we made do with the little axes. I then opted to hand-over-hand across the moat, slowly working my way downward to a large ledge system. We could see our tent from here, but welcomed this spacious bivy with running water after a long day.

Morning brought mysterious low clouds encircling the peaks, the Devils Thumb coming in and out of view. We arrived at our advanced camp just before noon as the clouds thickened, though still offering the occasional glimpse of sun. I kept looking up, knowing that we would have been charging upward. By 2 p.m. the winds had picked up and it had started raining; it did not stop for 36 hours. Our rope chop had been a blessing in disguise.

Lounging in my bag and listening to the rain on the tent, I reflected back on the previous two days. We were psyched to finish our trip with a possible FFA of the elegant 1000-metre South Pillar of the Devils Thumb, arguably one of the most aesthetic rock climbs in North America. Studying the topo from the first ascent (Pilling, Bebie; 5.10 A2; 1991) and its unfinished variation to the left (Elias, McMullen, Selvig; 5.10 A2; 1996), we realized that we couldn't be in a closer position to start. (We later found out that two Americans had combined the routes to free the pillar at 5.10+ just a week before we arrived).

Unfortunately, the rain would not let up. We ran out of provisions and I confessed to Jon, "This is my last trip across the Bowling Alley." He happily agreed. We packed up camp, and our sprint through the fog had me hyperventilating before the jug up the final fixed rope and our arrival at base camp like a couple of soaked rats.

Our last chance to tick the Thumb was now via its long and serrated East Ridge (Culbert, Star, Douglas; 5.9; 1970), rising 800 metres above camp. A *Fifty Classic*! Unfortunately, the elements conspired against us as more rainy days passed and our latest forecast called for another large front to move in. Regardless, our packs were ready and the waiting game continued.

July 28

"Wake up! Northern lights!" Jon screamed from outside the tent at 2 a.m. I crawled out, stood up, and got dizzy looking at the speed with which the lights moved. We ran down the glacier by headlamp, laughing as the aurora gave way to clear skies above. However, low clouds at sea reminded us that we had to move fast to avoid the next storm. Some easy soloing brought us to the first of two formidable rock steps.

"Most of the first six pitches," wrote Culbert in his account of the climb, "were extremely steep and went free only because of the fabulous rock, split almost to the point of being loose." Gendarme followed gendarme while I knew that every time I veered to the north side of this border peak I was back in Canada. We raced up the mountain and arrived on the summit by 11:30 a.m.

The traverse had been the ultimate goal, but ticking all five spires was just as good and we felt privileged. We threw the last of the ashes of our late friend Chris "Beeker" Romeskie to the wind, a rite we had carried out on all the summits. As we stared down the northwest face, we had the rare experience of "glory" — our shadows reflected in a halo off the clouds thousands of feet below to where Guy and John lay. Their presence was strong.

Lenticular clouds had formed as the front moved closer, and instantly mist started curling over the summit ridge. As we headed down in the impending storm, I called on the radio for pickup. We arrived back at base camp 12 and a half hours after leaving. Our pilot appeared just minutes after we had quickly packed up camp, and we were back in Petersburg as the rain started lashing down once again.

Eleven days spent in the tent out of fifteen proved to be typical for the Coast Mountains. Did we sell our souls? No. The Witch, the Cat and the Devil gave us respite.

Summary

F.A. of *Witches Cleavage* 800 m, 5.11a, to the summit of the west Witches Tit (3rd ascent of spire).

F.A. of the east Witches Tit via *Witches Cleavage* and its west ridge, 800 m, 5.11a.

F.F.A. of the *Elias-McMullen* route, north face of Cats Ears Spire, 300 m, 5.10, from the Ears-Tits col.

Enchainment of the Witches Tits and Cats Ears.

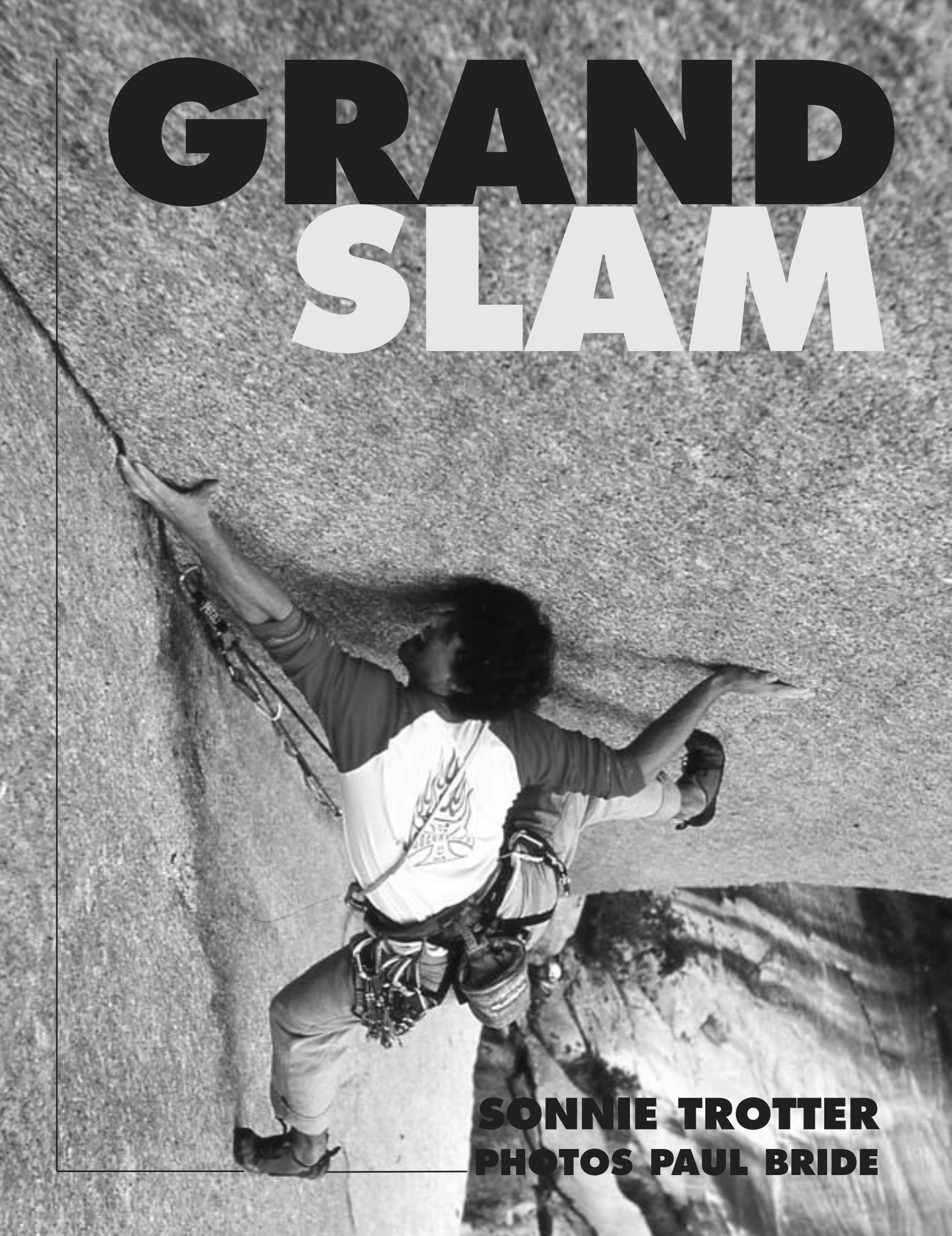
Second and third ascents of the lower and higher Cats Ears respectively.

First party to stand on all five spires of the Devils Thumb group.

Jon Walsh (Golden, B.C.), Andre Ike (Squamish, B.C.)

Grateful thanks go out to the John Lauchlan Award, MEC, Tony and Gillian Daffern, Yamnuska Inc., Integral Designs, Arc'teryx, Explore *magazine, the Calgary Foundation and the Canmore Ice Climbing Festival.*

GRAND SLAM



SONNIE TROTTER
PHOTOS PAUL BRIDE

It was mid-July 2004 in Squamish, British Columbia. The skies were blue and the sun was hot, really hot. On any given day, even before breakfast, our hands and feet would swell up like balloons, our clothing would stick to our skin, and the heat would destroy any climbing spirit we thought we had faster than you could say "Dude, where's my rack?"

Most of our house guests hid in the shade of our living room during the worst part of the day. We all sat there like zombies, staring at the oscillating fan as it swooped by us. It was too hot to think. The only thing I had on my tick list was another case of beer and a tub of Ben and Jerry's ice cream. My motivation hit rock bottom and I was looking forward to doing as little as possible. There was no indication that within a week I would do more climbing in one day than I had done all summer.

When I arrived in Squamish in early May, I found a part-time job at Climb-On Equipment. During the day, when most consumers were outside losing skin, rubber and camming units, I was at work fumbling through the guidebook and drooling over page after page of thin finger cracks and body-scarring off-widths. I began to form an idea — my dream for the perfect day of climbing. Over the past year or so, my interest in hard sport climbs had shifted slightly to the more aesthetic and intriguing world of gear-protected crack climbs, and when it comes to traditional climbing, Squamish is as good as it gets. Although the quality of the single-pitch climbing compares to anywhere else in the world, the real treasure lies on the soaring walls of the massive granite monolith that is the Stawamus Chief.

In his guidebook *Squamish Select*, Marc Bourdon lists four long free routes that all get a perfect five-star rating. I have no doubt that there are others, but for the last twenty years, these climbs have maintained a reputation for being ultra-classic objectives. One of the most obvious lines is *Northern Lights* (5.12a), a two-part climb linking *Alaska Highway* to *The Calling*. After reviewing the guide countless times and talking to many local climbers, I ruled this one out of my dream day for two reasons. Reason 1: In the book, each half of the route only gets a four-star rating; combined, however, they get five stars. This indicated to me that the climbing is not inch-for-inch as good as *The Grand Wall*, for instance. Reason 2: the climb is broken up by a major ledge at half-height and by a series of ledges to gain the top, which creates an interrupted line.

The three remaining freeclimbs are no mystery to any diehard granite connoisseur and are as follows: *University Wall* (5.13–), *The Grand Wall* (5.13–) and *Freeway* (5.11+). These proud and alluring routes have a few things in common: they all follow strong, obvious features and they all share a clean, steep and continuous face of stone on the proud right side of the Chief. These three routes combined would (in my eyes) create one of the finest, most spectacular link-ups on Canadian soil, and if stacked on top of each other, would constitute without a doubt one of the best big-wall freeclimbs in the world. In my mind, I dubbed the link-up "the Grand Slam".

When I heard that our friends Tommy Caldwell and Beth Rodden were coming to Squamish, my first selfish thought was to try and recruit Tommy for my Grand Slam idea. My second selfish thought was, *Why couldn't they wait until the fall season to visit us, when the temps would be cooler and I would be in better shape?* The thought of trying to climb nearly 30 pitches in one day at my current fitness level and during the hottest part of the summer was a little overwhelming. Actually, it was a lot overwhelming.

As it was, Beth and Tommy had chosen to escape some bad weather in Colorado and try their luck, midsummer, on the world-famous granite of British Columbia. Beth's foot had finally healed from a stress fracture she had developed nearly a year before, and after her selfless belaying and strong support during Tommy's *Dihedral Wall* ascent in Yosemite, it was Tommy's time to return the favour. Being the gentleman that he is, Tommy was willing to sacrifice his whole Canadian trip to make sure that Beth climbed as much as she desired. It took only 12 hours in our country for her to discover the classic *Grand Wall*, and after one taste of the sweet and satisfying granite, she became determined to clean her plate with the first free female ascent.

The crux of *The Grand Wall* sits high on the seventh pitch. It's a remarkably thin slab, but deservingly short. The three-bolt–protected line connects the top of "The Underfling" (5.12d) to the bottom of "Perry's Lieback" (5.11a). The moves are as technical as it gets, gruesome foot smears and dime-sized edges providing just enough stability to make the long stretches between one- and two-digit crystals. It took Beth roughly five days and multiple tries, but with Tommy's encouragement she finally accomplished a free ascent of the *Grand* on Aug 5, just days after declaring that she might never succeed. It was a strong and admirable effort capped by a great achievement; she had again proven herself to be as skillful as she is tenacious.

In between Beth's efforts and my selling shoes at Climb-On, Tommy and I would escape the valley floor and do some climbing of our own. Without knowing if we had enough time or if I had the proper guns to actually attempt the link-up, we spent time on those routes nonetheless. I thought it would be a good idea to climb *Freeway* first, just to see how fast we could move together and to familiarize ourselves with the climbing. Not that we were going for any record, but we climbed the whole route in well under two

The Shadow, .13b

hours, and if it had not been for my bowel-shaking coffee in the morning, we could have done it even faster.

Later in the week, we scampered off and had a go at the "Shadow" pitch on *University Wall*. If there is a line more striking than "The Shadow", these eyes have yet to see it. Nearly 60 feet above me, Tommy looked like a spider, all four extremities pressing against the wall, searching for balance and purchase. I hung lifelessly to a hanging belay, my legs feeling numb as they dangled over hundreds of airy feet. The magnitude of *U-Wall* is both inviting and intimidating. Tommy's thirty-minute battle ended with a frustrated voice calling, "Falling." "Shoot," he said. He was only ten feet from the anchor. Unfazed by his failed on-sight attempt, he quickly latched back onto the rock and carried on to the top.

After reaching the chain, Tommy belayed me up. Even on top rope I felt nervous and uncomfortable. It took everything I had to keep my heart from racing. Suddenly, my feet skated off the wall, along with the rest of my body, at about mid-height. It was a section that had given Tommy some "trouble" as well, or so he said. The wall suddenly "kicks back" during this transition, and the granite is far less featured than before. At this point only complete focus will get you any higher; if your mind strays too far or your body tightens up too much, you will most certainly get sucked down into the unrelenting void.

"The Shadow" requires techniques unlike those of most other rock climbs. At one point I found myself facing backward towards the town of Squamish — north, actually, towards Whistler. Both my shoes were pasted aggressively on the left side of the corner, while my hands and back pressed against the opposing side; my ass sagged into open air and I felt stuck, borderline claustrophobic.

"Now just walk your feet up the wall — you can do it," Tommy advised me.

"I can't — it feels too awkward," I complained.

"Trust me, it works," he encouraged again.

After a few minutes of bitching and whining, I finally found my groove and was able to execute many of the new techniques Tommy introduced me to. It was incredible to see how many different tricks this man holds up his sleeves. Climbing is not just about power or endurance; it's a craft that takes months, years — a lifetime, maybe — of dedicated practice. I respect Tommy enormously for his knowledge and his tenacity.

"We're leaving on Tuesday," Beth and Tommy announced sometime on Saturday afternoon.

"That gives you and me Sunday to try the link-up, if you're still psyched?" Tommy said, looking straight at me.

"Well, I'll have to find someone to work for me, but I don't think it's going to be a problem — and yeah, of course I'm still psyched," I said, trying hard to conceal my uncertainty. Deep down inside, I thought, *Well, even if I can't do it, it'll be good training for my next attempt in the fall.* I was looking for an excuse to justify my future failure.

Sunday was judgment day and I wanted more than anything to keep up with Tommy, to not disappoint him or bore him; he is after all one of the finest all-around climbers in the world. I didn't want my lack of granite savvy or marathon endurance to hold him back.

Our plan was simple. Climb *The Grand Wall* first to avoid any traffic or hassle trying to pass other teams. Then climb the *U-Wall* and get the "Shadow" pitch out of the way; after that it would be smooth sailing, only 16 pitches or so up to 5.11+. And that's exactly what we did.

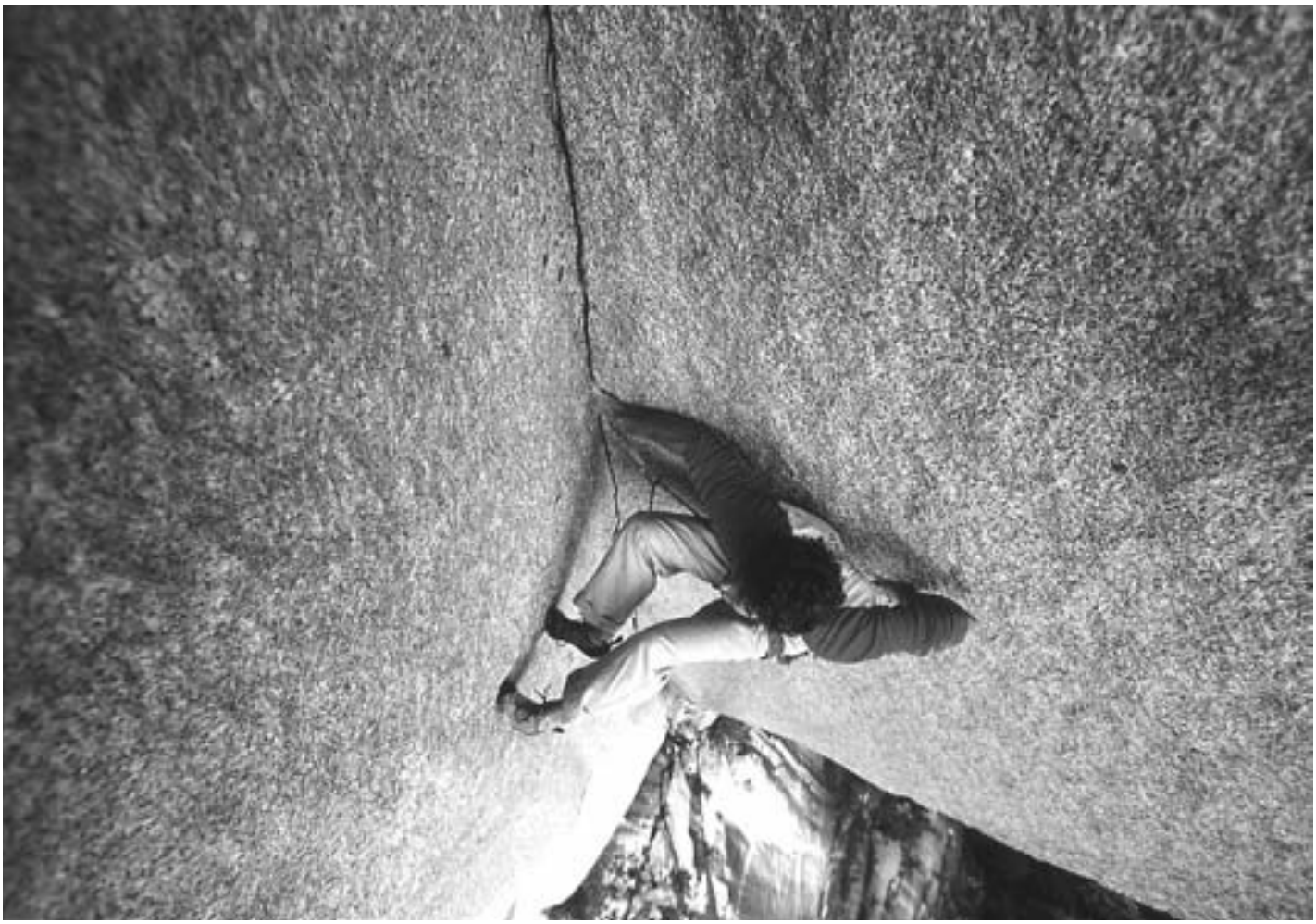
Our day began at 8:30 a.m. or so and we made it to the top of "Split Pillar" at around 8:45 a.m. Tommy led "The Underfling" (5.12d) without a hint of hesitation and I knew he would have no problem with the day's objective. I, on the other hand, was nervous and tired. I struggled through "The Underfling"'s crux, my feet slipping more than once and my arms burning with lactic acid. A fall this early in the day might be enough to crush my confidence and make me walk away from the project entirely. However, I kept climbing and my sport-climbing background gave me the guns to push through to the anchor.

After a short recovery, I found myself latched onto the tiny crystals of the 5.13b slab. I felt surprisingly calm and the moves flowed more easily than ever. Feeling strong, I linked the route directly into "Perry's Lieback". Tommy followed cautiously, but never strained. We met up with our silent partner, Beth, who had hiked up the back side carrying our running shoes and some water. Her consideration and involvement made the experience all the richer and slightly easier for Tommy and me. We ran down the back side with big smiles and big confidence.

Our next challenge was the under- and over-estimated *University Wall*. I heard a loud whoop as Tommy gained the anchor of the "Shadow" pitch for the second time that week, linking all the way from ledge to ledge. I tried to control my emotions as I started up the wall, pulling out pieces of gear. It was my fourth try at this daunting sweat-fest and I was feeling more tired than before the other three failed attempts combined. I struggled to reach a midway rest, where I focused my energy on relaxing. Tommy cried encouragement as I committed to the looming corner above. Fighting off the deep pump in my legs, I developed so much sweat on my palms that I began to use my elbows for more friction. My chalk bag was crushed against the opposing wall and my toes were numb.

"COME ON! COME ON!" Tommy yelled at me. "Don't give up."

He was right. I couldn't give up. I was in so much pain, but I knew that if I just pushed through the blinding ache, I would make the top. The only way I could fall off this route now was if I quit. This wasn't just some goofy climb on some goofy cliff; this was my dream link-up, with a dream partner, and I was ten feet from realizing that dream. I climbed through every warning sign my body could offer me — not because of my own will, but because we were a team and that bond pulled something out of me I didn't know I had. I owe



that moment to Tommy. I was close to tears when I shook his hand, and my body trembled as I clipped myself to the anchor, but I had grinning cheeks nonetheless.

The crux of the day was now behind us, and all we had to do was complete the last 15 pitches without slipping or getting tired. Tommy and I felt lighter and we knew we were going to finish the day as planned, as we had set out to do. Our spirits allowed us to fall into a rhythm; we climbed flawlessly together, in perfect unison, gaining energy and moving more and more quickly throughout the day. By the time we reached the Truck Stop roof, the sun was behind the coastal mountains and we were trapped in the cold shade. I struggled through the roof but managed a clean ascent; Tommy followed effortlessly. It was clear that he was unfazed by our long day, whereas my stamina was fading as fast as the light itself.

We had no time for lounging. By the time we reached the last pitch, the sky was completely black. The low-angle face climb is a challenge in broad daylight, let alone in the dark. Tommy climbed about 30 feet above our belay without finding a single bolt. They were invisible. I watched as he swept his hand back and forth across the wall, hoping to stumble upon a hanger. He was climbing solely by feel. I was alone in the dark at the last belay, wishing we had thought ahead and brought headlamps — it would have been simple enough. As it was, I was praying that Tommy would reach the anchor; I was pretty sure I could get up anything, so long as I was on top rope. Fifteen minutes later, I could barely make out Tommy's white smile as he sat on the summit, pulling up the slack in my rope. We found the trail when Tommy realized that he had brought his cellphone; the light on the face plate was faint, but just enough to illuminate our path. It "only" took us two hours to get back to the car.

At the time, it felt like just another climbing day, but as I write this and reflect on the 12 hours we shared back in August, I realize that it was perhaps the most perfect day of climbing I have ever done, though certainly not the last. This world is full of opportunities; we just have to be open enough to see them and invite them into our imagination. A dream that I began to develop in early spring led two friends to three five-star classics, all climbed in good style, together in one long but very rewarding day — a day that I will never forget.

reconsidering risk

jerilyn sambrooke

People ask, "Would it have been / Is it worth it?" I wonder what they mean. If I disappeared in a slide, would I think this run had been worth it — worth my life? Was this mountain worth it? Was this pitch worth it? Was this crux move worth it? No. None of these experiences would ever "have been worth it". This I know.

But somehow my collection of mountain moments has changed me. It has shaped me beyond my far-reaching expectations. These rough and cold places, so deceptively friendly, have changed who I am. Yes. That would have been worth it. That *is* worth it. This transformation is worth the risk.

Risk management is the catchphrase of our time. Risk assessment, risk minimization, risk threshold: we are fascinated with the possibility of controlling our world.

Risk is a mathematical concept that came out of the explosion of the medieval world view. Emerging in the 18th century, the ideals of the Enlightenment, e.g. human reason and progress, lent energy to very academic ideas such as mathematical probability and risk. The goal was to maximize gain and minimize loss — namely, to maximize gambling wins and to minimize financial loss.

This rational approach to risk still characterizes our contemporary culture. We talk about the probability of developing lung cancer, we work to raise awareness of species "at risk", we discuss the odds of surviving Everest. All of these discussions involve a very objective, distanced approach to risk.

But is this the approach that adventurers take to risk? The spirit of adventure embraces risk and pursues uncertainty. Sociology has very little to say to those who are willing to take risks. Mountaineering is a realm of such inexplicable risk taking.

Risk itself is rather difficult to define and can be understood in various ways. However, in order to challenge the rational "risk aversion" paradigm, I will treat risk as the encounter of uncertainty. A person can choose to minimize uncertainty in his/her life, or a person can choose to pursue uncertainty. Clearly, we all live somewhere along this spectrum of engaging uncertainty, and mountaineers are no different. While they may make every effort to climb as safely as possible (they "minimize their risk"), they nevertheless undertake activities with an unknown outcome.

The pursuit of uncertainty expresses itself in three common adventurer experiences: I go where no one has been, I take an established route in variable conditions, I tackle a route where my limits are pushed. Each of these experiences of risk — of pursuing uncertainty — illustrates a unique aspect of embracing risk in the life of a mountaineer.

The first ascent of any mountain is notable. As a culture, we honour the one who has the skill, the knowledge and the courage to ascend a new route. This mysterious attraction of navigating up unexplored peaks more commonly expresses itself in the search for new, harder routes to summits. North faces are checked off one at a time, sometimes at great cost, and we reinvent the challenge of finding our way through new territory each time we attempt to "pick a line". The mystery of what lies ahead fascinates us, and the very physical uncertainty of a new route is perhaps the most clear context in which to understand an attraction to the unknown.

Although your average "weekend warrior" isn't likely to go for an adventure off the edge of the map, he/she is likely to encounter the unknown in a slightly different way. Mountaineers spend most of their time on routes that have been established by another, usually more accomplished, climber. On these routes, the unknown is not the route itself but rather the conditions in which it is tackled. Weather changes instantly and dramatically; snow conditions are dynamic; and avalanche hazard can increase by the hour. The dynamic elements of the outdoors always create the unknown aspect of the adventure. While the route may remain standard, the trip involves countless unknowns each time.

Uncertainty at the Chateau It seems to me that Georgia Engelhard enjoyed the same view not so long ago. Savouring

a cup of pretentious coffee in the Chateau seems almost ridiculous as a contemporary mountaineer, but here in this place, I find some common ground with that ambitious woman of the 1920s and '30s. I ponder on the desire she and I share to run away sometimes from the systematic beauty of "haute culture". As I pay $7 for my cup of coffee to my server, who stands upright in the extreme (I could swear that his nose really does stick up), I find myself gazing more intently at the ridge in the distance.

Georgia climbed that far-off ridge of Mount Victoria eight times during that summer of 1931. Filming *She Climbs to Conquer* proved to be quite the undertaking. But extreme sports sold well. The adventurous ones who clamber up and down that narrow sickle have always fascinated those who swear that such terrain is impassable.

She is beautiful and wears heels. Edward Feuz is gentlemanly and excessively polite. Their pre-climb rendezvous takes place here, in front of these arched windows that frame the distant peak. They peer up at the ridge with their binoculars and discuss the route. He has climbed it countless times, but for a true Swiss guide, each guest deserves a new beginning.

She is drawn away from the systematic beauty of this place, where tea is at 3:00 p.m., cocktails at 5:00 p.m., and supper at 7:00 p.m. A gentlewoman reads appropriate novels and only thinks respectable thoughts. She pulls out her climbing trousers and smiles as she sets off on another adventure. These ornate pink ceilings and arrangements of perfect silk flowers seem hollow in their perfection. She embarks on a trip she has made six times already this summer; the route itself holds little mystery for her. Beyond that thrill of the "first ascent" which drives her on many other days, today she is attracted to Mount Victoria for something deeper. The sterile certainty of the world of cold, polished tea trays fades, and she ponders the possibilities of what her day just might be.

We gaze at the silent film as if in a trance. The occasional gasp is echoed by an amused chuckle. Those who don't climb are shocked at what she ascends so easily, and those who have done those same moves enjoy the moment with her. No one seems to wonder why she climbs. It appears evident. The challenge, the beauty... the grace. Smiles linger on our faces as we return to our little offices, peering out the windows and allowing our imaginations to transport us onto the ridges that cut the skyline.

ALTHOUGH THE CHALLENGE of putting up new routes draws the attention of leading-edge climbers and mountaineers, the enjoyment and challenge of repeated ascents is not foreign to any adventurer. The desire to encounter unknown elements runs in a remarkably similar vein to the desire to encounter unknown terrain.

The third aspect of encountering the unknown in climbing occurs within the self. A discussion of grading in sport climbing illustrates this third category of risk.

Does committing to a harder climb increase the risk of a climb? The answer to that question clearly depends on the abilities of the climber. If I move from a 5.6 to a 5.7, the risk may not increase at all, since I am still completely comfortable on that climb. But what if I am not comfortable on a 5.7 and it represents the edge of my ability?

I CAN SEE RIGHT TO THE TOP OF THE CLIMB. Each bolt only protrudes slightly, but together they create an artificial sparkle on the cliff face. I step back and perch on the closest tree trunk. I stare at the climb until I almost feel rude. I pick out all the obvious holds, even using old chalk marks as little hints. Passersby look at me oddly as I brush my fingers through the air, my eyes focused above me. I can feel the pressure on my fingertips as I imagine the move.

"Climbing." It's a powerful word. "Climb on." My partner can no longer help me. I am alone with the rock. I am alone with myself.

THE ENTIRE CONCEPT OF GRADING CLIMBS is founded on the fascination of one thought: *I wonder if I can do this*. Each time I ask myself, Can I do this? I encounter the unknown of myself. And why is it that when I discover the answer to be "Yes," I cannot bear to stop, but simply move over twenty feet and try a harder climb? Here, the chase after uncertainty occurs within my own mind and my own body.

This element of self-discovery is a significant motivating factor in the experience of the mountains. When we are forced to encounter the unknown within ourselves, we are changed because we understand who we are just a little better.

All three of these ways of encountering the unknown — the terrain, the conditions, the mind — illustrate the way in which mountaineers seek out the unknown. We chase after risk.

At this point, there are two possibilities: climbers are crazy, or our pursuits represent something common to the human condition. While the first possibilitiy is often (successfully!) argued to be true, our culture's fascination with extreme sports points to the second possibility. Our heroes are those who risk. What is it that mountaineers touch which rings true in the common human experience?

Each person confronts the unknown in his/her life. Admittedly, some people certainly shy away from the unknown. They are risk-averse, in the language of sociology. But as a climber knows, the "unknown" exists in areas more personal than job security and health concerns. The unknown exists within ourselves, and it also exists within relationship.

The unknown of "the other" — another person — represents an infinite unknown. You can never fully know your friend. Her being is dynamic, and deeper than even she can know. Each relationship is founded on the unknown of the other. We willingly open ourselves to another person, uncertain of the outcome. We commit to being impacted by our

relationship long before we know what that impact will be.

Some people say that it takes courage to climb a mountain. Climbers are set apart because they choose to enter a realm where there are no guarantees. Somehow our culture sees that as extraordinary. We have money-back guarantees for everything from cars to potato chips! We want to know the results before we have even played the game, and climbers stand defiantly and claim that's impossible. There still exist some places where you can do everything right, follow all the rules in the book, and still die. Such is the risk of encountering the unknown.

And such is the risk we all face in embracing the other. We encounter that which we do not fully know. And in that moment, we experience relationship.

I do not choose to ponder the unknown, to stand in awe of the unknown, to probe the unknown. I choose to embrace the unknown. I want to live my life the way I climb.

travelling into the unknown

greg hill

How the hell did I end up here? I ask myself, gripped with fear. Skis in hand, I swipe the snow away from above me. The forty centimetres of new slides easily on the old snow underneath. *Stable?* I wonder. Each labour-intensive step upward increases the potential of injury should anything happen. Looking down between my legs, I realize that this chute is much larger than it appeared. Looking up, I gauge the potential of an event. A large snow face sits above this chute, cross-loaded by winds that blow through the col. I am dreadfully curious about the stability of this face. It's potential energy itching to go kinetic. *Am I making the right decision, or pushing things to accomplish my own selfish goals?* We have spent two days without moving, and now my anxious mind aches to push further on this traverse.

With each upward step, my mind justifies my actions. We are 10 days into a first traverse of the northern Monashees, and forward is really the only option. The Monashees extend from Valemount south to Revelstoke, B.C., and consist of remote, alpine terrain inaccessible in winter except by helicopter. Due to the Colombia River, any evacuation is difficult. Ian plans to ski down to the lake and build signal fires if necessary, but the lack of speed and reliability of this option cancels it out. We passed one escape route three days ago; now, however, the easiest way is forward. With anxious thoughts, I push upward, snow sloughing away beneath me. Finally, my boots begin hitting a hard surface and I can move away from the deposited snow and into the safety of the col. "Aaron, come on up." Once again I question our decision to go onward. Perhaps we should be planning our escape rather than the continuation of this traverse. *But am I too driven to turn around — will my boldness be our downfall?*

Waiting for Aaron and Ian to join me, I think back on the first week of the traverse. We started out as five: Dave Sproule, Jeff Volp, Ian Bissonnette, Aaron Chance and me, Greg Hill. A high-pressure system and bomber travel conditions allowed us to go where we dared. The terrain during the first week was heavily glaciated and always burly; we were thankful that we could travel wherever we needed to. We managed to ascend 11 peaks, of which Monashee Mountain, at 10,720 ft., was the highest in the range. We travelled as swiftly and efficiently as possible to take advantage of the conditions. At Soards Creek, Dave and Jeff skied out to reality while Aaron, Ian and I filled our bags up at a heli-dropped cache and continued onward.

But now the conditions have changed, and we've reached our first col since the storm. Looking south, I wonder how far into the horizon we have left to go and whether everything will work out in our favour. So many unknowns ahead.

Each night, we scan our maps for the perfect route through this impressive topography; each day, we wind our skin track up the steep terrain, often touring up runs that would be incredible to ski down. We are always travelling into the unknown, slightly nervous that our planned route may not work out. But somehow each col leads to a great descent — or at least one that works out.

On Day 12, I awake keen and ready to go as usual but unable to open my eyes. My eyelids are so heavy I can't lift them. The bright in-and-out weather of the preceding day allowed me to tour without my hat on, and light reflected and bounced its way into my eyes. I lie in my bivy bag in the middle of nowhere, almost completely snow-blind. Anxious thoughts about having to quit this traverse flood my mind. *How long will I be blind for — is this the end of this trip? What is the proper recourse when this happens? Should we stay here and whittle away our food when I know the cache is a day away?* Stubbornness wins and we continue on. I can squint through one fuzzy eyeball and am able to follow Aaron down a sketchy waterfall and beyond. I spend the day following my teammates' up-track through the alpine, getting vague glimpses of the terrain around us.

My eyes slowly heal and within three days I can see perfectly again. We have spent the last week traversing without doing any real skiing, and we are all craving some freedom from our packs. Touring onto the Bourne Glacier, I know that there are some great peaks in store for us, but a 70-kilometre-per-hour windstorm greets us, forcing us to dig a large cave and spend the night in its comfort. When the storm breaks, we have to forsake the peaks in order to continue south.

However, it's time to ski something. Having spent some time in the Frisbee Creek drainage years before on a guides' exam, I know which line awaits us: the Glacier of Certain

Photo: Greg Hill

Death. This glacier falls 3000 feet straight down, an obvious ski line snaking its way through the seracs and off the glacier toe. We tour below it and I realize that, given the conditions, this may be the day to ski it. All is in our favour and we are rewarded with a fine ski down a spectacular run. First descent? Who knows; all I know is that it is *our* first and it is impressive.

After this descent we hurry south. Having shouted my girlfriend's name off several peaks along the way, I finally feel that my screams are reaching her ears. Several burly 7000-foot days lead us to our final summit on the trip.

On the last day, Mother Nature throws herself at us, horizontal snow sand blasting our faces. She makes it painfully clear that it's time to clear out. Winds of 80 kilometres per hour blast at us from the south, making progress agonizing. I look into Ian's eyes as the wind pins him to the ground. They say, *Why? Why are we here, Greg? Let's get off here and get the hell home.* Having summited my 21st peak in 21 days, I too am ready. Within two hours of this last summit, we are in the comfort of my home.

It's really hard to summarize in words what happens on a traverse of such length. Each day is an epic unto itself. So much happens, so much changes as challenge follows challenge. All I can say is that this was the most amazing odyssey I have ever been on and it was thanks to my partners. They were all awesome. Thanks, boys. Without you, I could get nothing done. With you, I will get more done than I can imagine.

from mountaineering to midwifery

lena rowat

LAST NIGHT I RETURNED HOME after being away for "the weekend". Actually, I had left the previous morning, as usual, to go to work, but with this student "job", each shift feels, in a lot of ways, very similar to a weekend adventure.

I've taken this year out of my life in the B.C. mountains in order to get a job that will help me to pay for my mountaineering career. For this reason I'm living on the U.S.-Mexican border in El Paso, Texas (thirty minutes from Hueco Tanks, and one hour from the granite of the Organ Mountains, which feature awesome long routes of all grades), studying to be a midwife in a program combining classes with shift work (24 hours every third day) in a clinic where we "catch" the babies of Mexican women who cross the border in order for their children to be born American.

So I don't have too much mountain adventure to report on this year, but I can point out how my life here is in fact not that different from my life in B.C.

First and foremost, clothing and eating issues are similar. Our clothing also gets very dirty — just with different colours: red (blood) and green (baby poop) — and is comfortable and functional versus fashionable, although some people do have some pretty cute scrubs. When a shift is crazy busy with appointments and births, we end up shoving whatever food we can find into our mouths, often in stolen moments, just to keep ourselves going. Chocolate inevitably takes on new importance at times.

Equipment usage is also similar. While some equipment consists of basic safety tools, other equipment,

especially some of the stuff used in hospitals, is actually more flashy than useful and can sometimes even get in the way or cause undue anxiety. For example, hooking a low-risk mom up to constant fetal heart monitors restricts her movement, which can prevent her from moving about in ways that would help her baby to be born, and at the same time can cause her to get unduly anxious every time her baby's heart tones dip.

THE FIRST THING THAT REALLY got me comparing my student shifts to weekend trips was how I always come home feeling as though I've really been through quite an adventure since leaving the previous morning. When we leave home to start a 24-hour shift, we never know what it is going to be like. We don't even know if it will really be over in just 24 hours. If I catch a baby in the morning at the end of a shift, I have to stay with her until she leaves four to ten hours later. Just as the events of our weekend adventures depend on Mother Nature, our shifts depend mostly on the mamas. Even if it seems calm when we arrive in the morning, things can very quickly change. It's kind of like heading into the mountains with a good weather forecast, but knowing that it's never really that reliable. At the clinic, all could go very smoothly and be not particularly exciting; we midwives/students might even get to chill out, and chit-chat, cook together and dance in the kitchen or watch a video before a good night's sleep. One day I even took a nap in the afternoon, but that's even rarer than a good night's sleep.

Or everything could go to hell and become very exciting and/or scary. At the end of a day when we are already overbooked with prenatal and postpartum appointments, and two students have already caught babies, four women could come in all threatening to birth within the next few hours. Meanwhile, an ambulance is called because one of the women who already birthed has been bleeding too much. The ambulance pulls up at the same time as another woman births in her car outside the clinic because she didn't have time to get inside (we actually have "car birth kits" ready by the door). Those are the storms we try to avoid, but it's all part of being out in the weather.

And even on a more detailed scale, there are similarities between my two vocations. Just as each pitch of a climb tends to be its own little adventure, each appointment with a pregnant woman is its own adventure. Some pitches appear simple at first but turn out to be challenging and involved and to require decision making. Others look hard but turn out to be simple. Often, however, complicated cases turn out to be simpler than expected, while a woman with a very healthy-looking history can end up being transported to the hospital during a prenatal appointment — for, say, suddenly presenting super-high blood pressure. You just never know.

Our shifts are also similar to weekend adventures in their human dynamics. Under the circumstances, we really get to know the people we are working with. Whoever we start a shift with is who we will depend on for support throughout that shift. As well, of course, the way each of our teammates reacts to and deals with each situation hugely affects how things turn out and how much we enjoy the shift. Because of how strongly our "work" — although many people would call it a passion, just like mountaineering — connects us to each other, we tend to end up feeling a sense of family and community with our fellow midwives.

Furthermore, midwifery also seems to attract especially awesome people who are more concerned with being genuine than with the superficialities of our culture. Perhaps this similarity is due to the fact that both activities require considerable commitment and hard work, and particularly that they both keep us constantly reconsidering basic issues of survival.

And just as in mountaineering, we have our summits, and the whole journey is worth more than any summit on its own. When I first started "catching" here, I noticed that people around the clinic whom I hardly knew at the time seemed to suddenly give me more respect because I had caught, and indeed that is what I had most looked forward to. But I also noticed that I could equally enjoy, say, helping a woman through her long hours of labour and difficult contractions even if she didn't birth before the change of shift or if she ended up being transported to the hospital.

This makes me think of so many instances of unattained objectives in the mountains which have done so little to detract from the overall enjoyment of an adventure. Sometimes we just need to have that objective in mind to keep us going — as when, here, I get stone tired at 3 a.m. after already helping a woman work through 15 hours of difficult and scary contractions. Indeed, there are times both in midwifery and in mountaineering when we find ourselves wondering why we are torturing ourselves so. But then the mama (or Mother Nature) calls to us, and our questioning falls by the wayside.

There are also "first ascents" to be had in birthing, such as trying new manoeuvres to get a baby out. I know of one manoeuvre named after the midwife who introduced it to Western obstetrics after learning it from a Mexican midwife, but by now most manoeuvres have already been named by male doctors. In both fields, native mountaineers and midwives end up not getting the credit for things they may have been doing years before the first white man came along.

Other first ascents are made by taking on births involving different risk factors, such as breech babies (which we aren't allowed to do in the clinic, but which I may be able to do in B.C.) or moms who've previously given birth by Caesarean. The first ascent I most look forward to, however, is that of catching a baby while completely in the nude, putting me more at one with the mama, just as my FNAs (first naked ascents) make me feel more at one with the mountains. But alas, even though it gets so hot down here, I think that feat also is going to have to wait until I'm back in B.C., birthing friends' babies. I can't wait!

the game bareback

will gadd

Although I've missed the leashless revolution, and have no experience with modern heel spurs, I can make the following observation: Any time the gear makes climbing too easy and success too certain, the best climbers will voluntarily limit their use of it. When climbing walls with aid became a rote exercise, we started to free climb them. Even at the beginning of waterfall ice climbing it was more satisfying to grab a hold on the ice whenever possible, rather than to place a pick. We never did feel that hanging by a harness from our tools to place ice screws was anything but aid climbing, and when thick, frozen waterfalls felt too easy, we had to move onto steep mixed climbs. Now it's leashless and spurless. Right on, brothers and sisters! As the gear and technique evolve, so does the spirit of the climber evolve toward keeping things as simple and challenging as possible. It's this tendency that keeps me excited for the future of the sport. In the end, we can't bullshit ourselves — we know what we need to be satisfied.

— Jeff Lowe, 2004

I REALIZED THAT CLIMBING WITH HEEL SPURS and "tool trickery" wasn't satisfying for me when I repeated *Musashi* in 2002 without leashes but with heel spurs and full tool trickery. This was the first leashless ascent of *Musashi*, but Ben Firth and I had just done the same with many of the hardest routes in Europe. Now, the normal protocol for sponsored poseurs such as me in this situation is to call the magazines, call your sponsors, call your momma. But this felt like bullshit; I knew that sending routes with the new tactics was like using dynamite for fishing — the routes never stood a chance. Instead, a feeling that had been growing all season exploded in me like a beer left in a snowbank: the new gear removed the pump factor on steep mixed routes. Take away the pump factor of linking moves, and anything is possible. If anything is possible, then it's dead boring, so in 2002–2003 I took a year off mixed climbing to explore alpine climbing, which is actually fun despite what you read in the magazines.

For me, heel spurs and what I call "tool trickery" are gear overkill: both allow almost unlimited total rests on steep terrain, which means that no steep mixed route is much harder than its hardest single move. Getting pumped? Just hook a tool on an edge, hook both feet on the tool and shake out on the other. Or cam a tool with the shaft horizontal and sit your ass on it. With these tricks, any steep mixed climb becomes an exercise in resting on gear rather than climbing. An analogy in rock climbing might be a special "Custom-fit Knee-bar Box" you could hang from every bolt. This might make your average hard rock route a bit easier. Spurs and tool trickery offer at least that level of rest.

The new gear and tactics mean that even if you found a perfect two-hundred-foot cave with icicles everywhere, it wouldn't be much harder than an eight-foot roof (eight feet is about the logical maximum reach with ice tools). The individual moves between tool rests could be harder, but after Ben Firth's ascent of *The Game*, even that looked like a dead end. The first hard move on *The Game* is an eight-foot iron cross into a release-and-swing move. But then someone beat the "catch" hold in a little deeper, the release hold broke, a new one was "found" four inches closer, and — as often happens with mixed routes — it became a little easier.

The naked truth about mixed climbing (hide your eyes if you believe in the Easter Bunny) is that what Ben Firth calls "the game" of sponsor stroking; as well as the malleable nature of most mixed areas; and especially the advent of heel spurs and tool trickery, have reduced any mixed route in the world to something anyone capable of doing the individual moves can climb — with full technology. And if you can't do the initial span, then just add some extensions to your tool handles, as my friend Bubu Bole intelligently did. Boulder problems separated by rests on gear are not free routes.

Then, in the spring of 2004, at the Canmore Ice Climbing Festival and over e-mail, I had a series of discussions with Bubu, Harry Berger, Simon Anthamatten, Aljaz Anderle, Ben Firth, Jeff Lowe, Raphael Slawinski and others, and started to see a new path. Just take the spurs off, don't hook your tools with your feet/legs/ass, and mixed climbing is damn pumpy and fluid again. After climbing *Musashi* easily on his second try, Bubu wrote: "How was it possible? I didn't make any effort at all. It was like stealing from a blind man... so easy!" He and Evgeny then removed their spurs and shelved the trickery; Bubu wrote: "On my last day I wanted to repeat *Musashi* in the traditional manner, the one I knew before this last winter: with crampons and ice axes on rock. Now I can confirm that this does change things... boy, does it change things! This is a real M12!" Raphael wrote: "We might mislead the mags into believing that what we do is way cool, but, ultimately, we cannot cheat ourselves. Deep inside, I definitely felt that something was not quite right when I was doing laps on the Cineplex routes, hanging off my heels on every other move."

I also repeated *Musashi* "bareback" — meaning no spurs, no saddling up on your tools, and recognizing Harry Berger's comment "Tools are for your hands, not your ass." This means no foot, no leg, no ass on your tools, period. *Musashi* bareback-style was about as difficult as doing it old-school-style, with leashed tools and heavy boots, but the climbing was a lot better. I could swing my light boots out to the side for small edges, match hands, and move creatively. It took me a few days to repeat *Musashi* bareback-style (alpine climbing is worthless for power endurance), and I loved it despite having already climbed the route in two older styles.

During this time *The Game* saw multiple repeats with full trickery, and I decided to also climb it. But bareback.

I could do the initial span and knew that with full trickery I could do the route relatively quickly, as many visiting climbers had done. They had only had a few days to repeat *The Game* and move on, but I live here and have the time. As a sponsored athlete, I'm supposed to climb hard routes fast and spray about them, but *The Game* and Ben Firth's vision in putting it up deserved better. I get no satisfaction from climbing like a sloth with my feet wrapped around my tools, and resting after every move; why not just clip into the frigging bolts? Ben shot a series of photos with him lounging in a lawn chair tied off to his axe, even camming his other tool for a footrest [*CAJ* 2004, p. 68]. Ben is a funny guy, but I didn't see why he had to go through all the effort when he could have just sat on his tool. Wait, that's what he meant! Spurs are actually less helpful than tool trickery.

After two days on *The Game*, it was clear that my alpine fitness could not match the power curve of the route. The season was winding down, and although there were still a few people working on it with full tactics, I knew that I couldn't be happy with that kind of ascent. I needed to train and actually develop as a climber in order to climb *The Game* bareback, so I walked out of the Cineplex for the last time that spring, a happy failure.

After three days of work, I was falling at the lip, pumped so damn silly I could only hang on the rope after each go and gasp for air like a caught fish.

THIS PAST FALL I TRAINED SPECIFICALLY for *The Game*. I focused on power campus moves, long sessions of hanging off my tools in the local rock gym, and front levers so that I could keep my feet on the wall. The passion for hard mixed climbing was back. I traded e-mails with climbers from around the world and learned that many of the top climbers were going "bareback" style this year. Evgeny wanted to call it "pure" style, but to me that's a bit much. Mixed climbing is dirty, and I really don't care what style someone else uses to climb something; calling the evolving new style "pure" implied that others weren't. This year the World Championship and other major European-competition rules allow spurs, but prohibit using anything but your hands on your tools (Harry will be happy — no ass action). They are talking about going bareback next year. The vast majority of top mixed climbers around the world see the need for a change in style, but there is some resistance, mainly from sponsored and weak climbers looking to stay that way. It's good sponsor pablum to repeat hard routes and spray about how quickly you did them; just don't mention that you had a tool buried in your ass. The "mixed public" can and should climb however they want, and tell me and anyone else to piss off. Style is voluntary.

In early December a crew of us were back in the Cineplex, fighting on our various projects even though *Panther Falls* roared over the lip and occasionally sprayed us all with liquid ice. The first half of *The Game* consists of three hard span/swing moves and some other hard climbing to a set of nasty pulls over a lip to a rest at a break. The second half of the route is hard, maybe M9+, but the top hadn't filled in with ice in the early season — this is the line Ben bolted but couldn't climb when it filled in with ice late in the season. This meant that there was another 10 feet of near-horizontal climbing followed by a very delicate and engaging icicle; the upper portion of the route alone would probably be M10+ in these conditions. After three days of work, I was falling at the lip, pumped so damn silly I could only hang on the rope after each go and gasp for air like a caught fish. Even after falling off at the lip and resting at the break, I couldn't climb all the way through the upper section, the cumulative pump was just too nasty — never mind arriving at the icicle with enough physical and mental resources to climb it.

David Dornian and I made the drive again yesterday, Day 7 (including last year's days) for me and Day 3 for him. Dornian and I have climbed together for twenty years; he's the kind of guy you want holding your rope when skipping clips. I had come close to hitting the boulders below the cave a couple of times while using this tactic in a desperate effort to save my energy. I even had my spurs hidden in the top of my pack; I would like to pretend that I don't have an ego the size of a house, but I do, and constant failure was getting old. Why not just climb the route with spurs first? I mean, then I could spray about it, and people were starting to wonder why I was taking so long to climb the route. I threw the bolts for the spurs deep into a crack in the rock. Dealing with mental weakness is a learned skill.

Then I sent *The Game* in a paroxysm of nausea-inducing verbiage that I'll skip. The coolest part was the see-through curtain at the end, complete with a goodly portion of *Panther Falls* slamming down on my head as I pulled onto the outside of it. I couldn't see to swing my tools through the foot of new soda straws, so I dug and more paddled than climbed my way upward through the torrent until I was standing on top of *Panther Falls*; if the curtain had broken just at the lip, I could have hit the ground fifty feet below. I had found what I wanted and was, if only for a day, satisfied. You see, there's this other line at the Cineplex...

A few people have suggested different grades for bareback and full-trickery styles. It's true that *Musashi* is about two full number grades easier with full trickery than bareback and that *The Game* is at least a full grade easier, but I like Ben's idea that this is all a game. I will grade routes based on bareback style — it keeps things realistic, as most of the early M-routes were done with boots and leashes, a roughly equivalent if less enjoyable style. The bareback grade for *Musashi* is M12; *The Game*, M13. For trickery grades,

I would suggest A0 (A for Ass), but I don't care about the grades people use for other styles, because I don't climb that way. *The Game Extension* is a bit harder and more committing, but not a full number grade harder, nor different enough to warrant a name. Wait, I gotta play the Game: I'll call it *The Game Reloaded*, M13+.

Some people complain that climbing horizontal roofs without spurs will mean multiple figure-fours. Damn right — shut up and hang on instead of talking about how uncool figure-fours are while sitting on your tool between moves. Actually, I find climbing without spurs but with light boots to be much more complex and engaging. And before somebody suggests that we go back to straight shafts, 10-pound boots and public transit, I would like to offer a free block of chalk to the first person to climb *Realization* without it.

Finally, I've been asked about the exact rules for "bareback" style. Bareback style means:

1. Tools are for your hands not your ass, to quote Berger. Stacking the other tool on the pick or grip is okay. No hooking the tool with shoelaces (yep, that's another tactic — I kid you not), no feet on your tools. It's not complicated.

2. Nothing on your crampons that allows a no-hands rest purely on gear. Go ahead and toe jam, knee bar, heel hook, whatever.

Now give 'er!

The Game*, at the Cineplex area on the Icefields Parkway, is rated the world's hardest mixed climb — at least it was ten minutes ago. — ed.*

requiem for wilderness: a rant

sandy briggs

FIRST WE NEED A DEFINITION of wilderness, and it turns out that Vancouver Island's 1993 Strathcona Park Master Plan provides a good one in its description of a Wilderness Conservation Zone:

> The objective of this zone is to protect a remote, *undisturbed* natural landscape and to provide *unassisted* recreation opportunities dependent on a *pristine environment* where no motorized vehicles will be allowed. *Development is non-existent* .... In short, areas designated as Wilderness Conservation are large natural areas *free of any evidence of modern human activity*, with very low use and without facilities [*Italics mine*].

Approximately 75 per cent of Strathcona Park is zoned as Wilderness Conservation.

I am mourning the death of wilderness. Perhaps this is a little premature, but I think not. As Kojak (Telly Savalas) once said: "Light a candle, Baby. A get-well card won't do."

Wilderness is dead because we are selfish, because we have forgotten the meaning of the word "wilderness" and because we seem to be incapable of ignoring the specious issue of translating unvisited wilderness into an economic bottom line.

Wilderness has been murdered by selfish convenience in the form of technologies such as cellphones, satellite phones, GPS units and keyhole.com. Or it has been sacrificed to the pernicious allure of helicopters, planes, snowmobiles and ATVs.

Wilderness has been made to appear to be less than it really is — namely, a place where one must be strong and alert, where one must take responsibility for one's actions and where decisions may have consequences.

I am moved to quote H.W. Tilman, who wrote in his book *Two Mountains and a River*:

> I have quoted elsewhere the Bengali proverb that "the sight of a horse makes the traveller lame", and I have some fear that the sight of an aeroplane might make the mountaineer think. To see an aeroplane accomplishing in four hours a journey which will take him nearly three weeks of toil and sweat is bound to give rise to thought — some of it subversive.... The farther away from mountains we can keep aeroplanes the better; a sentiment with which even pilots will not quarrel, and which, I hope, even those mountaineers whose pleasure it is to keep abreast or well ahead of the times will echo.

To be more succinct, let me quote the poignantly sarcastic Chinese proverb "He saw the flowers, from a galloping horse."

Maybe we need to ponder whether we would like our children's children's children to be able to experience something of the exhilaration we have felt when we have worked hard to contort our way through dense bush, traverse snowy hills and climb steep, pathless mountainsides to arrive on a clean, untouched plane where Nature prevails and the signs of man are only subtle: the occasional jet trail, the acidity of the lake, the too red hazy sunset, the points of light rushing across the night sky. It is already too late to ask for more.

I suppose there may be those of you who will accuse me of pointing a finger, but I want to assure you that I have taken a ski plane to Mount Vancouver and Mount Logan and Devon Island. I have helicoptered myself and food caches into the mountains. I carry a satellite phone in the Arctic and I even own a GPS unit. But somebody has to start casting some metaphorical stones; for if we wait for he who is without sin to begin the process, then we may wait quite a while. I am a participant in the murder of wilderness.

I am hoping, however, that as I am overtaken by the natural course of time's passing — which is to say, by deliquium of the spirit and/or physical decline — I will have the dignity to recognize that I have had my turn and that the wilderness (if there is any left alive) will do just fine without my technologically assisted visits.

I have mentioned some of the ways by which we are killing wilderness, but there are many more. Every piece of flagging tape I put up and do not later remove is another stab in the death of a thousand cuts. So also, in some sense, is every new summit or route cairn I build, every new summit register I place. These latter intrusions have a long and somewhat useful and engaging tradition in the human context, and so far only the very unacquisitive and strong-willed have been able to abstain.

But now when we go to summits, we are increasingly likely to find not only that someone has left a note, but also that someone has decided, generally unilaterally, to make that summit a memorial for a deceased friend or relative, even if the deceased didn't die on that mountain — even if the deceased had nothing in particular to do with that mountain.

Wilderness is dead because we are selfish, because we have forgotten the meaning of the word "wilderness" and because we seem to be incapable of ignoring the specious issue of translating unvisited wilderness into an economic bottom line.

A memorial plaque has recently appeared on the summit of Golden Hinde. Like the wooden cross that appeared there in about 1985, it is unauthorized; moreover, it contravenes B.C. Parks policy on memorial markers. This policy states, among other things, that anyone wishing to place a plaque must apply in writing to B.C. Parks and that "free standing memorial plaques or markers will not be permitted unless by previous agreement." Almost certainly, permission to place such a plaque on the summit of Golden Hinde would be denied because it contravenes the Wilderness Conservation zoning defined at the beginning of this article. There is an unauthorized memorial plaque on the summit of Elkhorn, and there is a more modest memorial installation outside Strathcona Park on the summit of Conuma Peak.

Such memorials are not restricted to summits. Memorial cairns and/or plaques not authorized by B.C. Parks have appeared in recent years at Schjelderup Lake outlet, Owens Lake, and the recently named MacIntyre Lake, southeast of Mount DeVoe. All of these contravene the Wilderness Conservation zoning for those parts of Strathcona Park.

Other Island locations where there are, or are reputed to be, memorial plaques and/or cairns — some of which may have been officially authorized — in the wilderness are (* indicates Strathcona Park): Douglas Lake*, Century Sam Lake*, Capes Lake, Idiens Lake, Gem Lake*, Argus Mountain*, Mount Clifton, Mount Chief Frank, Greig Ridge* and Wheaton Memorial hut*. There may be more that I have not heard of.

Let me be clear. This particular rant is not about the naming of geographical features, though one does wonder what our successors will do in 300 years to honour their heroes, after all the geographical features have been named. This rant is about sullying the wilderness so that it isn't wilderness anymore. It is about rendering the wilderness no longer "free of any evidence of modern human activity".

An even more modern technology-supported threat to the integrity of wilderness is the sport of geo-caching. One can go to *geocaching.com* and zoom in on geo-caches already appearing in Strathcona Park and many other places on Vancouver Island — heck, even on Baffin Island. While such caches themselves, placed and sought by hikers, represent a contravention of the definition of wilderness accepted for the purpose of this article, it is the idea that such caches in this worldwide game might be placed and sought by those using helicopters or snowmobiles which disturbs me most. Well, okay, maybe not the most. After all, I haven't even mentioned mining, logging, roads, radio towers, micro-hydro dams, pipelines or "Survivor" wannabes.

So Wilderness is dead — on Earth. But the cosmos is full of wilderness where there are, so far, few signs of man. In my view it's chimerical to anticipate getting to those new worlds any time soon, so we'd better think a little more about this one and how it's going to look in 50, 100, 500 years.

Will there be any wilderness? I doubt it. Sorry, kids — we blew the family fortune.

waiting for the sun

martin siddles

OTHER THAN THE PAIN, AND THE STUNNED THOUGHTS about our upcoming expedition being ruined, it was a glorious day. It was sunny, windless and about 5°C. Yet I was shivering, even with my insulated pants and down parka on. It was midday by now on Easter Monday. I lay on my pack in the snow with a broken leg propped against my skis, resigned to waiting.

It was the final day of a four-day trip on the Wapta Icefield in Banff National Park. We had camped high on the icefield and had completed several ascents. The weather had been excellent all weekend. The sun radiating off the snow penetrated the mind and spirit as well as the body. However, that feeling just wasn't present now. I smeared extra sunscreen on my face nonetheless and waited some more.

It was our last training trip before heading up to the Yukon for six weeks of climbing. The expedition had been a

year in the making and we were set to depart in one week. We were ready. We were stoked. The only preparation that remained was to buy the food and pack.

I REPLAYED THE EVENT in my mind, trying to figure out what had happened. When we left camp that morning, I felt great, basking in the joy of a few good-weather summits and the anticipation of our upcoming expedition. We were descending from the main icefield, skiing in big arcs given our eighty-pound packs. I briefly lost my balance on one of the turns and pitched forward. It was a gentle fall, or at least I believed so. However, the momentum pushed my chest into my knee, and that in turn forced my knee over my boot. The binding did not lift or release. The resounding crack registered instantly and I knew that I had broken my leg. My scream of pain did not immediately convince Kevin that I was seriously injured, since it was a minor fall similar to ones we had both taken a thousand times before. I asked him to release my binding. The telltale flop was proof enough. We decided that Kevin should ski out to Num-Ti-Jah Lodge to initiate the rescue, or perhaps find someone heading out of Bow hut and get them to place the call. That way Kevin could return. The clock began ticking at a painfully slow rate.

*The resounding crack registered instantly and I knew that **I had broken my leg**. My scream of pain did not seem to convince Kevin that I was seriously injured, but the telltale **flop** was proof enough.*

How long was it going to take? Would there be someone at the hut? Should I put on my warm clothes, or would Kevin be back shortly? I was starting to get cold, and sufficient time had passed that Kevin must be skiing out. Would he be rushing and possibly hurt himself as a result? How long would it be before the helicopter arrived? Would it even come today? It was all speculation. I put on my parka and struggled with my pants (not realizing until I had to urinate that I had put them on backwards), and then waited for another decision-making opportunity.

Then I could see someone coming up the slope below me. At last, some company. There was a second person too. After what seemed ages, they finally arrived. It wasn't Kevin. The pair were on their way to the Balfour hut and had met Kevin on his way out. They gave me some painkillers and, thankfully, helped me spin my pants around. They had to keep moving and (unfortunately for me) departed. I was alone again, waiting.

THE PAIN WAS BEARABLE when I lay still. I repositioned myself a number of times by hooking my boot with a ski pole. Movement was excruciatingly painful. Yet I so much wanted to move and take an active role in my rescue. The waiting bothered me most: doing nothing, knowing nothing, alone, with only thoughts to pass the time.

I've always disliked the insistent thumping of a helicopter invading the serenity of my days in the mountains. Today there was no sweeter sound than the helicopter's approach up the valley. This stage of the "waiting game" was over.

I broke both bones in my lower leg and spent four months in various casts. After a lengthy recovery, it's great to be out there again doing the things I love, taking action and making decisions rather than sitting on the sidelines. Five hours lying on a snow slope was nothing compared to the year of recovery and lost opportunities. The sun is once again warming me completely.

chickening out on victoria

perry davis

Hiking in from Lake O'Hara with my three companions that morning, I felt thrilled to be on my way back up to Mount Victoria. The last time I had stood on that summit was on a trip with Gary Pilkington in the '70s. We came in via the Death Trap without difficulty. Crossing it, however, we were stopped in our tracks by a loud crack overhead followed by a dribble of snow over the top of the cliff.

A lot of my excitement about this trip, I knew, was inspired by Marguerite — her youth, her enthusiasm, her spiritual nature. Shortly after we had started scrambling this summer, I lent her my copy of *Switchbacks*, the story of the author's adventures as a young summer warden at Lake O'Hara. The book had become our theme. We were, more by accident than design, reliving his story in a later time. Much of our summer's scrambling and climbing had taken place in this area. We found that we had an interest in the history of mountaineering in the Rockies and the early climbers. Marguerite was particularly taken by Georgia Englehard, a woman climber of the Swiss Guides era who had many first ascents to her credit. Her longing to climb Mount Victoria had some of Georgia and some of the history of this area mixed in it.

We had stopped to rest beside the trail above Lake Oesa. Marguerite was packing a framed photo of Philip Abbot up to the hut. She and I were delighted that Tabs had asked us to install it there. I was gallantly carrying the rope as my portion. While we chatted, something came over Marguerite and she declared that she wanted "to bring Wayne to Jesus". Oddly, her outburst of zeal was in keeping with the place. We were looking at a natural cathedral of towering stone walls. The rays of sunlight pouring in brought out the contrasts of light and dark, all the shades of blue and green, and the transient vividness of the flowers, ultimately sparkling, blindingly in places, on the lake water.

Well up in the couloir, we caught up to two middle-aged women. They were resting on a slab of rock that formed a bench, and from our brief exchange it was clear that they were thrilled with their adventure, so raw and so different from Montreal, where they were from. The flowery garden gloves one of them was wearing epitomized the situation. The women were to add a touch of manners to the hut that evening. I was reminded of them later in the year when I heard about the woman killed by falling rock in this couloir. It could happen to anyone, but it's always the wrong person.

Once we had settled in at the hut (so much the same on the outside but so much improved on the inside compared to on my last visit), Marguerite unwrapped the picture of Abbot. I had decided to hold off seeing it until I was in the hut and could share the moment with her. We noticed immediately that the dates were wrong — Murphy's Law in action. We installed it nonetheless, but with a note about the error.

Peter Fuhrmann's party arrived later that afternoon. Peter guides clients on what he calls the Panorama Tour, a high mountain trip involving stays in several mountain huts. On this trip one of their members had slipped, tumbled down the side of a moraine and been seriously injured. He later died in hospital. There was much to talk about with the participants, but the conversation was subdued. Had the victim fallen off the other side of the moraine, his most serious injury would have been to his pride and he would have been in the hut that night. The tour does not include an ascent of Victoria. Peter was guiding his group out to Lake Louise the next day via the Fuhrmann Ledges and gave us a brief description of that route.

The following morning we left the hut for the south summit of Victoria. We were on the rock just as it started to get light enough to distinguish the few patches of verglas. Marguerite and I successfully made our way up to the arête following Dougherty's description. We had to direct Wayne and Matthew in a few places. We felt like a true mountaineering party after cramponing up mixed ground to where the ridge levels off before the Sickle — that so aptly named, sharp, curved piece of the ridge.

Then the long slog to the summit, I thought. My indelible memory from that earlier trip was of looking at Lake Louise through my crampons as we trudged endlessly along the ridge. I had actually dug out the old black-and-white summit photo before leaving on this trip. As the cairn on the south summit came into view, I recognized it as the one in the photo, and that made me feel profoundly unsettled. Could I have such vivid memories of the traverse to the south summit if I had never been there? But the worst of it was that I, the de facto guide, no longer knew if I had ever been past this point, ever crossed the Sickle.

We took a break here. I had dug out my package of gorp and offered it around. It was clearly going to be a warm day, but right now the clouds scudding overhead made me dizzy and the wind chilled me. I mentioned that I thought we wouldn't be able to return from the summit before the snow turned soft. The advice from the rescue warden I had spoken to before this trip was straightforward: "Be off the snow by one o'clock." Even though we had made fairly good time, I pointed out that there was no way we would be back across the Sickle on time.

The hut custodian and his blond partner had by now caught up to our party. They greeted us but headed for the Sickle without stopping. That was the kind of progress I thought we ought to be making. They were short-roped and moving confidently, whereas I thought that we were somewhat awkward in the way we were handling our ropes. *Would that make the crucial difference while crossing the Sickle?* I wondered. *If Marguerite slips, I know I have to jump off the opposite side; there can be no choice.* If only I could remember what

the Sickle had been like when I last crossed it, but had I even crossed it? Was it a steep slope that you had to jump down, or was it a vertical cliff? I tried desperately, but despite the vividness of the image of the lake below my crampons, there was no memory of the Sickle.

So many other things were running through my mind: fatigue, the weather, the wind, the warning, our inexperience and the mood of our group. That morning at breakfast, Matthew had been upset that his cereal tasted of detergent, and had complained that the bowls hadn't been rinsed. Wanting to keep things cool, I tried to laugh it off only to be rebuffed by him and Marguerite, who I thought would have sided with me. If we were a bit cranky with each other then, what would we be like later when we were tired and something went wrong?

Matthew and Marguerite were in favour of going on. Wayne and I were hesitating but for quite different reasons. I was concerned about us getting back safely from the summit. Wayne wasn't getting the kind of rush he wanted out of this route.

Aware of my senior status, I didn't want to mention that I was unsure of the route ahead. I had to keep their confidence. What if I "came clean" (whatever that meant in my present circumstance) but we decided to go on, and I found out that I really had done the route before and tried to convince them? They would think that I was bluffing to regain face, and then there would be two strikes against me. Worse still, our group dynamics would be jeopardized. Even if I had to bluff, if something did go wrong — as with the Mexicans — we needed to work well together. I felt a certain kinship with the guides who had been on this route before.

Marguerite suggested continuing on until 11 a.m., which would give us enough time to be back across the Sickle by 1 p.m. She weighed and considered risks deliberately, but I also knew that getting to the summit of Victoria meant a lot to her. Once we got near it, especially in this good weather, we weren't going to be turned back by the clock and she wouldn't insist.

We had to make the decision here, at this cairn. Marguerite understood my concern to be off the Sickle by one, and perhaps Wayne and Matthew did also. She knew of the tragedy of the Mexican women on the treacherous snow slopes below us. We had both been very impressed by the account of this incident in *Switchbacks*. Now we seemed about to walk into their story. They had made it to the south summit on a fine summer's day and were on their way back when the fatal accident happened. *What if we end up rushing back, aware that we have deliberately gone over our eleven o'clock deadline — grouchy and not getting along, tired and careless, or elated with our success and feeling invincible? The snow will have softened in the heat of the day. Marguerite slips and I don't bring her up with the rope in time, or we're not short-roped and there is too much slack. Do I have the courage to jump off for this woman I am so fond of? She is picking up speed, screaming...*

Wayne spoke. "Slogging along a ridge for two hours just to get to a summit, doesn't do it for me." With those words, all my conflicting thoughts, hesitations, doubts were resolved — the morning crankiness, the warden's admonition, our comparative slowness, the thrill of the summit, the warmth of the day, the stories of the past, the glamour of Georgia, the traces of the Mexicans and the Swiss Guides, our awkwardness handling the rope.

"I think we should go down," I said. That was two against, and I was the senior guy: the matter was settled. The hut custodian and his partner had come back into sight again on the far side of the Sickle, heading rapidly onward. As we came down we could see the Fuhrmann party traversing the mid-slopes of Lefroy above the Death Trap.

It took us longer to get back to the hut than it had to reach the south summit. This confirmed my sense of our inexperience moving roped together on "easy terrain". There was an incident on the way down, too, not far above the hut. Marguerite was downclimbing a short, shallow gully and I was standing on the ledge below, belaying her, when her foothold broke loose. There was a clatter of rock and she slipped down, but the gully caught her. The way it turned out, there had been no real danger, but if she had toppled backward (as Abbot had on Lefroy), there was no way I could have stopped her fall — I had no protection in! I wasn't really prepared, either, since I was pulling the rope in as much to keep it out of the way as to belay. Was I negligent, or had I taken an acceptable risk? Or is it the outcome that answers the question?

It's easy terrain that usually gets you, I thought. Something seemingly innocent like that gully: an unnoticed patch of verglas while unroped on easy ground, a heavily loaded snow slope that looks so innocent and peaceful, a few ball-bearing pebbles you don't even notice as you step down, a small stone falling silently through the air with the velocity of a bullet, the seemingly solid but thin snow over the crevasse. You let your guard down just a little, or fatigue makes you a bit careless, or you don't feel the need so much to take precautions. Whatever happens, something in retrospect should have been done better or differently.

I thought of Gary Pilkington. He and Eckhardt Grassman were roped together and moving up the loose shingle on the upper slopes of Edith Cavell. The hard climbing was over. Then one of them slipped, or perhaps was struck and knocked over by a skittering rock. There was nothing the other could do but wait in terror until he was yanked off. In that moment, I and many others lost two friends. Archie Simpson, another good friend, also died on easy ground. He had been the driving force in getting the climbers' hut — named after him but now gone — rebuilt behind Yamnuska to encourage climbing in what has become the CMC Valley. Then he returned to New Zealand, and soon afterwards the news came from his parents: he had climbed Mount Cook, slipped on his way down, and fallen to his death. If we could only see the future! Had I avoided an accident in aborting this trip, or just nixed a good climb?

As we were descending, another party reached the top of the pass. They sauntered up to the hut, except for two of them, who headed over to Lefroy. *They're checking it out,* I thought. Even as they roped up and started climbing, I continued thinking, *They're just practising; they must know better than to start a climb at noon.* By now we were back at the hut. Matthew, Wayne and I stretched out on the slope behind — idle watchers with our shirts off to soak up some rays. Marguerite was resting inside. The climbers were now undeniably heading for the summit, smoothly switching leads.

Eventually, the wind cancelled the warmth of the sun and we went about other things. The climbers were lost to sight, or had to be pointed out to us from time to time by their comrades, who continued to keep an eye on them. I had to ruefully admit to myself that if they could do Lefroy with a late start, we would have succeeded on Victoria with our early start. I had been overly cautious in insisting on the one o'clock deadline and overly concerned about our inexperience. Later on, I felt even more rueful when I found out that the pair on Lefroy hadn't climbed together before.

But it still wasn't over. The four of us were looking at the large Gem Trek map of the area (which I forgot in the hut when we left). The peak we had reached was actually identified as "South Peak" and I was promoting this as a consolation. It wasn't that much short of 11,000 feet, I pointed out, but none of my party was buying it.

"Victoria's an eleven-thousander!" exclaimed Wayne.

The three of us were caught in disbelief. He must have known, but his remark was completely sincere.

"If I'd known that, I'd have gone for the summit," he concluded.

Had that come out up on the south summit, the senior guy would have been overruled. We would have carried on, saying that we would turn back at 11 a.m. and knowing that we wouldn't — and whatever was going to happen would have happened. Perhaps I would have had to leap off the Sickle to save Marguerite; perhaps we would have been rescued from the edge of the Death Trap the way the Mexican survivors had been boldly rescued by the Swiss Guides. More likely, it would have been a long walk in the park, as it had been for so many others; Marguerite would have been thrilled with our success, and Wayne relieved that the climb was behind him.

The next morning was equally fine. We set off for the Fuhrmann Ledges after the obligatory photos outside the hut. None of us had been on the Fuhrmann Ledges before. Judging from the people in Peter's group, I was confident that we could do it. After crossing the snow patches, the hut now far behind, I stopped to put my ice axe away. By the time I had slung my pack back on my shoulder, I found myself alone on the slope. I had to laugh at the outlandish thought that then came into my head, because I knew it could happen. If I were hit by a falling rock now, I would be sent over the cliff into the Death Trap and my companions would find no trace of me. The scree, I noticed, slid ever so slightly as I walked across it to the high point, where I saw my companions again.

Around the shoulder of Lefroy, the bench we were on broadens enormously We fanned out here but found no tracks in the snow. We knew that the route was marked with orange dots on the rocks, and Wayne and Matthew eventually found some near the lip of the cliff above the lower Victoria Glacier. We regrouped and moved forward along the edge of the cliff, but the orange marks seemed to have petered out and we were uncertain as to how to proceed. Wayne proposed rappelling down to the glacier. That looked possible, but I insisted that there had to be a way ahead. Peter's brief description of the route was that it contoured around Lefroy onto a scree slope. Sure enough, we soon found more orange dots, which led us onto a ledge on the face with a bolt for protection. Following the ledge was straightforward. Occasionally, there were other bolts.

It was not long before we turned the corner. Then the orange dots seemed to peter out again. Marguerite walked back to see if we had gone off route, and I followed behind her, also checking. Wayne again suggested rappelling; it didn't look as if we were that high up. Then Marguerite started talking to someone, and for a moment I was disoriented, thinking Wayne or Matthew had magically doubled back. She was talking to one of the Lefroy climbers who had followed us out. We let him squeeze past. Unlike us, he was wearing a helmet. *Please God,* I thought, *don't let that be a sign, not now!*

On this side, the ledge went on far longer than anticipated. Eventually, we reached the scree and began running down it. Expecting to be shortly in the glacial basin below, we quickly found ourselves on cement-like moraine on which our boots were always ready to slip. Once off the slope and happily soaking our feet in the glacial meltwater, we could look up at the Fuhrmann Ledges route, which we had just done for the first time. It was noticeably higher than it had seemed while we were on it, and we all felt a sense of accomplishment. Victoria was not visible, but we all knew that we were coming back — more experienced.

blind dates

mark stockburger

I HAVE GENERALLY SHIED AWAY FROM BLIND DATES. Ironic then that some of my best climbing days have been with people whom I'd never met, let alone shared a rope with. Like Rolf from Seattle. While we were sitting by the fire one night in the shadow of the Squamish Chief, Rolf approached our group and asked if we had seen his friend. We hadn't. Gregarious by nature, my wife, Lee, started talking to Rolf (something about microbreweries — I don't even

like beer) as I pushed coals around the fire pit.

Rolf: Yeah, I'm looking for my buddy. We were going to do some climbing at the Bluffs this weekend.

Lee: That sounds great! We just love it here.

Rolf: What I'd really like to do is climb the Chief...

At this point my ears perked up.

Lee: Funny you should say that. Mark has been dying to climb *The Grand Wall* for a while now.

Rolf (to me): So, what do you think?

I looked at Rolf. A good ten years older than my twenty-four, Rolf looked more like a linebacker than a climber. Still, I somehow felt that this just might be the right time to have a go at the *Grand*, a longtime ambition. Besides, if Rolf looked at my skinny frame and saw someone who might just be a climbing partner, maybe I needed to extend some grace his way.

We agreed to do a warm-up day. We headed for the Malamute, a beautiful granite crag down by the ocean (and the train tracks). Over the course of a few hours, we climbed *Hand Jive*, *Crescent Crack* (not Clean Crack but still an excellent climb) and Mirkwood Forest. Mostly hard .10s. Rolf was a powerful climber. I already knew who was going to be leading "The Sword" (and, as it turned out, "Perry's Lieback" just above it). I did all right as well, apart from getting my foot terminally stuck in the widening crack near the top of Hand Jive, with no more wide pro' to keep me from falling upside down, and held only by my stuck (and quite likely fractured) leg. I finally thrashed my way free. I surprised myself by on-sighting the second pitch of *Mirkwood Forest* — a steep and strenuous dike, not my forte.

The *Grand Wall* was fantastic. I fell three times leading "Split Pillar". Somehow I didn't care, and the falls couldn't diminish the thrill of the day. The exposure at the top of "The Sword" was pretty intense for a prairie boy, but I knew that we would make it.

I never saw Rolf again. Generally that means that the blind date was a failure, but not this time.

Fast-forward ten years. Three kids, too much work and too few climbing days each year. Summer holidays were great. We were finally able to get some relief at work, and so I took most of the summer off. Even here, the days out on the rock were few and far between. Lee, once my favourite climbing partner, no longer had the stomach for it. My brother David now had his own family and wasn't the driven climber I once knew. We met some friends in Squamish; Randal and I did a bit of climbing, but he was inexperienced and somewhat gripped by the exposure. He also wanted to spend more time with his kids, which put my desire to climb in an even more selfish light — the truth hurts. By then I should have known better than to try and combine climbing with a family holiday.

So what was one to do? What was I supposed to do with this fresh desire to climb, undimmed by the years?

We headed back down to Abbotsford for a few days with the in-laws before heading home. Lee's sister Rachel was home from England. One of her best friends, Laura, was expecting. I knew that she had married a climber from the States, but according to Rachel he was more into alpine routes than rock climbing. Of course, getting the dirt on a climber from a non-climber is like reading a steakhouse review written by a vegetarian — pretty much useless.

Jamie and I finally met that week. It was love at first sight (in a figurative, climbing-partner kind of way). We talked about climbs we'd done and climbs we still wanted to do. He was an accomplished climber without the attitude that sometimes goes with it. The only concern I had was that he had spent some time with NOLS in the States, a group I have always thought of as enviro-Nazis. I guessed that I would find out when I tossed my first apple core of the day...

Still, Jamie seemed surprisingly normal, so we agreed to head up the Coquihalla to Yak Peak. No yaks, but acres of granite would do just fine. Every time I had driven the Coquihalla in the last 15 years, it beckoned me — a stunning spire of rock that starts in an apron of low-angled slabs and sweeps ever more steeply towards a small true summit. I had nearly driven off the road numerous times while gawking at it (this is why non-climbers hate riding with a climber driving through rocky terrain); now I just might get to climb it. I had always assumed that I would climb *Yak Crack*, a mostly 5.7 route that is 12 to 14 pitches long, but Jamie suggested *Yak Check*, which starts up the first half of *Yak Crack* and then heads out left, keeping to steeper, cleaner rock and a more direct line to the true summit. This route went at .10a and had an exposed traverse. I hadn't led a sport .10a in a couple of years, let alone one 1000 ft. above the valley floor. Fortunately, the technical crux was bolt-protected. Jamie hadn't led anything harder for a while, either. Somehow we felt that collectively we could handle the difficulty.

Five a.m. rolls around early, even for a climbing day. Quick stop at Starbucks, and we're off east down Hwy 1 towards Hope — horribly misnamed town. Past Hope the road follows an asphalt equivalent of the road in the Yak Peak route description, Jamie's old Subaru meeting its crux much earlier in the day than we would meet ours.

Jamie is cold. If we go further, it will be up to me to push for the summit. I would have bailed earlier in the day, but now I'm ready to go in spite of how cold I am. I know that I'm not hypothermic, just uncomfortably cold — a tolerable suffering.

I'm back out left, where I should have pushed harder almost two hours ago now. The climbing is easy but interesting — up and over large flakes, laybacking one of them to belay in the "cave" formed by several flakes overlapping. I don't like relying on their integrity for my belay, but I really have no choice if we want to continue. Jamie joins me quickly. Up next: the bridge. Up a short corner with good jamming and pro', then a five-metre undercling traverse and up under the start of the bridge, where there's more good pro. The topo said that I needed to go out left along the bottom edge of the bridge until I found some good jugs to pull

the lip. Big breath, and here we go. The bottom edge forms about a 60-degree angle in my hand. There really aren't any holds; I just have to pinch the edge and trust my feet on the slab below. I traverse the entire length of the bridge, 10 metres or so, to the other side. No jugs. No pro'. Only mossy granite above. Now I'm really pissed off. A fall here would yield quite a lovely pendulum — not likely fatal, but who knows?

My anger has been rising steadily over the last few hours. It's foreign to me, this fury that's fuelling my climbing. I slowly traverse back to the start of the bridge, fall potential shrinking steadily. Still no jugs in sight. I duck back under the start of the bridge to rest — finally, something to hang onto. What now? Huge breathing. By now Jamie must think I'm insane, or maybe he's too cold to care. Brief rest, and I look back over the bridge. Just above me there are some small edges, decidedly un-jug-like. It looks harder than the 5.9 it's supposed to be. There's a good foothold on the arête below the bridge, but it's a horribly committing move. Who am I kidding? We are committed.

I step up and shift up and left over this foothold. Small handholds continue to present themselves, and suddenly I find myself on a short slab. As I shout out loud, my cry of triumph and relief is blown away by the rising wind. The hardest technical climbing is still ahead on the last four or five pitches, but for me, at this moment, the climb is in the bag.

Up comes Jamie, and he takes the next lead to try and warm up. We're into the corner system now, and the climbing is solid, the pro' excellent. My next lead flows smoothly. On the next pitch, nearing the top, I climb out rightward from our belay onto a steep, textured slab. One bolt, then another, then a seeming eternity as I balance above this bolt. In the sun, at the Smoke Bluffs, the run-out would be exhilarating. Up here, my hands barely working and the exposure huge, I'm relieved to finally rejoin the corner. After more excellent climbing for Jamie as he leads up the final slab, we soon find ourselves in the stunted trees below the summit, grateful for the shelter. Huddled under a spruce, we eat and drink. Very cold by now, we can't help but stop and savour this moment.

Earlier in the day, I was ready to quit, go home and give all my climbing gear away. Later that week, I related our (mis)adventure to a hiking buddy. Why did we continue and finish the climb when everything seemed to be going wrong? Stupidity? Stubbornness? Pride?

By 6:15 a.m. we're at the pullout. Beautiful blue skies, calm. We both decide to travel light, leaving some of our extra layers in the car. First mistake. After a few minutes, we plunge into coastal rainforest: huge trees, steep trail. Jamie easily leaves me panting in the distance. (Whenever I'm the fitter of a climbing pair, I like to give my partner a break on the approach, preferring conversation to competition. Wait a minute, though; when was I ever the fitter of a climbing pair?)

We break through onto talus and then move quickly up some easy-fourth-class terrain to the base of the first pitch. Jamie climbs a wide corner and then goes over to a belay at the base of a long splitter up a slab. Normally I would eat this up, but instead I tentatively climb a full pitch of this amazing 5.6 without enjoying it in the least. Jamie climbs the second half of perfection, and then I get a bit more, followed by some crap to a large ledge. We continue up a corner system for a few more pitches — some loose rock, but mostly okay.

The clouds have rolled in and the wind is picking up. Jamie leads a picky traverse up into a narrowing slab with a tricky overlap at the top — minimal pro'. I'm impressed, especially since my state of mind hasn't really improved. By my count we should be one more pitch before the transition out left, but we've been climbing on 60-metre double ropes and really stretching the pitches out, so I think we must be there now. Jamie thinks we need to go higher, but it's my lead, so I venture briefly out left to see if I can find the "cave" we are to belay in before we hit the key traverse of a natural granite bridge onto the second half of the route.

I don't see it, so I flow back into the corner system, finally getting into the climbing. I move up steadily on worsening rock into a bottleneck where excellent stemming replaces good pro'.

"Jamie, how much rope do I have left?"

"About ten metres."

Not enough. I ease up onto a flat ledge with no real hope for a belay and only two metres of rope left. I feel sure that we're too high. I downclimb and then move out left onto a hanging slab with overhangs above — a brooding place. Jamie rearranges his belay to give me a little more rope and I manage to add a sling to one already around a huge chockstone. There is no way out left or straight up. It's getting cold now and I realize that Jamie must be freezing. I at least have brought along a windbreaker, but my last lead was not overly fast. When he reaches our inhospitable belay, Jamie's teeth are chattering. We agree to rappel, at least to our previous belay. As Jamie backs off down the slab, he can see the bridge down and to his left. Duh!

Having got to our last belay, we pull our ropes. Guess what? That's right, they get stuck about halfway up. I have to re-lead a good portion of the pitch and then downclimb it. By now I'm really angry — at myself, the weather, just whatever. What will we do next?

I still don't know entirely. All I know is that, had we retreated, every trip over the Coquihalla would reawaken the regret of not finishing a long-desired route. None of the obstacles were insurmountable. We made some mistakes, particularly in route finding, but none of them were critical. Fear was definitely an issue; for me, however, it was replaced by anger and a strong desire to persist. Life is full of risks, and climbing reminds me once again that to walk away from risk is to walk away, at least potentially, from failure.

the arctic discipline wall

jon bracey

As the distinct drone of the 1973 Cessna fades into the distance, all I can do is concentrate on not being sick. Due to a gusty northerly wind, it has been quite a hairy flight into the heart of the St. Elias Mountains. Just as we were about to part company with the dirt airstrip at Kluane Lake, a sharp crosswind caught the tail, leaving Andy Williams, a bush pilot from North Wales (?!) fighting at the controls. This was only the start of the excitement. As we gained height, heading for the mountains, the winds predictably became more ferocious, and occasionally we entered vicious patches of turbulence. With no warning we would suddenly drop about 20 ft., leaving our stomachs way above us and our heads spinning. When Andy almost jumped out of his skin and grasped for the cockpit strut, it did little to reassure us of our safety.

Thankfully, we have somehow landed in one piece. As my nausea slowly subsides, the remoteness of our location becomes more and more apparent. Looking all about us, we struggle to grasp the scale of our surroundings and are awestruck at the majestic beauty of the vast glaciers and stunning peaks.

This all started in the usual fashion down at our grotty local pub, The Broadfield, in the English industrial town of Sheffield, famous for its cutlery and steel and some gritstone boulders.

"Where we gonna go next year — the Mooses Tooth, the Ruth, or how about India?" asked Rich mid-pint.

"Yeah brilliant, let's go to them all!" I replied in my usual state of overexcitement.

A few weeks later, Rich showed me a photo of some mountain called Mount Kennedy in Canada. A couple of American hotshots had been two-thirds of the way up, climbing big-wall style, and Andy Cave and Mick Fowler had been there, so it had to be good. I was told that the northwest face of Mount Kennedy had been one of the great unclimbed lines in the Yukon. Dubbed the Arctic Discipline Wall by the legendary team of Jack Roberts and Jack Tackle after several concerted efforts, it all sounded rather glamorous and a bit scary. Mountaineering is all about being lucky, though, so in May 2004 Rich Cross and I went to see what it was all about.

Our typically small, underorganized British expedition started smoothly bar the slight inconvenience of some lost skis. And this gave Rich and me plenty of time in Whitehorse to do all our shopping and gather supplies for the next three weeks. The Yukon is twice as big as Great Britain, and with a population of only 30,000 people must be one of the remoter parts of the world. Half the Canadians we spoke to elsewhere didn't even know where it was. Whitehorse is the biggest town in the Yukon, its wide, dusty streets and bars full of rednecks. It was like being on the set of a Western.

The next task was getting to Kluane Lake. Due to our small budget, we searched hard before contacting the cheapest option, a lad called Woody at Royal Limo. Right on the dot of 12:30 p.m., we heard a large vehicle pull up outside our hostel. We watched in awe as a gigantic, 300-lb. man with a long grey ponytail struggled out of his gleaming black stretch limousine. The colossal Woody had been a trapper for twenty years, then a Hell's Angel, and was now on the run from a bank job. After stashing our beer in the refrigerated drinks cabinet, we sat back as Woody steered the limo up the Alaskan Highway and told us the whole story.

In front of us is Mount Kennedy, the peak we have come to climb. Due to the poor flying conditions, Andy was not able to drop us at our proposed location beneath the face and we have been left a good 10 km away. The final rays of the evening sun cast a golden light on the North Spur and the northwest face beyond. This, however, does little to help make our climb look less daunting. Standing about 2000 m high, the face is of Himalayan scale. It is far longer than any route either of us has ever embarked on and it fills us with fear. Jack Tackle and Jack Roberts' efforts culminated in the spring of 1996 at a high point 1500 ft. short of the summit, following nine days of effort, a dropped crampon and atrocious weather.

We've brought along a telescope, which is great for getting a close look at the face and tracing the exact line we will try to follow on the climb, thereby limiting route-finding errors later. While dinner stews on the stove, we take stock of the situation and discuss our options. With no chance of any kind of forecast, we know that we will just have to go climbing and battle against whatever the Yukon has in store for us. And having been warned about this coastal range's reputation for dismal weather, we have come prepared for the worst.

We wake early to bright sunshine. After a quick breakfast, Rich suggests wasting no time and getting straight over to Mount Kennedy. We meticulously pack our rucksacks with six days of food, and a load of good luck. A morning ski tour brings us to the base of the North Spur, the daunting vastness of the northwest face rising beyond.

Conditions look good and icy, but the first 1000 m of the face are very steep; given the lack of bivouac options, we decide to camp for the night and to make an early start in the morning if the weather is still good. To help speed our progress in the early hours of the following day, we break a trail up the steep lower snow slopes and scour the bergschrund for a way through. Overhanging ice cliffs loom above us, but we spy a possibility and trudge back down through the thigh-deep snow for dinner.

At 3 a.m., the alarm wakes me from a deep sleep. This is brutal. Rich, who sleeps like a dead man, shows no sign of life despite my efforts to make as much noise as possible while I get the stove lit. We

The North Face of Mount Kennedy. Arctic Discipline *ascends the shadowed wall right of the prominent* North Ridge Photo: Jon Bracey

begin the daily ritual of alpine climbing: always on the go, with no time to relax, and always in a heightened state of awareness.

After all the preparation, it is a relief to get going. Rich's arms are rudely awakened by a section of vertical rotten ice made worse by his weighty rucksack pulling down on his shoulders. But we are over the bergschrund.

"Whoosh!"

I tense instantly, cowering against the ice as a rock the size of a small television set hurtles past us at terminal velocity. It is a fast-moving reminder that we are back in the big mountains, and far from being completely in control of our destinies.

Good ice runnels allow us to make steady progress through the steep, blank cliffs of granite, and by early afternoon we reach the first of the major difficulties. The ice thins out, and steep rock looms grimly above offering no easy options. Rich leads rightward across thin patches of ice without which we would have to resort to hard aid. This is what makes this kind of climbing so special: unlikely blobs of icy névé plastered onto steep rock. Upward progress is barely possible.

As the rock rears up, the ice disappears, leaving snow at the back of a faint groove. We hope to find a crack that will allow us to gain access to easier ground above. But with one swing of his axe, Rich clears all the snow to reveal a blank seam. We both cast our eyes around in search of an alternative way through, and soon Rich is teetering out across a steep slab, desperate to find a solution. The lack of any protection and the prospect of more hard climbing force him back.

We have one alternative: a steep corner directly above us. It is only VS (5.8) or so, but plastered in loose snow it proves a real test and the crux of the route. Sensing that I might be belaying for a while yet, I pull my down jacket from my rucksack and shout up words of encouragement to Rich, who is busy removing his rucksack in preparation for the steep climbing above.

Over the next two hours, Rich fights a desperate struggle while I fidget about every couple of minutes, trying to get comfortable and stay warm on my hanging stance. Finally, the rope comes tight and I prepare to follow the pitch, tying Rich's rucksack onto one of the ropes a metre above my head so that he can haul it as I climb.

Desperately hanging off my axes, I struggle to make upward progress. Thanks to the slack, Rich's rucksack is now dangling from my waist. My shouts and curses are lost in the wind, along with white flurries of goose feathers as my down jacket tears against the rough granite. Eventually, the fight is over and I pull up to find Rich perched on a small rock edge, attached to two tied-off ice screws semi-embedded in a tiny blob of ice and to a loop of rope draped around a rounded spike.

Tired and weary from our struggle, we decide to get the stove out and have a brew in order to try and regain enough strength to carry on. As I watch the stove struggle to melt ice into water, I rest my head against the rock and slump in my harness. Our bodies are already dry and the water is quickly gone.

Traversing out from the belay, I contemplate the idea of climbing several more pitches before finding any kind of bivouac for the night ahead. But poking my head around a corner, I am shocked to find a sun-bleached blue bag, and the remains of a portaledge protruding from the ice.

I have struck upon Tackle and Roberts' abandoned camp and, more

importantly, some easier-angled ice that has potential for being transformed into a bivy ledge. We hack away at the iron-hard ice, our hands numb and cramped from the effort, until, nearly two hours of tedious effort later, we have sculpted a pair of fine bucket seats.

Then we erect the "Mark III Coffin", a multi-purpose bivy shelter designed by the infamous sufferer Alun Powell. After pulling it over our heads and zipping up the doors, we sit back to relax in relative comfort, pleased with our day's progress. But clouds are building outside, making us fearful of incoming bad weather. There is nothing we can do but slump forward like a pair of drunks and try to grab some sleep. It is here that Jack Tackle dropped a crampon back in 1996; given that they were only a third of the way up the face, it is truly remarkable that they carried on.

The next day comes and goes quickly. The clouds disperse and we are even graced with some late-afternoon sunshine. After another 15 pitches, we fail to find any kind of rock ledge for the night ahead. I'm lured on by rocky outcrops in the hope of finding a tent-sized ledge, but in the end I waste too much time. I abseil back down to Rich, and we set to work chipping out two more buckets to sleep in.

Day 3 on the face dawns with a spectacular cloud inversion giving us breathtaking views. But they come at a price. Bitter northerly winds fray at our nerves. After the relentless front pointing up grey ice of the previous two days, five pitches of mixed climbing through the final rock band offer relief to our sore toes and weary calves.

THE GROUND ABOVE EASES; knowing that protection will be scant, we tie both ropes together in the hope of finding belays. We begin a series of back-breaking 120-m pitches, our faces continually blasted by ice particles whipped up by the fierce winds. Moving together up the final summit slopes, we realize that it is now only a matter of time before we reach the top, but that doesn't make progress any easier. Eventually, I find myself sitting on the summit and pulling in the rope as Rich comes to join me. I don't feel any great ecstatic emotion. I just say a few words in my head for friends lost but not forgotten.

We originally planned to abseil back down the face and return to our well-stocked base camp. We didn't wanted to rely on a pickup from the far side of the mountain with so few supplies. But contemplating the 50 or so stressful abseils spread quite probably over two days, we opt for the slightly more attractive option of a walk down the Cathedral Glacier — and pray for good weather.

Our heads tucked in against the wind, we struggle to stand up in the worst of the gusts. We even resort to walking backwards at times in order to protect our faces from the relentless ice shards. Finally, we come to a small hollow off the ridge which is sheltered from the worst of the winds and we lie down, delighted to be back on flat ground again.

The following day we set off down the glacier, happy to have completed our route and confident about getting picked up. The sun beams down on our burnt faces. We've been warned about monstrous crevasses on the glacier, but we find a fortuitous path through the most treacherous icefalls and by lunchtime reach what we think is a suitable landing spot. Without delay I pull the satellite phone from its case and call Kluane Lake.

"Hi Andy, it's Jon on the Cathedral Glacier. Any chance of getting picked up today?"

"Afraid not, guys — we're clagged in here but will try tomorrow."

Our hearts sink. We mull over the reality of our predicament and consider how long it might be possible to survive without food. Our three remaining gas cylinders might last a week, but after that the chances of surviving will decrease quite rapidly.

We wake up the next day in thick cloud, feeling sorry for ourselves. I doze off in the hope that the sun might burn through and — miracle! — this actually happens. We then sit back and enjoy the sunshine, certain of getting out that day. It is just after noon when Rich first says that he can hear a plane. I can't hear a thing and tell him he is losing it.

But in about 20 minutes, lo and behold, we can both absolutely hear the buzz of a small prop plane getting louder and louder. Disturbingly, a small, evil cloud is rapidly shrouding us. The plane comes in low but at the last minute banks away. It tries again, but the same thing happens and then we can see the plane disappearing into the distance. We can't believe it.

High on the wall photo: Rich Cross

NOW, ON THE SEVENTH DAY since setting off, we share our final fig roll for breakfast and ponder the question of how long our greyhound-like bodies might survive. It is decided that I, being the scrawniest, will eventually have to kill and devour Rich in order that one of us might survive.

A singalong is suggested to help pass the time, but is quickly dismissed; we are both tone-deaf. The frustration of our situation is getting to us. As a mountaineer one is always taught to be self-reliant, and here we are, sitting around with our lives completely in the hands of a Welsh pilot and his little aircraft. It looks like we'll be stuck here forever. But hang on. What's that sound?

Thanks for support from the Mount Everest Foundation, UK Sport, the British Mountaineering Council, DMM, Rab, Outdoor Designs and Sprayway.

king peak and fairweather

david hart

Four attempts, six weeks, two routes. That's the investment my climbing partner Paul Barry and I made over the last four years before finally standing atop Canada's stunning King Peak (16,972 ft.) — along with Paul's wife, Carolyn — on May 22, 2004. King is the sixth-tallest peak in the combined Canada-Alaska region, behind Denali, Logan, St. Elias, Foraker and Lucania. Each of its five existing routes presents continuously exposed climbing, as demonstrated by the scant dozen or so ascents of the peak to date. There is no walk-up route.

We had twice previously attempted the first alpine-style ascent of the committing 1967 Japanese Southwest Ridge route, reaching a high point of 13,400 ft. in 2001 and 15,200 ft. in 2002. In 2003, we begrudgingly turned back on the East Ridge from our 14,100-ft. high camp due to avalanche concerns. This summer's successful 24-hour summit day on King's East Ridge was one of our most challenging to date among the combined 60-plus expeditions in which Paul and I have participated, most of them together.

Our strategy for King Peak was simple. We would acclimatize with an ascent of Mount Fairweather (15,300 ft.) on the B.C.-Alaska border, then fly 200 mi. north to a camp on the Yukon-Alaska border. From here we would ski 20 mi. up the King Trench to a well-stocked high camp at 14,100 ft. and patiently wait for a window of good weather. We were tired of going back to the same peak four seasons in a row and were committed to staying as long as needed in order to give it a fair try.

Mount Fairweather is the southernmost of the 26 peaks over 14,000 ft. in the combined Canada-Alaska region. Its proximity to the stormy Gulf of Alaska has made it notorious for consistently inclement weather. We therefore left Haines, Alaska, on May 10, 2004, in Paul Swanstrom's Cessna 185 ski plane with four weeks of supplies for both trips. The group consisted of Paul and Carolyn Barry; Wayne Todd; two Dutch friends, Wytze Rijke and Joris Endel; and me. Wayne and the Dutch pair would return to Anchorage after Fairweather, whereas our trio would continue north and ski into King Peak.

Our route on Mount Fairweather ascended from a northern base camp at 10,000 ft. on the Grand Plateau Glacier. This route has become the standard walk-up, although crevasses, avalanches, serac exposure and poor weather make this a potentially severe mountaineering objective. With favourable weather on our side, we spent our first full day on the glacier, ski touring around camp.

The next morning, not wanting to waste fair skies, we climbed 5500 ft. to the summit in 10 uneventful hours round-trip, almost cursing our quick ascent. Nevertheless, we summoned our pilot's return on our satellite telephone on the third morning for a spectacular 200-mi. flight north along the entire coastal St. Elias Mountains, complete with a fuel stop in Yakutat, Alaska. By 4 p.m., Paul, Carolyn and I were bidding our pilot farewell as he taxied down the glacier on his way back to Haines in time for dinner. We were on our own at our new base camp on the Yukon-Alaska border. The black, rocky pyramid of King Peak towered an impressive 9000 ft. above us, 15 mi. to the east.

On May 14, we prepared our last full breakfast for 12 days: coffee, pancakes and fried ham. Even more enjoyable were the soaring views of Mount St. Elias to the south and Mount Logan and King Peak to the east. Not a bad place for breakfast. We loaded our sleds with food and fuel for two weeks, along with all the requisite cold-weather and climbing gear. We would have to travel 9 mi. into Canada and gain 1000 ft. of elevation in order to reach the standard Mount Logan King Trench base camp. American air taxis cannot land in Canada without prohibitively expensive insurance premiums, forcing our additional trek from our border base camp. We would share the King Trench with several Logan expeditions for ten more miles up to King Col at 13,500 ft., where we would diverge to our final camp.

We spent two days skiing under glaring sun and in oppressive heat up to King Col, cursing our heavy sleds on the steeper inclines. Our third day was short, seeing us gain only 600 ft. to our high camp at 14,100 ft., which we placed in our previous year's exact location, pinpointed by remnant snow walls barely discernable on the wind-scoured saddle. At this point we were questioning having hauled so many supplies and warm clothes, as the weather was stellar and more sun was forecast It was easily 20°F warmer than on our several previous attempts on the mountain. We went to sleep that night hoping to start our summit bid the next morning at 4 a.m. We were even planning what other peak we might climb during the extra week that we would now have thanks to finishing the ascent early.

We should have known better. We spent the next six days confined to our tent. It was in fact clear, but lenticular clouds hammered Mount Logan and King Peak for the entire week. Our snow walls required daily repairs as intense winds eroded our snow blocks without reprieve. After Day 4 or 5, we had mastered construction of triple-thick walls augmented by secondary deflection walls. It is impressive what three bored engineers stuck in a tent for a week can create.

Finally, on May 21, the winds mellowed and our satellite-phone weather forecast suggested one day of improving weather before yet another storm. We had to give it a shot. Anticipating a moderate 12- to 15-hour day to climb 3000 ft. to the summit and back, we each packed a dozen Gu energy packets, two quarts of energy drink, and extra clothes. Little did we realize our underestimation as we left our high camp at noon under broken clouds and in snow flurries.

The terrain was steeper than expected, and ice and hard snow required running belays and careful climbing just above camp. We gladly sacrificed speed for protected climbing. The weather remained marginal all afternoon; as we climbed in the high winds, lenticular tongues licked the summit. Multiple fixed lines littered the route all the way to 16,000 ft. We clipped most of the visible anchors, supplementing with our own as required. The consistent 45-degree snow and ice slopes proved enjoyable before increasing to 55 degrees for the last three pitches below the top of the main couloir at 16,000 ft. At the prominent rock tower, erroneous fixed line led us off route, forcing an hour-long traverse on front points for five pitches on 50-degree snow and ice through the rocks, only 100 ft. above a bergschrund and the easier snow slopes below.

At 10 p.m. we reached the final summit ridge, a mere 500 ft. from the top, and reevaluated our situation. We'd been climbing for 10 hours, the weather was deteriorating, and it looked downright

nasty on the summit as lenticular-driven snow plumes streaked hundreds of feet into the darkening sky. Would it get worse, or better? Who knew? Retreat was sure to be slow, especially in poor weather. We had already donned all our clothes, including down parkas, neoprene face masks, and ski goggles. We had never before climbed wearing all our bivy clothing, yet even so dressed we found it difficult to stay warm. If the weather got worse, descending would be a real challenge, especially given the approaching twilight. But if it got better, we would regret turning back on our fourth attempt. What should we do? We huddled behind the leeward ridge crest and gathered our senses as best we could. Ten minutes and two Gu's later, we decided to press on for another hour since the skies seemed to be clearing.

The higher we climbed, the more the winds dissipated. We finally reached easier terrain and could enjoy the views down to the Seward Glacier, 10,000 ft. below. The setting sun cast long pink shadows across all the big peaks in the range: Logan, St. Elias, Vancouver, Augusta, Cook, and beyond. We could even faintly make out Mount Fairweather 200 miles to the south. Finally, at 11:15 p.m., Paul stopped climbing a pitch ahead and started belaying Carolyn and me as we traversed the exposed ridge. I secretly hoped that they were on top, but knew that Paul was simply regrouping and retrieving pickets, as we had done for the last 11 hours. On approaching, I realized that karma was with us for once. As I squinted through my goggles into the setting sun, I could see the knife-edge ridge dropping out of sight below. This was it! After three prior attempts, we had finally made it.

Standing atop King Peak with such good friends and looking down from our sky-high perch at the entire St. Elias Mountains bathed in alpenglow, we each felt a huge sense of relief and satisfaction. Still, these feelings were dwarfed by apprehension as it finally sunk in that it was –20°F and 11:30 p.m. and we had not yet begun our 3000-ft. descent of continuously technical terrain. We knew that this would be equally as challenging and hazardous as the ascent — perhaps more so due to fatigue and darkness. We took a final look around and headed down. It was eerily quiet as the surrounding mountains glowed pink. Most importantly, the wind had died down to almost nothing.

Carefully downclimbing and reverse leading our route, we avoided the five off-route traverse pitches in exchange for a blind overhanging rappel into a bergschrund to easier travelling below. The old fixed line we had encountered also aided our descent. We unroped from each other and arm-wrapped our way down each fixed section. This saved considerable time. Still, we had to break out our own ropes countless times in order to rappel where the fixed line was either buried or missing, spending hours in these transitions. We used existing anchors where possible and supplemented with our own pickets, V-threads and pitons where necessary. At one point we even found a picket embossed with the name of an acquaintance from an attempt 15 years prior.

We continued down through the night, still wearing all our gear; fortunately, however, the wind stayed at bay. At 2 a.m., we pulled out our two miniature LED headlamps so that the end climbers could ensure proper rope work and knots. The headlamps provided barely enough light to keep moving and avoid a bivy. During these darkest few hours, our beams bobbed along the snow and ice, the faint shadows of three climbers in tow. At 5 a.m., we were instantly warmed by direct sunlight again, yet our lingering chill made us retain every single bit of clothing for several more hours. We were able to unrope for the lower section of the ridge, before the final steep pitches above camp. From here we saw a group of Logan climbers on King Col wake up, come out of their tents, and watch our final few rappels from their vantage 1 mi. away and 1000 ft. below us. I can only imagine their surprise upon seeing us return after watching our ascent one day earlier.

After finishing our final rappel, we pulled our rope through the anchor and trailed it behind us for the 300-yd. walk back to camp. Finally, at noon on the second day, May 23, we returned, physically exhausted and mentally spent. We collapsed on the snow — the first sit-down rest we'd had in 24 hours of non-stop climbing. Paul and I agreed that this had been one of the most physically challenging summit days in our careers. It was such a relief to be back. We brewed multiple litres of water and went straight to bed, too tired to really sleep, though I'm sure we each dozed off for a couple of hours.

By four o'clock that afternoon, the predicted fast-approaching storm had set in, accompanied by snow and gale winds for the next 36 hours. Our 28-hour weather window had slammed shut; fortunately, we had found the only possible summit day in at least a 10-day period and possibly more. We slept all afternoon and night and awoke the next morning to a howling snowstorm. As much as we were ready to abandon our camp of the previous eight days, we were even more excited to rest for a day after our summit-day marathon.

The next day, we woke to less stormy conditions and minimal visibility. It was our ninth day at our high camp; we were rested and ready to leave even if it meant travelling by GPS and compass. We packed camp, struggled with our sleds back down a few steeper sections to the now empty King Col, and GPSed our way back to the Logan base camp, arriving eight hours later. We shared evening tea with an Aussie trio at base camp who had turned back from Logan due to the constant lenticulars of the past week. We then skied 9 mi. back to the Alaskan border that night, arriving at 11 p.m. We were home in Anchorage by 6 p.m. the following night.

The fact that this was our fourth attempt on King Peak and that it proved such a challenge made our expedition that much more rewarding. I returned to work, while Paul and Carolyn rested for a couple of days before flying into the Alaska Range, where they climbed Denali's West Rib in seven days round-trip from home. A week later they joined with friends on a successful seven-week expedition to Mount Nun (7100 m) in the Kashmir region of northern India. They certainly had an enviable summer climbing season.

King Peak's East Ridge isn't unique in the mountaineering sense. It has been climbed a handful of times among the dozen or so ascents of the mountain. In fact, Ruedi Homberger soloed it in eight hours in 1992. Perhaps the only notable aspect of our trip emerged when Kluane National Park ranger Rick Staley commented that he was unaware of a woman having climbed King Peak before. It's fitting, I suppose, that Carolyn may have been the first woman to climb Canada's fourth-tallest peak, since she is a Canadian citizen. Even more exciting for her was that this trip was her first major expedition.

Great friends, beautiful scenery and challenging peaks made our two-and-a-half–week adventure a complete success. Co-operative weather helped, too. Mostly, however, we're just happy that we won't have to go back to King Peak a fifth time next spring!

northern baffin wanderings: bylot and borden

greg horne

THE SMELL OF WHITE GAS hit us as we finished unloading our pulks from the komatik. Before our snowmobile drivers left us, we needed to check the source of the odour. My heart dropped as I lifted the two one-gallon metal cans of fuel from Louise's pulk; they were empty. Large rips were easily visible on the sides of both cans. We had just completed a five-hour snowmobile ride from Pond Inlet to our drop-off point on the west coast of Bylot Island, off the north coast of Baffin Island. We were about to begin a one-month ski tour and exploratory mountaineering trip. Fifty per cent of our fuel supply for the month had soaked through the contents of Louise's pulk.

Although the ride had not been a particularly rough one, we had made the mistake of not separating the fuel for the ride and had neglected to treat it like eggs. We had sat on the load not knowing that the fuel was somewhere underneath, creating unexpected stress on the cans and literally ripping them open. Luckily, we discovered our misfortune before our drop-off drivers left us. In the Arctic, any snowmobile ride out of sight of help requires carrying a full camp in case of storm or mechanical breakdown. The guys had lots of spare fuel and were able to give us a full two-gallon plastic container. As the sun edged closer to the horizon and temperatures dropped, they left us to set up our camp before the mountains of Baffin Island to the west blocked the last rays.

While we sorted through the soaked clothing and gear, I kept thinking that we were lucky it wasn't kerosene. It was possible to actually wring out fuel from a number of the items. We then discovered that some but not all of Louise's half of the month's food supply had been touched by the fuel leak. Over the next month, we would encounter many taste surprises. We learned which brands had white-gas-impervious packaging and which were more like fuel sponges. The worst hit were the lunch bars (all the sweet and high-energy things, of course) followed by crackers and a bit of cereal; no suppers were hit. The typical routine went as follows: inspect the bar wrapper for discolouration or delamination; open and smell; carry out the nibble taste; compare sample results; if still okay, eat slowly and cautiously, re-evaluate, then continue. White-gas burps later meant that our taste buds had failed us that day.

Our drop-off point on Bylot Island (May 1, 2004) was 21 km east-southeast of Canada Point. Wishing to avoid contact with polar bears, we moved north and inland towards the toe of a 23-km-long valley glacier flowing southwest from Savik Mountain.

At the end of the trip, when we had returned to Pond Inlet, one of the snowmobile drivers asked how we had made out that first night.

"Fine. Why do you ask?" I said.

"Oh, we saw a polar bear sow and cub a kilometre or two from your camp after we left," he replied.

This trip was in Sirmilik National Park, where visitors are not allowed to carry firearms; only researchers, park wardens and the Inuit are permitted to do so. Our protection consisted of a camp-perimeter tripwire alarm, noisemaker pistols and bear spray.

From a camp at 46 m above sea level, we made two peak ascents: a ski and scramble up Unnamed 1073 m and a mainly ski ascent of Unnamed 1113 m, which has an ice-cap summit. Countless peaks of Bylot's Byam Martin Mountains stretched off to the east and north.

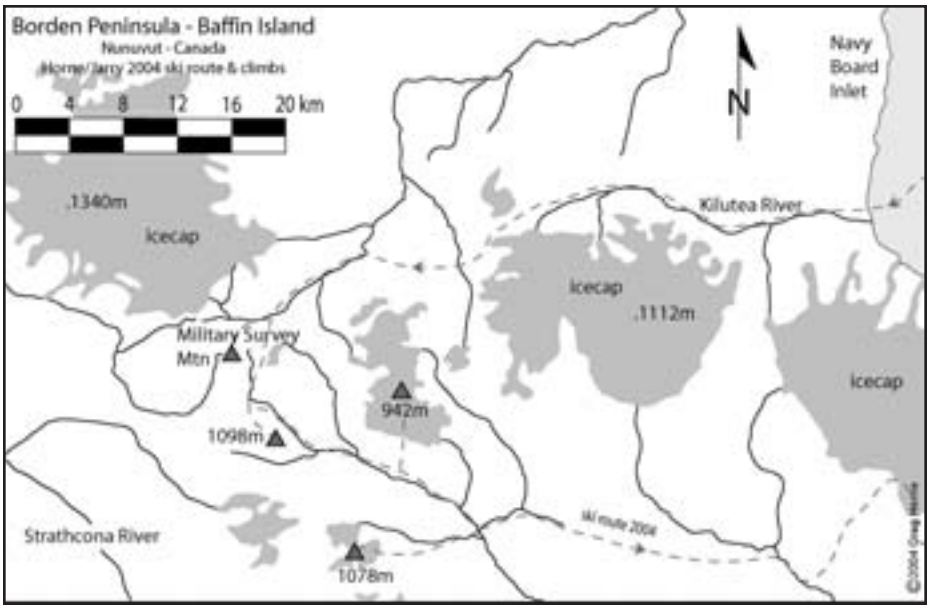
Next we skied up the valley glacier, then west up one of its tributaries to a pass (425 m) holding four lakes. Just before the pass, we spotted an ice cave entrance on the flank of the glacier. We were able to cross under a portion of the glacier and to exit using a different meltwater channel. The ceiling was studded with boulders that are the abrasive grit of this valley carver.

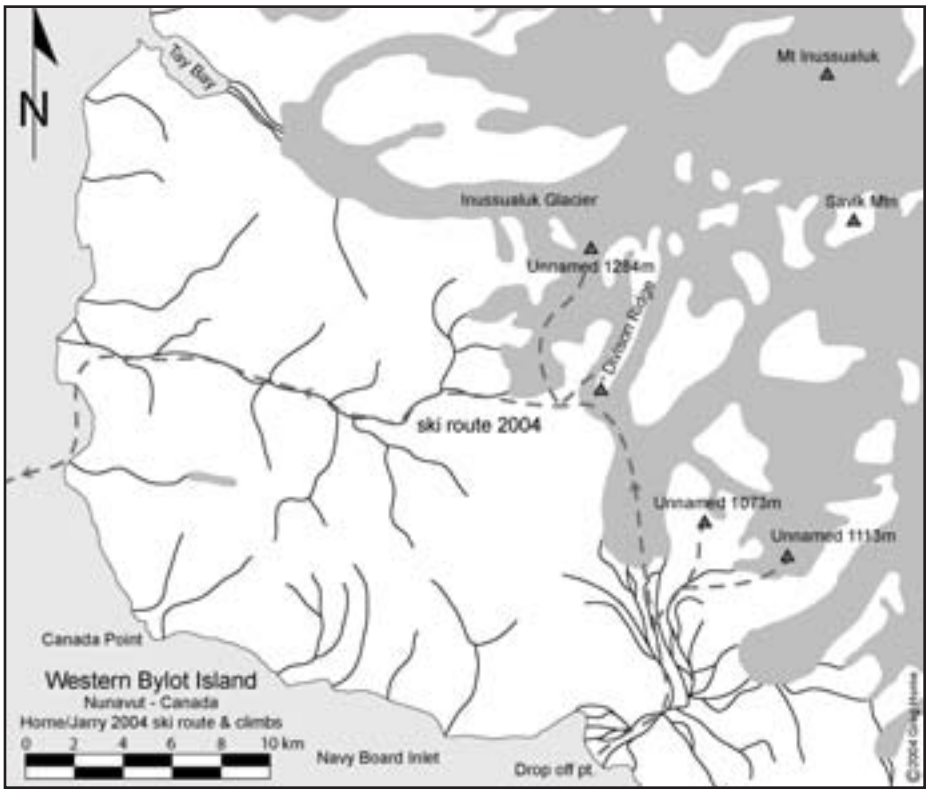
After setting up camp we headed off for an afternoon ascent of the end of a long ridge dividing the tributary glaciers, climbing its north-northeast ridge to a tiny alpine summit at 720 m. We called this feature Division Ridge because of its long and narrow but distinct separation of two glaciers north to Point 1357 m.

The next day, we skied from our lakes camp in thick fog up the glacier to the northwest. It turned out to be one of those magical days when perseverance pays off. After several hours of whiteout navigation, we broke through the heavy cloud layer to clear blue skies and warm sun. We continued north up the glacier, skiing to the summit of an unnamed, 1284-m, ice-domed peak. There were impressive views down the Inussualuk Glacier and west to Tay Bay. Further in the distance, Baffin's Borden Peninsula was visible.

Leaving the mountains of Bylot was difficult; nevertheless, we skied west from our lakes camp towards Navy Board Inlet. After passing two sets of bear tracks many, many kilometres from the coast, we unexpectedly just about ran out of snow while travelling down a river valley. This new valley was subject to much more wind than our previous one. Most of the snow on the braided river flats had been blown away or was covered with sand and dirt reworked by winter winds. To save our skins we were forced to walk and pull our pulks. Short sections were completely missing snow or ice, and tough pulls across sand and gravel resulted.

We had begun our trip climbing igneous peaks, then we had skied through a





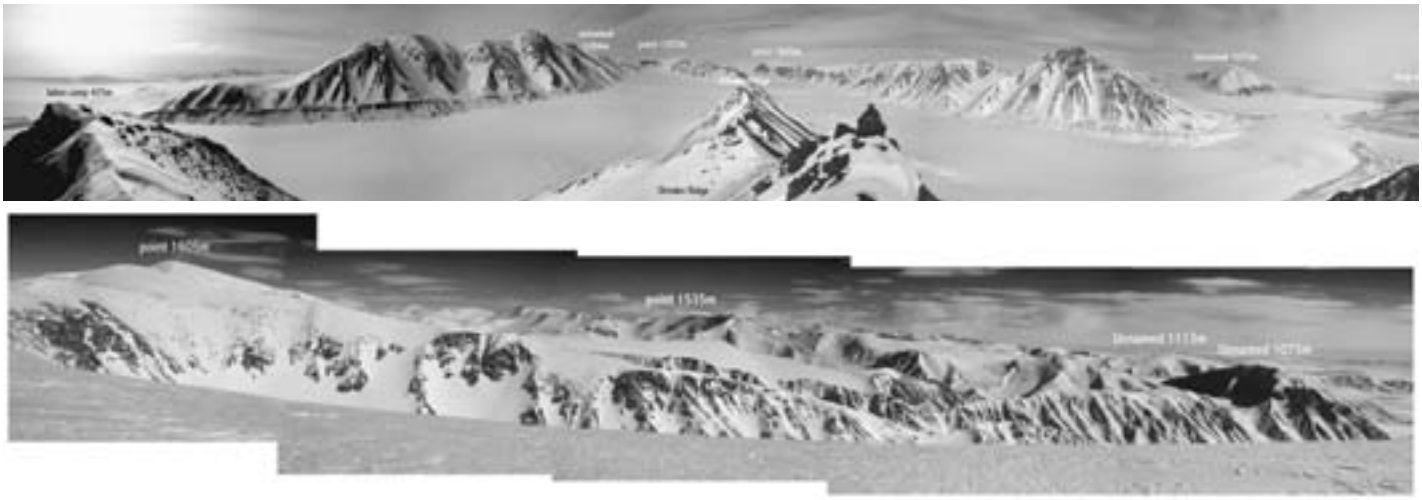
left: *Panorama from Pk. 1284*. above: *Ascending Pk. 1078*. following page top*: Bylot panorama from Pk. 720,* bottom: *Panorama from Peak 1284* All photos: Greg Horne

limestone canyon; now, near the coast, we passed interesting sandstone outcrops featuring hoodoos and heavily sculpted bluffs. As we approached the coast, of course, we started seeing polar bears at every change of the horizon line. Mirages and pressure ridges of ice on the frozen ocean kept us from daydreaming much. We positioned ourselves on the shore of Bylot in order to make the 15-km crossing of Navy Board Inlet and move inland up the Kilutea River, on the Borden Peninsula, all in one day. Three sets of bear tracks were seen along this crossing route.

Another lean section of sledding had us wondering what conditions would be like in several more weeks of warming spring weather. We travelled up the Kilutea by weaving our way around gravel bars and bouldery rapids and using interconnected river ice and snow, not knowing if the next corner might be the end of canyon-bottom travel. Our 1:250,000 topo map indicated three potential ways of exiting the drainage near its headwaters. Ahead, out of sight by several hours, a lake with a headwall, and a glacier tongue provided possible exits. The third possibility involved climbing out of the valley bottom earlier and traversing over a shoulder much higher than the lake. In one of those "damned if you do and damned if you don't" toss-up decisions, we opted for the early exit.

The shoulder traverse did not look like a cakewalk: lots of boulder fields with small, patchy snowfields we hoped would connect together so that we wouldn't have to portage our pulks and their loads. Since it was too steep for skins, we cramponed up in slow motion. On the second day of the bypass traverse, we dragged our plastic pulks over numerous sharp igneous boulders that carved off curly shavings from the sled bottoms. Fortunately, we did not have expensive fibreglass models to cry over. The telling moment came during a brief clearing of clouds and snow: the toe of the glacier ended in a vertical ice cliff, and the headwall was a steep, wind-loaded avalanche slope. Our unsure route decision of the day before proved to be the right one.

The day after finishing the headwall bypass, five days of skiing in flat light ended and one day of clear skies raised our spirits. Passing fresh caribou tracks, we skied west to the base of Military Survey Mountain (MSM), the only officially named peak in the northern interior of the Borden Peninsula. We encountered pairs of snowy owls in courtship, their hooting carrying on during the midnight sun. For the next couple of weeks, hardly a day would go by without at least one owl courtship or mating sighting.



On May 17, we were treated to improving views from MSM; neither of its equally high twin summits (1073 m) showed any sign of a cairn. In hindsight, this seems odd in the context of the next mountain we climbed. Moving further south, we ski ascended the next 1000-m peak, Unnamed 1098 m. On its summit we found a moderate-sized cairn along with remnant strips of bright fabric used for survey and air-photo work. Given that this latter peak is higher and has a cairn and survey fabric and that the labelled MSM has none of this, there may be map-labelling error.

Continuing southeast down an unnamed river valley, we stopped for a ski ascent of a 942-m-high unnamed ice cap 13 km east-northeast of Military Survey Mountain. Our final peak ascent, on May 23, was of Point 1078 m, 17 km southeast of MSM. This involved a very pleasant ski across its east glacier. At approximately 832 m, on an outlying shoulder of the mountain, we discovered what might be a human-built bivy rock wall, potentially prehistoric.

Our original plan had been to ski down the Mala River, but views of the lower Mala from Point 1078 m made us nervous that there might not be enough snow left, so we travelled east, north of the Mala, through a series of side valleys and passes.

We had hoped to ski up one last ice cap, its dome rising to 1227 m 18 km west-northwest of Tuluria Mountain. We positioned ourselves at 725 m beside its 5-km-wide south glacier. Marginal weather turned to a wet spring snowstorm lasting a couple of days. We could wait no longer for visibility to clear; our pickup was only two days away. Descending the glacier in heavy whiteout and lots of fresh snow, we soon met a flock of snow geese equally unimpressed with the weather. They flew off into the fog reluctantly, letting us pass.

We heard the drone long before seeing a lone snowmobile trying to navigate along a hoodoo-studded mountainside. The driver had chosen a gully-laden slope not suitable for mechanized travel. Half a kilometre away, he didn't appear to see us, and soon he turned around. Later we heard a single gunshot not that far off. Hopefully, skiers with pulks and hunters with poor eyesight wouldn't meet in happy caribou-hunting grounds!

On May 29, it rained most of the night. The locals said that spring had arrived several weeks early. The following day we were picked up by snowmobile north of the mouth of the Mala River and returned to Pond Inlet. Along the way, we met the previous day's hunter and were treated to a taste of snow goose killed when we heard that single shot.

We wish to thank The North Face Canada and Mountain Equipment Co-op, who generously supported this expedition.

Date	*Peak*	*Elevation*(1)	*Route*	*UTM Grid Reference*(2)
May 3	Unnamed	1073 m	S and SW slopes	E 0530843 N 8136610
May 5	Unnamed	1113 m	W shoulder, gully and ice cap	E 0533760 N 8134729
May 7	"Division Ridge"	720 m	NNE ridge	E 0526198 N 8142491
May 8	Unnamed	1284 m	SW glacier	E 0525960 N 8147288
May 17	MSM, NE summit	1073 m(3)	NE glacier and N ridge	E 0445070 N 8120266
May 17	MSM, SW summit	1073 m(3)	E ridge from NE peak	E 0444820 N 8120071
May 19	Unnamed	1098 m	NW slopes and N ridge	E 0448783 N 8113379
May 21	Unnamed ice cap	942 m	S slopes and ridge	E 0457662 N 8116298
May 23	Unnamed 1078(4)	1084 m	NE shoulder and E glacier	E 0454616 N 8105393

1. Elevations by GPS
2. Grid zone 17X, NAD 27
3. Both summits read 1105 m by altimeter.
4. 1078 m is the spot elevation shown on 1:50,000 topo 48 D/3.
All elevations and grid references were obtained with a Garmin-12 GPS unit, using the position-averaging function.

alaskan virgins

shawn huisman

Thunder Mountain. Maxim *takes a gully out of sight on the left.* Photo: Sean Isaac

I WAS SITTING in the Calgary International Airport, waiting for Sean to meet me. Shelley had just said goodbye, and I was kind of bummed out. It's hard leaving the ones you care about to chase the other things you care about. I always get nervous just before I leave to go somewhere. I remember when we went to Pakistan: I think we both had tears in our eyes as we drove away from Canmore. You're never sure if you're going to see it again. This time was worse because Shelley was staying home. I was leaving my favourite climbing partner behind, and for some reason, it just didn't feel right. Sean arrived and he seemed bummed, too. He was leaving behind his one-year-old son, Noah, and his wife, Hermien. The baggage we carried wasn't just in duffel bags.

When Sean and I got the idea to go to Alaska, we thought we would go a little earlier in the season, hoping that the cool weather would leave the peaks we wanted to climb in good shape rather than in the sloppy, wet, avalanche-prone, scary conditions sometimes common later in the season. With this in mind, we left Calgary on April 17, 2004, planning to climb new routes on Royal Tower in Little Switzerland and on Thunder Mountain next to the Tokositna Glacier. Sean is an encyclopedia of information when it comes to the mountains. He found these two peaks from various sources and checked out the lines, gathering beta from others who had been there and from magazines, journals and whatever else he could dig up.

We arrived in Anchorage at around midnight and headed to our motel, amped by the fact that we were finally in Alaska. The next morning, we bought supplies and packed all our gear into a rented Suzuki Sidekick before heading to Talkeetna. There, our first stop was Talkeetna Air Taxi (TAT), the company that would be flying us out to Little Switzerland. TAT has a bunkhouse where climbers can stay overnight before their flights out.

The following morning we woke up to cloudy skies. When we checked with TAT about flying, they told us that chances were fifty-fifty that they could get us out that day. We headed out for breakfast. As we were settling up our bill, the phone rang and the lady who answered it started looking us over and nodding her head, saying, "Yeah, they're standing right here." I started to look for the exit just in case; we hadn't even been there a day yet, and already somebody was trying to track us down. Turned out it was TAT, and they said that we could fly out and to get our butts down there and weigh our gear.

The climbing gods appeared to be on our side, so off we headed. Our pile of gear got quite a look from Paul Rodderick — our pilot and the owner of TAT. Seemed that we might have some kind of record for the amount of gear we had for two people. Paul said that we were going to fly in the Cessna 185 and started to load our stuff. As the plane filled up and our gear pile didn't get any smaller, I thought we might need a bigger plane. Paul claimed that he had always been able to get two climbers out with the Cessna, and since this was a record we didn't want to hold, we helped him stuff the plane. Finally, the puzzle was complete and all our gear was in, with just enough room for Sean to sit in the back and me in the front.

We took off and headed towards our home for the next couple of weeks. Paul flew along massive walls of granite and pulled the plane over a pass. The ground fell away below us and I saw several tents, and a runway packed out in the snow. Right in front of us was Thunder Mountain. Paul flew alongside it, banked steeply to the right and then lined up with the runway. We touched the snow, but the only way you could tell was that it started billowing behind the plane. Paul pulled up at the end of the runway, did a quick U-turn and stopped. We piled out of the plane and unloaded all our stuff. Paul shook our hands, said something about making sure to build a good runway if we wanted to be picked up, then jumped in the Cessna and took off. Sean and I kind of looked at each other; nobody had said anything about building a runway.

The morning after our arrival, we did some skiing and also checked out our intended route. It looked better than we expected. There was even a cool-looking pitch of ice at the bottom which wasn't in any of the pictures we had. That evening, we ate a big supper, drank water and packed our gear.

At 4 a.m. our alarms went off and we slowly got moving. After roping up, we skied to the base of the climb in about 30 minutes. We stashed our skis here and racked up, then Sean headed off to do the 'schrund. While I belayed him, he carefully worked his way across the snow bridge where it looked the best. After a bit of digging, he was through and heading up to put me on belay. Unfortunately, I'm not as light as Sean or as graceful; I had to dig my way through a roof of snow and finally plunge my axes in and do a belly flop to get over it. This would not be the last time on the climb that I would have to use this rather ungraceful technique.

With the 'schrund done, we headed up to the first ice pitch. I took the lead and climbed up a nice steep bit of ice. Actually, it was more like compact snow than ice. We started to call it "snice". It didn't take ice screws, but you could get some rock gear in as you went up. I finished this pitch, threw in a belay and brought Sean up. From here we continued up steep snow slopes to

another bulge of ice. This one was Sean's lead and he quickly took off up it. It didn't look too bad from the belay, but once he was into it he slowed down and took his time. When I followed I found out why. The ice was quite rotten, making it difficult to find decent protection. A few more pitches of the same, interspersed with steep snow gullies, brought us to a rock wall barring access to the ridge.

Looking up, I could tell that this steep wall was going to be interesting. Large blocks held a pretty good buildup of snow, and it would take some cleaning to get this one done. Sean headed up, working his way through the blocks. Every time he cleaned snow off, it would slough down. I was thinking about how smart I had been to build a belay off to the side. As he started to work his way left again, I noticed that the falling chunks of snow were getting closer to me. Eventually, I was being pounded with everything he was cleaning off. Guess I hadn't been so smart about my belay spot. I couldn't tell how hard the climbing was, but Sean wasn't flying through it, so I figured it was pretty difficult. After what seemed like quite a while, the snow stopped and I knew that he was putting in a belay. As I followed, I found the climbing to be good, probably because all the snow had been cleaned off — oh yeah, and I had a rope above my head. The pitch turned out to be only about 30 m, but it was probably the technical crux of the climb.

I thought I would eventually see Sean sitting on the ridge, but I looked up and there he was sitting under the cornice at a nice bomber belay. He had wisely chosen not to try the cornice, but that also meant that I would have to do it. Leaving most of the rack with him, I headed out to tackle the last bit to the ridge. I would probably have to dig through only 4 or 5 m. I plunged my axes above my head, cleared snow and tried to work my feet up and push my way through. My axe placements and my feet were awful and it felt as if just the texture of my clothes was keeping me attached to the snow. Add the fact that I was looking at a decent fall, and I was not a happy camper. Finally, though, I was able to wiggle up and belly-flop onto the top of the ridge, panting like a dog.

Sitting comfortably, I brought Sean up while enjoying the incredible views. He then led out, putting in a piece every 30 or 40 m, and we simulclimbed all the way up the ridge. We reached the summit at around 4:30 p.m., shot some video, took some pictures and headed back down. We reached our first rap station at around 6 p.m. and landed back on the glacier just as darkness descended.

Sean Huisman on Maxim. Photo: Sean Isaac

Clipped into my skis and heading back to camp, I let the impact of the day settle in. After three days in Alaska, we had just completed a new route in great weather and had a blast in the process. I knew that once I was back at camp the climb would be complete, so I let Sean go ahead and I took my time going back, enjoying the feeling of success and looking forward to a good supper. We called our route on Royal Tower *Canadian Bacon* (ED1, M5 WI4).

A couple of days later we got bumped over to Thunder Mountain. As we had done in Little Switzerland, we took a day to ski around and check out the peak. Our line looked good. This mountain seemed more remote, mostly because we were the only ones here. If we got into trouble, we would be on our own, which was something we kept in the back of our minds. Also, Thunder Mountain has a bit of a reputation because of Malcolm Daly and Jim Donini's epic on it in 1999. Earlier in the winter, I had been introduced to Malcolm and Jim while visiting Ouray with Shelley, who was competing at the Ice Festival. Meeting Jim was pretty cool, and hearing about the amazing stuff he had done all over the world was inspiring. But the knowledge that these two guys, both excellent climbers, had had an epic on the same mountain we were now on, kept us focused on being safe and not making any mistakes.

Using the same ritual as before, we planned an early start and set our alarms for around 4 a.m. I volunteered to do the 'schrund this time, because Sean had done the last one, plus I needed to work on that belly-flop move. Turned out that this 'schrund was much better, with a solid bridge that I quickly crossed before heading up the snow slope to build a belay. Once Sean had followed this section, we began simulclimbing the steep but wide gully. After about two hours I ran out of rack and brought him up. He then sorted the gear and headed up the final part of the gully to what looked like an interesting pitch of ice.

Sean put in a good belay at the base of the first pitch and I plodded my way up. I was still kind of punched from my earlier effort, but I was psyched to get this pitch, because it looked like nice Grade V ice. I started up, put in a good screw, took a look around and headed for the end of the ice. When I climb ice, I usually try and put a good screw in just before I pull over the end of it; you never know if there will be bad ice on the top, and a good ice screw makes the last moves safer. I did the same here, just below a narrower section that headed into what looked like some of the lovely "snice" we had encountered on Royal Tower. As I dialled in the ice screw, the sun was just starting to really hit the face and I noticed that a bit of spindrift was coming down. What started as small quickly turned into a large amount of spindrift and I was stuck in the middle of it. Meanwhile, Sean was getting pounded at the belay.

After what seemed a very long time, the spindrift started to slow down and I made the decision to move up. Unfortunately, my hands had taken the brunt of the snow and felt like solid chunks of ice. I knew that pretty soon I would have the "screaming barfies". To complicate matters, the ice started to get really thin and the gully narrowed to the point that it was pushing me away from the ice because of the way I had to turn my body. Feeling pretty desperate, I started scratching on the rock for good dry-tool placements and working my way up. Finally, after an awkward move or two on rock holds, I was through. I think I squeaked something like "Watch me!" as I pulled the last few moves and got a decent purchase on the snow slope.

What came next was one of the worst cases of the "screaming barfies" I have ever

experienced. I yelled; I cried; I even dry-heaved, thinking I would vomit. My fingers actually hurt for a week after I got back from the trip. Eventually, my hands came back to life and I moved up the gully.

Noticing that there was a spot about 20 m up for a belay, I quickly headed up to it, glad to be able to kick good steps in the steep snow. I tried to stomp out a decent platform and then began looking for a crack to put some gear in. As I was standing there, part of the platform gave way and I started to slide back down the slope. My last piece was the screw down in the ice, so I knew that I had to stop myself on the snow. I dug my tools in and after about 5 m came to a stop. Cursing myself for being so careless, I headed back up, quickly put in a piece of gear and stomped out a really good platform. Luckily for me, I had caught myself and not taken a nasty fall. In the back of my mind, I knew I had dodged a bullet, and I made a promise to be more careful after that.

After following the pitch, Sean headed up the gully, putting in ice gear as he went. We simulclimbed once again, and after a few hundred metres he put in a belay and brought me up the final part of the snow. From here the gully was narrow and quite steep, with ice in the back of it. Sean handed me the rack. Part of me really didn't want this lead; I was tired from the earlier pitch, and this one looked quite difficult. But part of me was excited to try it. I headed up and encountered probably the best pitch of climbing on the trip: steep, thin ice up a gully with solid rock gear and some good rests. The climbing was never easy, but I can't say I ever got totally worked on it, either.

After 60 m, the rope went tight and I looked for a good belay. When Sean arrived, I told him that I was pretty much done; I was tired and shattered from that earlier pitch plus the last one. We had done three new alpine routes in the month of April — one in the Rockies and two here — plus a lot of ice climbing all season. I was sick of winter and ready for some warm weather. Plus I missed Shelley and felt that I needed to get back and help my dad put in his crop.

Sean stretched the rope out on the last pitch — a tight, shoulder-width gully of undulating ice. That put us on the ridge; unlike on Royal Tower, however, we didn't head to the summit. We started rapping down, building Abalakov anchors where we could and using rock gear where the ice disappeared. After over 20 raps, we made it back to our skis and headed to camp. We called our route on Thunder Mountain *Maxim* (ED1, M5 WI5).

The next morning, we woke up to snow and bad weather. While climbing the day before, we had noticed a low bank of cloud coming in. We had ended up skiing back in a complete whiteout; luckily, we had our tracks to follow. Now we called the TAT office and told them that they could pick us up when the weather cleared. Five days later, we were able to fly out.

Back in Canmore, surrounded by all the comforts of home, I find that the memories of Alaska just seem to get better. Forgotten are the cold nights, the early starts, missing the ones you love, and all the other things involved in being away from home and living on a glacier in the mountains. I saw Karen McNeill on the street the other day and she excitedly told me about her adventure on the Cassin. She suffered huge on that route, but I could tell that she was already starting to forget the misery, too, and to just remember all the good stuff. That's how it is with climbing, I guess — life too, I suspect — and that's probably what keeps you coming back for more every year.

Yesterday I received an e-mail informing me that a high-school classmate had passed away after a long battle with cancer. Sometimes I think we forget how lucky we are to get to play this game called life; I know I do. I also know that running around in the mountains is a pretty selfish endeavour. I'm not teaching kids to read or finding a cure for some nasty disease. But for me, I'm living life the best way I know how, and that's by having fun with good friends, having lots of different experiences, and packing as much into it as I can. I mourn for those who leave us too early, I cheer for those who find true happiness, and, finally, I try to remember that mountains are just mountains and we're just climbing them, that's all, and it ain't no big deal.

The climbers would like to thank Devonian Properties, Arc'teryx, Black Diamond, Sterling Rope, Kayland, Clif Bar and Adidas Eyewear for supporting this expedition.

perfect weather in the kaslohub

linda bily

MAY 2004. My stomach hit the ceiling. Then an updraft followed and my stomach plunged to the floor, leaving me to dread the next 100-ft. downdraft. Andy Williams glanced over his shoulder and grinned. For Andy this was routine stuff, but for us it was shear terror. It seemed unlikely that an aircraft could withstand this kind of abuse, and I was certain that a wing would be ripped off in these turbulent winds. One last wing-tearing bounce, and Andy commenced his final swooping turn to scout out a place to land.

Ironically, after several days camped in the dreary rain on the Kluane Lake airstrip, we had been ecstatic when a brisk north wind brought clear, cold weather and Andy decided to attempt to fly us into the Icefield Ranges. Now, however, as we (John Baldwin, Gordon Ferguson and I — Linda Bily) spilled out of the plane and set solid foot on the Dusty Glacier, we were relieved to know that we were going to be *skiing* the 230 km back to the Kluane Lake highway rather than being subjected to another fright or flight like that!

After reassembling our nerves while organizing our crazy-carpet sleds, we set off up the Dusty Glacier, overwhelmed by the enormous, icy walls on the north side of Mount Kennedy. We planned to complete a horseshoe ski traverse from our landing on the Dusty Glacier, west to the Hubbard Glacier, clockwise around and up Mount Queen Mary (where we planned to pick up a food cache), and then down the Kaskawulsh Glacier and out the Slims River to the highway 230 km later.

The initial inspiration for this trip evolved from a distant view of Mount Kennedy on our flight back to Haines Junction at the end of our Fairweather spring trip (see *CAJ* 2003) the year before. But the St. Elias is a big place, and much research going over maps and talking to people was required in order to refine our vague plans into an actual trip. Old *CAJ*s were particularly helpful!

The 2004 *CAJ* had some impressive images by Steve Ogle and Cam Shute of skiing up Hubbard and Kennedy, and the 2001 issue had an interesting article about a group of Calgary gals who skied up Mount Queen Mary from the highway. Most of the ski traverses were in older journals; many had been organized by Martyn Williams. A circumski around Logan was

top: *Ascending Queen Mary* bottom: *Queen Mary in the distance* Photos: Linda Bily

done several times in the early 1980s. There is even a great article from 1979 written by a dog who accompanied a group of skiers on a traverse from the Seward Glacier across the range and down the Kaskawulsh Glacier.

Slowly, a plan started to take shape. Most ski trips, aside from the King Trench, seemed to be on the icefields east of Logan. The general consensus was that Water Pass was spectacular (though it took us a while to figure out where it is), the views from the Hubbard Glacier were outstanding, and Mount Queen Mary was probably one of the finest ski ascents. The Kaskawulsh Glacier didn't sound like too much trouble, and descriptions of the hike out the Slims River ranged from excruciating to enjoyable (depending on the size of loads and the number of blisters).

We started to lose interest in Mount Kennedy due to reports of high objective hazard on its approach and to the realization that the ascent could take up much of our available time for the trip. Then, way back in the 1962 *Journal*, we found an article about a peak that had been named Kaslohub because of its location near the junction of the Kaskawulsh, Lowell (this branch is now called the Dusty) and Hubbard glaciers. The article indicated that Kaslohub, though not much lower than nearby Mount Kennedy, was a straightforward ski ascent.

The first few days saw us skiing north through a pass at the head of the Dusty Glacier to a camp in a sheltered bowl on the northeast side of the unnamed 3680-m peak referred to as Mount Kaslohub (14 km west of Pinnacle Peak). We ascended a broad trough between impressive seracs to reach the summit plateau. Approaching from this gentle east side, we had no inkling of the views to expect until we kicked our last few steps onto the summit. We were astounded by the jaw-dropping panorama surrounding us. The west side of Mount Kaslohub plunged 2500 m down to the Hubbard Glacier; on the other side of the glacier, the huge massif of Mount Vancouver rose 3000 m. We had spectacular views of Logan, St. Elias and nearby Mount Queen Mary, which we hoped to ski up later in the trip. Far to the southwest, we could see a sliver of ocean glistening in the sun at the snout of the Hubbard Glacier.

The following day we kicked steps up a steep 200-m slope (shuttling our crazy carpets in a separate load) to cross onto the next glacier to the west before enjoying a long, gentle 1200-m descent to the

Hubbard Glacier, avoiding a complicated icefall at the bottom on the far west side. At this point the Hubbard Glacier is a ridiculous 10 km wide!

The next five days saw us make our way, snail-like, up the mighty Hubbard. We had whole days of skiing in a straight line where at the end of the day we could still see 20 km to where we had started that morning. If it were not for the remarkable scenery rising more than 3000 m on either side of the glacier, I figure this is what hiking across the flat prairies in Saskatchewan must be like, headed for that one far-off tree in the distance. One day, after spotting a dark object on the snow, we skied towards it to investigate. I was thinking it was something that must have dropped out of an airplane, but was surprised when this mysterious dark item lifted its head, quacked at me angrily and then flew off in the direction of the ocean. This mallard duck must have been blown off course, and was resting in the snow when we came upon him.

After our long march, we finally arrived at the stunning Water Pass. Here we camped at the edge of the Seward Glacier and stared in disbelief at this monstrous, 40-km-wide frozen ocean (actually a glacier) that is rimmed by Mount Logan on one side and by St. Elias, Augusta and Cook on the other!

After a few more days' travel, we arrived at the base of Mount Queen Mary and climbed up a smaller glacier on the west side to camp in the 3000-m col north of the summit. We skied up Mount Queen Mary from here, roping up in places due to some thin snow bridges. Up to this point in our trip we had lucked out with 10 solid days of sunshine, and the weather was still holding for our summit day. Mount Queen Mary is centrally located in Kluane National Park, allowing for stupendous summit views of the entire Icefield Ranges, dominated by Mount Logan but also by mounts Vancouver, Hubbard, Steele, Walsh and Kaslohub, our previous summit. We could also see our planned exit out the Kaskawulsh Glacier.

After leaving the summit of Queen Mary, we skied around to our airdrop in the broad main pass to the north and enjoyed a luxurious rest day washing, baking ourselves in the sun and soaking up the views. Normally, the rest days I am familiar with arise from foul weather and the rest is forced on you, but without any bad weather on this trip so far, we had already earned our rest day and were ahead of schedule.

Many parties have skied up and down the Kaskawulsh Glacier, and we were looking forward to this part of our trip. John was particularly keen to experience a glacier that you could spend four full days just skiing down, letting the mountain scenery roll by on both sides. As we left our camp spot behind, we enjoyed beautiful views of Mount Queen Mary's more serac'ed north side. Ideal cruising conditions allowed us to cover distances effortlessly; one day we skied over 20 km before lunchtime. Strong winds from behind in one particular section inspired John and me to attempt sailing with the tent fly down the glacier. After a couple of minor wipeouts, we got things temporarily under control and nearly took Gord down from behind.

Further down the Kaskawulsh Glacier, we came upon an enormous water canal etched out in the glacier and running down its lower reaches like an oversized luge run for woolly mammoths. We were tempted to ski down into this canal and along its length for a smoother, non-crevassed route down the glacier; however, it was just too freaky thinking of how we could be wiped out should a sudden flash of water appear.

The snow ran out eventually, and after our skis were sufficiently abused, we finally resorted to strapping them to our packs and hiking down the last few kilometres of dry glacier. One tricky section at the toe of the glacier found us searching for a way around the pools of glacier meltwater and onto solid ground. John's idea to hop across some floating icebergs provided one

Kluane National Park Summary — 2004

Mountaineering use was down by fifty per cent in the St. Elias Mountains over the 2004 climbing season. Only 19 mountaineering expeditions were registered, accounting for 54 climbers/skiers spending 1009 person-days in Kluane National Park. This is the lowest mountaineering use seen by the Park in many years.

Mount Logan received the most use, as usual, with eight parties attempting the King Trench route and six parties attempting the East Ridge. Four groups were successful in reaching one of the mountain's main summits. Weather, and some tricky route finding due to open crevasses on the upper King Trench route, were reasons for other parties being unsuccessful.

Additional mountains where climbing took place this season include Mount Kennedy, Mount Steele, King Peak, Pinnacle Peak and Mount Queen Mary. Of note this year was a successful first ascent of the northwest face of Mount Kennedy by two British climbers. They took three days to climb the face, and then descended by way of the Cathedral Glacier. Also of note was the success of an American team on King Peak's East Ridge. This was the team's fourth attempt at the mountain over a number of years; they believe this to be the first ascent of King Peak by a woman.

On a sad note, a Canadian climber was killed in a fall during a ski descent after climbing the East Peak of Mount Logan. Recovery was not possible due to altitude and location. Another death occurred during a planned traverse of the St. Elias Mountains by a couple of Alaskan climbers when one member drowned after breaking through thin ice on Harlequin Lake only two days into their expedition.

On a more positive note, park staff took advantage of the heavy melt this summer and revisited the "Project Snow Cornice" camp established on the Seward Glacier by Walter Wood in 1948. A Parks Canada historian was able to record part of the site, and this will ultimately contribute to the human history of the St. Elias Mountains.

Anyone interested in mountaineering in Kluane National Park Reserve should contact: Mountaineering Warden, Kluane National Park Reserve, Box 5495, Haines Junction, Yukon Y0B 1L0; or call: (867) 634–7279; or fax: (867) 634–7277; and ask for a mountaineering package. OR visit the Kluane National Park Web site: www.pc.gc.ca/kluane

Rick Staley
Park Warden
Kluane National Park Reserve

possible way off, but not before I first ended up nearly fully submerged, camera and all, in the icy water after slipping off the steep, pebble-covered ice while trying to jump onto one of the icebergs.

We finally made it past the tricky glacier-pond section and onto dry ground. As we camped on the east side of Canada Creek, we witnessed a large grizzly bear high on the slopes on the far side of the creek. He was grazing initially and then eventually rambled 500 m down a very steep spur, seemingly on a direct line to our dinner. Gord scared him off with his impressive 5 ft. 7 in., 135-lb.–soaking-wet frame; in other words, this bear just wandered off and clearly wasn't very hungry.

The hike out the Slims River was magical. We walked along the wide, friendly Yukon valley, soaking up gorgeous views both up and down the valley and stopping to explore interesting features, from marshes to sand dunes, along the way. On the trail ahead of us, the only footprints to follow were those left by bears and wolves. We finally arrived at the end of the road; remarkably, we were still basking in the apparently never-ending Icefield Ranges sunshine.

In closing, since I am aware of the potential multi-day storms that are often the norm for trips in this area, I feel fortunate to have had three weeks of perfect weather in my first of many, I hope, journeys in this special place of enormous peaks and vast icefields.

summer in tassialuit

david w. macadam

In the summer of 2004, I was fortunate enough to be invited, for the third time, to hike in the Arctic with my father, David P. MacAdam, who has annually travelled and explored the inland valleys and fjords of eastern Baffin Island since 1970. This year, Dad and I decided to spend approximately three weeks hiking up Tassialuit Valley, an area that he visited alone in 1989 and that I viewed with Mother and Dad from a hilltop at the shore in 1999. This valley of seven lakes is about 20 mi. long, running roughly southwest from the shore deep into the mountains, where it abruptly ends in a most fantastic mountain amphitheatre. It lies between, and roughly parallel to, two great fjords: North Pangnirtung to the west, and Kangert to the east. This area is praised by both my father and the Inuit as being one of the most beautiful in southeastern Baffin.

According to my father, this was one of the most extensively planned trips he has taken, and now we both agree that it was overplanned. One thing we overplanned was food. Despite our efforts to make our food weigh as little as possible, we ended up bringing over 60 lb. At the beginning of the trip, our packs each weighed around 60 lb., though they felt heavier. However, we did not carry it all at once. Instead we double packed and dropped a load at a cache near our next campsite. The excessive weight of our packs was probably the largest impediment to the trip, since it prevented us from moving up the valley at our planned pace.

We began our journey at Cape Cod, Massachusetts, where my father lives, and travelled by car to Ottawa. Dad and I decided that we would indulge ourselves in luxury and stay at a very posh hotel right in the centre of downtown Ottawa. The next day, we flew to Qikiqtarjuaq (Broughton Island), making brief stopovers in Iqaluit and Pangnirtung. In Qikiqtarjuaq we were greeted by one of Dad's friends, Mina, who arranged for us to stay with Imona. Later we met with our guide, Jacopee, and made arrangements with him to travel by boat to Tassialuit two days later.

The boat trip out took about three hours. We stopped first at Jacopee's cabin, near Tassialuit, where he and his family were planning to stay for the weekend, and they invited us to share tea and bannock. We then left with Jacopee for our drop-off point across the inlet, where the river from Tassialuit falls into the sea. On arriving, we unloaded the packs and gear and got out of our boat clothes. As we said our goodbyes and the boat began to motor off into the distance, a mix of emotions ran through me. The initial excitement and exhilaration of being on the land began to slowly ebb away, and I felt an element of fear and anxiety juxtaposed to the uncanny silence.

While the boat disappeared around a promontory, we began carrying our gear up and over the gradual slope of the embankment by the falls to our campsite less than a quarter mile away. We set up camp on a small sandy moraine encroached on by patches of heather. Left of camp when facing up the valley, and no more than 30 or 40 ft. down the moraine, a short but turbulent stretch of river left the lake for the waterfall and the sea. Looking up the lake, we could see a small bay in the shadow of a cliff with large boulders strewn at its base. Beyond, a large, jagged promontory obstructed further view up the valley. As soon as we were settled, the eerie silence of the valley was accompanied by the constant and soothing sound of the waterfall. That was enough to put a restless sleeper into the deepest slumber.

The following morning we organized the supplies we intended to take up-valley to cache. After starting at around eleven, we rounded the visually obtrusive promontory and were presented with our first view up the valley. On the opposite side, we could see a modest and predominantly white-covered mountain featuring a noticeable snow-filled avalanche chute gently twisting down its face. In the centre of the valley, we could see the rest of the first lake. The route along it was mildly sloped and not the easiest, but by no means the hardest, to travel. We trudged through a sea of heather, using the scattered and comparatively sturdy rocks as steppingstones. I soon learned that walking on the heather, however yielding, was like walking through soft snow and would tire us out in little time.

After stopping for water at a small brook at the head of the lake, we continued on to a group of long islands that separated the river from a small lake on the side of the valley we were hiking on. Almost the entire shore was covered with boulders that were dark grey with lichen. We crossed the field of rocks to the group of long islands, where we spent about 45 minutes caching supplies. We left the cache at about two-thirty after taking a quick glance at the third lake just ahead, visually selecting our next campsite on its long sandy shore several miles up the valley. A gentle slope of lichen and heather rose from there to the base of a substantial cliff. We returned in relatively good time since our packs were nearly empty, and arrived at our camp at around six. After a quick supper we went off to sleep.

We were awake the next morning at around the same time as the day before, yet we did not get started until later since we had to take down the tent. Our load was 10 to 15 lb. heavier than the day before due to the tent and clothes. We arrived at the cache at about three-thirty and I picked up

my collapsible cup, which had fallen out of my pocket the day before. It was as if I were on the moon; the cup was in the exact place I thought it would be, undisturbed.

We continued down a ridge away from the cache to a mosquito-infested brook where we stopped for water. Then we moved over another ridge until we met with the sandy beach on the third lake. This ridge, which began at the bottom end of the first lake and continued to where we now were, dropped into a low pass rising up to the northwest from the lakeshore on terraces of small, sandy hills. We hiked below them along the sandy shore until we reached our predetermined site. Finding it to be suitable for a camp, we set up the tent. After cooking supper, we were in bed by ten. It was still light, but the sun was as low as if it were dusk, and the lake and the mountains reflected a cold blue light.

Dad was constantly worried about the weather and how it would affect our progress. But he never predicted, or even considered, that mosquitoes might be a problem. On our first morning at our second camp, however, we realized all too well that mosquitoes were a major factor. Due to three days of heat and a lack of wind, there was nothing preventing the mosquitoes from being out in full force. Inside, we could see from the thousands of shadows that there were hordes upon hordes of mosquitoes under the fly of the tent. Anyone so bold as to go outside would be greeted with a face-ful and often a mouthful of small, mindless bodies whose sole purpose, it seemed, was to make our lives as miserable as possible. Needless to say, we stayed inside the tent that day until about three or four in the afternoon, when the sky clouded over, some wind came up, and we grew restless inside.

We decided to go pick up the cache so that we could at least say that we had accomplished something. We braved the initial onslaught of mosquitoes which greeted us at the door and tried pathetically to get our packs ready only to discover that swarms of mosquitoes had taken over their compartments. Thus we were greeted with a second onslaught before we could finally get underway. Miraculously, we did bring back the cache and ourselves without dying of bites, and we fell asleep with the buzz of mosquitoes ringing in our ears.

The following two days were spent moving cache and camp up the valley across a swampy flatland that later opened into a large plain with slightly elevated plateaus and frequent marshy segments in between. The area bore an uncanny resemblance to the Plains of Rohan or the Dead Marshes, as described in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. We travelled along the shore of the fourth lake to our third camp. This campsite was at the base of a high cliff coloured red from the high iron content of its rocks. The cliff, as we later learned, was home to a pair of hawks. Facing up-valley from our camp, the cliff extended a considerable distance back to the right, into a narrow pass gradually rising maybe 1000 ft. above the camp.

As we travelled up the valley, its walls narrowed ever so dramatically, making each campsite more beautiful and more surreal than the one preceding it.

From the top of the pass, a river flowed swiftly down, passing no more than 20 ft. from our camp before continuing on to the main river in the valley. We occupied this camp for about three days: one day while we moved the cache up-valley to our final camp, and two other days waiting out a very heavy rain and fog which lasted for 33 hours straight. It was a relief for both Dad and me when we were finally able to move up the valley again.

As we travelled up the valley, its walls narrowed ever so dramatically, making each campsite more beautiful and more surreal than the one preceding it. Yet none of our camps could compete with the one furthest up the valley. Hiking in to it can only be described as a dream. Beyond the fourth lake, we passed into the narrow upper valley. A hike on 12-ft.-thick river ice brought us to a wide and majestic waterfall on the main river. We climbed up to the fifth lake — a large one with a gently sloping bank, save for a run of seemingly impassable boulders. These we had to navigate slowly due to the weight of our packs and the treacherous terrain. Our siege on the rocks was followed by a gentle, much-welcomed slope leading to the top of a high moraine nearly crossing the valley. And, as if the boulders were a trial of one's worth, we were presented at the top with what could only be termed a glimpse of heaven. From here we looked down into a broad, magnificent flatland flanked by the most dramatic cliffs, in places plummeting straight down to the river's edge.

On open ground at the upper end of the sixth lake, we set up our furthest camp. Just ahead towered a great cliff rising several thousand feet. Many thin white cascades coursed through the myriad cracks and contours of the cliff face, and when the soft northwest light of the evening illuminated this gargantuan wall, these edges and contours were amplified by elongated shadows.

On our first attempt to visit the head of the valley, we were driven back to camp by a snowstorm that raged down from the massive ice cap to the south. By the time the storm was over the next day, it had dumped 5 in. of snow in camp. We had just one day left to make a second attempt at visiting the innermost valley.

Beyond the great cliff above camp, there extends a line of towering cliffs that narrow to their vanishing point far up the seventh lake, drawing one's eyes with mesmerizing power to an even more amazing cliff face smoothed by the glaciers from long ago and glistening with thin streams of melted snow. Where the valley takes a sharp turn to the left beyond the shimmering wall and the seventh lake, stood — removed from the rest of the valley — a throne-like mountain capped with ice. Glaciers tumbled down on either side, heightening its majestic air. The entire scene was as if dream had become reality.

Though over a week still remained of our trip, including the ascent of a previously unclimbed 3500-ft. mountain west of the fourth lake, the vision that will always stay with me is of the inner valley at Tassialuit.

Despite the sudden and capricious weather and the daily hordes of unyielding mosquitoes, we still had an eventful and unforgettable trip. The one thing I learned is that Dad is not always correct, especially in predicting the weather or the mosquitoes. But on a broader scale, I learned that even with the most complete and detailed planning, there will always be something unaccounted for. So in the end, one must always be prepared, both mentally and physically, to improvise. This lesson is one that the local Inuit have learned well from birth, and is also one that we Southerners ought to be mindful of, however rustic it may seem.

The year 2004 marked David W.'s third expedition to eastern Baffin, and David P.'s thirty-fifth. David W. is in his sophomore year at University City High School in San Diego, California. David P. is Professor Emeritus at Cape Cod Community College.

sunny days in the chugach mountains

david e. williams

In the winter of 2004, I found myself surrounded by maps piled high in the map library of the University of British Columbia. Another spring was fast approaching and my question was "Where to go this year?" Each area I had considered appeared to be too rugged for a ski traverse. I kept returning to look at the Chugach Mountains. Half an hour of careful consideration, and I had semi-convinced myself that there was a potential route through this dramatic range, the caveat being that although the Chugach Mountains looked remote and isolated, there appeared to be several escape routes: to the coast in the south, and to the Glenn and Richardson highways in the north and east respectively. Next, the task of finding keen trip mates was taken care of when, a few days later, Glen Hearns dropped by my lab at UBC. Another trip was born.

The Chugach Mountains are renowned for extreme helicopter-supported skiing, for being impossibly rugged, for the huge Columbia Glacier, and for being blessed with metres of deep winter powder, and of course extensive periods of stormy weather. As far as I knew, no one had completed a west-east traverse of the range on skis. With this in mind, Glen Hearns, Craig Hollinger and I set out on the evening of April 24, 2004, beginning a 24-day journey.

That first evening, we made our way on foot up the lower Knik River valley through forest, scrub and brush and onto the alluvial fan of an enormous valley. It was a surreal evening because in the growing darkness we became surrounded by the sounds of "quads" and trucks being revved by their beefy drivers, accompanied by screeching brakes, and the din of semi-automatic guns being unloaded into the wilderness. We were only 10 km from Palmer, Alaska; the nearby bend in the river is well-known locally, and appropriately, as Rambo Point. We camped below a huge sand dune after crossing a small tributary.

We spent the next day and a half with our skis on our packs, trudging up what would have seemed like a gorgeous valley if we had not continually been passed by "quads" whizzing by. Two drivers offered us a ride, but scoffed when we told them our plans in the area. Fortunately, we remained in good humour, eager to be on our way, heading for more remote territory. Once we crossed Metal Creek and got into the old moraines of the Knik Glacier, we had the wilderness to ourselves.

We spent our third night camped among willow thickets and pocket meadows on the side of a huge moraine to the north of the glacier. As the other two cooked, I fixed a broken ski pole and enjoyed the stunning views across the Knik Glacier. I was beginning to comprehend the size of the mountains through which we planned to travel. Our trip encompassed very rugged mountains rising to over 13,000 ft., with the ocean directly below. All the northerly aspects looked horribly wind-scoured and blue, and all the north- and west-flowing glaciers seemed dreadfully broken up. I felt that the crux of the trip would be getting down from the upper Matanuska Glacier to the Harvard Glacier, and then up from the head of this glacier, near Mount Thor / Mount Willard Gibbs, and through the col between Mount Gilbert Lewis and Mount Valhalla. I doubted that we would find a route through this crux, which made for a light sleep that night.

The next morning, we descended a few hundred feet onto the Knik Glacier and finally put our skis on. We travelled 5 mi. east over easy ground before turning north-east and descending into the Grasshopper valley. At the toe of the glacier, in deteriorating weather, we had to deal with some painful willow and alder thickets and rotten snow interspersed with deep, snowy ponds. We had to carry the skis again; after a brief period of bush thrashing, however, we emerged from the thickets, very wet, onto a beautiful bench. Up 50 ft. from the valley bottom, the bench was covered in lichens and open birch forest — a delightful place covered in moose droppings. After a pleasant walk in these surroundings, we descended to the valley bottom and, luckily, were able to ski again on the ice pan of the creek channels. As we moved up-valley, the wind increased to ferocious levels and the snow became wet and heavy. We searched for a sheltered location, which we eventually found around a bend in a small canyon, and then quickly made camp. We were wet and cold, but very relieved to be inside the tent. We were soon supping on hot soup.

Over the next few days, we made our way up the Marcus Baker Glacier, surrounded by tremendous scenery. We towed our crazy-carpet sleds for most of the way, with the exception of a few awkward broken sections, and reached the col at the head of the Marcus Baker and Matanuska glaciers. The slopes down to the Matanuska Glacier was steep initially, but soon we had our skis back on for the rest of our descent to 6700 ft., where we made camp. This was an impressive spot, with 5000-ft. ice walls and chutes ascending to the 12,000-ft. peaks to the south. Everything, including the flat glacier we were on, was scoured by wind, creating a cold, metallic blue colour. Numerous ice blocks and bits of avalanche debris were strewn out across the flats — evidence of terrain in flux and harsh weather conditions.

The weather on Day 8 improved as we skied east across the entire upper reaches of the Matanuska Glacier. Once we passed the avalanche zone, an ideal day unfolded. After lunch under blue skies, we ascended Peak 9330 ft., the highest of a small clump of peaks sitting between the two branches of the upper Matanuska Glacier. Huge ice cliffs dominated our view to the south from this perfect perch, while the massive Matanuska Glacier extended northward into the distance. We took in views to the west, to the col of the previous afternoon, and to the east, our route for the rest of the day. Massive cliffs dominated south of our route, and below these stretched a few hundred metres of relatively flat glacier over which we intended to travel before descending below cliffs and chaotic ice blocks to the Matanuska Glacier.

A perfect bench led us east, and after a long afternoon brought on by our wariness of the approaching high cirrus clouds, we arrived at our food cache at the head of the eastern fork of the Matanuska Glacier (9050 ft., 61°31'N, 147°18'W). By the time we had constructed a snow fort, full white-out conditions had set in and we felt justified in having pushed to the cache late into the day. It seemed perfectly planned; we were stormbound at the cache the next day. With no time constraints, no pressure to move on, we snacked greedily on the extra goodies from the cache — which included some non-fat Fig Newtons, of all things — and slowly drank our thawed juice over the course of the day.

From the cache, the plan was to move

into the difficult and worrisome portion of the trip. Due to the heavy snow falling outside, I was growing even more apprehensive about our proposed route over the next few days. However, upon pondering the maps, I noted what seemed a reasonable alternative route. This route involved going through several steep-looking cols and ascending and descending several icefalls, but none of these were on the scale of what would be involved in the original plan. It took little to convince Glen and Craig that this alternative route would be better and more likely to meet with success. I relaxed for the rest of the day and enjoying lying around.

The next morning, we woke to fantastic blue skies and were soon approaching Peak 10,930 ft., 1.5 mi. southeast of the cache. Intense wind made for a cold morning. The gusts were so strong that my favourite old toque blew off my head and on several occasions we were nearly blown off our feet. But after a fun crampon scramble up the north ridge, we were rewarded with terrific views from the summit out to the inlets off Prince William Sound and of the surrounding ruggedness of the Chugach Mountains. Back at camp, spindrift and high wind made for an uncomfortable time as we packed up camp with 14 days of supplies, in addition to fixing Craig's binding.

From the cache, we travelled east to our first mellow col and descended onto the upper Powell Glacier; the massive ice cliffs to the south continued to dominate all other aspects. Through the next col east, we descended steeply on skis to the upper Sylvester Glacier. Heading slightly northeast, we crossed this glacier to the next col (3.5 mi. north-northwest of Mount Siegfried) and descended onto the Tarr Glacier. We then skied directly south, and made camp that evening below a daunting-looking icefall. We thought we had spotted a route through the jumble of ice but we wanted to wait until morning before pushing on.

The following dawn was crisp and cold and we were soon on our way. We spent the first hour moving just about as fast as we could in order to pass quickly below rather fragile- and dangerous-looking seracs. Once we were out from under the objective hazards, we roped up and slowly made our way through a chaotic maze of ice blocks and slots. By lunchtime we had made camp at the col 1 mi. north of Mount Siegfried, atop another imposing icefall. Luckily, we thought we could see a way down for the next day. That afternoon, we climbed Mount Siegfried by skiing around the mountain and climbing up its southwest ridge.

Climbing Peak 9260 Photo: David E. Williams

On Day 13, snow was falling. Initially, the descent proved to be a good deal more technical than we had anticipated. We had to belay each other past an ice bulge. Still roped up, we weaved our way through a field of seracs and then descended on skis to the Nelchina Glacier. This was quite a wild, haphazard route down, and we felt dwarfed by the large scale of the scenery — split, cracked, tumbling and jumbled rock and ice. We used our sleds to travel northeast, and in improving weather crossed the western fork of the upper Nelchina Glacier, then headed directly south along the glacier's central branch. We camped below Peak 9260 ft. (3.5 mi. northeast of Mount

Fafnir). The next morning, we scampered up this peak via its east-northeast ridge before continuing south and passing through a shallow col onto the Science Glacier, where we made camp. We were nicely placed for an attempt on Mount Fafnir the next day.

Once again we awoke to great weather. We were soon on our way, travelling west up the broad but very crevassed and windblown east-northeast aspect of Mount Fafnir. Despite the wind and the cold, the views from the summit were spectacular, encompassing much of the huge Columbia Glacier icefield as low cloud from the south billowed up and over the cols below us. We could also see portions of our proposed descent route from the col between Mount Gilbert Lewis and Mount Valhalla, and what we could see appeared passable. Once off the wind-scoured snow, we enjoyed a memorable and relaxing scoot down the Science Glacier back to camp, where we sprawled and relaxed from mid-afternoon until dinner.

We descended from the Science Glacier in spectacular conditions. Graceful fog patches and banks of cloud contrasted beautifully with the jagged peaks, which disappeared and re-emerged in the mist. We enjoyed ideal snow conditions as we sledded more than 18 mi. eastward across the upper Tazlina Glacier before turning south and camping below a col just to the south of Mount Cashman. We needed to get through this col the next morning in order to continue east and go down the Valdez Glacier.

Very soon, however, it became apparent that passing through this col was near the upper limit of what we could technically manage with our week's supply of food and gear, and our skis and poles strapped to our packs. The route looked perfectly reasonable on the map, but the glacier had receded considerably and the headwall up to the col was both longer and steeper than previously envisioned, with a horrible metre-thick crown line two thirds of the way up. The snow flukes, snow stake and rock gear were worth their weight in gold for the three hours it took us to climb through the col to safety. This was an anomaly in that we usually use climbing gear to climb peaks, but on this trip the climbing gear was used several times on the traverse itself and not on any of the peaks.

Descending onto the Valdez Glacier was easy on skis; for the rest of that day and the next, we travelled down to the 3000-ft. level, where a fork comes in from the west. We made our way up this fork to a col 2.5 mi. northeast of Abercrombie Mountain, and camped shortly after lunch in deteriorating weather. Luckily, the weather the next morning was great, and we were soon on our way over to enjoy the stunning views from Abercrombie's two summits. What a perspective: The lower Valdez Glacier lay 5000 ft. directly below us. The Harding Icefield beckoned out towards the coast, as did the peaks and glaciers all around us. We could see a road and a bridge crossing the stream from the Valdez Glacier, which we expected to be driving along in six days' time. The lower reaches of the Lowe River, as well as a small slither of the ocean — part of Valdez Arm — were also visible.

We descended east that afternoon and then ascended north-northeast to the pass at the head of the Tonsina Glacier, where we made camp and anticipated the climb of Peak 7100 ft. (1 mi. south of the pass). Another great day unfolded as we climbed the peak along its northeast ridge. This involved a route-finding dream around and through some wonderfully blue seracs calving off the ridge line. Later in the day, we moved camp 16 minutes (1.5 mi.) down-glacier to just below another col, on the western edge of the glacier. That afternoon, we climbed Peak 6120 ft., situated 2.5 mi. northeast from the pass at the head of the Tonsina Glacier.

On Day 22, we were woken by the sun hitting the tent, a norm on this trip. Our plan was to peak-bag. A spire-like peak that we had spied a few days back was our first objective. This peak, Peak 7200 ft., lies 3 mi. directly east of Mount Schrader. We travelled 4 mi. west from camp over easy ground before the terrain steepened, and then boot stepped up the peak's east face onto the upper northeast ridge to the very small and icy summit. After lunch, Glen and I headed southeast to climb another lovely-looking summit, Peak 6900 ft. (2.5 mi. southeast of Peak 7200 ft.). From that summit, we had great views of the big peaks of the St. Elias Mountains. After the best ski run of the trip, we arrived back at camp suitably tired and relaxed.

The next day, May 15, it was time to head home. We started east down the Tonsina Glacier, but after only 2.5 mi. we abandoned our sleds to tackle one more summit. As we ascended southward, low cloud came rolling down from the col above. After some initially difficult route finding, we managed to find our way from the col onto the upper north fork of the Tsina Glacier. We climbed above the clouds as we traversed south and then east for a distance of 1 mi. before removing our skis and boot stepping to the summit of Peak 6430 ft. This was our last view from a peak for this trip, and it didn't disappoint. To the south, seemingly endless peaks poked out of the fluff of low clouds.

Once filled with views, we returned to the sleds and made our way rapidly to the toe of the Tonsina Glacier. A few more hours of travel over alluvial flood plains brought us to a small canyon where we made camp. We were positioned below a moraine among small spruce and willow bushes next to the Tonsina River. Although windy and chilly, this was a lovely spot. Ptarmigans greeted us, a duck eyed us, beavers continued their busy work, and animal prints of various sizes criss-crossed the snow in all directions. The wonderful smells of vegetation and the sounds of water on the move filled our senses.

The weather on our final morning was not pleasant. Wind and drizzle continued for much of the day as we continued east up to the pass at the head of Stuart Creek. From the pass, views north down the Tonsina River and to Tonsina Lake were wonderfully green. A dank day unfolded as we travelled down Stuart Creek on the south side of the valley through snow swamps and into canyonland. We maintained an elevation of 3000 ft. in order to remain above the canyons in the lower valley. On what we had expected to be a broad bench, we dropped down into the bush on very rotten snow. Soon we were carrying our skis and thrashing our way down through difficult and rather complex micro-terrain until reaching an open and beautiful poplar forest.

Upon arriving at the Alaska Pipeline road, we wandered to the Richardson Highway, where we turned south. I was prepared to hitchhike from here directly to Valdez, but Craig and Glen were convinced that a group of buildings we had spied from higher up was in fact a restaurant. I was not so sure, and would have preferred to hitchhike, giving my tired feet a rest. However, they convinced me to go on. Fortunately, they were correct; I ate my words of doubt as we feasted on Brussels sprouts, carrots, French fries, a fine salad and a cookie at the Alaska Rendezvous Lodge. Thanks to Theo (the proprietor) and Mike (the chef) for taking us in, and thanks to Craig and Glen for another great trip.

the west coast

the best-laid plans

bret sarnquist

In the beginning was the word. An obscenity rarely seen in print, I yelled it to the wind in frustration, unable to stop the torrent that followed. Jeff, belaying far below, ignored me, conditioned to accept my verbalizations of terror on lead. He burrowed deeper into the collar of his belay parka, probably wishing I would finish the pitch and get him moving. It was not going to happen, however, and I yelled again, aware that this line was not going to go. I also faced downclimbing some of the most insecure snow climbing I had ever done, a poor Knifeblade in kitty litter rock — as my only protection.

Back in the tent, I ranted about bad rock, vertical powder climbing, and the crowds of the Alaska Range. Jeff was quiet, and I couldn't tell whether he was embarrassed by my outbursts or ignoring me. I fell silent, waiting for a reaction. He is one of my best friends, perhaps my best climbing partner, and supremely adventurous. I was not surprised, then, when he turned towards me, grinned, and said, "I've heard the granite in the Coast Range is really good."

Fast-forward 14 months: Eldorado, work, skiing, Hueco, Yosemite, endless driving, the Cascades, Squamish, gravel roads, gear packing, last calls, liftoff. Press play.

Covered with the sound-deadening headphones, my ears filled with the pounding rush of my heart as Graham threw the helicopter sideways, banking sharply over Sunny Knob and dropping precipitously to the glacier beside the granite bench. Jeff and I unloaded the chopper, keeping our heads down, and after watching it disappear, began carrying loads. Once settled, we quizzed the others in camp about the weather and the routes they had done, hoping for info about our goals on Combatant and Asperity.

We quickly got a valuable tip: Katie and Pete said that walking to the Waddington-Combatant col was reasonable, and their track through the icefall good. Jeff and I glanced at each other, our plans already shifting. We began to pack, now thinking of routes on Wadd and short lines on Combatant.

Fast-forward 36 hours: packing, unpacking, paring, repacking, trying to sleep, an early alarm, tricky crevasse navigation, a day on the col, route-choice debates, a big dinner, an early bedtime. Press play.

Unable to find an anchor, I moved to the far side of the ridge and dug myself into a pocket of snow, not worried that Jeff would fall. It should have come as no surprise, then, when there was suddenly a yell and a major jolt on the cord. The rope dug into my hips and I ground my teeth, silently yelling at Jeff to get back on the rock. It was a long time before he started moving; by the time he arrived at the belay, I was worried. The gouge in his helmet and the blood dripping from his ear did little to assuage my fears.

But first, back it up a bit. From the col, the *Flavelle-Lane* is the most visually appealing moderate route up Mount Waddington. A 900-m couloir of ice and mixed terrain, it leads to the Terrace, a broad plateau below the northwest summit. A serac above the initial half of the couloir provided an incentive to move quickly, and after overcoming steep, aerated ice on the bergschrund, Jeff and I simulclimbed the route in two pitches, running out rope lengths between screws.

On the Terrace earlier than planned, we pushed on for the true summit, less than 100 vertical metres above us, via the rarely repeated Northwest Ridge. We scrambled along above the 'schrund, losing minimal altitude, and began climbing the long, mixed knife-edge. The rock was beautiful but extremely shattered; leading became a mental battle, with fragile holds and poor protection, as cracks tended to be behind detached blocks. It was nerve-wracking, and a building sense of the inevitable hovered. How many times could we pull on these tottering masses before our luck ran out?

In the end, when Jeff did pull a block, he wasn't on lead, which could have been catastrophic. As it was, he was badly shaken, and the tenor of the day, and the trip, changed in an instant. Our plans for a new route on one of Asperity's long, shattered ridges faded, and doubts about long routes on Combatant began to surface. The emotion of the day had shifted as well, the sense of confidence replaced with a quieter, more focused desperation amid increasing mental weariness. Retreat would have been difficult and dangerous, and we were still a half-dozen pitches short of the summit.

The last hour was broken up by two memorable events, both pleasant. First was the crux section of rock, a steep face with beautiful and thoroughly enjoyable climbing. A diagonal finger crack split the block, providing locks and good protection, and a tiny crack paralleling it several feet below accepted monopoints into perfect twisting jams. For one minute, the trials of the previous three hours faded and the rhythm of climbing — pure rock climbing — dominated. As I mantelled the ridge crest, the feeling of euphoria was unexpected and powerful. I whooped once and was startled by a reply from the summit.

Standing atop Mount Waddington, equally surprised, were Mark and Colin, friends who were about to become the second party to complete the Waddington Traverse. We yelled back and forth a bit before they started descending, and the grim mood that had settled over my day lightened a bit. The top was just that close.

The last few pitches were mellow, though still frighteningly loose, and the sense of relief was palpable as we pulled onto the top. Warm and windless, the summit was wonderful. The view, which I had expected to be amazing, was obscured by dense smoke from nearby forest fires, but I stared and took photos anyway. The profile of the Tooth was stunning, and we looked at it with silent regret, realizing that it was unlikely we would be back up here for a long time.

The descent off the Summit Tower was a wet, loose, and maddening epic of stuck ropes, icy rock and thinly veiled

frustration and fatigue. By the time we dropped over the bergschrund onto the glacier, it was 4 p.m. Grateful for Mark's and Colin's tracks in the soft snow, we plodded back up to the sunlit flatness of the Terrace, where we ate the last of our food and scouted the descent down the Angel Glacier. Glissading, tumbling and running down, we soon passed Mark and Colin's camp, where we hit them up for water and wished them luck on the traverse.

Hours of serac navigation, tedious downclimbing and rappels off shaky V-threads dropped us onto the main glacier as the last of the light faded. An endless slog led us back to camp, one step at a time, our usual banter lost to a weary focus on the small patch of glittering snow illuminated by our headlamps. The moon was out and the glow on the great granite buttresses of Combatant was gorgeous, but despite the ambient light, we couldn't find the tents; it was a surreal scene, beautiful and embarrassing. Twenty minutes of random stumbling finally led to a set of old tracks, and camp. After several rounds of brew and food, we crawled into our bags and, settling back, were surprised by Jeff's alarm clock: we had been up for 24 hours.

Fast-forward a week: resting, eating, an ascent of *Kshatrya*, retreat to Sunny Knob, a trip up the South Face of Tiedemann Tower, and a three-day storm. Press play.

I awoke hesitantly, denying the grey light that filled the tent, and kept my eyes closed minutes after consciousness returned, enjoying the drowsy warmth of my down cocoon. The faint, repetitive patter of rain on the tent fly threatened to disrupt my sense of calm, though it soon appeared to be clearing. The pressure was up, almost to pre-storm levels, and the overcast was breaking, pulling apart into individual clouds and low-riding fog. At about midday, we packed and then started moving up the South Ridge of Serra Two, planning on two nights and hoping to use the extra day in the middle to do a new route. Jeff and I had been fantasizing about the Grand Cappuccino since hearing Andrew rave about the spire, and we hoped that a camp on the ridge would give us access to its east face.

We climbed in the mist, and the calm, quiet hush of the dense fog made us more taciturn and sluggish than usual. Nightfall found us perched tenuously on the side of Phantom Tower, where we levelled a bivy on loose blocks just big enough for three-quarters of our tiny Bibler. We stayed tied in that night and slept poorly, anxiety and rocky pillows wearing at our heads.

Mount Waddington. The Flavelle-Lane *ascendes the couloir in the centre.* Photo: Bret Sarnquist

The morning weather was ambiguous: we were still socked in, but the active precip had stopped and the barometer was normal. The Grand Cap was obviously out, so we lay down again and tried to snatch a few more hours of sleep. The conditions proved stable by mid-morning, and we decided to try a new line on Phantom Tower.

Moving slowly, lethargically, I followed a system of cracks and hanging slabs which led up the north face to the top, dizzying in the uniform greyness that surrounded it. Occasional clear spots tempted us to linger on the summit in the hope of a glimpse of the surrounding peaks. There was no celebration, only a mild feeling of accomplishment, and we did not discuss naming our route, silently agreeing that a minor route in a major range had little need for pretensions. Only later, much later, as we drove through the night, came inspiration, and I began calling the route *A Touch of Grey*. I hoped Jeff would approve.

The next day was perfect, and we scrambled along the South Ridge, enjoying the first blue sky in a week. After dropping our packs at the start of the descent, Jeff and I climbed the last pitch to the summit — a spectacular knife-edge ridge to a sharp summit tower. This time the views were magnificent. To the south, we could see Mount Waddington, clear of the haze of the previous weeks, and to the north, row upon row, the Coast Mountains extended as far as we could see.

After rapping the Hidden Couloir, we dropped onto the upper Tellot Glacier and slogged down to the Plummer hut, where Colin and Mark were waiting with food and with stories from the traverse. After a break, we soloed a quick lap on the West Ridge of Claw Peak before descending to Sunny Knob, collapsing into our tent in the last of the twilight.

Fast-forward two days: napping, gorging, rinsing off in a pool of glacial melt, sunbathing in the grips of a food coma, planning for Combatant. Press play.

I cursed, violently, and Jeff's head popped out of the tent, questioning. I had

found a crushed spot in our rope while flaking it out to dry; it had obviously been smashed by a falling rock during the Serra climb. Jeff and I looked at each other, then away, and a sense of resignation lingered around camp like petrol fumes, bitter and unpleasant. Ever the devil's advocate, I argued for an hour that we could still make it work, though cognizant that it was time to go. As in Alaska, we had been given a sign, and we accepted the change in our plans with growing enthusiasm, our disappointment evaporating into the beautiful clearness around us. This adventure was over.

As climbers, we dream, plan and, hopefully, execute, but the results are often beyond our control. The touch of fate, *deus ex machina*, may not be dramatic, as with a snapped fixed line or an avalanche, but the end result is altered just the same. Alpine climbing can be compared, perhaps, to cooking without a recipe: The ingredients are the same, as are the techniques and the medium. As in any chaotic system, however, the results are always different — sometimes good, sometimes bad, and sometimes disastrous. Our trip was great, but the results were, not surprisingly, unexpected.

Summary

Mount Waddington via the* Flavelle-Lane *(1000 m; TD+, 5.8, 55 degrees), second ascent, and the* Northwest Ridge *of the Summit Tower (D, 5.8, 60 degrees)

Combatant Mountain via* Kshatrya *(735 m; D+, 5.8)

Tiedemann Tower via the* South Face *(minor variation; 630 m; TD, 5.10c)

Phantom Tower via* A Touch of Grey *(300 m; D, 5.10c), first ascent

Serra Two via the* South Ridge *(1000 m; TD, 5.9, 45 degrees)

Claw Peak via the* West Ridge *(130 m; AD+, 5.6)

Jeff and Bret wish to thank the American Alpine Club and the REI Challenge Fund for their Mountaineering Fellowship Grant in support of their trip.

waddington traverse

colin haley

PANTING, I LEAN INTO THE SLOPE. My right arm burns with lactic acid, but it is the whole-body exhaustion from another full day which is really slowing me down now. This chopping would be a lot easier if we'd brought real ice tools; more importantly, however, we wouldn't be chopping at all if only we'd brought a couple of screws and a V-threader. But here are Mark and I, in the last evening light, anchored to nothing and chopping another bollard on the east face of Asperity.

I discovered the joy of ridge enchainments in the summer of 2003, so it only took a few conversations with Don Serl that fall to get me fixated on trying the Waddington Traverse. Mark Bunker, my only climbing partner as weird and eccentric as I am, was psyched as well. After some great advice from Don and some persuading of Mark's boss, we hit the road from Seattle and found ourselves at the hamlet of Bluff Lake, which was rapidly turning into a fire camp.

The next morning, July 26, White Saddle Air Services flew us up to the Plummer hut, where we quickly dumped out our base-camp cache, and then whisked us over to Fury Gap as The Doors' "The End" eerily played in the helicopter headphones. After a couple of experiences getting dropped off in Alaskan base camps with ridiculous quantities of gear, it felt liberating to be left in the middle of nowhere with only two small backpacks. We spent the day rambling up Waddington's scenic West Ridge under bluebird skies, and pitched a camp that afternoon at the base of the Angel Glacier.

We spent the 27th lounging in camp to acclimatize, and then headed up the Angel Glacier with daypacks early on the 28th. While descending from the upper Angel Glacier to the base of the summit tower, we encountered our first evidence of dry conditions: the snow gully we expected was instead hard ice, and required time-consuming tool swinging all the way down. We climbed the lower portion of the summit tower via the *Wadd Hose*, and the upper portion via the rock to the right of the Chimney. It felt great to be on top of a mountain I'd read about for so long, and the dry conditions had exposed a really old summit register that we got to briefly leaf through. Right before leaving the summit, I saw Jeff and Brent (from California and Colorado) nearing the top via the Northwest Ridge of the summit tower. Before descending the Angel Glacier back to camp, we couldn't resist quickly romping up the northwest summit for the unforgettable view of the main summit.

On the morning of the 29th, we headed down towards Combatant Col. Instead of the easy glacial stroll I've seen in old photos, it was a jumbled mess, and we made one rappel off an ice horn. The northwest slope of Combatant was much icier than we expected, but the moderate ridge climbing to reach Combatant's summits was very enjoyable. The descent from

the Great Couloir notch to Chaos Col was slow and tiring because the "snow slope" was once again an ice slope. We stayed on the excellent-quality rock for most of Tiedemann's West Face, as all the front pointing had rendered the balls of our feet quite sore. When we arrived at the summit, we decided, by persuasion of exhaustion, to camp right there, although daylight remained. As the wind picked up and shook our tent that night, we felt a bit vulnerable perched about 1600 m above the Tiedemann Glacier, but we woke to find it calm and clear once again.

By the time we started up Asperity's west ridge, it was well into the afternoon of the 30th, and Mark and I were already tired. During our seven-hour descent of Tiedemann, we had encountered one 20-m section of the worst rock I have every climbed, and — you guessed it — a hard ice face in place of the snow slope. Our spirits were soon lifted, however, by the delightful climbing on Asperity. Mark and I both agreed that the Northwest Ridge, with its perfect snow arête and flawless rock, must be one of the classic routes in the range. Two rappels off rock anchors, some steep downclimbing and finally the painstaking bollards brought us staggering into the Asperity-Serra col, where we were delighted to find a tent platform already stomped out (a pair of climbers had climbed Serra Five a couple of days before, accessing it from the Tiedemann Glacier).

On the morning of the 31st, we climbed the Northwest Corner of Serra Five, which offered excellent rock mixed with ice patches. Lacking a pencil, Mark signed our initials in the summit register using his blood, as Guy Davis and Carl Diedrich had done in 1989 after the first ascent of *Thunderbird*. While setting up the first rappel down the east face, I launched a refrigerator-sized block with little more than a nudge. We made a total of three and a half 50-m rappels, arriving at the Four-Five col very late in the day. Serra Four went quickly and easily, and we arrived just after dark at a bivy ledge between Serras Three and Four, the only camp during the traverse where we couldn't pitch a tent. We still had plenty of fuel, but my dinner that night consisted of rice flavoured with Cytomax.

On the last day of our traverse, Mark crested over a false summit of Serra Three and yelled down with a deranged and excited look on his face, "Humans!" We quickly tagged Serra Three, and caught up with the super-nice Peter and Katy partway up Serra Two as they were descending (Katy Holm's article about Waddington appeared in last year's *Journal*). We rappelled down to the Tellot Glacier late in the evening and started up *The Ladies Route* on Serra One at 9 p.m. It was at around midnight, seven days after starting, that we summited Serra One — becoming the second party, we believe, to complete the Waddington Traverse.

We stumbled down the Tellot Glacier by moonlight, and woke on August 2 to begin the tasks of eating huge quantities of food and drinking Kokanee. As it began to sleet and snow that night, we marvelled at our extremely lucky timing with regard to the weather. We spent another week hanging out around the Plummer hut — eating lots of food, raiding the first-aid kit for painkillers, generally acting insane, and wandering around the Tellot Glacier to bag some smaller summits (Claw Peak and the Second, Third and Fourth Claws; Mounts Shand and McCormick; and Termination, Eaglehead and Dragonback peaks).

the search for the perfect tarn: kingcome river

john baldwin

If you run to your bookshelf and pull out your 1983 *CAJ*, you'll find a five-page article brimming with spectacular photographs of the rugged divide between the Kingcome and Satsalla rivers. Narrow, snow-covered ridges snaking off into the distance, valleys walled in by thousands of feet of granite cliffs, tumbling icefalls and horn-shaped peaks. You would think it would have caught someone's eye in the last 22 years! But no one has been there since John Clarke and Jamie Sproule travelled the length of the divide in 1977. I had once skied across the head of the Satsalla Glacier where it slops off the Ha-iltzuk Icefield. I had stared out at the coastal ridges, fantasizing about a summer horseshoe traverse around the Kingcome River which would retrace John and Jamie's route along the Satsalla divide and continue along equally attractive-looking ridges on the west side of the Kingcome River. With plans to complete this traverse, Lisa Baile, Linda Bily, Peter Pare and I flew in to the Satsalla divide at the beginning of August, placing two food caches to the north and west on the way.

Our initial camp was high on the Satsalla divide, east of Lahlah Creek. We enjoyed our first dinner sprawled on slabs of rock, peering into the depths of the surrounding valleys that defined the ridges we were going to be travelling on. The Satsalla River valley is particularly rugged and scenic. A muddy glacial lake at the snout of the Satsalla Glacier lay 1700 m below us, cliffs rising 2000 m from its shores to the peaks on the far side of the valley. The next morning, we made a side trip south along the ridge. Unfortunately, views were partly obscured by a thick blanket of smoke from a large forest fire in Tweedsmuir Park. Linda and I stopped partway along the ridge to nurse Linda's swollen knee, while Peter and Lisa continued south to Peak 6900 ft. As a consolation for not getting to the peak, we found a small tarn to dip in and then baked ourselves on the adjacent warm, smooth granite slabs.

We packed north along the narrow divide the second day, climbing over a 7000-ft. summit where we added our names to the scrap of paper that John and Jamie had left in a cairn 27 years earlier. After lunch on the peak, we quickly discovered the reason for a strong east wind as wispy cirrus and lenticular clouds began to fill the sky. By evening we were struggling to set up the tents in driving rain 10 km to the north — but not before we had been treated to wild views of the huge icefalls on the north side of Peak 7000 ft. Rain pelted loudly on the tent all night but eventually subsided in the morning and we set off sidehilling across steep glaciers high above the incredible S-turn made by the Satsalla Glacier. On the edge of the Ha-iltzuk Icefield, we made a side trip to Peak 7600 ft., where clouds periodically ripped open to offer us amazing views to the valley glacier below. We continued onto and across the icefield in the afternoon, staggering like drunken sailors as we stumbled over and around enormous sun cups.

Hoping to have incredible views down the Kingcome River, we had planned to circle around the head of the river by climbing past Mount Kinch on the edge of the Ha-iltzuk Icefield. But rain, wet snow and near-whiteout conditions set in. Rather than wait it out, we set off confi-

dently with Peter's new GPS. Ironically, the only time I put my foot in a crevasse was when I was concentrating so hard on following the GPS that I forgot to look up at the snow in front of me. We arrived at our airdrop west of Mount Kinch cold and wet and wondering if summer was over.

We pushed on in continued bad weather the next day, hoping to be near the lush meadows and tarns further along our route when it did clear up. It turned out to be just as wet and cold as the day before, but our packs were heavier and we had some difficulty descending a steep, crevassed slope north of Peak 7400 ft. The following day was brighter as we continued south onto a promontory above the Kingcome valley. We lunched among a few small flowers clinging to the top of a volcanic pinnacle, and soaked up an incredible view of ridges and valleys snaking off into the distance. Below us the many tributaries of the Kingcome Glacier converged into a pile of blue seracs which plunged deep into the forest.

The second half of our trip followed the high spine of mountains down the west side of the Kingcome River. Since we were sticking almost entirely to narrow ridgetops surrounded by deep coastal valleys, cols or passes were actually low points along our route. The first broad pass between Catto Creek and the Kingcome River turned out to be a magical place of lush heather meadows dotted with tarns and lakes — rare in this part of the Coast Mountains.

Our first unclimbed peak was the 6900-ft. summit west of McFee Creek. The peak is offset from the main divide and we soon discovered that the only way to get to it was to traverse across the middle of a big cliff on narrow grassy ledges used by goats. A short step in the north ridge involved a bit of third- to fourth-class scrambling. We rushed back to our packs in the evening light and set up camp amongst pools of water and trickling streams on polished slabs of rock perched high above the glacier on the southwest side of the 6200-ft. dome.

Our second major pass was the narrow col between Powley Creek and McFee Creek. The col is surrounded by granite cliffs and slabs, and the 600-m descent to get to it took us most of the day. We avoided the bald nose dropping directly into the col by downclimbing a wet, 300-m-long gully on the west side of the ridge. Near the bottom of the gully, we ended up on a bench with bluffs below us on all sides. Even though we found some bear droppings here, we could not find an easy way down and were forced to do a rappel at the bottom of the gully. The descent was very hot; the whole way down, we were anticipating the tarns we had spotted in the col. These turned out to be some of the best swimming tarns we had ever seen, including a 70-m-long pool set into a small granite cliff and surrounded by sun-warmed slabs. We spent the rest of the afternoon washing clothes and swimming. A black bear crossed the pass while we were eating dinner.

The climb south out of the col had looked a bit tricky from a distance, but it went fairly easily the next day; after another swim at lunch we continued to Peak 7200 ft. This is the highest peak in the area and we were curious to see if it had a cairn. (In the '80s, John Clarke and I had often talked of visiting this region, but one of the reasons we had never done so was that John always had the impression that Glen Woodsworth had been here. So it was rather ironic when I called Glen before our trip and he said that he had never been in this area.) The peak turned out to be a nice scramble from the south, and we built a big cairn while soaking up the views. We could almost see our entire traverse — from our start on the Satsalla divide, to our route across the edge of the icefield, and finally the rest of our ridge system snaking off to the south.

Linds Bily above an unnamed lake at the snout of the Satsalla.

Our second airdrop was just south of the peak, so we eagerly rushed down to our buckets sitting on the snow. Upon reaching them, however, we realized that our one and only can of white gas was missing. After some searching we figured out that it had slid on the snow and plummeted over a 150-m cliff! While watching a crimson sunset, we deliberated over what to do about our predicament. We decided to abandon all our soup and tea, figuring that we could manage as long as we could find some firewood for at least one night.

After the airdrop, we continued southeast on ridges that led around the headwaters of the Atwaykellesse River. This was granite country and there were impressive cliffs and slabs everywhere. We started to see more and more pools of water lying on the ridgetops amidst giant flakes of rock or depressions in the slabs. Shortly after passing fresh grizzly bear footprints on the glacier, we dropped to a flat section of the ridge at about 1600 m, where we discovered an especially alluring tarn with several arms and bays. We jumped into the pool from various platforms of rock, and ran around on the slabs in our bare feet.

There were several more inviting tarns further along the ridge, and it was late in the day by the time we reached the 6000-ft. peak west of the lake at the head of the Atwaykellesse River. Because we were low on white gas, we continued down the other side towards the narrow pass between the Atwaykellesse and Kingcome rivers. About 200 m above the pass, we came onto a sloping shoulder of rock above the lake, where we camped on smooth slabs beside yet another tarn. Some dead trees from avalanche debris gave us just enough firewood for the night.

In the morning, we continued down

to the pass below at 1100 m. Clear streams of water meandered through lush subalpine meadows walled in by huge, curving cliffs. The full heat of summer was upon us as we had our first swim of the day at nine o'clock in the small lake just east of the pass. On the climb out of the pass, we swung around to the south side of the long, bald nose of rock rising to the southeast. Linda and I got separated from Lisa and Peter here as we tried to work out routes through the steep slabs and cliffs. Eventually, Linda and I broke out onto gentler slabs with more tarns at 1400 m. This was such an enticing spot that we stayed long enough to sunburn our bums.

We discovered yet another beautiful tarn at 1600 m and were caught diving into it by Lisa and Peter, who had bypassed us on their route up the ridge and were looking down on us from the peak above. With this many tarns, we were hardly even getting sweaty between swims! The 5600-ft. peak above gave tremendous views of the deep Kingcome valley walled in by cliffs and slabs, the pointy spire of Haymaker Mountain rising above the Satsalla River in the distance. We continued south from the peak on waves of smooth granite slabs. About 1 km south of the peak, we crested a small rise to see Peter and Lisa both lying naked, asleep on a sun-warmed slab beside a perfectly round tarn. It seemed that the goal of our trip had shifted from climbing mountains to searching for tarns!

The next day, we continued south along the divide for 10 km. As we travelled at 1800 m, steep slopes plunging to sea level on both sides, this section felt a bit like hiking through the sky. Peter and Lisa had set off early, and Linda and I had promised to limit ourselves to four swims so as not to get too far behind. We were squeaky clean when we caught up to them at our last camp, on the east shoulder of the 6000-ft. peak above Mason Creek. Peter remarked that we should call our trip "The Search for the Perfect Tarn".

On our last day we had four more kilometres of ridge before the divide ended abruptly at the junction of the Clear and Kingcome rivers. With time running out, we chose our remaining swims carefully. Our search for the perfect tarn was over when we climbed past the repeater on the last summit, at 5500 ft. Long, sloping slabs led down and across to a bald dome a kilometre away at the end of the ridge. The sides of the dome plunged 1200 m into the deep, green Kingcome valley on three sides. Perched on top and surrounded by slabs was a large pool where house-sized blocks of solid granite formed islands in the clear water. While swimming, one had an unobstructed, 360-degree view of the mountains. We lost track of how many times we alternated between the cool water and the sun-baked rock. I have never been so clean at the end of 15 days in the mountains! It was a fitting end to a magical trip. We were picked up late in the afternoon by helicopter and flown back to Port McNeill.

Trips like this are absolutely magical, but I have always been surprised at how few of the summer ridge traverses between inlets which John Clarke and I completed have been repeated. One of those few is a traverse around the Tahumming River, at the head of Toba Inlet. Repeated by about half a dozen parties, it is gaining a reputation as a classic due to its recent inclusion in *Ways to the Sky: A Historical Guide to Mountaineering in North America* by Andy Selters. This trip around the Kingcome River is easily as spectacular as the traverse around the Tahumming, and it would be a shame if another 27 years went by before someone else repeated it.

on fear, ethics and cro-magnon man

matt maddaloni

CAN FEAR BE CONTROLLED? Can we face any challenge with unwavering confidence? I would like to believe so, because as a climber I spend a lot of time working towards this goal. But by definition, fear is caused by our lack of control over our environment, our bodies and our minds. To control fear, we would have to acquire complete power over everything — an impossible goal. Control is something we desperately need as humans; without it, we feel vulnerable. My own examples include flying aboard a large commercial jet, the most terrifying position I've experienced. Those who have control are in the cockpit and the control towers, all of which is beyond my grasp. While on a trip overseas once, I awoke to turbulence. Suddenly I was overwhelmed by the thought that there was absolutely no reason why this couldn't be the moment I died. I felt lost without any way to take control and was left trembling at the complete mercy of the plane, its pilots and its mechanics. The only thing left to do was trust in someone else's ability. At that unbearable moment I looked to my climbing background to regain control.

Panting hard, Nathan and I rested before entering the North Gully, a dark chasm wrought between the thousand-foot walls of the Sheriff's Badge and the Zodiac Wall. Our thoughts had struggled to find confidence while we slogged through the steep old-growth forest, but now we had run out of time. The warm August rain pelted our clothes as we hung our heads, our lungs heaving. A westerly wind whipped through the treetops before funnelling into the narrow passage, catching the vapour from our breath and merging it with mist and cloud on its way to the summit. Cold water seeped down my sleeve as I braced myself against the wall. My gaze followed the wind, making me aware of several old fixed lines swaying back and forth across the stained black granite — evidence of past failed attempts.

It was easy to see why those before us had given up on this miserable place. Perpetual moss and mud hung from the walls due to the consistent lack of direct light, and the tattered lifelines all ended in a hanging forest 200 ft. above. Going any further would have meant more jungle-choked corners.

Picking ourselves up, we heaved forward, slipping on the slick talus under our heavy pigs. We were searching for a new line, one that would veer away from that tangled horror. Five hundred feet into the gully, we sloughed off our burdens below the last unclimbed line, a jagged ceiling of bus-sized flakes. The roof blocked any view of what lay above. Without knowing if we had made the right choice, we began unpacking in the darkness, our thoughts already questioning why we had come.

As a climber, I understand fear, since climbing is a game where one purposely puts oneself in situations of reduced control. I believe that you can build tolerance to fear in the same way that your body can become stronger through training. The trick is to find answers to as many of the unknowns as possible; the more you learn about each situation, the less you fear about screwing up and getting hurt.

Nathan Kukathas and I chose a line that would take us out of the North Gully and up the Zodiac Wall. It involved unexplored terrain and difficult aid-climbing

possibilities. A sure means of increasing your tolerance level, aid-climbing regularly puts a climber in the path of fear, because as the difficulty increases, the danger follows suit. All we had to do was find a goal that would make us keep our focus long enough to reach the top, so we selected the Zodiac's most defining feature, a spectacular 20-ft. horizontal roof near the summit.

To me, wall climbing is about getting severely worked and enjoying it. The motivation stems from all the bad energy one can gather during dark rainy winters in Squamish or after bad breaks with girlfriends. This powerful and potentially harmful energy is an aid-climber's asset. It can drive you out of the gloom of everyday life and get you high on a wall. Ryan Treneer and I surfed our motivation wave when we pulled off the second ascent of Andrew Boyd's *I Shot the Sheriff* during the natural-disaster flood in Squamish in October 2003. As people were being lifted by helicopter out of flood zones, we climbed for three days amidst waterfalls and driving rain.

Most find their enthusiasm petering off halfway up a big wall, and bail for no apparent reason. It can take a lot of energy to steam all the way to the top. Wall climbing is hard, stressful and extremely physical, but if you have the right attitude, it can leave you with an experience you will never forget. After ten years of adventures, those routes that have changed me the most are the hard-won big-walls of my youth.

Once we committed to our climb, Nathan and I finally accepted the endless rain. Reaching a ledge above the initial roof on our second day, we discovered what we had feared all along: a blank wall. To our right we could see a corner that might be climbable but would require several large pendulums and a lot of lost height. Nathan's answer to our dilemma was to take the headwall straight on. Thinking this to be an absurd idea, I pegged it as lack of experience and, ignoring him, focused on how to get to the corner. Nathan wouldn't give up, saying that if we managed to climb the face, we would gain the next ledge in only a pitch. Following his gaze, I tried to see what was giving him so much hope. Small, crimp-sized edges littered the vertical face, offset by large blank spots. I also noticed the bus-sized ledge that would be impossible to miss in a fall. Nathan began to get excited at the thought that I might be considering his plan. He pulled out the hand drill and hooks, taking the liberty to clip them onto my harness. "*%$#!" I mumbled to myself. The next protectable feature was over 60 ft. above; what was he thinking? I then focused on our ultimate goal. The washed-out light from the sun illuminated the underside of the huge arched roof far above us, giving me my first view of a 20-ft.-long splitter hand crack shooting straight through the roof's centre.

I had stared at that beautiful roof on the Zodiac Wall for years, and it had been easy to convince Nathan to join me. Nathan's native Australian blood gave him his tightly curled black hair and dark chocolate skin. The 22-year-old didn't fit into any social circles, either in his professional life as an ACMG assistant rock guide or in his personal life as a wandering dirtbag genius. Nathan constantly questioned everything, especially authority, and always saw a "better" way. For example, he would find fault in an anchor system and then dive into serious study until he had redesigned it to his liking, his journal overflowing with sketches and diagrams. Our time together was spent in loud debates over any number of these improved ideas. I had met him while taking Kirk Mathner's infamous Rigging for Rescue course in Invermere, where we both couldn't get enough of the applied physics. Nathan had an immense understanding of design and had previously sewn his own four-season tent, as well as backpacks and technical clothing. I had never met anyone who so easily understood complex rope systems. Here was a guy who loved rigging as much as me! Surely he wall climbed too?

Now, as I balanced my weight onto the 20th hook, the sharp point crumbling the pencil-width edge, I was swearing I had picked the wrong partner. It was too late to turn around; I was completely committed. Scared, I tried to focus on securing the hook. I began slamming my weight up and down on it to test its integrity. The thought that I might suddenly rip from the wall and become welded into the ledge 40 ft. below quickly overwhelmed me with fear. Knowing that the best method to regain control was to fill my mind with the only other emotion that can compete with the power of fear, I became really pissed off. "Come on! Blow off, you son of a bitch!" My voice echoed off the nearby walls, causing Nathan to move away from my line of fall. My raging actions amplified my body weight three to four times and thus gave me the assurance that the hook would not fail. It looked to be another 20 ft. or so above to an expanding flake and, finally, freedom. All I needed to do was resist the temptation to drill.

I had always debated against using power drills on aid-climbs. The time needed to work out each piton, hook or 'head is forever long compared to the seconds required to use a power drill. Choosing to not bring a power drill immediately forces a climber to be more honest. From a precarious position, it can take up to 45 minutes to place a 2-in. bolt by hand. Usually, finding another alternative is more appealing and results in a better style. Above all, I also knew that this was my lead on a first ascent. I therefore had the power to place as many or as few bolts as I wished, and any climber repeating my route would have to respect that decision, although fear can corrupt one's ability to use proper judgment. The hand drill on my hip would enable me to climb as far as I dared until I reached safety or placed a bolt out of fear. If the latter happened, the ethical thing to do would be to turn around and rappel, leaving the route for a better or bolder climber.

Luckily, I was to be spared having to make that decision. The rope hung 55 ft. out, completely suspended except for a lone bird beak that was tweaked into a shallow impression halfway between me and the life-threatening ledge. I was nearing my wit's end when the rock became totally blank two moves before the expanding flake. Thankful that there were no more options, I hammered in the first bolt of the climb, making for an incredible 60-plus ft. of hooking. Nathan took over my lead, and we reached Astro Ledge that evening.

For the next three nights, we survived a torrential downpour by sleeping in a tent protected by the ceiling of a cave on Astro Ledge. Having endured such a high level of fear, I found the rest of the climb to be almost a non-event. We reached the summit roof without incident and were proud that our only bolt placements had been the one on the hooking pitch; a pendulum point out of a wide chimney; and several rappel anchors for getting down. Nathan dispatched the roof quickly, placing bomber gear through the 20-ft. ceiling. Even though the climbing above was hard and the exposure daunting, we were at our most relaxed on this upper section, becoming stronger mentally and feeling more confident with each new day. As we climbed out of the billowing mist on our sixth afternoon, Squamish lay hidden in cloud below us. Free at last of the thick humidity, we felt the sun warm our damp bodies while we tried to savour the last

hours of our climb, knowing we would be back down in the gloom again all too soon. *I would like to dedicate our route to Daryl Hatton; let his nickname and legacy be forever remembered on the big walls of Squamish.*

Summary

Cro-Magnon Man. ***V, 5.10 A4+. Matt Maddaloni, Nathan Kukathas. August 2004.***

access notes: klattasine-homathko

mark grist

MOST PARTIES NOWADAYS fly into the Homathko Icefield, but a relatively cheap and aesthetic alternative exists. In June of 2004, Roger Linington, Jacqui Hudson and I sailed up Bute Inlet and completed a 13-day traverse of the Homathko Icefield on skis. The technical crux of the trip was trying to determine where to leave the boat. One quickly learns that Waddington Harbour offers no refuge, and moorage on the ocean is non-existent. Previous groups sailing up Bute Inlet either had boats small enough to haul out, or tied up to a log boom for two weeks! (CAJ 1998, pp. 91–92). Our persistent inquiries panned out, however, and we made contact with the good folks at Homathko Camp.

Chuck and Sheron are the resourceful caretakers at this delightful spot 3 km up the Homathko River. They also have a dock where we were able to tie up alongside their 60-ft. steel sailboat, which they built over four years of full-time effort. The camp itself would be a great base for climbing (see Mount Bute) or hiking activities in the area and features the largest indoor hot tub I have ever seen. The owners are very accommodating to the outdoor crowd and can provide logistical support in the area, including access to the Waddington Range. (*http://www.parallelaviation.com/homathko/moreinfo.html*)

Chuck was able to drive us just past Mile 30 on the Homathko system, at the lowest reaches of Klattasine Creek. Mother Nature has permanently deactivated the road, in an area well-known for its active geomorphology: In the early 1970s, an estimated two million cubic metres (approximately 330,000 dump trucks) of debris raged down Klattasine Creek and blocked the Homathko River! There is an excellent aerial photograph on the Internet. (*http://www.sfu.ca/~qgrc/people/john/floods.htm*)

Hiking up the road, we encountered difficulties at the confluence of the south and east forks of Klattasine Creek. The bridge had been removed, so crossing the creek took us a good three hours in the pissing rain. Fortunately, using a 50-m rope and the remaining bridge infrastructure, we were able to rig a Tyrolean with a "clothesline" system for quick transfer of gear. Our non-verbal communication skills got a real workout beside such a torrent.

Most parties travelling at times other than peak runoff can expect to reach the Klattasine Glacier in a full day. This approach is also recommended for mountains to the south (*CAJ* 1974, pp. 63–64/*CAJ* 1975, pp. 2–3) and for climbing routes on Mount Klattasine and neighbouring peaks, (*CAJ* 1987, pp. 37–39/*CAJ* 1988, p. 68/*CAJ* 1999, pp. 103–104) an area featured as one of John Clarke's favourite places in the 1988 *CAJ*. (p. 15)

Our final day was a ten-hour push from about 5700 ft. on the Bute Glacier down to the road on Galleon Creek. Experiences ranged from the sublime (standing in the meadows looking at 6800 ft. of relief on the awesome west face of Mount Bute) to the salmonberry (which was twice my height in a patch of avalanche-downed trees). After seven hours of fresh greens, we were ready to appreciate the excellent trail hacked out by Andy Alsager and crew. We then covered in three hours what has taken some parties three days of legendary bushwhacking — among some of the worst John Clarke said he ever encountered. Of course, travel earlier in the season might minimize the amount of bush, but I would still recommend allowing six travel days to complete the Homathko horseshoe.

from carlson to kiltuish

mark grist

"WELL, THIS FABLED *%$# WEATHER of the central coast better get a move on or else we're going to miss it completely!"

Such were the words spoken as we reached the fourth and final food drop of our traverse from Carlson Inlet to Kiltuish Inlet in the Kitimat Ranges of the central coast of B.C. In spite of our best efforts to tempt fate, we didn't encounter bad weather until our final day, August 21, the day the summer of 2004 dissolved into weeks of rain.

Our plan was to link three trips that had previously been done. The first was a ski trip completed in sporting style by Pierre Friele, Ken Legg and Alex Frid in May of 1991 (*CAJ* 1992, "The Kitlope Traverse", pp. 30–33). We would leave their tracks just north of the headwaters of the Kitlope and jog west to join Dave Williams' footprints (*CAJ* 2002, "From Cascade to Mussel", pp. 102–103), which eventually overlapped with a ski trip that, sadly, saw Randy Stoltmann taken from us (*CAJ* 1995, "The Traverse", p. 73).

The morning of our first day, we caught a ride from the dock in Bella Coola with the proprietor of Just for the Halibut Fishing Charters. When he asked us what we were up to, we told him we were going to hike for six weeks, almost to Kitimat. He laughed for the next five minutes. "But don't you guys have anything better to do with your spare time?" It wasn't the first time I've fielded that question, and he then asked if we had shotguns, for all the bears we would encounter. We told him that we had a can of bear spray. He howled the rest of the way to the airport.

After placing four pairs of food buckets, Roger Linington and I began our hiking trip on July 15 on the shores at the head of Carlson Inlet, 40 km northwest of Bella Coola. We had specifically chosen our food-drop sites in out-of-the-way locations, as we were fairly worried about bears raiding our caches. Our pilot, Danny Hodson, had flown several wildlife biologists into the area and figured we didn't have much to worry about.

Our first day saw us on game trails through the woods and making a short final thrash to "Cliff Lake", where seagulls dived and cried in the blustery winds. We had perhaps two hours of bush to reach the alpine the next day, and then it was ridge running for the next five weeks! Highlights of the following days included a clean granite catwalk section of ridge that zigzagged

back and forth for three kilometres, seemingly suspended above the valleys on either side. An afternoon rain shower encouraged us to look for an early campsite on Day 4, and we were only too happy to pitch the tent beside a meadow of pink mountain heather in full bloom. Carrying light packs, we boulder-hopped up the perfect slope right beside a raging creek before having lunch at the glacier-rimmed lake feeding it. We made the first food drop later that afternoon and then basked in the sun, camped on smooth granite with a swimming tarn 3 m away. Bare feet, real fruit jujubes and big smiles were on tap that evening on the Nascall-Kitlope divide.

The weather during the next week was stellar, which we needed. Just down from our first food drop we caught the on-ramp to "Highway 41", the broken line marking the TFL [Tree Farm Licence] 41 boundary, which we would essentially follow for the next two weeks. Unlike Friele's group, which was hampered by bad weather, we were able to stay high on ridges near the headwaters of the Kitlope and managed to sneak through a tricky section with two missing contours. We cast longing glances at Peak 6400 ft. immediately to the east, a real beauty at the extreme headwaters of the Kitlope, but the surrounding terrain was bonkers and would have involved a detour of several days. On Day 9 we also caught our first glimpses of Marmor Peak, the only named mountain along our route. It was still 17 days away, but we were encouraged by seeing it appear larger and larger every time we came up over a rise.

Along with the impeccable weather, we were blessed with fantastic campsites throughout. Roughly 70 per cent of the time, we camped on smooth granite, which was a good indication of our surroundings. Our camp on Day 11 was a real gem: more flat granite, perched above a pancake glacier on one side and a lake (2980 ft.) surrounded by impossibly green slopes on the other side. During dinner, Roger surprised me with a homemade birthday hat and card for my 30th, and it was a treat to fall asleep to the sound of birds chirping that evening. We would later refer to this area as "Ireland"; we lingered the next morning, walking around the south shores of the lake.

The next three days were a grunt and involved many recces and false starts. We lucked out on one section and scampered up a slope with a missing contour — after all other options had proved fruitless. We were pretty knackered when we reached our second food drop on Day 14; over the previous week we had covered 75 km, climbed 21,200 ft. and descended 20,900 ft.

Photo: Mark Grist

We had an unexpected surprise on the morning of Day 17 when Roger managed to raise the Coast Guard with our hand-held marine VHF! We had been too cheap to rent a sat phone, so had brought the VHF in the half-hearted hope of its being any use whatsoever, emergency or otherwise. A short two-hour hike then took us to what Dave Williams had called "the incomparable slab and rock formations of upper Kalitan Creek". We called it heaven, and camped on a sandy beach that sloped gently into a lake hemmed in by two granite whalebacks. Roger explored near camp while I did a clockwise loop around the lake at 3070 ft. and climbed Peak 3800 ft., which had a dilapidated cairn on it. The rest of the afternoon was spent exploring scalloped granite formations, whalebacks and lakes, followed by a quick dip back at our lake. There was more lingering the next morning as we moved through this landscape of lakes and rounded granite.

Over the following few days we cut west, across the grain, and it was tough sledding. I couldn't imagine how Dave Williams and crew made it through this section with limited visibility and in the pouring rain. Soon enough we were above the Mussel River, where the terrain took a big Valium and mellowed right out. We flew along and spirits rose. Just past our third food drop we received "Greetings from the 20th century!" in a message John Clarke had inserted into a summit register atop Peak 5300 ft. at the head of the Mussel River. I wrote a short message, along with greetings from the 21st century.

Two full days of hiking took us to a windy camp 2 km east of Marmor Peak. Along the way, we negotiated a tricky gap and saw a host of fireweed growing in a vertical crack that split a car-sized boulder. The final ridge connecting towards Marmor was littered with goat rubs and provided stupendous views down the East Khutze River.

We spent Day 26 climbing Marmor. From a distance, the north ridge looked much like the southeast ridge and face — aesthetic and inviting. Unfortunately, closer inspection proved them all to be festering choss piles. We opted for the north ridge, which turned out to be glorified kitty litter with a section of steep snow and ice. It was at the limit of what we were comfortable doing with only crampons and a tool each. On top, I was too enthralled with all the distant peaks to notice the remnants of an old gold mine virtually at my feet. We would later learn that an operation from the 1930s was located on the south side of the East Khutze River, only 5 km away.

We continued to roll along in perfect weather, the terrain ideal for ski touring. Just before our last food drop we hit a flat divide that was like a giant maze. I meandered in passageways through white, brown and black marbled granite. Roger happened upon a lead that took him straight through. It would prove lucky for him, as he made a rare sighting of a ker-

mode bear, possibly on its way over to the Kowesas River.

At the last food drop, alpine lassitude really set in. We were well ahead of schedule, and there weren't many enticing side trips or peaks to climb. It didn't help that the forest fires had reduced visibility to about 15 km. Over the remainder of the trip, we would take four good-weather rest days, playing cards and faffing about. We did manage two side trips, climbing a pair of 6100-ft. peaks. The first one had a large cairn built by John Clarke's party in 1994. The huge stone at its apex looked like an oversized Hershey's Kiss. Clearly, there was a dearth of chocolate on our trip! The second 6100-ft. peak was a sombre one to climb, for it was here that Randy Stoltmann had been swept over a cliff by an avalanche.

There was still some spice left in the traverse, however, as an unexpected cliff band contours for several kilometres above many of the glaciers in the upper Cole Creek drainage. We also found a lovely 50-m waterfall pouring into a lake that only appeared as a pocket glacier on the map. The ridges south of Europa Lake made for pleasant hiking with good views to the enticing terrain north of the lake. We shambled along as Marmor Peak shrunk on the horizon to the south.

I would love to say that we skipped down through old growth to the sea, but this trip had a nasty sting in the tail. Perhaps it was retribution for the lack of bushwhacking dues paid thus far. At any rate, we hit a cut block where slash was strewn everywhere; in the thick, freshly rinsed bush, we didn't have a prayer of seeing our feet. Shins took a beating. I might have sworn once. Perhaps several times.

All was soon forgotten when we hit the relative luxury of a cabin at the mouth of Europa Creek, and a note from Stan Hutchings, who does fish counts in the region. The next day, he appeared in his jet boat; ten minutes later we were melting in the hot springs at Europa Bay. Shortly afterwards we satisfied our coffee craving aboard the *MV Hawk Bay* and were fed lasagna and cake made by Karen Hansen while we cruised up to Kitimat. It was the exclamation point to a superlative trip.

Details/Comments

Our route (excluding side trips) was 194 km long and took 25 travel days, with two rappels. We carried a 30-m, 7-mil rope, but if glaciers keep melting, a 50-m rope (or more) is recommended. There were about half a dozen mini-cruxes along the way; in every case, however, several options exist (including swimming). We were out for 37 days, and lost only 3.5 days to bad weather! In most years, one could probably expect close to two weeks in the tent. A fast party travelling light might complete this traverse in as little as 18 travel days. Special thanks to Dave Williams, who gave us the idea for this trip.

talchako NE ridge — up in smoke

drew brayshaw

A grey mist gathered, and rising slowly to a great height like smoke from a fire, as a pale shrouded figure it loomed over the Hill. For a moment it wavered, looking to the West; but out of the West came a cold wind, and it bent away, and with a sigh dissolved into nothing.

— J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King*

Ray Borbon, from Seattle, had been planning this trip ever since he flew out from Monarch the previous year. On and off through winter and spring I received invitations to climb and tantalizing photos via e-mail. I hate making plans in advance, so I didn't commit to the trip until about two weeks before we left, by which time the trip was fully organized. Ray, James Nakagami, Fred Beckey and I drove to Bella Coola on July 24. The trip was enlivened by forest-fire smoke so thick we could stare at giant sunspots with the naked eye, and by Fred's zombie-like shopping technique in Williams Lake, which was a real hit with the locals — the Old Man of the Mountains wandering down the aisle of the local SaveOn with a shopping cart containing 15 identical bricks of cheddar. In Bella Coola that night, the aurora pulsed in time with a soundless techno track while seals barked out near the log boom as we bivied on the beach.

The next day, we flew in to a base camp southeast of Talchako Mountain with Richard LaPointe of West Coast Helicopters. We were directly across the canyon of the Talchako River from the Lonesome Fire, and its huge smoke plume was a central feature of camp life for the next week. The Talchako (Ulkatcho for "whitewater") valley is described by Clayton Mack as one of the last dwelling places of the sasquatch; gazing down its length, I could well believe it. The *sninik* — a supernatural, sasquatch-like creature the colour of a blue jay which eats the bodies of the dead and is named after the outflow winds of winter — is also said to live in the Talchako valley. We didn't get visited by either of these valley denizens during our stay at Talchako, however.

On Monday, we got up and grabbed our packs at 4 a.m., ready to try the northeast buttress of Talchako. Fred's back was acting up, so he went back to bed. James also sacked out again. Ray and I ate breakfast and wandered over to the base of the buttress to scout out an approach route. We ended up crossing the toe of the northeast glacier and spending the day scrambling up the southeast flank of the easternmost summit of the four-spired peak northeast of Talchako. A little bit of fourth class and a lot of scree got us to the summit and excellent views of the ridge that was our objective. Rotten, overhanging gaps separated us from the other spires, so we headed down and back to camp, ending a 10-hour day.

The next day, we woke up in a bank of fire smoke. This lasted all day, visibility ranging from minimal to hazy. Ray, Fred and James all lay around camp while I walked down to some lakes to the south and took a peek across the canyon of Jacobsen Creek to Mount Ratcliff. Crossing the canyon looked difficult to impossible, which put our Plan B out of the picture.

On Wednesday, James, Ray and I left camp early and headed off to the northeast buttress. I had some doubts about rock quality on our line, but for Ray and James it was the line they had come to do and changing plans was not an option. It took us about four hours to hike to the base, and we climbed 16 pitches that day. The first 10 or so were fifth-class rock, mostly in the 5.6 range with a few harder bits. We stayed near the buttress crest at first but were then forced off left by overhanging sections. Eventually, we trended into a gentle gully feature about 150 m left of the crest which went at fourth class with copious loose rock on ledges and trickling meltwater from the snow patches above. Near Pitch 15 we ran into our first snow patch, which turned out to basically be ice. We skirted its left edge on

easy mixed ground and found a broad ledge system just over the crest on the north face. At the top of this ledge system, we set up an excellent bivy on a sidewalk-style ledge above an 800-m drop.

The night was long and cold. Our various bivy systems all sucked in the name of lightness, and we shivered throughout. When the east glowed pink we got up and Ray shared out a can of beef stew. After ceremoniously sacrificing the empty can to the void, we climbed onto the ice and ran a couple of pitches up it. Now, we had only three screws — and three pickets, which Fred had insisted we carry. As it turned out, the pickets were unplaceable, so the first belay of the day was off an Android leash and the clip-in loop of the third tool, which I was using as a hammer.

A few rope lengths higher, we climbed three pitches up a steep rock band separating the two snow patches on the upper arête. This proved to be the crux and featured steep, wandering climbing to 5.8 on large holds; exposed rubble arêtes; and a bit of mixed in a chimney for good measure. When we hit the second snow patch, we hit another sidewalk-ledge system at its left edge and followed that on the east side of the crest. This ledge system offered easy walking broken by vertical rock steps of a half-pitch or so, and there were several more sections of 5.8 between the easy bits.

The last couple of pitches to the east summit forced us back onto the snow, which had a thin slush crust over the ice. At around noon we topped out on the route after about 11 pitches of climbing that day and stopped for a lunch break on the east summit. None of us knew which way the descent route went, so Ray and I got into a major argument over it while James laughed at us. We ended up deciding to summit the remaining peaks in order to get a view of the lay of the land. Ray and James went to the central summit while I bypassed it on my way to the west summit and then climbed back to them. The west summit is the highest, whereas the central one has the original George Whitmore summit register in an old Klim tin.

Once on the summit, we got some idea of the descent. There was a lot of steep scree to descend — and a bit of icy snow, which we did our best to avoid. A couple of sections edged into fourth class, but mostly we rode talus. James has a permanently injured knee, so he found the descent to be rather gruelling and went slowly.

A thousand metres lower, we exited our descent couloir and began contouring along the base of the south face. One final obstacle, a deep gully, lay between us and camp. This took some time to get through, and our final route involved fourth- and low-fifth-class scrambling and a bit of inventive tree pulling. We were back in camp by 5 p.m.; Fred was actually so glad to see us back that he cooked dinner.

Our radio had no line of sight to make contact with Bella Coola, so we were stuck in camp until Richard made the pre-arranged pickup on the Sunday. Our last two days were spent lazing around, smoking, tanning, cragging on a bluff near camp and watching Fred do some sort of Tai Chi. We were all glad when the chopper came to whisk us back to civilization, and visual and gastronomical treats such as cheeseburgers, 24-hour news stations, and women.

Summary

The northeast ridge or buttress of Talchako rises about 1000 m. We climbed 30 pitches, but some were short, so the route is probably only 27 pitches long. The climbing was up to 5.8 and AI3 (60-degree, icy mixed). The overall grade was about V or TD–.

F.A.: Ray Borbon, Drew Brayshaw, James Nakagami. July 28–29, 2004.

camping on drabble

meg jabusch

EVERYBODY TAKES PICTURES of the mountains. It's because they're shocking. They rise out of the earth like bones, or teeth. Driving through the Rockies at dawn is like watching monsters solidify in the air around you. The impulse to grab a camera and start snapping pictures is irresistible.

I've seen thousands of pictures of mountains. Snowy peaks; craggy peaks; people smiling and hugging on the edges of things; people hanging from vertical walls of rocks; grainy photos; snow in sharp relief — the works. Some of the pictures are beautiful, frame-worthy even, and yet they always have an odd effect on me. They make me feel as if mountains aren't real, or as if they're as unattainable as other planets. The pictures lack the spirit of mountains. They're missing the emptiness, that sensation in your chest which comes from staring out at a huge entity that does not need you at all. It's not often that photographs capture humbling awe.

It's hard to find time to get out and camp in the mountains, especially in the middle of the school term. It's hard to figure out where to go, who to go with, what to bring and, well, how not to get lost and die. I was thrilled this October when Sandy organized a trip out to Mount Drabble and invited members of the UVic Outdoors Club. I'd never heard of Mount Drabble and couldn't help but notice that the name combined all the eloquence of "babble" with the dubious charm of "dribble", but when I heard that we would be camping on the summit in an alpine meadow, I was in.

Sandy told us that it would be a six-hour hike uphill, but that it would be worth it because the views would be "fine". It's funny, because to me, "fine" means something pretty okay, like having sandwiches for lunch or walking only a couple of blocks to the bus stop every morning. Just... fine. It turns out that what Sandy meant was that the entire walk up the mountain would be through gorgeous, dark trees and patches of sharp, bright rock. He meant that in the fall, the alpine meadows turn into a spectrum of colour. The deep, dark green of the pines, the juiced-red and carrot-orange of the leaves, the tiny, pale purple flowers and the pure blue of a clear sky all gathered and reflected in the alpine lakes in a way that would make a rainbow jealous. It was one of those times when the world seems to have taken everything awesome out of a country and tucked it into one enchanted place.

My bag was kinda heavy. It was hot. My shirt was sticking to my back. When someone suggested swimming, I couldn't say no. We ran to the edge of some random lake and hopped in. I would guess that the surface of the lake looked beautiful, lying serenely on a plain halfway up into the sky, but given that the water actually stopped my heart, I was too busy clawing my way back onto the rocks to notice. I recommend jumping into an alpine lake, but expect cold toes.

This is getting long, so I'll cut to the view from the summit. We set up camp on a plain of rock and moss, with a ring of mountains all around us. Standing beside the summit cairn felt like being on a bull's eye. We watched the sun drop behind one range of mountains and then turned to see the moon slide up from behind another. It was odd, because we were watching the sky do what it does every night, but to see it

from such an isolated vantage point forced the realization that the everyday life of the sky is one of the strangest and most beautiful things ever.

In the morning, I turned a full circle and stared out across the fields of peaks and sky. The feeling of being alive in the middle of something that couldn't care less about my existence was incomparable. Standing on that silent plain at five in the morning, surrounded by air and rock, I reached for my camera and then changed my mind. I knew that I couldn't pin down that feeling. The trip was a good time.

Summary

This was a trip organized by Sandy Briggs for the Student Outdoor Club Affiliation Program with the University of Victoria Outdoors Club. It took place October 2–3, 2004. About 13 students participated, as well as several ACC members, including official co-leader Gerta Smythe.

overland to waddington

caroline van hemert

On July 28, 2004, Patrick Farrell, age 24, and I (Caroline Van Hemert), age 25, began the approach to Mount Waddington following the Mundays' first 1926 attempt via Coola Creek. This journey proved to be unusual in several ways. First, we approached overland, unsupported, from the ocean, a route that hasn't been reported since the late '70s. We planned to approach from the water in a single push, without ferrying loads or receiving air assistance. Also, before arriving at our jumping-off point, we sailed from Bellingham, Wash., in a 27-ft. Catalina up Bute Inlet in southwestern British Columbia and up the heavily silted Homathko River. At low tide, the mud flats surrounding the mouth of the Homathko are too shallow even for a tiny skiff, so we pored over the tide book and hoped for the best, making only a one-knot headway against the river's strong current. We moored our boat at a logging camp on the east side of the Homathko River and were shuttled across via skiff by Chuck Burchill, the resident caretaker, who brought us to the mouth of Coola Creek.

From here, we planned to follow the recommendation from Don Serl's *The Waddington Guide*, which suggests that Scar Creek, a different approach route, should be avoided at all costs, thus leaving Coola Creek as a supposedly favourable alternative. Our experience was to suggest otherwise. We battled head-high devil's club and tightly woven thimble- and salmonberry bushes growing atop steep, previously clear-cut slopes. This disturbed Pacific Northwest rain forest proved to be so impenetrable that we took off our packs and rolled them ahead of us in order to pack down some of the thorny vegetation enough to climb over it. In this horrendous terrain, we at times made only a mile in over eight hours of exertion, one of us sometimes bracing the other while trying to scramble up or over downed logs and the thrashed, uneven hillside.

Photo: Patrick Farrell

After eventually reaching the glacier, we were unable to follow the suggested route — which skirted along the edge of the glacier between the rock and ice — due to significant glacial retreat. The glacier was also far too broken up at its terminus to permit access, and thus we continued on through the forest and joined the Scar Creek approach route on top of the ridge leading to Pivot Dome. From here, we accessed the Waddington Glacier, and travelled without problems other than being pinned down by weather at the Agur-Munday col at 9100 ft. We dropped down to the Corridor Glacier and wrapped around the impressive southwest face of Mount Waddington to our final high camp, at 7000 ft. on the Dais Glacier.

The next morning, July 4, we began our ascent under a nearly full moon, heading up the Dais Glacier to an alternate couloir line about 150 yds. to climber's right of the commonly ascended Dais Couloir. This route would not be visible from camp on the Dais Glacier, as it lies between the Dais Couloir and prominent left-leaning couloirs to the right. Accessing the couloir presented a snow step of half a lead, followed by 650 ft. of ice up to 50 degrees. To our knowledge, this variation had not previously been climbed. We summited the Northwest Peak that afternoon under beautiful skies (route rating: Alpine Grade D).

Due to the unfavourable conditions of our approach route, we decided to return to the Homathko River via Scar Creek, despite the miserable reports that had put us off earlier. The return to the Homathko River down the Scar Creek drainage, while very steep at times, offered much more feasible travel than did Coola Creek, and we would recommend this approach over the latter. During our entire 11-day trip we encountered no other people, only a cougar, a brown bear and a wolverine.

niut ranging 2004

drew brayshaw

Our 2002 trip to the Niut Range is described in the 2003 *CAJ*. In 2003, we went back to the range, but in three days never got past Don's cabin at Little Sapeye Lake. It was snowing heavily and Mike never got a decent window to take us in. In 2004, the weather was good when we arrived, and pretty soon the White Saddle Air chopper was dropping off Gord Betania, Don Serl and me in the same valley southwest of Whitesaddle Mountain where we had camped in 2002. Our objectives

were more or less what we had failed on that year.

On our first day, we slept in and enjoyed a late start. Don skied up to the east face of Quartz Peak to have a look at proposed lines up close, while Gord and I separately visited some granite towers on the divide between our camp and Whitesaddle. I ended up climbing the two easternmost and highest of these "Pan Pipe Towers", which we named for the goat hoofprints found on the easternmost summit. The rock was solid and the traverse went at a fourth-class standard.

That night, a storm came in and raged for 24 hours. It snowed heavily. We sat in the tents, drinking whisky and brandy and reading. By bedtime I had gotten 600 pages into *Little Dorritt* and was starting to worry about the possibility of being tent-bound for a week.

Tuesday morning dawned sunny, but there was about 20 cm of fresh snow draped over everything. We were obviously going to have to give things a chance to settle down and solidify. I skied up-valley to Quartz in order to re-establish the track, while Don and Gord climbed a minor scree heap above camp. Wednesday was a beautiful day, but we didn't think that the snow was stable enough yet, and spent another day making small day trips out of camp. Gord skied and scrambled up Peak 8700, the highest point in the cirque northwest of our camp, while I bagged "Sierra Tower" and "Splitter Tower", a pair of granite spires between Peak 8700 and the Pan Pipes. Again the climbing was fourth-class on solid rock with a bit of fresh snow.

By now the snow appeared to have consolidated, so we decided to have a crack at one of our big objectives. The east face of Quartz was a line we had bailed off in 2002, stymied by slushy snow and rockfall after a later-than-it-should-have-been 4 a.m. start. This day we got up very early, left camp at 2 a.m., and skied to the face in the dark. We left our skis at the base and started climbing by headlamp, soloing up the lower couloir, which was excellent, squeaky, fifty-degree névé. After climbing 350 m up the couloir, we detoured to the northeast ridge at a prominent col just as the sun rose, disregarding a short water-ice pitch above because we believed the couloir above that would dead-end at a blank, vertical headwall.

From the notch, we began soloing up the northeast ridge. The climbing consisted of snow-covered rock in the fourth- to easy-fifth-class range. Don was out in front with the rack; Gord and I were behind with the ropes. Gord started getting a little rattled, but Don was too far ahead to hear Gord's suggestion that we stop and rope up, leading to an amusing (in retrospect) chase up the ridge as Gord tried to get close enough to Don to yell at him.

Once we roped up, we climbed several more pitches of steep-ish snow, rock bands and easy mixed, approaching a major steepening of the ridge which formed an impressive tower. Don managed to trigger one small slab avalanche while working up a hanging snowfield. At the base of the tower, we regrouped and considered our options. I was the only one who had brought rock shoes, so we decided on a line traversing around the north face of the tower on mixed ground, rather than the steep, solid-looking rock on the tower's south side. Don led off on a traverse across steep mixed terrain as ice feathers warmed by the sun dropped on him from the looming wall above. He vanished out of sight around a corner and was out of hearing range for what seemed like rather a long time. Then our ropes came tight. Assuming that we were on belay, Gord started climbing, followed by me.

I came around the corner into sight of the rest of the party to hear Don telling Gord not to climb up to him but to stay where he was at a small stance in a gully, about 10 m below the belay. Then Don informed me that he had broken the frame on one of his crampons and that his anchor was not all that secure. I rapidly concluded that it was my lead and climbed up to Don. Taking the gear from him, I set out on vertical rock only to drop one of my tools. Gord retrieved it as it tumbled down to him, and sent it up to Don, who got it to me. I placed a rickety nut, then climbed up a bit higher only to have my other tool detach. This was my first time trying out Android leashes in the mountains, and I was beginning to regret it. Gord retrieved this one too, but I decided to continue to the top with just one tool, as the distance between us was too great to get the second tool back up to me easily. I found some more gear just as my first nut fell out, and worked my way up through vertical rock on big holds at about M4. I pulled onto a snowfield above the rock, climbed back to the ridge crest and belayed off a stance and my remaining Quark planted into the snow. Fortunately, Don and Gord were able to climb up to me without difficulty.

Don repaired his crampon with some webbing and a zap strap and then set out along the snow arête. It whumped a bit and he began to clean the slab away with his tools but nonetheless triggered a large slab that nearly swept him off the ridge. Gord began calculating how long it would take us to retreat down the ridge, and concluded that we would suffer. Meanwhile, Don finished his lead and made it to some rock and a solid belay. Two more pitches got us to the summit at just about the same time as a snowstorm swept in. We found the first-ascent party's cairn, then hurriedly down-climbed back to a notch on the west ridge for a bit of a rest break. Given the snow conditions, we decided that there was only one way down: a long traverse along the southeast flank of the mountain to Peak 8500, which I had climbed in 2002, and then a circuitous descent into the next cirque south of our camp, followed by a traverse around the toe of the intervening ridge, and a climb back to our camp.

We made this long descent, although it was not pleasant. Aside from one rappel, there was nothing technical, but it was nonetheless long and exhausting. We had been out of food and water for hours; on the last ascent to camp, I found myself stopping every twenty steps to eat snow and to rest. It was past 11 p.m. by the time I got back to camp, giving something like a 22-hour day. I fell asleep with the stove on while melting water for Don and Gord, who were carrying the wet ropes and were some distance behind me.

On Friday morning we awoke to the certain knowledge that we were all too worked to do any more climbing. We called Mike on the radio and spent the day packing up camp. Gord trudged back up to the east face of Quartz, and skied back to camp carrying Don's and my skis and poles on his back. When Mike picked us up we were just light enough for him to take off in the thin air, and the heavily laden chopper carried us out of the mountains and back to Chilcotin hospitality.

Summary

First ascents of "the Scree Heap"; Peak 8700; the two easternmost towers of the five "Pan Pipes"; "Sierra Tower"; and "Splitter Tower" — all minor summits located between Quartz Peak and Whitesaddle Mountain. Difficulties in the second- to fourth-class range; Alpine grades F to PD+. *May 10–12, 2004.*

First ascent of the east face / northeast ridge on Quartz Peak, and second ascent of the mountain; 600 m, 5.8 M4 with snow to fifty degrees; Alpine Grade D/D+. *May 13, 2004.*

close to home 2004

drew brayshaw

In addition to the bigger routes in the more remote parts of the Coast Mountains, described in separate articles, I spent a lot of time in the mountains near home this summer and did a few things perhaps worth describing.

In mid-March, frustrated by wet weather in Squamish, Fern Webb and I took a crack at the large and mysterious crag of Arthur Seat, located above the Trans-Canada Highway in the Thompson Valley near Spences Bridge. This face saw two routes developed in the 1960s, was listed in Culbert's 1974 guidebook, and has suffered from disinterest since then; according to Lyle Knight, it features mostly "70s climbing", or routes undertaken in order to get to the top of a face rather than for their climbing aesthetics. Fern and I didn't know what to expect in terms of rock quality, but I figured it could not be any worse than the nauseating schist of the Cayoosh Wall, which I had climbed in 2003. Also, when you drive up and down the canyon a lot, commuting from home to ice climbs near Lillooet, you begin to get some idea of the possible lines on the Seat — or "Art's Ass", as Culbert renamed it. I had actually driven up to Spences Bridge in 2003 hoping to solo something on the Ass, but after gazing at it for an hour through binoculars, I psyched myself out of attempting it.

We drove up one morning and left the car parked at the first switchback on the Murray Creek road, then traversed benches above a Thompson ranch towards the base of the face, encountering gluey clay and prickly pear cactus. A long, slow climb up a talus cone spilling from one of the gullies on the face got us to the base of the wall later than we might have liked. The start of the 1963 Culbert route seemed to suffer from gravel ledges, so we set out up the next major rib to its right. After scrambling up several hundred metres of third-class terrain, we hit a major notch and the remnants of the winter snowpack. Unable to find a compelling route across the notch and with an early-spring snow squall moving in rapidly, we elected to bail down the next gully north of our rib, which involved several precarious rappels, downclimbing sections of fifth-class scree masquerading as rock, and a chopped rope.

In late May, not long after coming back from the Niut Range, and with more crappy weather in Squamish, I headed back up to the Ass. Fern had a sprained ankle, and no one else was interested in a loose nonentity, even if it was 800 m high. However, I had gained confidence from the previous attempt and I believed that I could climb something on the crag. I made several unusual choices: I took no rope, hoping that if I decided to bail I would downclimb whatever I climbed up. I took a helmet and a pair of rock shoes. I didn't tell anyone where I was going. And finally, I didn't leave Chilliwack until 10 a.m., and didn't leave the car until noon. I suppose that I had more than half figured that this would be just another reconnaissance trip.

On the hike in, the cacti were flowering and I encountered a herd of bighorn sheep playing in the boulder field. When I got to the base of the wall, I set out on the same line Fern and I had taken. From our high point, I then downclimbed into the notch where we had bailed from the previous time, and went up the other side, only to encounter a second, much steeper, hidden notch about 50 m beyond. I tried for the longest time to find a route on the north side down into the notch, but everything was overhanging and mossy, and large blocks the size of a television would shift noticeably when weighted. Back on the ridge crest, I finally decided to try the south face of the ridge; after downclimbing ledges for 10 m, I found a reasonable, mid-fifth-class traverse route on nasty, wobbly stacked flakes across the wall below the notch and onto more solid rock on the far side.

From here the ridge steepened notably. I climbed up near the crest until I came to an area where a thick granitic dyke diagonalled across the ridge, cutting through the old sea-floor volcanics making up the bulk of the Ass. The left side of the dyke was overhanging, so I scrambled down the gully on its right side until I found a crack cutting through to more amenable terrain above. I had to put my rock shoes on for the first few overhanging boulder moves and managed to get through the 5.9 fist jamming into easier terrain above. A short 5.8 section then eased into a traverse right and a half-pitch or so up a 5.7 V-chimney groove thing.

After changing back into scrambling shoes, I worked up another long, easy, forested section to the third notch, which is at the base of a steep 300-m headwall. I downclimbed slanting gravel ramps into the notch and could find nothing on the headwall that seemed believable as a solo, so I traversed down and right into the head of a mammoth gully system that splits the Ass from bottom to top. This gully forks higher up; I got into its left fork and climbed to where it dead-ends in steep walls. I tried one line, then another, but couldn't find moderate terrain. I decided to climb out right and have a go at the arête between the two gullies.

About fifty metres up the arête, the ledges and holds ran out and I had to put the rock shoes back on while sitting on a little pinnacle. The wall above looked like about 10 hard moves up a vertical face and a little overlap, then easier terrain again. I spent a long time psyching up and trying to empty my mind of distractions, then set out. Unfortunately, after only seven moves, I broke a foothold and found myself hanging tightly on two crimps, trying to persuade myself that I could downclimb what I had just come up. The options were not particularly attractive, and eventually I got back to the little pinnacle, where I indulged in a good bout of swearing, trembling and the cold sweats.

Not really wanting to downclimb all the way back down to the prickly pears and face defeat, I decided to see if I could find my way into the right branch of the great Y gully. I slid down scree and grovelled in dirty cracks before finally standing in the bed of the right fork of the gully. The next bit was sort of like a canyoneering adventure, but uphill. The gully bed was full of perched stones and I was quite glad that I was soloing and not kicking stones down onto a climbing partner. There were a couple of short, vertical steps, and chimneys with chockstones — the type of thing so characteristic of horrible gully climbs — and after finishing with a pitch or two of wet, dirty face climbing, I suddenly found myself on top of the Ass, watching the sun sink in the west.

Unwilling to finish my adventure so easily, I decided to walk off the plateau by going north and ended up making a convoluted descent through steep forest and scree chutes to the Murray Creek road. A black bear kept me company, ensuring that I did not loiter on the hike back to my car. I made it to the Canyon Alpine Restaurant

in Boston Bar just before they closed the kitchen, rather perversely satisfied with the day. (III, 5.9; route is about 1400 m long, but ninety per cent of that is second- to fourth-class scrambling, and there are maybe half a dozen short fifth-class pitches.)

In mid-June I managed to significantly injure my shoulder and leave several pieces of gear on the mountain while exploring in the Anderson River range. This seemed to set the tone for the whole summer. In search of easier objectives, I hiked into Wall Creek in Cathedral Park with Merran Fahlman over Canada Day. Although it was supposedly a dry summer accompanied by severe fire hazard, the Wall Creek trail was a bit of a swamp, and our progress up the trail at times resembled wading more than hiking.

Once set up in Wall Creek Meadows, we discussed potential lines; the next day, we ended up climbing the classic Matriarch to Grimface traverse via a new start up a four-pitch line on the southwest face of Matriarch. We scrambled up the broad gully to the left of the *Lady Fanny of Omaha* buttress and started about 50 m right of a prominent orange wall that can be seen from base camp. Two long, easy pitches of low-fifth-class flakes and corners up the left side of a belt of slabs gave way to two more pitches (5.8, 5.8+) up a continuous left-facing dihedral. The last pitch pulled over onto the summit plateau of Matriarch, just below the 10-m-high summit boulder (II, 5.8+).

The continuation of the route along the traverse to Grimface was as enjoyable as I remembered it from several years previously. It was enlivened by a couple of dumb incidents such as stuck ropes and a "nearly a fall" slip while we were contouring exposed slabs. On our descent of the massive and sandy scree slopes below Grimface, we noted an intriguing line on the unclimbed south face of Grimface proper. At the time, it was a drainage chute catching the last of the snowmelt, but we speculated that later in the season, when dry, it might be an enjoyable line — probably requiring some aid, at least for us.

By the time Labour Day rolled around, we had decided that this line was probably dry and that it was high time it got climbed. We drove back up to Cathedral with huge racks of gear, and sorted them in the morning, ending up nonetheless with seriously overloaded packs (I think mine weighed about 40 kg) due to the tube chocks, #5 Camalots and other wide crack gear we carried in anticipation of some wideness. The Labour Day weekend was very cold and we could see some fresh snow on nearby peaks, but we reasoned incorrectly that Grimface would be dry by virtue of its sunny aspect.

After plodding back up to the Meadows, we were caught in a storm and spent most of the rest of the day in the tent or hanging out beneath overhanging boulders. The next day, we actually went so far as to lug all the gear up to the base of the wall, but the frequent snow showers and the ice feathers riming the summit rocks were not all that conducive to motivation and we turned tail and fled.

Discussing potential salvage-the-weekend plans, such as going sport climbing at Skaha, put me in mind of an old route in the Anderson River range, of which I had climbed the first pitch ten years previously (*CAJ* 1995). That night we drove through Princeton and Merritt and up the Coldwater road to a camp below Zum Peak. The next day was cold but started off clear, and we hiked up to the base of Alpaca Peak's northeast face in about two hours as pikas chirped at us from the moraines. The line I remembered was one that John Simms and I had attempted the day after climbing *Purple People Eaters*; we had retreated after one pitch in the face of time pressures and wetness. It was pretty interesting to see how much lusher the cracks on the face had become in 2004 compared to those in my memories and slides from 1994.

This time around, I climbed the lower two-thirds of the pitch John had led in '94, and then deviated out left across a long traverse and up a low-angle corner to a belay in a vegetated sentry box. Merran started up a beautiful fist crack off the belay, but ran out of quality climbing higher up. I sat with a trickle of water running down the rock, trying to prevent it from running into my rock shoes, while bits of turf and muffled curses floated down from above. Eventually, she found a way through to the belay.

After following, I led a long pitch up and over a series of flake ledges — easy climbing but a lack of solid protection — to a good belay below a smooth white corner. Merran's pitch up the corner was one of the most interesting of the climb: a low-angle off-width and stemming corner where the low-friction, glacier-polished walls made precision footwork necessary. The last pitch was a ledge walk to a short wall, and we topped out about 300 m east of the summit. We called the route *Al-Pika Slabs* (II/III, 5.8).

In early October, Don Serl, Steven Harng and I made a trip to Robertson Peak, an isolated high summit northwest of the Chehalis, between Stave River and the head of Harrison Lake. Robertson was first climbed by Doug Kasian and Ross Lillie in February 1978; to the best of our knowledge, it had never been repeated, despite some strong attempts. The original approach via Tretheway Creek is now a tangled jungle of 25-year-old slide alder, but a new road was punched up Tipella Creek in the late 1990s. Don and I had tried Robertson in 2002 via this road, only to fall victim to a punctured tire. Steve and Jordan Peters had taken a poke up Tipella Creek in 2003, but turned around at a massive fallen Douglas fir blocking the road.

This time around, Don, Steve and I drove up the west side of Harrison Lake and then up the Tipella Creek road to the fallen tree. A half-hour hike took us from the tree to the road end, from which we plunged directly into the famous Chehalis bush. After crossing a massive slide alder flat and splashing across Tipella Creek, we found easy hiking through open forest for a while and began climbing up the creek draining the cirque between Robertson and nearby Mount Thirsk. The open forest ran out into more Chehalis-style alder jungles, and we spent several hours bashing through alders and hand-over-handing up vegetated bush lines running across the walls flanking the head of the creek before gaining whaleback rock slabs and a campsite at the outlet of the cirque's lake.

The next morning, we got up relatively early and scrambled up the long ridge running northeast from the summit of Robertson. After several hours of moving over perfect granite, we reached a gendarme, Peak 2011 m, not far northeast of the summit but with a 100-m-deep gap separating it from Robertson proper. Getting into the gap looked rather technical and the terrain from the gap to the summit of Robertson also seemed rather technical for the speed at which we were moving. Instead, we backtracked, downclimbed, and traversed west from lower down on the northeast ridge to gain the glacier north of Robertson, which we followed to the col between Robertson's main and west peaks. From the col, easy-fourth-class climbing took us to the summit, which showed no traces of any visitation since Kasian and Lillie — in fact, not even a trace of *them*,

probably because on their February ascent the snow cover was too deep to allow for cairn construction.

We descended back down the glacier, out to the lake and our campsite. In an effort to avoid the bush that had plagued our ascent route, we traversed north across the lake outlet and into forest beyond, crossing several gullies before picking one we thought would get us through the cliffs below. As it turned out, we had to do some steep tree downclimbing and make one rappel to get through the cliffs, but our route from there out, hugging the north side of the lower valley, was less bushy than our approach line. We made it back to Don's vehicle just after sunset and out to Chilliwack by midnight. The next weekend, the Indian summer high collapsed and the fall monsoon began.

line of fire

kevin mclane

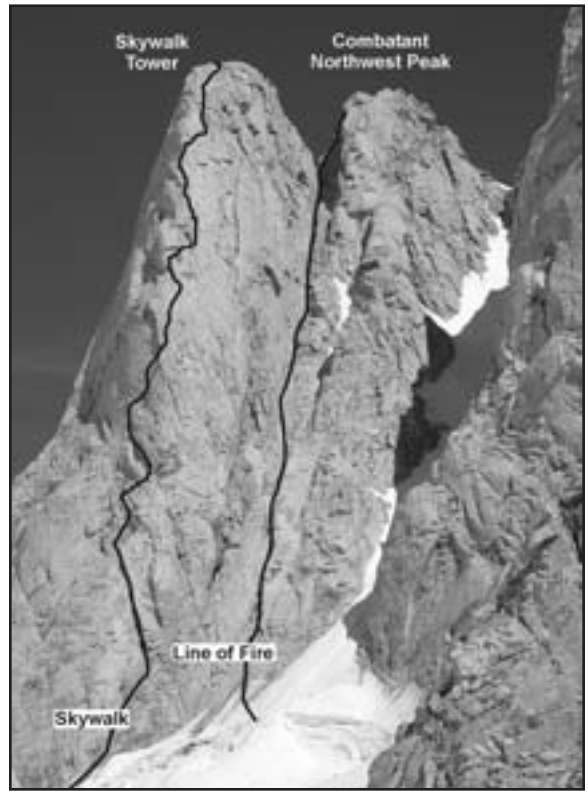
THE SUN ROSE over Waddington's high tower as we sorted ropes and gear at the frosty bergschrund below the Great Couloir of Combatant. Chris, feeling more lively than me, began a long diagonal traverse up left to reach the start of the icy runnel we had come to climb, ominously pocked with stones and grey with grit. I led on into steeper and narrowing ice, rock pressing close on each side. A few more pitches followed of much the same: steep but never excessive; rock to the side for a grating crampon; always just enough gear or a screw. The high rock walls of the Southwest Tower and the Middle Buttress began to close in around us.

The couloir opened up after four pitches, and we began to feel uncomfortably exposed to the high-pitched whining that was flying overhead every few minutes. Now it thwacked and smacked too close for comfort. We hugged the left-side wall, avoiding the centre. Screws in ice that seemed as hard as bell metal gave comfortable if muscle-rending security, and we clipped the odd cam left by what looked like epic descents off *Skywalk*. As we passed, we unclipped and kept the cams. Fat booty, we thought, until Robert Nugent showed up at my door a couple of months later to claim "his" gear. I had never thought a Scotsman could own so many cams.

We made long pitches, stretching the 60-m ropes till they sang. The sun was now fully onto the upper reaches of the mountain and we had a wary eye to its movement towards the top of our couloir. Sure enough, as it burst onto the east wall of the Southwest Tower, ice loosened after its frosty night sojourn, and rocks followed, taking with them more rocks for the merry ride. Our side-wall hugging took on an urgent appeal. I led over the first of the short, steep water-ice bulges that would be the hallmark of every pitch on the steeper upper half, emerging into an icy, stone-scarred widening. I cut the pitch short at 50 m and headed across to a covering side wall on the right. Chris led on, smooth and steady, sun now all around him.

Fifty metres above, he seemed to be about to belay, and I stripped out my station, ready to go. He was taking an uncharacteristic length of time; something must be troublesome. In the name of haste and efficiency, I began to step out and start up. But I held back, a-wondering. As I hesitated, waiting for something, an alarming crash resonated in the air, and heavy grinding and banging began high above. I saw a shower of dark, fast-moving things in the sky. Cascading stones ricocheted off the walls, accompanied by pounding, cracking thuds, whirring thwacks, a frenzy of banging and crashing, and explosions erupting from the couloir ice. It went as fast as it came, and silence reigned again, the smell of blasted rock heavy in the air. I hurried on, gasping my way up to reach Chris tucked safely below a bulge. The whole lot had spewed a couple of metres over his head. If you climb with Chris and he takes a while to set up a belay, be assured there's a very good reason.

The rope showed a lengthening strip of white where it should have been blue. Our two ropes had become one and a half; oh well, better than one. On we went. The final, fourteenth pitch to the top of the couloir was perhaps the hardest: vertical ice below an overhanging chockstone. I stemmed high enough to throw a leg out and up, and somehow thrutched and rolled on top of the chockstone to confront a mass of loose rock, much of which wanted to urgently head for Chris. One got away, smacking him painfully on the leg. I made it up the rest of the teetering mess, and huddled in a tight notch as the wind howled around me. Four pitches of rock left to go.



Photos: Kevin McLane

Chris took off up clean stone in the sun — steep, strenuous and jammy — to reach a spacious ledge, the first we had encountered in 15 long pitches. An appreciated brew later, we finished off up easier

rock to the summit. We were greeted by a startling sight to the north and west: vast, mushrooming clouds of evil-looking smoke filled the skies with crisis — the fire lines of that hot, dry summer.

At that point, however, it was someone else's problem, so we turned to brewing up on the beautiful Northwest Peak of Combatant, facing Waddington. That sustained us for the descent down the picturesque, weaving ridge to the top of the west slope of the mountain. Then began a long, tedious and wearisome front-point descent on crumbling rain crust overtop hard, snowy ice down a face alive with cascading rivers of wet ice crystals. But there comes an end to all things, even that descent, and 15 hours after starting, we arrived back at the Waddington-Combatant col, knackered but happy.

Summary

Line of Fire *18 pitches. TD, 5.8 WI4. Southeast side of the Northwest Peak of Mount Combatant, Waddington Range.* Chris Atkinson, Kevin McLane. August 11, 2004

Postscript

The day before Chris and I climbed *Line of Fire*, we discovered its existence while on a mission on the high Shelf of Combatant to bury a Buddhist peace vase. The small plastic urn filled with precious stones and medicinal substances was designated for "Waddington Mountain", considered (cannily) by a faraway Tibetan lama as being one of the world's power places. The Shelf of Combatant, facing the northeast side of Waddington and a magnificent vista to the south and east, was declared a fine alternative and, as it happens, is a truly auspicious place.

The peace vase we buried is one of 6200 that are in the process of being dispersed across the world, including other peaks and mountain centres in Canada. The program was begun in 1991 by Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche of Tibet, one of the most senior Buddhist lamas of the 20th century, to help protect important places against misfortune and to promote positive, healing energies for a planet in dire need.

The place we chose to bury the vase on that sunny August 10 gave us a unique view into the silvery thread of *Line of Fire*. Had we not been there, it would still be unclimbed today.

the historic ascent of "mount adams"

lisa baile

"I DON'T THINK MOUNT ADAMS has ever been climbed," said Gernot Dick as he skillfully navigated us to the south end of Atlin Lake in his powerful speedboat. "No one was interested in climbing mountains during the gold rush days, and this one is so remote."

Well, Gernot should know. As a longtime resident of Atlin, a founder and director of the Atlin Art Centre, and a wilderness adventurer, there wasn't much that he didn't know about this isolated area of British Columbia. We (Judith Holm, Lisa Baile and Peter Paré) had identified the 6900-ft. peak at the very south end of this 100-mi.-long lake in the very far northwest corner of B.C. as a perfect vantage point from which to view the vast Juneau Icefield, which extends from Atlin Lake (2200 ft.) all the way to the Pacific.

It was a totally still, cloudless morning, and the lake mirrored the surrounding peaks with almost perfect fidelity even though visibility was limited by the vast cloud of forest fire smoke which had blown southwest from fires in the Dawson Creek area. Soon we could make out the dark black, asymmetric shape of Mount Adams. "It used to be called Black Mountain," explained Gernot, "but it was renamed 'Adams' in memory of a local helicopter pilot who was killed in a crash nearby."

Some two hours after leaving Atlin, we jumped ashore below the imposing northeast ridge and waved to Gernot, who promised to pick us up at midnight four days later. A couple of hours' bushwhacking brought us to the rocky ridge, and after another hour or so of easy scrambling we reached a meadowed shoulder at 3400 ft. studded with tarns. In stifling heat we stripped and dipped, set up camp and relaxed in our scenic home.

The next day was still clear, warm and smoky as we continued up the ridge, preceded by a procession of over 30 mountain goats. Lisa collected more than a pound of goat wool, which she intends to transform into a unique vest! We reached the peak in the early afternoon and were rewarded by the spectacular albeit somewhat hazy views of the vast Llewellyn Glacier and the Juneau Icefield to the west and south, Atlin Lake to the north, and the continuation of the Boundary Ranges, and Sloko Lake to the east. Wow! It was well worth the heat and the swarms of exuberant bugs.

Eventually, we tore our eyes away from the awesome panorama to check out our surroundings more closely. "Oh look," exclaimed Judith, "there *is* a cairn! So we're not the first ones here!" We were more surprised and intrigued than disappointed. And then we were delighted to find a message inside the antique Players tobacco tin wedged within the small summit cairn. It contained a single entry from 50 years earlier! "August 1, 1954: John C Godel, Paul Russell, Grant K Kenedy. Would anyone finding this cairn please communicate with the above (addresses) and we'll swap yarns."

"Well, I'll give it a go," volunteered

Lisa, "but what's the chance of finding any of these guys, even if they are still around?"

Still speculating about the first ascentionists, we descended a few hundred feet to a grassy shoulder on the south side of the peak and set up camp in a most extraordinary spot. To the west, the flower-strewn, grassy slope descended in a convex roll for a few hundred feet before an abrupt 4500-ft. cliff plummeted to the glacial lake at the snout of the vast Llewellyn Glacier. On these pastoral slopes just below us, our herd of goats were enjoying dust baths and goat wallows, grazing on the profusion of grasses and alpine flowers. We felt privileged to be here — and even more so when, later that evening, a westerly breeze cleared the air and we could see the icefield in all its immensity.

The next morning, we were reluctant to leave this magic spot and so wandered back and forth along the precipice, awed by the panorama, watching the goats on the crags and enjoying the endless photo opportunities. Finally, we packed east down easy snow and gravel slopes to camp at about 4500 ft. beside a flower-strewn meadow with an expansive view of Sloko Lake.

On our final day we descended into the swampy, bug-infested delta at the west end of Sloko Lake, swam in the frigid waters and found the footpath back to the bay on Atlin Lake, where Gernot picked us up, right on time at midnight.

Back home, the search for the first ascentionists of Black Mountain began. Judith "Googled" the Web and found an e-mail address for a J. Godel, and Lisa fired off an e-mail. Two days later she got this reply:

> *Dear Lisa,*
>
> Yes, this is indeed me, many long years ago. I spent two summers during my medical undergraduate years surveying in the Arctic and did some climbing on the side. What a wonderful reminder. What were the circumstances of your climb there? I'm intrigued. Tell me more.
>
> *John Godel*

And then a second e-mail from John:

> *Dear Peter and Lisa,*
>
> Thanks to both of you for the notes and your description of the circumstances of your climb. I found it interesting and exciting, because the day we climbed the mountain was the day our first daughter was born (although I didn't know about it for 2 days when a telegram to our chief in Atlin caught up with me). Not only that, during our stay at the south end of Atlin Lake I would pen a note to my wife Marge in Edmonton every day, although the mail was only picked up once a week. We kept all the letters and found the note I sent the evening of August 1st when I got back to camp. I am enclosing a transcription of it that may interest you.
>
> *Regards, John*

Several more e-mails went back and forth between John, Peter and Lisa and Judith, and Gernot. What follows is John Godel's original account of the first ascent of Black Mountain 50 years ago.

First Ascent of Black Mountain,
By John C Godel, August 1st 1954

Today dawned cloudless and warm, so we went mountain climbing: climbed from Atlin L. — elevation 2,100 — to the top of the mountain at 6,900, about 4,800 feet of mountain. That's about the same height as Mt. Rundle at Banff. As a matter of fact this mountain is almost the spitting image of Rundle. We left camp (Paul, Grant and I) by boat up the inlet and into a small side channel which brought us out into a little cove nestled quietly in the hills at the base of the mountain. Up the mountain we went. There wasn't too much difficulty climbing — only a couple of sheer cliffs that we couldn't get around. Everywhere we saw evidence of goat — tracks, droppings, trails — but saw neither hide nor hair of them. (Speaking of hair, I'm enclosing a lock from an old ram.) We reached the top about 2 o'clock. The view was breathtaking — mighty glaciers to the south, east and west, with majestic peaks rising high above us; Atlin Lake to the north and east, its islands like little cookies set on a platter of different shades of blue from a dirty grey glacial water through milky, and turquoise to a deep almost-navy blue. To the south-east stretched Sloko Lake, heavy with silt, towered over by the battlements of Paradise Peak. I tried to capture some of this spectacle on color film. I took about ten pictures of the climb.

We saw thousands of little wild flowers high above timberline — two grouse on a snow bank, bees and grasshoppers 4,000 feet above the valley! There were some amusing moments: I tore my pants — at the knee, that is — almost made them short pants. I was able to repair them thanks to fixit glue. Paul wore through his shoes so we had to stop every once in a while so he could tuck his toes back in. He claimed he had much better traction on the cliffs — he could grip with his toes.

Have you ever skied without skis on the first of August? Well, I have. There is a series of snow slopes, each extending about 1,000 feet and at an angle of about 30 degrees. At first we were careful to avoid the snow, but suddenly we thought, 'Hell, why not walk on the snow? It's a darn sight softer than rock.' So we walked, then skated, then skied. It was quite good — I could do turns, stops, or just plain ski. As a matter of proof I got Grant to take a picture of my skiing efforts. It was so much fun we almost climbed the mountain to do it again. However, it was almost 4 p.m. by then and supper called.

We returned to the boat to find the little inlet as calm and still as a tabletop except for little circles where fish were jumping. Soon we were all jumping with excitement. We could see fish everywhere — three-foot long grayling under the boat, as many as six fish jumping at a time. Oh! For a fishing line... And so we came home to supper.

As soon as supper was over, Don, Paul, Grant and Gordon went fishing. They just got back, and Grant got four lovelies (the two biggest got away!). So we'll have fish for breakfast. And that's the story of my day. I must be in good condition because usually about this time after such a climb I'm nursing aches and pains, and muttering 'Never again' from under cold compresses.

I think I'll get to bed early tonight... a hard day of cross-sectioning tomorrow."

GOOD STORIES should never end, and this one doesn't. Septuagenarians John and Gernot are planning to climb Mount Adams together this coming summer:

> *Dear John,*
>
> It seems your adventurous spirit is still alive .... So yes, please come to Atlin next summer .... Of all the mountains I had climbed, they had generations of history on them .... I love to venture into places where no stone had been turned over. Sure you got [there] 50 years ahead of me, but that's why I would especially honor the opportunity to climb a mountain with you next summer.
>
> *Regards, Gernot*

fairytales and fantasies

craig mcgee

THIS AWESOME FREE CLIMB is on the west side of the South Nesakwatch Spire. It climbs up the right side of a huge flake on the right side of the face. The rock is very clean and the climbing very aesthetic. Out of the seven pitches, five are as good as it gets. Five-star classics at any cragging area. There is a good route photo and approach description in Kevin Mclane's, *Alpine Select for Southwestern BC*. Bugaboo-quality climbing only an hour and a half drive from Vancouver followed by a 2.5- to 3-hour hike. Lots of great new routes up there, no crowds and the views are drop-dead awesome. So get up there!!!

Pitch 1 5.8 55 m

Start at the base of the large flake and head up to the base of a large eye-catching corner that dominates the right side of the face. Belay at its base.

Pitch 2 5.10+ 30 m ****

Head up left in a perfect, slightly bigger than a climber, chimney. In the back there is a double splitter finger crack. On the left side, this crack widens from fingers to hands as the chimney widens to a Devils Tower-like double corner. Awesome!!! Belay where a rock fang sticks into the corner and where it is possible to step back right. This pitch is hard to see from the ground.

Pitch 3 5.11- 30 m***

Step over right and boulder past the thin spot (small nuts and TCUs), then head straight up the splitter. When the crack becomes vegetated, step left and up another splitter 5 m to a sitting belay on a large flake. A large 3.5-inch cam is useful but not necessary for the belay.

Pitch 4(*a*) "Natural Ecstasy" 5.11+/12- 50 m****

Step back to original crack and crank up the steep right-facing corner. At 20m pull a powerful, changing-corner move as you switch from right-facing to left-facing corner. (Finger-size cams useful.) The shallow LF corner is very sustained with lots of cool "I can't believe I'm still on 5.10" climbing. Just as you wish it were over there is a power layback for 5 m to the anchor. This pitch has five fixed pins in the upper half. No one move is harder than 5.11; however, there is lots of sustained climbing. It may be easier than the 5.12- grade given it may have felt harder when led on-sight while placing pins from awkward stances. This pitch's cruxes could also be aided on clean gear or pins thus keeping it to a more moderate grade. This would enable you to still climb the very cool 5th pitch and not use the bypass chimney variation.

Pitch Five

Pitch 4(*b*) 5.10+ 60 m, plus 10m to join Pitch 5.

It is possible (as was done on the first ascent with Lori O'Hare) to bypass the crux pitch by working up and out left from the 3rd belay. Climb up the obvious hand crack out to the left arête and into the giant chimney/cleft which is now a route called *Sublimation*, (5.10c, C2). Free up through wide cracks (many options) to a cave belay below a hideous chimney and the traverse of pitch 5. Wide cams (3-6 inch) are useful. Climb up through ugly chimney and join Pitch 5.

Pitch 5 5.10+ 20 m****

A truly unique pitch! Head out left on 1 inch foot rail across an exposed headwall. Step over the ugly chimney from *Sublimation* (very cool and exposed), then up and back right to ledge. Belay here only 7m above previous belay and below a chimney. There are 20m of climbing on this pitch but only 7 metres vertical gain. Belay there or pay the price with rope drag.

Pitch 6 5.10+ 45 m***

Head up the large chimney created by a detached pillar. In the back climb a wafer - thin, 2-inch-thick fin of rock up and out of chimney. A steep hand then finger crack leads to easier ground. A two-pin belay can be found out right and up on a lichen-covered slab.

Pitch 7 5.10 15 m

You gotta pay for all that good clean climbing. Out of the three dirty cracks (not that bad) climb the middle one, which is the steepest, but the cleanest.

Rack: Double set of cams to #2 BD, 1 X #3. Double TCUs from finger to the smallest. 1 set nuts including some small ones. #3 to #4 cams needed if bypassing the crux pitch.

Summary

Nesakwatch Spire Fairytales and Fantasies *Seven pitches 5.11+/12- (or 5.10+* variation) Craig McGee/Lori O'Hare: early July 2004, Craig McGee/Jim Martinello: late July 2004

mt. james turner; n. face variation

colin wooldridge

Russell March, Marcus Dell, and I climbed a variation of the *Black/Fabische* route on the north face of Mount James Turner in the Coast Range on July 2, 2004. Although a decade has passed since John Black and Reinhard Fabische first climbed this remote peak, our ascent was likely only the second time the face had been climbed.

Our route shared the first half of the *Black/Fabische* up the 350m-long central snow couloir. We gained the couloir by climbing the right side of a rock spur that split the bergschrund, after which we climbed snow and rock up the right side of the couloir. Climbing roped together, we placed snow pickets and rock gear to protect against wet snow avalanches sweeping down the couloir — like the one that hit Marcus as he crossed a 3-metre-deep icy runnel.

Poor snow conditions below the headwall — isothermal 60° slush that collapsed under body weight — forced us rightward onto a buttress immediately right of the *Black/Fabische* rib. Deteriorating weather conditions — intermittent rain and sleet with less than 15m visibility — caused us to avoid climbing the buttress directly. Instead, we climbed the right side of the buttress for one pitch into a steep-walled embayment. A loose and shattered break was then followed leftward to regain better rock on the buttress, which was climbed for two pitches to Fingerpost Ridge. We traversed the ridge for one pitch to reach the summit twelve hours after leaving the bergschrund.

We downclimbed loose gullies on the SW face, and like Black and Fabische before us we also tried unsuccessfully to shortcut Fingerpost Ridge. After backtracking, we wound our way to the Chaos Glacier where we spent a second night at our bivi high on the Needles Glacier — steeling ourselves for the trudge out. (*TD-550m, 60°, 5.5*)

The 550m north face of Mt. James Turner (2686m) showing the Black/Fabische (solid lines) and March/Dell/Wooldridge (dotted line) routes. Photo: Colin Wooldridge.

more rambles on ashlu

craig mcgee

Again for the third summer in a row I headed up to Mount Ashlu for some beautiful alpine granite cranking in the sun. This time I was accompanied by Jim Martinello.

After three trips I think I have the approach figured out. The approach described in *Alpine Select for Southwest BC* is true but not the most accurate.

From the bridge over Ashlu creek walk about 30m north and gain a briefly flagged trail. Do not follow the creek, instead head slowly up and right (north). The going can be tough, but it will get better. Stay on a vague ridge in the forest, still heading up and right. Soon you will gain a bump and sparsely treed meadow. From there head up to the end of the meadow and gain a flat trough in the forest, which extends east all the way to the creek that comes down from Rugged Lake. From there, head straight up steep trees to the meadows before the lake. Keeping to the furthest right, on the border of the creek, and the forest will be highly rewarding. Once at the lake, work up (east, then south) onto a bench that curves all the way around the south ridge of Ashlu. This can be exposed at times, but nothing more than 3rd class. Once this bench gains the ridge, continue following it all the way around and back north to the base of the south face.

In a previous article (Mellow Yellow Buttress, *CAJ* 03), I mentioned how we had previously climbed the *Serl-McNab* route on this face. I said that it was a bit loose and not all that recommended. Turns out we were not on that route and that we were not the first to head off this way. *Alpine Select* states that after the second pitch you should follow a 4th-class ramp out left. The problem with this is if you look from below there is a large ramp that leads from the centre of the face to a corner on the far left. This is not the ramp the *Serl-McNab* follows but rather a very loose mid-5th ramp. The proper start for that excellent route would be to say: start below a vague right-facing flake/corner system 60 m left of the left water streak on the face. Then climb straight up, staying in the largest corner on the upper face.

On this latest trip, Jim and I climbed straight up between the two water streaks, aiming for some large roofs and right-trending ramps high on the face. Once at these roofs, follow the natural line through them. Trend right above each roof, then straight up at the end to avoid a band of bad rock. The climbing again is superb. Not many routes on this face will get repeated in their entirety because of the nature of the rock. There are so many flakes and cracks that it is possible to go just about anywhere you want. So the grades are very subjective. Have fun!

Summary

Smooth Hooky *5.11-, five full 70-m pitches. Double rack to #3 BD, no pins needed.* FA: Craig McGee, Jim Martinello. Aug 2003.

Also worth noting

Brent Phillips and I climbed the east side of the Witches Tooth in the Tantalus Range. There are many ways to climb this thing. Ours had a scruffy 5.9 crack pitch followed by a cool, airy 5.10 face/seam to the top. We stayed on the east side the whole time, but there are many easier options. The summit is very cool, a true spire. Next time you are on the Sea-to-Sky Highway, you can look across and think' *Cool. I've been on that!* Bring tat to wrap around the top.

the back of beyond — part II

jordan peters

In July 2004, Mike Layton and I added a sister route to *Back of Beyond Buttress* (see *CAJ* 2004) in west Kookipi Creek on the other side of the slabby north buttress of the 6800-ft. granite "mohawk". The first pitch was spectacular — .10a finger cracks in perfect granite — but the remainder of the route wandered a bit until it "relented" to lower-angled terrain containing 20-ft. sections of 5.10 cracks. Mike was unable to reach an exit crack on the fifth pitch and had to resort to some funky A1 up an overhanging seam, but a repeat ascent would likely be able to iron out a friendlier, freer line by moving to the crest on this pitch. The rough, lichen-y nature of the rock on this, the west, side of the peak only confirmed the elegant and classic nature of *Back of Beyond* on the cleaner, east side.

We argued that the peak now needed a name, if only an informal one, and we continued to argue through the summer about just what that name should be. I won with "Mount Ichor", ichor being both the blood of Greek gods (something we wished we possessed on some of the cracks) and the oozing from wounds (something the cracks did endow us with). A near-comical series of injuries and forest fires kept various parties' repeat attempts at bay — a shame, as it is quite the place; two-wheel-drive roads and ninety-minute approaches to excellent alpine rock are indeed rare. And during all our adventures in the area, we have never run across evidence of previous passage on any of the peaks.

The name of this route comes from that famous Larkin pondering on the decay of belief and reflects the perfectly triadic experience of approaching, climbing and wondering. Places like this one certainly instill something like belief — that under-explored parts of the province still exist for the faithful.

Here's to the blind spots of the Coast Mountains!

Summary

Brambles, Buttress, Sky *8 pitches. D+/III+, 5.10 A1. "Mount Ichor" (Peak 6800 ft., west Kookipi Creek; 92 H/13 907307).* F.A.: Jordan Peters, Mike Layton. July 14, 2004.

coast mountains 2004

don serl

The year 2004 was an astonishing one in the Coast Mountains, especially in the Waddington Range. The presence of *The Waddington Guide* made itself felt dramatically, with perhaps triple the usual number of climbers entering the range. Moreover, there was a major shift in focus; with better information available, climbers chose objectives better suited to their talents and interests rather than all lining up for the Bravo Glacier route on Mount Waddington. More-moderate mountaineers went to the Franklin, upper Tellot and Radiant glaciers, while the "harder" lads settled in at Sunny Knob, the Waddington-Combatant col and the upper Dais. The result was a great outburst of climbing, the likes of which have never been seen in the Range.

At the moderate end of the spectrum, about a dozen people from the B.C. Mountaineering Club enjoyed numerous ascents on the upper Tellot and around the Plummer hut. A five-person Alpine Club of Canada party later did likewise. A 15-member party from Korea also arrived in the Range. Their glacier-travel skills were perhaps not quite up to the scale of the undertaking, and their stay was fairly short, but one wonders if this is an indicator of a trend towards greater foreign visitor-ship. A four-man party from Britain also arrived, and spent a productive time at Rainy Knob before a slip on a snow slope on the South Ridge of Serra Two resulted in immobilizing injuries to one climber, and the first helicopter long-line evacuation the Range has seen. One hopes this is not indicative of another trend. Finally, Chris Barner and Paul Rydeen from Vancouver Island made their annual foray into the Range, accompanied by four friends, resulting in numerous climbs (including first ascents of both Couplet Towers) in and around the Radiant cirque.

Hard repeat ascents abounded:

Skywalk (600 m; ED1, 5.9) on Combatant was climbed three times, as was *Kshatrya* (735 m; D+, 5.8).

The Wiessner-House (770 m; TD+, 5.8, snow/ice to 60 degrees) on Waddington had its eighth ascent (Jim Daubert, Bill Enger, Nick Ranicar and Colin Wooldridge), and the *Risse Route* (800 m; TD+, 5.8, snow/ice to 50 degrees) its third (Jake Larson, Enger, Ranicar, Wooldridge).

The South Ridge of Serra Two (1500 m; TD, 5.9, snow/ice to 45 degrees) almost turned into a trade route, seeing four or five ascents, a couple in a day.

Serra Five (1450 m; TD, 5.8 mixed) received its fifth and sixth ascents (Doug Artman and Tom Reid; Mark Bunker and Colin Haley).

Sundog (525 m; ED1, 5.11a) on the Blade (Justin Cassels and Ari Menitove) was repeated.

And, in a seven-day tour de force, the complete ***Waddington Traverse*** (4000 m of ascent, 10 km of travel; ED+, to 5.9, to 60 degrees) got its first repeat, by Bunker and Haley.

There was also an outburst of new routes, some relatively minor (not described here), but many of which were hard rock routes done in excellent style and sometimes astonishing speed:

Janez Ales and Jia Condon established two new routes on the right side of the east face of Dragonback, the first five pitches to 5.11, the second two pitches on a subsidiary right-hand pillar at 5.11+.

Andrew Boyd and Derek Flett established a route (300 m of scrambling and simul-climbing, then six pitches to 5.10+) up crack systems on the west face of Dentiform's West Peak. Later, in a fast day trip from Sunny Knob return to a bivy at the base, the pair climbed the rounded arête in the centre of the west face of the Blade (11 pitches to 5.11 on good rock; descent via *Sundog*).

Justin Cassels, Ari Menitove and John Simms climbed a new line, *Drag Queen*, on the southwest pillar of Stiletto, up a striking dihedral right of the existing line. There were 13 pitches (some short), of which five were 5.11, with a crux of 5.11d R. A 3-m A2+ aid section will likely go free at mid-5.12.

Cassels and Mentove had previously climbed the west face of Bicuspid Tower via a good six-pitch 5.11 line.

Jeff Phillippe and Bret Sarnquist did a new route of four pitches to 5.10c on the northeast face of Phantom Tower. They had previously made the second ascent of the *Flavelle-Lane* couloir (980 m, TD+, 5.8, ice to 55 degrees [minor 90 degrees]) on the Northwest Summit of Waddington and continued to the Main Summit via the second ascent of the very loose Northwest Ridge (220 m; D, 5.7). They also climbed the South Face (630 m, D+) of Tiedemann Tower, adding a beautiful 5.10c splitter variation on the middle pillar.

Chris Atkinson and Kevin McLane established *Line of Fire* on the Northwest Peak of Combatant. This 14-pitch, stonefall-threatened ice line climbs a couloir immediately right of the *Skywalk* pillar, with bulges to 90 degrees on pitches 11–14. Four pitches of rock to 5.9 then reach the summit.

John Furneaux and Matt Maddaloni's new route on the southeast side of the Incisor was the highlight of the summer. The route started from a ledge high on *Day Trip* with a 5.12d traverse (one aid move), which was followed by a 5.12b off-width pitch. Despite these difficulties, the 11 or 12 pitches took only four and a half hours, above which *Belligerence* (1150 m, ED3) was joined. *The Jawbone* (11 rope lengths, but mostly climbed moving together) was crossed in five hours, and the top was reached via snow and rock on the southeast face in a further two hours — total time: 11 and a half hours! Truly astonishing!

Overall, the most impressively productive season in the Waddington Range since the days when the "old-timers" were knocking off all the first ascents.

Elsewhere in the Coast Mountains, the finest route of the summer was the ascent of *Up in Smoke* (TD–, V, 5.8, snow/ice to 60 degrees) on the northeast ridge of Talchako Mountain (3037 m), east of Ape Lake. This dramatic feature rises gently for 400 m, then shoots steeply up 1000 m to the summit. Ray Borbon, Drew Brayshaw and James Nakagami did the climb in one and a half days, finding considerable loose rock mixed with plenty of good climbing, and sections of icy snow up high.

Chris Barner and Paul Rydeen climbed amongst the peaks at the head of Gillman Creek. This area south of Doran Creek had only previously been visited by John Clarke, who did several first ascents in 1974. Barner and Rydeen found excellent rock and fine lines, including one nine-pitch 5.9 they likened to the East Ridge of Bugaboo Spire.

Jordan Peters, Andrew Rennie and Don Serl walked into the Falls River valley. The highlight of the trip was the third ascent of the fine (and underestimated) *1964 National Pillar* on Mount Winstone (D+ scrambling, plus 14 pitches to 5.8). Rennie and Serl later climbed a short but enjoyable rock route on the steep, crack-riddled granite of the southwest face of the Beehive (5.9, 5.10b, 5.8).

Closer to Vancouver, Damien Kelly and Jim Martinello climbed the complete western spur on the Gnomon on Mount Athelstan (9 pitches; D+, 5.10 R]. Janez Ales, Jia Condon and Don Serl had earlier climbed the first six pitches of this feature, finding mostly mid-fifth-class climbing, with sections of 5.8/9 and infrequent but adequate pro'. Below the obviously more run-out upper section, the threesome traversed left into *Lillarête* (D, 5.8), which was completed to the summit of Randy Stoltmann Tower. The later pair used no bolts, but found very sparse protection on good, solid rock.

In May, Gord Betenia, Drew Brayshaw and Don Serl made yet another spring foray into the Niut Range. Basing themselves on a lovely 1950-m bench about 3.5 km east of Quartz Peak (2942 m), they made a couple of ascents of 2600-plus-m summits to the northwest of camp, then tackled Quartz. About 450 m of 45- to 55-degree névé on the east face led to a notch on the northeast ridge. This encompassed about 10 rope lengths of entertaining mixed snow and rock, a couple of significant slab avalanches being kicked out of pockets on the right (lee) flank. Direct descent back into the access valley was not possible, so a long descent was required: 2.5 km of ridge traverse southeastward, a short rappel and 1000 m of descent eastward over another 2.5 km to the lake at the head of Whitesaddle Creek, and finally a 350-m reascent northwestward back to camp. In all, 22 hours were consumed in the outing (650 m; D+, 45–55 degrees, 5.8 M4).

judged

chris kettles

No, really, what the hell *am I doing here? I mean, this time it's not even fun any more. Oh yeah... right, it's for "the adventure", it's to "challenge myself and harmonize with nature", to "realize my dreams" and all that *%$#. Well, this is pushing it. I'm way out of tune and "this" wasn't in any of my dreams! *%$#, man, what's the point of this anyways?* I think to myself. *My crampons aren't penetrating the surface enough to make this seem skiable, and we're not even really sure it goes all the way through. My back slipped and went into spasm about 500 m ago, the snow's boilerplate, and we're going to ski this thing? Right. From where I'm standing, it's looking as if the mountain's chances are better than mine.*

I peer down the steep wall of snow as it rolls and pitches between 45 and 50 degrees in the centre, to a solid 55 to 60 degrees on the sides. I look up to the mountain above us — a maze of cliff bands, flutings and lines coming in from everywhere. The north face of "the Judge" is absolutely huge.

Wow, there's gotta be 10 different ski lines on this thing, I ponder in awe and respect. I find our ramp up there on the looker's left. It's hard to get a grasp of its steepness; it splits off from the mountain at such a crazy angle, then dumps out onto the main face, which looms above us. I turn my gaze back down the mountain to see the lower face, a maze of huge chunks of ice welded into its surface. *We climbed through that an hour ago, and we're going to ski it later today... right?* From there, the lower face peels away into open air, off 200-m cliff bands that separate us from the valley. Separating our line: wall, choke, ramp, upper face to the summit towers — our *What the hell am I doing here?*

This huge sheet looks more like white ice than snow to me, I question myself. *Oh yeah, it'll soften up later.* So we strategized in the dark at the base of the face at 4 a.m., in that *%$#ty debris field full of 10-m-high "runnels of doom". "Yeah, right, on this big, dark north face... it'll soften up later." "Remember, we won't know till we get there." That was to be one of the many "We won't know till we get there"s of the day.

As I watch Scotty pound step after suspiciously hard and crunchy step up towards wherever that ramp is, I think back

to his discovery two weeks earlier of this immense north face. "The Judge", as we called it. Mount Judge Howay: 2000 m of cold, dark, twisting, steep, apparently skiable face.

Scott spotted it while flying his plane from Abbotsford to Whistler. I recall him explaining the peak to me over a Scotch. "The line's gotta be at least 2000 metres," he said as he looked through his glass. "We climb up to these two sweet, snow-covered pyramids, the back one being the summit," he rambled on, speaking a little faster, eyes flashing. "We ski down that, down to a lower face, through this choke, down this ramp," he took a quick breath, "then that goes right through to the valley." He chucked me a demented smile with a slight head twitch. "Kinda looks like the place flying monkeys would hang out," he slurred slightly, a gleaming madness in his eyes somewhere between inspiration and insanity.

The next day, we jumped into Scott's Cessna 185 and were off on a little more of a thorough recon. After a short flight we arrived at the Judge. It sits just north of the Fraser Valley, not far from Vancouver. Sure enough, there it was — big, very steep, and white all the way from the summit to the valley.

"Holy *%$#, the whole north face is covered with snow," I crowed over the radio. "Well, mostly covered, except maybe at the top of the ramp."

Hissing over the headset. "Some black spots in there. It looks thin," Scott confirmed on the mic.

We flew a closer loop around the peak. It was obvious that there were patches of exposed rock at the narrow point at the top of the ramp, but the rest was one white line. One steep, white line.

"It looks like it goes, right?" Scott asked.

We looked at each other.

"If the choke goes at the top of the ramp, and if the snow conditions are good on the north-facing stuff...," Scott said questioningly.

I looked back at him. "Yeah, I think it goes."

Standing here, though, I realize that from 3000 m in a nice warm Cessna, this particular surface looked a lot more like snow than it does right now. Step, step, plunge, step, plunge, crunch, crunch, there goes another chunk of ice off Scott's boot and almost hits me again — *zing*. "Sorry, man," Scott yells down, "almost smoked you with a softball." This is what he's calling the ice chunks — also the average size of what I was showering down on his head while leading.

These chunks wouldn't be going so fast if I wasn't so far behind, I think to myself. *Gotta hurry up, keep climbing! *%$#, my back hurts so much. Should've eaten more of those prescription anti-inflammatories this morning — thought four would do.*

"*%#@!, my back is killing me!" I scream in ascending brilliance. Scott's got to be sick of hearing it, I'm sure. *He probably thinks I'm just sucking out and full of *%$#*, I think to myself.

But no, it's real. And now I need to make a decision: shut up and keep going, or go down. Here we are in one of the most incredible, powerful, wild and wonderful places I've ever been, and all I'm experiencing is pain, and lots of it.

In an attempt to be funny, I yell up at Scott, "If this thing wasn't so *%$#ing steep, I wouldn't be cranking the hell out of my neck trying to figure out where this 'ski' line is." Neither of us laughs.

A chunk, another chunk — ice slams me in the helmet. This one gets my attention. "*%#@, man, that one was bigger than a softball," I squawk.

Feeling rather pathetic, I pull off to the side and stay out of the line of fire. The pain's ripping right down my leg now, heating up my foot and making my calf feel as if it's getting scorched in a fire. *Keep up, gotta keep up.*

I start climbing again, and look up to see that Scott's way ahead, just approaching "the slot" — another "wait and see". "It goes through," he shouts, "but it's kinda hard and... well, maybe not quite as hard as lower down." He tries to sound convincing.

We've gotten through the huge field of ice chunks and runnels and made it above the big cliff band separating the lower face from the debris field, and we're now heading up the ever-narrowing sheet, being drawn closer and closer to the little narrow slot. Like a mini-couloir in the middle of this huge north face, this slot is about 20 m wide and 100 m long, and the snow is a little more like real snow — "at least in the shady parts, where the wind hadn't hit it", according to Scotty later.

"Scott, wait for me at the top of the choke," I flatly holler.

"How ya feeling?" he yells back. One look up, even from 100 ft. below him, is all he needs. "Man, you look like you're hurtin', boy," Scott twangs the obvious in his slack-jawed Southern drawl. "Did you take those pills I gave you?"

"Yeah, four of them," I grunt back, "and my back's still killing me."

"Wow, that's *%$#ty. Pop a couple more," he says, without raising his voice. Then he yells down to me, "We're not far from the ramp. Looks like another 200 metres or so," as he cranes his neck to see around the edge of a block at the top of the gully. "Let's get to the bottom of the ramp and see how we're looking, OK?"

"Yeah, get to the bottom of the ramp, then see how we're looking," I quietly murmur with light conviction. Won't know till we get there, right? *Won't know till we get there.*

The face eases up to a more comfortable forty degrees going into the ramp, giving me a chance to stand up straighter, relax a bit, and get into it and enjoy the work a bit more.

If these bloody skis weren't on my back, I bet I wouldn't be hurting so much. Actually, this would be a really nice alpine climb, I think to myself just as I round the lower cliff and look up the ramp. *Wait a minute — this IS an alpine climb*! I gaze up the colossal ramp splitting this enormous north wall. I can barely make out the top. That's where it chokes out. From there it flips onto the upper face and should prove to be easier going. *This feature has to be 400 m long*, I ponder in amazement, *and it's looking near vertical at the top where it narrows.* I try to push the top of my pack down with the back of my helmet so as to look higher up the line, get a better look. My back tweaks again, as does my brain.

"You gotta break again," I whine to Scott.

"No problem," he answers quietly, almost cautiously, "I'll punch up to the choke and we'll take it from there."

"Sounds good," I reply. *Man, am I glad to be here with this guy*, I think to myself. *He's staying full chill, helping me to be convinced that all is OK. OK enough, anyways.*

Now the snow is starting to feel more like "real" snow, just in time for it to start rearing again to an almost puzzling steepness. *Can we ski this?* I ask myself as I squint up the narrow tongue.

"Look at how the upper rock wall comes over the face. It's kinda covering some of it." Scott points.

I twist my head and look up. What a crazy feature! The rock on the face makes it look even steeper — and, at over 55 degrees, it already looks steep enough.

Scott approaches about the halfway point. I'm not far below, now beginning to enter a state of numbness, physically and

mentally. Slowly, step by step, I begin to separate myself from the pain. The climbing is getting really steep now — elbows in the snow, axe plunging becoming deliberate and careful. Falling here, you'd never self-arrest. My focus begins to ignite. Things become clearer, easier, and I begin to enter "the zone".

As we approach the choke, I notice that Scott has pulled off to the side and is taking his other axe off his pack. "What? You think you need two tools to get through here?" I ask the dumb question.

Scott looks at me with a shrug. "Why not — got 'em."

He starts up towards the notch, scraping away with his picks and exposing ice in the back, glad to have two tools. I have just one very light axe. I think back to my great conclusion while packing — since my back was bad, I would go super lightweight — which is not seeming like such a "super" idea right now.

I traverse back to the centre of the ramp and look up to see Scott just as he's exiting the top. I follow his steps up to the choke. Suddenly, it becomes very obvious that I should have two axes, since it's ice throughout. And although stemming on the rock is positive, there are no good handholds. I look between my legs down the sweeping ramp spilling off into the darkness of the north face, and just as the anxiety creeps in, my focus snaps back. I'll just have to cut some handholds and make sure that my axe is solid before I move.

One move at a time, right? I chop a handhold above me. It breaks through the ice, creating a great hold. I have to be delicate. I stem up while pulling on the plate, then throw my axe in high above me. It responds with the happy thunk of a solid placement. I pull myself up on the axe while working my feet up, stemming the rock on the sides, and trying to pull just enough on the hole to stabilize my right side. I establish a good stance with my feet again — my hands low now — pop out the axe and, fast and sure, sink it again, *Thunk*.

I move up another few feet, and am glad that I sharpened my axe yesterday. *Ok, it's only a few more moves — chop two more handholds and you're there*, I say to myself. Carefully, I remove the axe and, while hanging on to the hole below with one hand, start chopping another hold above me. This one is solid ice. It takes longer to cut but is more secure to hang on to. Two or three more moves like this, and before I know it, things start opening up. I lift my head to find myself looking out onto the enormous upper snowfields of the north face, rolling and flowing up towards the summit. I look to my left, and just behind the bench Scott is standing on, it drops off 1500 m into open air.

"Wow, what an intense place to be hangin' out," Scott hollers up to me as I make my way down to where he's eating power goop and drinking his super-energy drink concoction. "Whatcha figure, how ya feelin'?" he asks, just as he sucks the last bit of chocolate goo from its tube.

As soon as I stop, my back stiffens and I know I have to keep going. "I think I'll break for a while," I say as I turn around and start up towards steeper ground.

Now it's snow, nice snow, and my enthusiasm begins to bubble. I look up to figure out our route. It looks as if we could climb the snow beside the rocks, then to an upper bench, traverse that below the north tower to the south tower, then up that to the summit. As I reach the top of the first steep pitch, the slope opens up into a large, flat bench from which the two summit towers rise like crystal pyramids out of a frozen desert. I can see that the back summit tower is completely covered with snow. I yell down to Scott excitedly, "It's white all the way, man!"

Scott looks up at me from 30 ft. below and says, "Well, we best be gettin' up there." He puts his head down and starts to climb faster.

We walk side by side across the bench and approach the final pitch to the summit, noticing that it's steeper than it looked from the bench, with exposure opening up to our left as we approach the top. While we climb, chunks of ice and snow fall off into the expansive air of the south face.

I climb up on a rock outcropping and realize that we are on the summit. Cold, wet and sore, all I can think of is getting some water and food in me, and getting the descent underway. We drop our packs, pull our skis off and dig out the remainder of our food and water. Scott clicks a couple of quick shots off. I just keep eating, looking out onto the wonderment of Cats Ears Peak and Stave Lake, with as backdrop the Fraser Valley and the towering white cone of Mount Baker. As soon as the last chocolate-covered almond grazes my lips, I'm cleaning out my bindings, getting my goggles on, adjusting my poles. I have to keep the momentum going — can't stop now. We're only halfway. I click into my bindings and make the last boot, glove, pack and goggle adjustments. Looking over at Scott, who's just putting on his skis, I start to ski over to the first pitch.

"Hang on, man. I've got some things to dial in here," Scott yells to me.

I slow down, but just can't stand still. I traverse over and look down the big white cone as it rolls out onto the east face; from there it peels off to the north and south into open air. My eyes follow our boot-pack line, it being the only indication that there's a way through. Just as I'm starting to get cold and impatient, Scott starts moving. "What do ya think?" he says, carefully pulling up beside me.

"Well, I think you don't want to fall, and we should be careful of slabs when we ski by those rocks," I suggest as I start sliding down the face, picking up speed, and giving the slope a couple of thumps with my skis to test for slab.

The snow feels good and I start turning. Chunks start flying down the slope, designating the fall line, off the south cliffs into space. *Don't want to end up there*, I think to myself. I focus on our boot-pack line as I ski; it gives me an indication of surface conditions and lets me know what to expect in the upcoming turns. A few hundred nice, steep, chalky turns, and we're back at the bench above the ramp, contemplating our next move.

Scott clicks a piton and some slings off his harness as he postholes over to a rock corner at the top of the ramp. *Ding, ding, ding, ding!* The piton rings with an ever-ascending security. "We should be good to go," Scott yells up to me as he clips the rope to the anchor and starts to rappel. I walk over just in time to see him disappear down into the icy choke, and in a couple of minutes he yells up "Off rappel!" I clip in and, as I slide down the rope, see Scott clearing out a flat area in the snow in order to put his skis on again. By the time I pull the rope down and get to him, he's in his skis and ready to go.

"I'll scratch my way down there and wait for you at the bottom of the ramp," Scott states in a clear, even voice as he stares down the huge ramp with intense focus in his eyes. He sideslips away from me, hesitating to make his first turn, as it's a scary one. Finally, he turns and drops 5 m, having to edge hard on landing to control his speed and stay on the mountain. Plumes of snow and ice cascade down the ramp and disappear into the black. Another turn, then another — he has his rhythm now and is rapidly disappearing down the ramp. As I see him exit the ramp and go ripping across the face to safer ground, I clip into my skis and very care-

fully start sliding down the wall. I can see that where Scott has turned, all the snow is scraped off to ice; I have to time my turns between his so as to have some snow to get an edge into. Turn after turn, I carefully make my way to the bottom of the ramp.

I traverse across the slope and join Scott, whose face is beaming as he gazes up the ramp. "Quite a line!" he says, glowing with pride. I turn around to see the huge, looming ramp, now signed with the subtle little shadows of our ski tracks. Then everything stops. I look out into the warm, sunlit valley, so much closer now, then glance down the rest of the north face, which no longer seems quite as steep as it did before. The reality of our success begins to settle into my awareness, and a glowing satisfaction wells up inside me. We skied it! And got our "fix".

Over the next hour, we slowly make our way down, ice-chunk dodging, sideslipping, and navigating around cliff bands. Then I find myself on the other side of the valley, alone, looking up at the massive north face of "the Judge". I stop, pop my skis off, and fall back into the snow to look up at it just as Scott appears from behind a huge debris pile. He skis up to me, puts his hand out and asks, "Well buddy, whatcha think of that?"

I look up, face beaming. "*That is what it's all about.*"

prince rupert to terrace

nelson rocha

THE TRIP WAS ORIGINALLY conceived a couple of years ago when Dean Wagner and I had just finished climbing Mount Logan in Kluane National Park. We both had a taste of what it felt like to accomplish a goal after months of planning and preparations. We also had a freshly instilled craving for big-mountain adventures, but we wanted to do something more familiar, something a little closer to home.

"You know what I've been thinking of doing for a long time? A ski traverse from Prince Rupert to Terrace." All Dean needed to do was throw the words out there to set the gears in motion. I knew, without any hesitation, that I wanted in, but one dubious question troubled me: "Is it possible?" Few have ever ventured that far into the mountains north of the Skeena River before, let alone on skis in the middle of avalanche season. To successfully complete a 220-km traverse linking Prince Rupert to Terrace through ocean, valleys, ridgetops and glaciers seemed nearly impossible, especially considering the north coast's notoriously bad weather. Fortunately, my reservations were drop kicked into submission by my keenness. Ultimately, it was an extremely physically demanding effort that took us 17 days to complete, but the most difficult obstacle turned out to be in my mind.

Dean Wagner, Steve Ogle and I left Prince Rupert on the morning of March 31 in our kayaks with enough provisions to get us into the mountains, where we had arranged to have our ski gear left for us to pick up. Our route began at Fairview Harbour in Prince Rupert and would lead us north through Chatham Sound and then into Khutzeymateen Inlet.

After three days of paddling amongst dozens of seals, thousands of surf scoters and a humpback whale, we began a merciless bushwhack through the Khutzeymateen valley. Since the valley is home to over fifty grizzly bears and is Canada's only declared grizzly bear sanctuary, we spent as little time as possible in the area. Two days of weaving through devil's club and salmonberry bush, postholing across boggy swamps and fording hip-deep rivers brought us in sight of a ridge that led up into the mountains. Besides doorbells and sleigh bells, and schnitzel with noodles, snow-covered ridges were some of our favourite things. Our skis continued to burn holes in our packs as we fantasized about the moment we could put them to use.

Photo: Nelson Rocha

The next morning, we were greeted with a sinister grin from an arduous 3500-ft. climb. British Columbia's north coast offers up some of the wettest, most densely packed brush on the planet; much to our chagrin, we had to endure seven steady hours of it while on a 35-degree pitch with the equivalent of small houses strapped to our backs. Evidently, we had underestimated the time it would take us to plough through the "coastal cobwebs" of foliage and blowdown. The issue of reaching our cache before running out of food and fuel began to gnaw away at my optimism.

Once we had reached snow line, we unstrapped our skis from our packs and strapped them onto our waterlogged feet, turning our beasts of burden into sticks of speed. After our bushwhacking fiasco along the valley bottom, skinning on snow made us feel like Bjørn Dæhlie superstars! In our minds, we skimmed effortlessly along the surface, the excessive weight of our packs now just a distant memory; in reality, we slogged through a mountainscape coated in vanilla Slurpee.

After a few more days of travel on snow-capped ridges, we reached the headwaters of meandering valleys that feed such rivers as the Exchamsiks and the Exstew. We trudged along valley bottoms, three tiny, Gore-Tex–clad specks amid towering peaks of granodiorite and volatile slopes. As we contoured up glaciers, we kept a watchful eye on the wet-snow avalanches that poured down the mountain walls surrounding us. Ironically, our anxiety was overshadowed by the constant worry of reaching our cache before running out of food. At times this worry would overshadow all physical adversities; for me, it had become the biggest hurdle of the entire trip.

On Day 10 we finally reached the cache and treated ourselves to a day of rest and gluttony. From that moment forward, our entire outlook changed. We felt confident that we would complete the trip, and never once doubted ourselves. We were able to totally enjoy the dramatic peaks, the impressive rivers of ice and the feeling of remoteness. It's a feeling I get every time I travel into the mountains of this region. Having grown up in Prince Rupert, I have driven Highway 16 from Rupert to Terrace countless times. Now, when I make the hour-and-a-half drive along the Skeena River, I will think about those 17 days of sea, snow and dirt, appreciating every inch of paved road beneath me. It was a trip we were all grateful to have completed, but one I would definitely never do again.

summers on the upper tellot

janes ales

Summer 2003 saw a large party camped at the Dragon's Tail campground on the upper Tellot Glacier, just south of Dragonback Peak. Participants were: Jesse Mason, Toby Froschauer, Jeff Hunt, Robert Nugent, Don Serl, Ade Miller, Graham Rowbotham, Luca Bellin, Silvia Alessi and Janez Ales.

We were extremely lucky with the weather on this trip. Out of the three weeks that my climbing partner Graham and I stayed on the Tellot Glacier, we only had three to four forced rest days due to storms or high winds. We spent the first two weeks at the Dragon's Tail Camp. The rest of the party was leaving, and due to a storm moving in, we had to move all our stuff down to the Plummer hut. The weather window came the next morning for the flight out. Graham and I decided at the last minute to stay an extra week.

The nicest route we climbed was a new route on Tellot Spire. From the upper Tellot, we climbed a variation of an existing route on Stiletto Needle, and a variation on the only route on Phantom Tower. Other routes climbed were the upper part of the South Ridge on Serra Two (which was accessed through the col on the south side of Serra One) and Dentiform, as well as a scramble up Dragonback Peak. We also paid a visit to the Plummer hut, where we joined the crowd on a social ascent of Claw Peak. There were a total of eight of us on the summit on that beautiful afternoon. After moving the camp to the Plummer hut, we climbed routes on the Blade and on Tedium Tower.

Triple Crescent 130 m. D+, 5.11 A1. Tellot Spire, upper Tellot Glacier, Waddington Range. *F.A.: Graham Rowbotham, Luca Bellin, Janez Ales. July 2003*.

The route follows the buttress between *Central Dihedral* (85 m; D+, 5.11a; Lorne Glick, Kai Hirvonen, Whit Richardson; 1998) and *Southeast Dihedral* (80 m; D, 5.10+; Michael Down, Scott Markey; July 1999).

above: *Upper Tellot Glacier Peaks , from left to right: Dentiform, Blade, Stiletto, Stiletto Needle, Serras One to Three).*photo anes Ales right: *Dragonback* photo Jia Condon

P1 (60 m, 5.10+): Straight up the right-facing dihedral — when the angle eases off, climb slightly right towards the second of the three small roofs. Belay strategies could vary; we put the first belay out of the fall line of the corner due to falling ice.

P2 (15 m, 5.9): Climb up to a large ledge below a big left-facing corner. This is slightly down and right from the start of the main feature on the *Central Dihedral* route.

P3 (25 m, 5.11–): Start up a right-leaning diagonal crack feature, stem to the corner on the right, and pull on a suspicious block to reach the corner again. Some slab moves bring you to a hanging belay.

P4 (30 m, 5.10+ A1,): Three beautiful *Crescent Crack*–like arcs (5.10+), and a step to the right along a horizontal crack, bring you to the base of another crack. Show your mastery or use aid :). A slab leads to the base of the summit boulder. Mid-fifth-class from there.

There is a 60-m free-hanging rappel from the summit, then 30 m of scrambling and a 30-m rappel. The pitch lengths add up to about 130 m of climbing.

Routes (first two with new variations?) climbed by Graham Rowbotham and Janez Ales:

Stiletto Needle, 200 m. 5.10. Two-pitch variation, OS; upper Tellot Glacier.

South Ridge of Phantom Tower (3100 m), 200 m. 5.10, two-pitch variation; Serras.

South Ridge of Serra Two (3605 m), 600 m (upper part). TD, 5.9, 45 degrees; Serras.

East Couloir/North Ridge of Dentiform's east peak (3240 m), 120 m. AD, 55 degrees / 5.10; upper Tellot Glacier.

*Triple Crescent*130 m. 5.11 A1; F.A.; Tellot Spire, upper Tellot Glacier.

East Buttress of the Blade (3340 m), 180 m. D, 5.10, OS; upper Tellot Glacier.

West Ridge of Claw Peak (2812 m), 130 m. AD+, 5.6; Tellot Glacier.

*Medium of Tedium*100 m. D, 5.10b R, OS; Tedium Tower (2660 m), Tellot Glacier.

Due to the lack of good weather in the summer of 2004, Jia Condon and Janez Ales were mostly camp-bound at Dragon's Tail. A couple of sunny half-days allowed us to climb two (new) routes on the southeast face of Dragonback Peak. We called the first route *Guess What?* in reference to the weather we had. The answer is: "It's snowing again!" Here are the specs:

Guess What? 200 m. D, 5.10+ (5.10, 5.10, 5.9, 5.7), F.A.: southeast face of Dragonback Peak, upper Tellot Glacier; *July 2004*.

P1 (50 m, 5.10): Start to the right of a big cave and follow cracks slightly to the right.

P2 (50 m 5.10): Angle right and traverse into the big left-facing corner.

P3 (50 m 5.9): Continue up the corner to a ledge with some big blocks.

P4 (50 m 5.7): A few moves around the blocks, followed by a lot of scrambling, bring you to the top.

String Fever 120 m. D+, 5.11– (5.10, 5.11–, 5.10+), F.A.; southeast face of Dragonback Peak, upper Tellot Glacier, *July 2004*.

P1 (50 m): Climb cracks to a slab below the big roof.

P2 (50 m): The good news is that the roof will surprise you; the bad news is that the off-width above will also surprise you :).

P3 (20 m): The final wide crack.

Plans were again big, but the weather was not right. During our planned 18-day stay, we had less than a handful of semi-decent weather days. One of the storms caught us on the south side of Serra Two. Due to my slide on the slope, and consequently a lost tent, a storm-night bivouac did not look like a good option, but it was the only one. Not knowing how long the storm would last, we did not use our sleeping bags during the wet night and we were covered only with a small tarp stretched over our tent poles.

The snow accumulation was big enough to prevent any rock climbing and yet small enough to allow us an escape across the notorious south-face slope of Serra Two.

the interior

solitary confinement

sean isaac

NEAR THE END of July 2004, Grant Statham, Andrew Querner and I spent almost two weeks camped in East Creek basin on the back side of the Howsers, in the Bugaboos. Our goal was a well-known yet secretively whispered-about gem. The smooth, vertical southwest face of Prince Albert Tower is sliced by a series of stunning splitters, the middle one of which aims straight for the summit. If this line were located in Squamish or Yosemite, it would be a three-and-a-half-star classic done way before I started climbing, but instead it has evaded climbers due to its remoteness, sustained parallel nature and burly off-widths.

On our first day, we set up camp, then decided to walk over to check out the line, hoping to get a pitch in before dark. The first pitch exceeded all my expectations. A straight-in tips crack pulled a small roof, feldspar crystals providing foot smears. After this crux, the crack gradually opened to fingers then tight hands before ending at a belay in a pod. Who would have thought that we would be glacier cragging in T-shirts at eight o'clock at night?

Over the next couple of days, Grant, Andrew and I slugged away at the splitter, torqueing fingers and jamming hands into rough crystalline granite. More-dialled crack masters would have dispatched such a short route in a single day. Being jamming bumblies, we ended up blowing the on-sights on a few pitches, which meant that we had to return for the redpoints, as our goal was a free route. Also, Andrew wanted to pursue his artistic urges in addition to just climbing, so the most spectacular pitches were re-led for photos. Visualize the absurdity of Andrew 10 ft. behind us, dangling from the apex of his A-frame boom. His rigging stunts typically turn heads a pitch off the ground at cragging areas, but seeing him hanging in space a few hundred feet off the glacier was definitely a crazy sight. Needless to say, he'll do just about anything to get a unique perspective.

Route finding was not an issue, as we followed the singular, unflawed fissure from bottom to top. Ever widening, it progressed through all the sizes: *Pitch 1* was tips to tight hands; *Pitch 2* was tight hands to cups; *Pitch 3* was mainly fists. Eventually, it widened to the much-feared size of off-width on *Pitch 4*. I tried it first but ended up aiding to a stance. Luckily, we had burly Grant along to slay the burly off-width. He followed it clean on top rope, so the following day he shouldered the monster rack of #4 Camalots and set to the task of firing it on lead. I got completely worked just following the pitch, and barely resisted the desire to shout "Take!" Arm barring, hand stacking, laybacking and general thrutching got me to Grant's belay, where I curled up and hyperventilated. Through gasps of heavy breathing, I congratulated him on an awesome send; meanwhile, Andrew had been hovering behind us, snapping shots of our flailing.

Above, the crack abruptly narrowed back down to fists and hands, joining *Dingleberry Spam* (D, 5.10) for its last pitch to the top. This was the second ascent of Prince Albert Tower, the first being when Guy Edwards and I opened *Dingleberry Spam* in 2002. That was our last mountain route together, so this particular summit holds special meaning for me.

We named our new route *Solitary Confinement* (D, 5.11) for obvious reasons. (We were "confined" to a "solitary" crack, in case it is not that obvious.) The climb is equipped with two-bolt stations, so the precious rack of cams can be saved for the same-sized parallel cracks. We spent the rest of our trip trying another new route, but ended up running away from afternoon lightning storms every day, leaving it incomplete. It's probably better that way; gives me something to dream about for next summer.

left: *The crack,* Solitary Confiment.
photo Andrew Querner

kmc: horsing around granite creek

doug brown

"EXPECTED CAMP LOCATION is only three or four kilometres from where the horses drop us off," I can still hear myself telling applicants for the 2004 KMC Climbing Camp. "And judging by the aerial photo and first-hand reports, the travel looks pretty good," I continued, "but you just never know ..."

I organized the KMC's Climbing Camp again this year, and it was a bit of a pilgrimage for me — definitely a "Brayshaw #5" game (*CAJ* 2004, p.96). In 1994, Sandra, Mark Young and I attempted to ski from St. Mary's Alpine Park to Panorama — the Southern Purcells Traverse. A collection of meteorological (snow, snow, rain, rain) and nutritional (food cache sunk into lake) catastrophes came together at Lone Cairn Lake below Mount Findlay. Our forced retreat consisted of three hard days through difficult terrain with abysmal weather and no food. A spanking like that cannot go unanswered, so I vowed to return one day.

It took ten years, but return I did in late July 2004 with nine other climbers for the 2004 KMC Climbing Camp. As Mount Findlay lies at the head of Granite Creek, in the heart of the Purcell Wilderness Conservancy, air support is not permitted; a walk of close to 40 km would be required to reach our intended base-camp location. Walking that far, with only horse trails to follow (if we were lucky) and with nine days of food and a full mountaineering pack, was not something my old body would

enjoy. And if I wanted anyone other than Sandra and Kumo to join me, I needed to find a way to reduce the suffering involved in getting in to and out from this year's camp. The only answer was an expedition in the old style: a multi-day approach using pack horses to carry our great piles of gear.

The plan was simple: Mike Christensen of Findlay Creek Outfitters would supply five pack horses and two handlers to carry our stuff up Granite Creek as far as the horses could travel, while we walked with day packs; from there, we would carry all our gear the final 3- to 4-km distance and 500 vertical feet to camp. Two days of travel were planned for in each direction, with an overnight spent at Mike's cabin at the confluence of Granite and Findlay creeks. This meant that we would walk about 25 km on the good Findlay Creek horse trail on the first day, with the second day expected to involve about 10 km on the not so good Granite Creek trail, followed by 3 to 4 km through the bush, boulders and swamp of the upper Granite Creek valley.

The first day went mostly according to plan. We had a good trail to follow, although it was a very hot day and our crew was feeling a bit whipped by the time we stumbled into camp after nine hours on the trail. Unfortunately, we were faster than the horses and waited three long hours for our dinners to arrive. That night, it became apparent that all our gear had made it — except for Will's mountaineering boots. Oh good.

The next day, things were a bit more interesting. The horse trail up Granite Creek is much less used than the Findlay Creek "mainline"; it was rougher, and tough to follow at times, and involved maybe a dozen creek crossings, a couple of which fell into the "dodgy" category. But with a minimum of fuss, noon saw us arriving at the end of the horse trail — just in time to be checked out by an inquisitive grizzly across the creek. Despite valiant efforts to extend lunch, it came time to shoulder our massive packs, many of which were in the 60- to 70-lb. range. Some in the group found that their packs were unmanageably heavy and concluded that shuttling gear in two trips was the only feasible option.

While the travel beyond the end of the horse trail wasn't too bad, even "not too bad" becomes a bit of an ordeal when one is staggering like a drunk under a huge load. After travelling about 1 km in an hour, Maurice lost his balance in a boulder field and fell over, soundly smacking his head on some rocks. Luckily, he is a thick-headed Brit, and after Sandra had expertly bandaged his head, we continued on, although a bit more carefully. Unfortunately, very soon after starting off again, Eva badly twisted an ankle. Given that continuing on was out of the question for Eva, the group decided to make camp even though we were far short of our planned destination for the day. The good news was hearing by satellite phone that Will's boots had been found and would be delivered to the end of the horse trail the next morning.

above: *The Leaning Tower Group from Clutterbuck.* photos: Doug Brown

The following day Eva and Will decided to stay put in order to give Eva's ankle a chance to mend, while the rest of us headed off (we had FSR radios, so we could keep in contact). After an hour or so, we reached a clearing beyond which the bush apparently got much worse. Sandra, Hamish, John and I wanted to continue on to our intended camping spot; the others were quite keen to camp at the current spot at around 6000 ft. As we had three radios in the group, we decided to split up: Will and Eva at Camp 2; Maurice, Ken, Jane and Peter at Camp 3; and Doug, Hamish, John and Sandra at high camp. As it turned out, the bush above Camp 3 on the north side of Granite Creek was indeed hideous; eventually, however, elk trails on the south side of the creek were discovered which greatly eased travel to high camp.

On Tuesday those of us at high camp went on a magical mystery tour care of Mr. Hamish My-Name-Is-Mud Mutch. You see, it seems that the east ridge of Mount Clutterbuck is unclimbed, and nothing excites an old Scotsman like an unclimbed route. Hamie assured us that, despite the terrifying appearance of the ridge from camp, we would find it to be wheelchair-accessible up close. And who were we to doubt the redoubtable Hamish Mutch? Well, after we had ascended 300 ft. of boulders and moderate snow, and had grovelled up another 300 ft. of steep slag and dirt to gain the east ridge proper, it was obvious that we would need those aforementioned wheelchairs if we persevered with our plans: the ridge to the summit was very long, involving much fourth- or low-fifth-class terrain up and over various turrets, gendarmes and other obstacles.

With a minimum of name-calling and rock throwing, we changed our objective to the (also unclimbed) south ridge of Clutterbuck. Thus, we rappelled down fourth- to low-fifth-class dirt and slabs to the Duchess Glacier (unofficial name) on the south side of Clutterbuck (can you say "feeling committed"?). The glacier was gentle, with minimal crevasses, so we quickly found ourselves at the base of the south ridge, which looked easy except for possibly the very last bit.

After ascending said easy ridge, we bumped up against some very difficult climbing about 100 m below the summit of Clutterbuck. Oops. You see, our plan was to climb Clutterbuck and then descend the normal route on the west ridge, thus saving ourselves the trouble of levitating back up the slag we had rappelled down on the east ridge — not to mention descending the nastiness we had ascended on the other side of the ridge. We could possibly go down the

south ridge and make our way around to the Clutterbuck-Lees col, from where a descent to camp would be easy. But from what we could see, the col appeared to be guarded by steep and featureless slabs, and as it was already 2 p.m., there was little enthusiasm for risking finding ourselves even further from home with no way back. Hamish began preparing us for the shame of an unplanned bivy without having tagged the summit.

All's well that ends well, though, and we managed to find another way up to the east ridge (which we made Hamish lead, of course), and an excellent descent, so we were back at camp by 7:10 p.m. (two hours before dark), making for almost a 13-hour day. We have submitted a request to the B.C. Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management that the east ridge be renamed "My Name Is Mud Ridge".

While we were bumbling around on the north, east and south sides of Clutterbuck, Ken, Jane and Peter went to take a look at its west ridge. Peter wasn't feeling great, so he waited at the Clutterbuck-Lees col while Ken and Jane enjoyed a few short pitches of low-fifth-class climbing on fine granite on their way to the summit of Clutterbuck. Here is Jane's story:

> We are smack in the middle of summer. The sun is commanding a small fleet of cumulus clouds. At 10,000-plus feet, Mt. Clutterbuck grazes the skyline like the hunch in an old crone's back — high and rounded and wind-wrinkled.
>
> Ken disappears around the corner of a low-fifth-class offwidth. It will be my lead next. There's still an element of doubt that our route will "go". What a shame if it doesn't, as we're so close to the top. Besides, a perfect day is taking shape.
>
> Several hours ago we were crashing excitedly through prickly spruce and walls of rhododendron, lurching over deadwood and emerging gleefully from watery bogs. Above the forest we found fluffy larches beside a wrinkled tarn. A lovely sight. Then from here we continued up to just below the prominent southwest ridge and cramponed up the snow to the col between Mt. Clutterbuck and Mt. Lees.

> My lead now. The steely blue sun gazes. I shudder, and then move gingerly in the coolness. The rock is like cottage cheese clawed with a fork. It is solid granite, requiring several low-fifth-class moves in mountain boots. Delightful. Ken and I unrope and scamper up the final boulder slope to the summit. My senses try to adjust. I've never lost that excitement of getting to the top of a mountain; it's always a bright, euphoric blow to the brain. It's great to sometimes leave our supercharged world of accelerated travel, helicopter access and quick assaults on mountains. Here, all mechanized travel is prohibited. This is a quieter, stiller, slower world.
>
> There's no hint at all that anyone has been on the summit, and ours is maybe the third ascent of this route. I scan the horizon. Ridge after ridge, spire after spire — Henrik Ibsen's "deep, unending, inexhaustible kingdom".

Wednesday saw most of the group hiking into the upper reaches of Granite Creek, Sandra, Hamish and I enjoying a very pleasant ridge walk to a 9300-ft. peak east of camp. On Thursday, Sandra, John and I joined up with Peter, Jane and Ken on the South Ridge of Mount Findlay. When Sandra, John and I reached Lone Cairn Lake, we could see the other three, who had come from Camp 3, contouring around the basin above the west side of the lake. We happily followed their tracks in the rapidly softening snow (here John decided to hang out in the sun and soak up the view). From the basin, easy-to-moderate snow led to the rock of the South Ridge.

Once on the ridge (where Sandy and I caught up with the other three), we were treated to wonderful scrambling on broken but very sound granite. With rock shoes on but the rope in the pack, Sandra and I found a meandering route that we rated fourth- or low-fifth-class; the others elected to don the rope and took a more direct line which they rated 5.6. A very enjoyable ascent in a grand place.

Ours was the second ascent of the South Ridge, and we were the second party to summit Findlay since our friends Paul Allen and Hamish Mutch did the first ascent of the same ridge in 1991 — 13 years prior!

The following day, Sandra, Hamish, Eva (still hobbling, but determined to get at least one summit) and I climbed Clutterbuck by the West Ridge, as Ken and Jane had done three days earlier.

Our walk out was accomplished in two days (again with the help of the horses) without any dramas — except for a nasty creek crossing, and a severed black bear paw on the trail from a fresh grizzly kill.

This trip was a grand adventure into a remarkable, very seldom visited wilderness area – easily the largest unlogged area in B.C. that I have ever seen. The climbing was generally excellent on wonderful granite. Our weather was spectacular, with nine consecutive sunny days, and new friends made the adventure complete.

Participants: Sandra McGuinness, Peter Jordan, Maurice de St. Jorre, Ken Holmes, Hamish Mutch, Doug Brown, Eva Boehringer, Will Neustaeder, John Halliday, Jane Weller.

southern selkirks traverse: ferguson to the pass

stan metcalfe

The skiing began April 7 from the town of Ferguson. Quinn Castillo, Brian Coulter and I spent the entire day in the valley as we skied up Ferguson Creek and took a left turn at Parisian Creek. After 1.5 km we veered northward to ascend the drainage west of Coon Creek. By evening we had reached a nice campsite in the subalpine.

From camp, we ascended to traverse the west side of the height of land in order to cross over the ridge at GR 652268. The path of least resistance contoured the headwaters of Coon Creek, heading north and east. We ascended unclimbed, unnamed Peak 2575 m (GR 671287) via easy snow slopes on its east ridge before traversing northward and descending steep terrain to Glengarry Mountain, which we ascended via its 30- to 40-degree west slopes. The ski descent was pleasant on nice corn snow. We climbed back to a camp at the beautiful pass (GR 680315) north of Glengarry Mountain, where ptarmigans kept us company that evening.

The next morning, we ascended unnamed Peak 2650 m at GR 679319 via its third-class south ridge. From our camp at the col, the descent to the Westfall River was a 1300-m ski run. Once in the valley bottom, we headed northwest up the river, lunching at a small lake, and then continued northeast up a 1000-m grunt of a climb to gain the Scylla Glacier. Here we set up camp, and enjoyed several hours of rest without our ski boots on, soaking in the warm afternoon sunshine.

From the Scylla Glacier, we climbed Mount Ulysses on nice north-facing ski slopes. A 200-m-wide, 40-degree slope in a beautiful position gave us a great ski down the southeast face. This brought us to a col (GR 713372) west of the peak. From here we removed our skis and ascended the third-class north ridge of the peak 1.5 km southeast of Mount Ulysses. This was the fourth possible first ascent of our ski tour. We were blessed by good weather, great snow, fine terrain and exceptional partners. We returned by skinning up our ski run on the southeast face of Ulysses.

Time was in adequate supply, so we angled ourselves towards Scylla Mountain. After skinning as far as possible, we boot packed in thigh-deep, rotten snow up the northwest face to a notch in the west ridge. Thirty metres of fourth-class rock led to the summit. A steep ski from the notch brought us right back to camp.

In the afternoon, the weather was fine and sun-affected avalanches seemed unlikely. We decided to press on to the Houston Glacier. After packing up camp, we contoured around the northwest end of the Chinese Wall and up to Oasis Pass before continuing northeastward to the south slopes of Mount Billy Budd and Claggart Peak. (These peak names are confusing, as the map names and the *Selkirks South* guidebook names differ.) Quinn volunteered to boot pack up the 100-m couloir in waist-deep, rotten snow if he would be allowed to name the couloir after his dog. The Toggle Couloir brought us to the col (GR 716417) between Billy Budd and Claggart, from which we ascended the peak at GR 712417 (Billy Budd). A steep descent northward brought us to a ramp that we used to traverse west to the Houston Glacier. At nine in the evening, Quinn and I made ourselves comfortable while Brian cooked soup and dinner.

After a well-deserved night's rest, we skied up the south glacier of Mount Proteus and climbed that peak as well. The north glacier of Proteus was a technical descent over icefall debris and through heavily crevassed terrain. We skied northeast around the Ohno Wall of Moby Dick Mountain to less convoluted terrain that brought us to a camp at Pequod Pass.

The following day we climbed and skied the northeast glacier of Moby Dick. On our seventh day we climbed mounts Ahab and Butters. From the top of Butters, we heard the call of a horn. On that note, we returned to Pequod Pass and went off to collect our food drop at Battle Abbey. After a week outside, we were met at the door by Margaret Gmoser and her family and friends and welcomed for a sumptuous dinner and a dry night. The hospitality offered by the Gmoser family was of great warmth and friendliness.

The next day, warm, dry and happy, we left the regal Battle Abbey to ski down to and connect with the traditional Bugaboos–to–Rogers Pass traverse. Stormy weather cooled us off as we ascended to the Beaver-Duncan col. We descended in the proverbial ping-pong ball to the Duncan Névé. After a day of waiting for the storm to subside, we dug the tent out and phoned for a forecast. The update convinced us to ski to the Beaver valley. The Beaver Glacier was quite broken, so we followed the moat on its west side, which involved crossing several large, bowling-ball-filled run-outs. Despite a broken binding, we made it out to the highway via the Beaver valley trail.

Descent down the SE Face Ulysses

Summary

Required maps: 82 K/14 and 82 N/3
Map datum: NAD 27

Possible first ascents: Unnamed 2575 m, GR 671287, north ridge, easy ski ascent; Glengarry Mountain, 2704 m, GR 682307, west slopes, easy ski ascent; Unnamed 2650 m, GR 679319, south ridge, third-class; Unnamed 2670 m, GR 714372, north ridge, third-class.

Possible first descents: Ulysses southeast face, Unnamed 2575 m, Glengarry Mountain, Pequod north glacier, Moby Dick northeast glacier, Billy Budd north aspect, Scylla northwest face.

Special thanks to the many folks we phoned in order to discuss route plans and possibilities. We relied extensively on David Jones' Selkirks South *guidebook. The mention of four previously unclimbed peaks was a factor in our route planning. Photos of the descent down the north sides of mounts Billy Budd and Proteus allowed us to head into large terrain with an idea of what lay ahead.*

the wrong way to battle abbey

stan wagon

FOR EACH OF THE PAST FOUR YEARS, our team of mostly Colorado skiers has done short traverses in the Selkirks and environs. We want to maximize our chance for interesting skiing, so we choose routes of modest length — considerably shorter than, for example, the Bugaboos to Rogers Pass. We usually spend two nights at each camp, allowing time to ski the great slopes that have made this region famous as one of the best ski areas in the world. Moreover, we try to end the trips at a lodge (Fairy Meadows, Sorcerer Lake, Battle Abbey) so that we can spend an additional week enjoying the terrain in relative comfort. This has worked quite well for us: the feeling one has when making the final descent to the hut after a week or more out is unsurpassed.

In 2001, we were dropped off at the Argentine Ski Camp, going in just as an ACC group was coming out. We skied from there to the Great Cairn hut and on to Fairy Meadows. The crux that year was the final day through Azimuth Notch and then Thor Pass; despite a large number of avalanches on the lower slopes, Thor was high and cold enough to be stable.

The following year we went to the same landing and proceeded south to Sorcerer Lake Lodge. That week had the best weather of all our trips, and we easily bagged Argentine's summit on our first day. While at the lodge, we were able to reach the top of Iconoclast Mountain and also the true summit of Nordic Mountain.

In 2003, we were dropped off near the northwest end of the Mons Icefield, from where we proceeded south to the Freshfield Icefield and down to a pickup on the Mummery Glacier. The highlight of that trip was a 60-m-long ice tunnel we discovered on the Mons. We thought it was a run-of-the-mill ice cave, but after we entered we could see light at the other end. What a remarkable spot! That week was marked by pretty poor weather, but things cleared up for the last day down to the helicopter pickup site on the Mummery Glacier. Getting through the Helmer-Gilgit col was interesting. We took the easy route on the north side, but that led to a steep slope on the south, where we belayed at the start. However, if one goes through a slightly higher point west of the actual col, then the south side is a walk-off.

In April 2004, we tried something new for us — a traverse that had not been previously done. Years before, while at Battle Abbey, we had seen the Snow Ocean heli-ski run to the south. So a route from Snow Ocean to the Abbey seemed a natural line to try. It turned out that two other teams were also investigating this range, though for them the Abbey was just a way station: one group skied from Nemo to Revelstoke; the other, from Ferguson to Rogers Pass (see previous article). For us, the Abbey was a fine termination point. Our route was a natural one, starting at the south end of the Westfall group and following a line near the spine of the range but on the north side so that we could ski north-facing slopes on layover days. Total distance was 32 km, which we covered over four travel days.

The Wrong Glacier

Don McTighe was able to drop us off on a high bench northwest of the bottom of Snow Ocean (a.k.a. Gyr Glacier); this was an excellent helicopter landing site and camping spot (GR 792320). On the next day, we could thus ski south on Snow Ocean to near the top of Gyr Peak, the southernmost peak of this group. From here we moved first up and over a col to the west so that we could descend a fork of Laidlaw Creek to the main branch, and then up Laidlaw Creek past Thumb Spire to Gobi Pass and a camp on the other side.

After a day of good skiing, we continued into more-alpine terrain by climbing through the Wrong-Vistamount col. Here we came to the first major decision point: whether to proceed down to the snout of the Wrong Glacier or try for a high route around Mount Goodrich to the easier west branch of this glacier. Since it is hard to go up when there is a route that goes down, and also since the snout had appeared challenging but doable when viewed from the terrain at Battle Abbey, we decided to go down. There is a line of steep, ice-free snow on skier's left, but the nearby jumble of seracs certainly got our attention. It turned out to be a cruise, and once past the snout, we made a hard left turn, putting us on a small ledge that brought us to Oasis Lake.

The next day was glorious as the group put in 14 sets of tracks on the north face of Goodrich. But the day after that was a bit stressful. We decided that a high route via Oasis and Houston passes would be better than a route straight down into Houston Creek. This involved traversing the west side of Billy Budd and Vere Summit, above Kellie Creek, but the day was sunny, increasing avalanche danger on this large slope. We were surprised to find a barrier ridge coming off the north ridge of Vere (warning: there is some confusion on peak names here; the topo map has Vere incorrectly marked) which blocked easy passage to Houston Pass. We had some information from summer travellers that there was a route through (notably from Sam Silverstein, first ascentionist of Moby Dick, Goodrich, Wrong and Scylla), but it took us some time to find a feasible route.

There turns out to be a small gap in the ridge which allowed a descent without any cornice issues (GR 695414). Once through here, it was clear sailing to Houston Pass and down to the lake in the valley for our last camp.

The next day was a storm day, but Rob, Bob and I wanted to investigate a steep couloir that might have offered a route over the north ridge of Vere. We had been close to its entrance on the previous day. It turned out to be quite stable, but also very steep at 52 degrees. We were able to boot to its top, and skiing down presented no problem. So we believe that this couloir, which we called White Chocolate Couloir, can in stable conditions provide a good shortcut from upper Kellie Creek to Houston Glacier (couloir top is at GR 698414).

On the last day, we took a straightforward route to Battle Abbey by ascending to the col between Typee and Forecastle and crossing around the north side of Typee to reach terrain leading easily to the Abbey. There we met guides Tom Raudaschl and Robson Gmoser and spent a great week. Even though this was my third visit to the Abbey, on every day but one we skied terrain that was new to me — a tribute to the alpine enthusiasm of the guides, and the extensive possibilities from this remote and historic lodge.

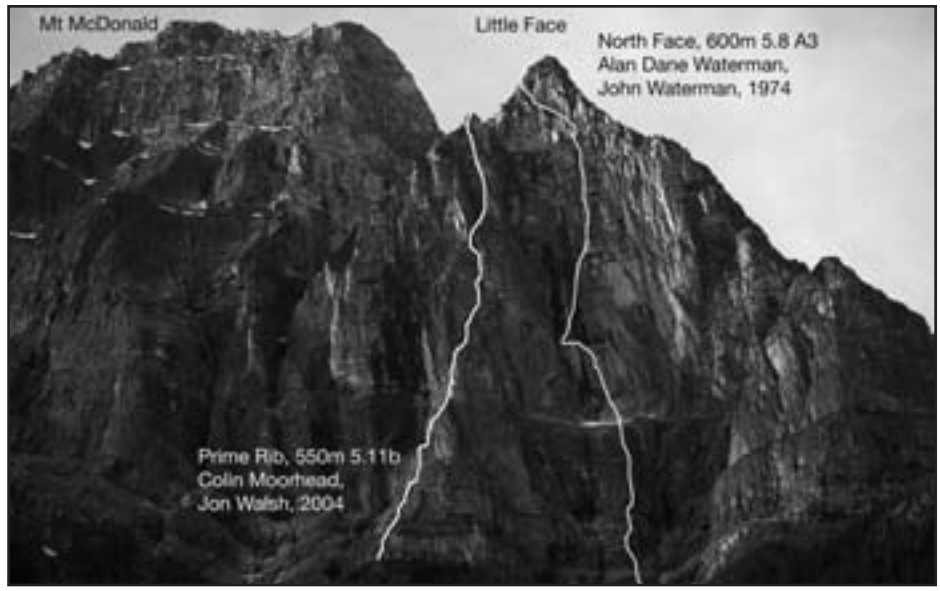
The terrain of this traverse is ideal in many ways. There are interesting ridges and peaks and many route options. Three groups did traverses in this range in 2004, and they each took different paths through the tricky terrain: one found a route through the Chinese Wall, another went through a high col and descended the north side of Billy Budd, and we chose the Wrong snout and the Vere transverse ridge. Moreover, each of the parties took a different route to approach the Abbey: Typee col, the King's Landing and Pequod Pass. It might not be the only way to cross the range, but for us the Wrong way was the right way.

Personnel*: Stan Wagon, Silverthorne, Colo.; Bob Portmann, Boulder, Colo.; Rob Nachtwey, Olympic Valley, Calif.; Katie Larson, Montezuma, Colo.; Phil Williams, Alma, Colo.*

new route: mount macdonald

jon walsh

ONE CANNOT DRIVE the Trans-Canada Highway through Rogers Pass without noticing the north face of Mount Macdonald. Characterized by long, continuous rock ribs, numerous avalanche paths, frozen waterfalls in winter, and two pointy peaks, this aspect has seen surprisingly little climber traffic. Its lesser summit, known as "Little Macdonald", has a particularly steep and triangular wall of vertical stone. Dave Jones calls it "one of the major walls of the Selkirks" in his guidebook *Selkirks South*. In 1973, the Waterman cousins opened a direttissima line on the face in a three-and-a-half-day effort, and there had not been another successful party since. I climbed the 80-m waterfall at the base of the face in October a few years back and took note of the quality rock that loomed above. One rib in particular on the left side stands out and gets both morning and afternoon light in the long days of summer; it is a very obvious line. For a couple of years, I waited patiently for the right time and the right partner. Finally, on June 26, 2004, Squamish hard man Colin Moorhead and I were getting after it.



Despite a forecast of sixty-per-cent chance of rain and afternoon thundershowers, we left Golden at 3 a.m. with old Metallica blaring, and were approaching by 4. An hour later we were back at the car, defeated by raging Connaught Creek. We started again, found a crossing, and two hours later were 2100 ft. above the road and at the base of the face. Three 5.8 rope stretchers with a little simulclimbing put us below the first amazing pitch: an overhanging, Yosemite-style squeeze chimney to a splitter corner of sustained 5.10 finger and hand jams leading to a terrace where the rib juts out from the steep headwall above. From here, we had a good view of the upper face and our intended line. The next two pitches were obvious: the left side of a 90-m pinnacle, followed by a vertical blank face. With the weather looking marginal at best, we decided to proceed despite the possibility of being dead-ended and getting wet. Sure enough, as I started leading Pitch 6, the rain began. Colin suggested retreating before I got too high, but the 5.9 stemming and hand jamming up this left-facing corner was too good to quit. I topped out on the pinnacle and shouted down that there might be a way through the blank face above. As Colin reached my belay, the rain eased off.

We waited a few minutes for the stone to dry and then continued. It was fortunate that the quartzite was featured with just enough incut edges, as Pitch 7 was the key to the route. Colin found a diagonal line through this face section, pounding 'blades and Arrows for pro' along the way — mostly from 5.10 stances. Three of these were left in place in key spots for future ascents, although the crux section required a 20-ft. 5.11a run-out on small face holds. Except for a couple of rappel stations, this was the only pitch that required pitons. Five more pitches of sustained, technical and beautifully exposed climbing brought us to the nipple on the ridge just left of the summit. Lightning was striking all the

neighbouring peaks as we fired the last two pitches, but the rain held off until we started rappelling. Eleven rappels later we were back at our packs — tired, wet and relieved. On the second-last rappel, the ropes had gotten stuck and an extra pitch of wet slab had to be climbed and down-climbed in the dark: a two-hour-long task that was exhausting given the state of our bodies at this point. With dying headlamps, we grovelled our way back down to the highway through soaking-wet slide alder, and arrived at the car 22 hours after leaving it.

This was truly one of the best climbing days either of us had this year and we highly recommend our route to others. It provided us with everything we were looking for: great physically, technically and mentally demanding freeclimbing, big exposure, and a fine adventure we'll remember well.

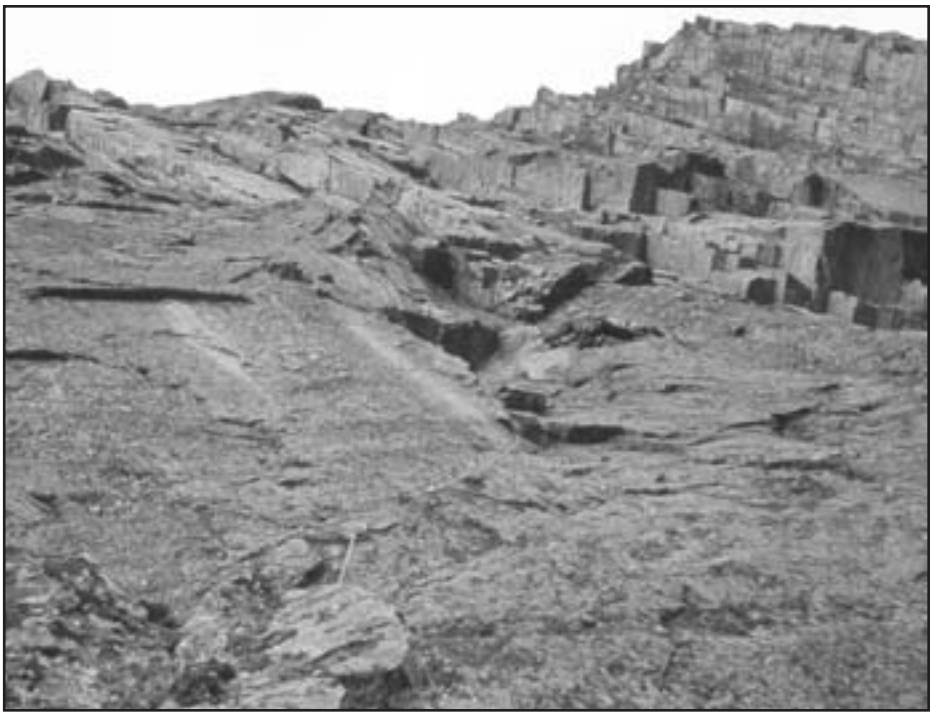
Now that the route is set up for rappelling, competent climbers armed with the beta should be able to shave several hours off our time; 12 hours up and down should be enough (plus the approach). The ultimate, however, for a very fit party would perhaps be to link *Prime Rib*, the Little Macdonald summit, and the Northwest Ridge of Mount Macdonald to its true summit, returning to the car in a day, for the full-meal deal. See the Dave Jones guide *Selkirks South* for info on the Northwest Ridge and the descent from the summit.

Summary

Prime Rib *500 m. V, 5.11b. F.A.: Colin Moorhead, Jon Walsh. June 26, 2004.*

This route takes the prominent rib just left of centre on the face and is more or less a plumb line up to a "nipple" on the ridge which is down and left of the summit. The route is characterized by a good mix of face and crack climbing on compact, in-cut and very clean quartzite from base to summit. The climbing route was then rappelled (11 raps in total); however, the rappel line for the first four pitches is to climber's left. Ascent time: 12 hours from base.

Approach: Park at a pullout above the second snow shed, take a trail (west end of pullout) to the creek, and head upstream for a short distance to where the creek splits into three. Three log bridges lead to old growth that offers much easier travelling than the slide alder. Hike about 15 minutes up the old growth, traverse the slide alder until an avalanche path is reached, and continue up to the base of the face. Fortunately, in late June there is still a lot of avalanche debris, which makes travel easy to the base of the face. Total time from car: 2 hours. It is also possible to scramble up through steep trees between the two prominent avalanche paths.



Midway on Prime Rib

Pitch 1: Start up a corner at the left side of the rib, passing a fixed nut, then continue up blocky slabs towards the right side of a huge roof (60 m, 5.8).

Pitch 2: Climb a right-facing corner at the right end of the roof and belay on the prow above (60 m, 5.8).

Pitch 3: Continue up small corners on the prow, step left, and belay below a clean, white, slightly overhanging left-facing corner (60 m, 5.8).

Pitch 4: A beautiful left-facing corner. A short section of squeeze chimney, followed by hand and finger jams, leads to a terrace (60 m, 5.10c).

Pitch 5: Walk to the base of the obvious pinnacle and climb its left side (55 m, 5.10a).

Pitch 6: A stellar hand crack up the left-facing corner leads to the top of the pinnacle; belay just above a two-nut rappel anchor on top of the pinnacle for a better view of the next pitch (35 m, 5.9).

Pitch 7: Step right off the pinnacle, climb up a short corner and start traversing right on face holds past a fixed piton. Make a few moves upward (fixed piton) and move diagonally up and right on small face holds to another fixed piton below a roof. Step right around an arête, move up and right and belay at the base of a left-trending groove. A spicy pitch that is a tad run out — three fixed pitons in total (35 m, 5.11a).

Pitch 8: Climb up the left-trending groove, then up steep jugs to where it is possible to make some exposed moves right in order to gain a blocky ramp that heads up and right. Belay on a ledge about 5 m above a slung block (rappel anchor) (45 m, 5.10d).

Rappel note: From the slung block, a 60-m diagonal rappel reaches the pinnacle (top of Pitch 6); some gear needed for directionals.

Pitch 9: Move right along a ledge for a few metres to below a small roof. Layback steeply around the left side of the roof, then continue up a steep, technical corner for about 10 m. After a tricky traverse left to easier ground, head straight up on good holds. Belay at a fixed nut and piton (rappel anchor) (58 m, 5.11b).

Pitch 10: Climb on the right side of a slimy gully towards some overhangs. Finger traverse left below the overhangs and step across the gully; easier terrain leads to a small tree (rappel anchor) (55 m, 5.10c).

Pitch 11: Climb up and through an overhanging slot, then continue up moderate terrain (58 m, 5.10b).

Pitch 12: A short pitch up and left to the ridge (rappel anchor) (10 m, 5.9).

Rack: 60-m ropes, a double set of cams from #0 TCU to #3 Camelot, 1 #3.5 and 1 #4 Camelot, 1 set of nuts, 5 pitons. All belays are on good ledges.

touring the southern selkirks

jonny simms

THE KITCHEN TABLE CONSISTS of old snowboards: one, an original Craig Kelly, Burton Supermodel prototype given to me in Fernie; and the other, an old friend's 162 K2 with a blown side wall. Another Rockies shallow, snowpack cliff drop put this board outta commish. Meaningful to me but useless items to the general public. Old '60s couches outfit this small Golden CP Rail house built eighty years ago.

Colin Moorehead sits directly across from me. I observe the usual sewing-machine leg and the intense look he gives me when there's some sort of psyche brewing within. Topo maps and empty beer bottles clutter the makeshift kitchen table. The gears in our brains are turning, trying to formulate a plan for a spring tour, something new. It's mid-December and the ski psyche is coming back after a long season on the rock. Our chicken legs and bulging forearms will soon metamorphose into iron lungs and inexhaustible legs thanks to countless days of touring in the home zone of Rogers Pass.

The plans are formulated. We decide to attempt a traverse of the entire southern Selkirks, from the Nemo Glacier (50 km south of the Beaver valley – Trans-Canada intersection) to Revelstoke via the high alpine. Both of us are fully committed, but the longstanding question until seven days before the start of our April tour is: Who will be our third musketeer? At first our good buddy Brian Salzgeber is in for sure, but a knee injury puts this young sessioner on hold for a few months. Jonny Red is my next target, but the "scared horse" decides to leave winter early in search of clean splitter granite walls. Who can blame him?

As the departure date nears, our lack of a third doesn't really deter us, since Colin and I are willing to go as a pair. Then, just a week beforehand, Golden local D'arcy McRae commits to our adventure. I'm a little skeptical about old D'arce, probably because he recently removed his ACL involuntarily in a ski crash at Red Mountain. He assures us that all will be good. We arrange the placement of two food caches and a date with Alpenglow Air Service. Steve and his Cessna ski plane are soon flying us in to the Nemo group. High-speed ski bounding is one thing, but skipping across breakable crust on a glacier while in a Cessna is another. I feel as though we're in the shoes of the Jamaican bobsled team embarking on their first committing line.

After a few quick shots with the pilot, we watch in awe as he and his plane depart, heading directly for Evening Mountain to the northeast of us.

"Man, he's heading straight for it. Do ya think he knows what he's doing?" I say out loud as visions form in my demented mind of red shrapnel spewing all over the summit.

"It's all good — he's been flying in this zone for years," D'arcy replies.

Our brave pilot is actually kilometres from this towering peak, and the buzz of the aircraft drifts lazily away.

Right from the get-go, the business is on. We immediately throw the rope on and are off, heading up, up and away. Mazinaw Mountain's north face is looking quite promising and will involve negotiating a bit of a 'schrund. An hour and a half later we're on top of a fairly exposed col. With the summit of Mazinaw directly to the west and an unclimbed, unnamed summit to the east, it seems a great place to have a spot of tea. After a snack and a brief weather obs' (bomber), I find myself chasing behind Colin to the summit of the unnamed peak. Snowy granite-ridge traversing and 5.7 splitter hand jams in Lasers take us to the top of this quick summit dubbed "Mount Trident". Downclimbing is always a little more real. Good thing I've brought along my headspace and granite mileage, or I'd be taking a one-way ride to the bottom of the Beaver!

Back at the col, we find D'arce anxious to continue the push. So off we ski, southward, down 1800 ft. of flawless corn. What a way to start a tour — dropping into a 45-degree corn chute that gives way to amusing alpine pillow rolls! Old heli-ski tracks take away some of the magic of the open wilderness, but who's complaining?

"Well, boys, if it ain't going to kill us, it'll only make us stronger," Darcy comments, observing the next big climb. Two thousand feet later, knees buckling and psyches depleted, we reach the Ferrite–Fish Ridge col, our home for the night. What a balmy evening for such a rugged place; we couldn't have asked for better weather. "It's probably shirts off in Squamish right now," Colin slurs.

After getting back into the routine of dinner chores, I decide to go for a little recon mission to check out the quality of the very enticing rock staring at me. I soon find myself on the southwest flank of Ferrite Peak, barefooted and locked into stellar hand jams. Five or six pitches of 5.7 take me to the summit of this sub-peak.

"Are you going to be able to get down from there?" yells Colin, uncertainty in his voice.

"Relax, it'll be a breeze," I yell back. At this point my feet are becoming quite sensitive due to the coarseness of the alpine granite, so down I scurry back to the comforts of camp, to be welcomed with a shot of Scotch from my comrades.

The start of Day 2 entails two committing rappels into a narrow couloir. Ice axes in hand, we climb down to the gentler terrain below that descends to Laidlaw Creek. After contouring west just above the creek proper to Gobi Pass (such an unusual name for such a gnarly place), we set a track up the northeast ridge of Mount Thomas, from which we ski an unbelievable shot ending in Houston Creek. We could mistake this place for Alaska. Such a nearby destination for big mountain lines. If only it could be corn conditions all the time!

Our evening punishment consists of a 3300-ft. skin up to the Erratum-Wrong col, where we enjoy another high alpine bivy in balmy conditions. This bivy will prove to be short-lived because of tomorrow morning's objective: a 3000-ft. southeast slope leading to the Scylla-Ulysses col and precluding a sport climber's sleep-in. So, freshly caffeinated, we're off to an alpine start the next day. An icy, melt-freeze ski down the 1500-ft. shot takes any grogginess out of me. Feeling like an '80s mogul skier, I do a constant twister down the sustained incline to keep my speed in check. What an exhilarating way to start a day. Life makes so much sense in the mountains!

The skin up to Scylla isn't really as bad as it looked from across the valley. I do feel pretty exposed at times, but thanks to an early start and ski crampons, we're on top in a matter of a few hours. The slope rises 3000 ft. at a consistent forty degrees — something to take very seriously since things could change in a matter of minutes with the sun's presence.

Lunch at the col represents only the beginning of our day. With the Chinese Wall ahead, Colin expresses his deep con-

cern about its possible impenetrability and the very long alternate route around this "Berlin-style" wall. Rising 300 ft., it extends for about 3 km along the northwest flank of Scylla Mountain. Oasis Pass is our intended destination, but that seems days away given the task at hand.

So on we flow, shredding perfect corn to the base of the Chinese Wall. The southwest aspect of "the Wall" is lined with loose rock and Rockies-style chutes — a lot tamer than the northeast side. We all spread out and recce the chutes in order to find the best one to boot up. Once we've made the ascent, a look down the other side proves to be a bit of a "kick in the nuts". Sheer walls and inconsistent couloirs mark this aspect, accompanied by a good helping of vertigo. But a glimpse of hope sparkles within me as I scan the crest of this long ridge and spot a somewhat steep-looking face leading down from the top. It's kilometres away but looks promising.

The ridge crest of the Chinese Wall is an inconsistent mess of loose 50-ft. cliffs we will have to go around. So back down our boot-pack track we go in order to access the promising face from a different chute. A lucky choice and a bit of mountain sense have us on top once again, this time excited that our potential way down is just around the corner. When I see the line, a sense of danger sends shivers down my spine; it looks a lot like the "White Wall" at Kicking Horse: steep spines and committing lines. If it weren't for the great stability of the snowpack, there is no way I would be going near that chunk of real estate. Fifty degrees for 500 ft. is what it turns out to be. I thank God for inventing corn. The line proves to be really fun and safe — jump turns and a bit of slough checking all the way to Oasis Pass! *Yee-haw*, is what I think, because the comfort of Battle Abbey is quickly nearing.

That night, we sleep at another high col, this one just northeast of Mount Billy Budd. The following morning, with a low moving in and a surprise of 35 cm, skiing off the back side is out of the question. It's quite a committing line; new snow, warm conditions and a full-blown whiteout force us to consider going down into the rain instead. Now, pissing rain is always bad for the psyche on a tour, but it's a lot better than getting swept away in a slide. Besides, I've been in training, enduring months on end of rain while working movies in Vancouver. With Battle Abbey only a day away, our alternate safe route is down Houston Creek and up Schooner Pass. This route will take us right to our first cache.

The rain and the quick elevation gain back into the alpine prevent the next day from being too comfortable; getting soaked and then heading into cold temps always sucks. During the climax of this wet Selkirk storm, I manage to lose my Therm-a-Rest. It's a reminder of how valuable such simple things are in the mountains. Fortunately, our timing couldn't be better with tonight's home, as we find ourselves in an old burn. The sight of many standing dead puts the spirits back into Team Slayer. Nearing hypothermia due to the morning's soak and the deep chill of the alpine, we're pretty glad to end the day with a blazing hot fire. During construction of the night's camp, I spot and manage to ski a 500-ft. pow' line back to my forgotten Therm-a-Rest.

Morning brings us broken skies with mild temps, welcome weather after some pretty harsh times. Following coffee and a few safety meetings, we depart for Battle Abbey. The morning's turn of events causes Colin to ski laps around Darce and me. "What's up with you guys? Especially you, Jonny — if I were you I'd be taking full advantage to schralp up Ruedi's tenure," he yells. He looks like an excited schoolboy at his first teen dance as, grinning from ear to ear, he pumps laps in the perfect blower pow'.

The first signs of other humans come at Schooner Pass and bring a great sense of excitement after our isolation. We are greeted on the doorstep of Battle Abbey with ice-cold beers and smoked salmon from the ever-friendly and always-generous Gmosers. Hans, Margaret, Robson and Conrad welcome the three of us with open arms.

The lodge is beaming with friendly faces; it seems that we have arrived at the right time! Friends and Family Week is in full effect, and there is definitely no shortage of booze or food. Within an hour I find myself half cut and having a conversation with the ambassador of Austria. He's explaining what it's like working for the government, organizing cocktail parties for other government officials. The next two days consist of more eating, skiing and drinking. The generosity and good nature of the Gmosers and their friends still brings a great sense of warmth to my soul. Thank you.

Leaving the comforts of the Battle Abbey hut is pretty hard, but our departure for the next leg starts with a 2500-ft. pow' shot down to Butters Creek. My quads are screaming and my knees buckling under the weight of the fresh food cache! The boys soon catch up, along with their hangovers. My head is pounding as well from the previous night's heavy drinking and shenanigans. Our next up-track, 4000 ft. up to the Beaver-Duncan col, is punishment in itself. Our tired legs and lungs arrive at yet another 8000-ft. high-camp col — our home for the next nine hours. The Mexican meal we put together for that evening doesn't quite go along with our current weather.

With the wind whipping hard and visibility pretty much nil, the feasibility of our planned route around Sugarloaf Mountain remains a mystery. We intend to negotiate a way around this ancient beast from south to north. This task, which presents some very challenging objectives in a full-blown whiteout with rapid snow accumulation, proves to be the most intense and involved day of ski touring in my life. The weather threatens to shut us down quickly if we don't act fast. There isn't really an escape route for Sugarloaf, so reaching the Grand Glacier is our only option. This route consists of multiple 1000-ft. up-tracks; corniced ridges; and committing amphitheatre-type terrain ending just shy of the summit on the north ridge of Sugarloaf.

Once we've reached this high point, Colin leads us down the gnarly north-side glaciers. As we descend roped up through very broken crevasse terrain, I'm glad we're all rock-solid skiers. There's something very unnerving about skiing roped up on massive forty-degree slopes. This 3500-ft. shot takes us down to the relative security of the Grand Glacier. With the day's events safely behind us, we're thankful to retire to our little Marmot tent. After dinner the real Selkirk mood sets in! Over the course of the next 36 hours, our home is blasted with over 70 cm of snow. Shovel duty and medicated charades help us pass the time in our two-and-a-half-man tent.

The original plan was to ski off the summit of Grand Mountain down onto the Deville Glacier. All cards are pointing in the direction of nay rather then yay, so we decide on a more conservative line via Beaver Overlook. Hotel Marmot is planted at the base of Mount Wheeler for the night. The following day we blast out of camp, excited to be nearing the Dawson Range. Like a snake charmer's hypnotized cobra, I'm mesmerized by these ancient, towering mountains. The Bishops Glacier provides the entrance to our IMAX experience.

Mount Selwyn and Hasler and Feuz peaks loom above our heads. The massive relief of this zone would get any extreme skier hot and bothered; 2500-ft. elevator-shaft "pipes" began right at our feet. However, thoughts of our diminishing food supply (we're two days behind schedule) remind us that eating is more important than skiing pipes. Our next food cache, located at Selkirk Lodge, seems days away.

The 5-km gradual ski into Mitre Creek is one of the most enjoyable of the trip — mellow, with great views, and offering a lot of base-camp potential for next time. Still in awe from the morning, we sit by a sunlit creek, quietly snacking on Landjaegers. After briefly discussing our afternoon objective, we come to a general consensus.

"Hey Darce, howz you feel about leading us to za summit?" I ask, trying to impersonate a great Austrian guide.

"Aye, Simms," responds Darce.

"Yahhh!" says Colin. "Up iz sa way."

So off we charge — west towards our new destination, Purity Pass!

Another 3500-ft. skin up lies ahead of us. "Sloggin'" is starting to get a little old, so I decide to get fit! Startling Darce out in front, I rudely start my own skin track. With this option I push my heart rate for three grand until the balling up on my skins prevents me from sending the whole pitch. Nausea is setting in anyway, so I'm quite content to rest and wait for the lads. The final push to Purity Pass is somewhat committing and exposed; however, good stability and an obvious upward line bring us to our day's objective. Bedtime comes early, with a full day behind us and a very big day ahead.

We depart our high camp early for a big morning objective. Our plan is to climb the east slopes leading to Purity Pass, summit Purity Mountain and then find a way off the west side down to the Van Horne Glacier. This barrier is the initial gateway to the western Selkirks and to our next yummy cache! The crux-y section couldn't go any more smoothly; we even manage to find our way off the exposed summit. Our exit off Purity is similar to skiing the Grizzly chute in Rogers Pass — steep and exposed.

Darcy and I are at each other's throats all day. Like two grumpy old men bickering over a game of darts, neither one of us will let up. Colin finally tells both of us to shut up and apologize. So we resolve matters over a safety meeting. Brothers for life.

The Incomappleux River, seven grand below us, is our destination. An exciting river crossing awaits as we near the swift-flowing water. The horror stories about previous parties almost drowning don't deter my spirits. The boys, on the other hand, are like timid mice. Watching a granite hard man (Colin) at work, tiptoeing on boulders, is quite humorous.

Controversially, I set off ahead in order to scope out a possible place to cross. I am quickly groin-deep, but feeling sturdy and using my momentum, I choose to commit and cross the thing. The boys are nowhere in sight, still battling the small sub-streams and trying not to get their feet wet. I cross, Schoeller and all, and eventually find myself sitting safe on the other side, feeling that it wasn't such a big deal.

The lads, meanwhile, are fuming at the whole scenario. By the time they reach the point where I crossed, I'm already in my down pants, drying out in the last rays of the sun. The comedy begins to unfold as I watch the boys strip down to their cute little briefs, put their ski boots back on and proceed to get in the drink (one at a time, of course). Colin looks like a Euro extreme skier, his face painted in alpine cream and his muscular legs freezing in the river. He's so furious at me, yelling midstream about my actions.

I can't help but start laughing hysterically at his appearance and the situation. "Hey Moorhead, ya know, you should try to concentrate on the task at hand before you get washed," I yell to him.

"You really messed up this time, Simms," he yells back, battling the river.

"Joo can do eet," I reply in my best Mexican voice.

Once Colin is safe, Darcy's harrowing experience begins. He has a little more trouble than Colin, probably because of the lack of an ACL in his right leg. At one point our fearless comrade is on one knee, midstream, fighting the current. I honestly think he's going to get swept off, but the powerful survival instinct, combined with a little determination, does wonders. In the end, Darcy sends the river but our precious camera is ruined in the mini-war zone. That night we get our sleep on the moonlit shores of the soothing Incomappleux River.

Ring, ring, ring, echoes my tiny alarm clock in the still-moonlit tent. Another alpine start to begin another day. Waterlogged Lasers and damp Schoeller give us the motivation to bust a nut out of our temporary home. The 6500-ft. skin up to the Hope-Charity col is uneventful until the last 500 ft. or so. High up on this slope, with ski crampons intact, I feel as though I am soloing on the Squamish Apron. The slab-like melt-freeze crust is unforgiving. The steep exposure with potential consequence is at best nauseating. Somewhere out ahead is Colin on lead, battling this *White Lighting*–type climb. Another reminder as to why I haven't chosen slab climbing as a profession.

With the morning's challenge coming to an end, another is brewing. Just as we reach our high col, a storm slams right into us. Great — whiteout conditions and intense winds are presented for us to enjoy. "It's all training," I yell to Colin as we navigate GPS-less. The frustratingly uncooperative device has been cussed at and tossed back into my pack. I'm a little worried due to the minimal visibility and the big, lurking slots of this new glaciated area. To keep our spirits high, we joke about Darcy's boys freezing. Thanks to the morning's sweaty skin up and the afternoon's brisk alpine storm, his bare legs are wishing for their long johns. His constant pain and endless complaints are really starting to concern us. Darcy's boys hold up remarkably well to the elements, however, and amputation is deemed unnecessary.

Our day ends in the avy-prone horseshoe basin of McDougal Creek. Isothermal conditions and continuing precipitation encourage us to choose our campsite wisely. The little tree island dubbed home seems barely out of range from the threatening paths above. My body and mind safely in my wet down bag, I know that the promise of tomorrow's good weather report will bring us to our final cache.

A morning skin up an east aspect followed by a quick traverse lead us to the wonderful Selkirk Lodge. Two small figures are working busily around the building.

"Hi there," I say, happy to see some new faces.

"What are you guys doing back so soon?" asks the woman while darting around. "I thought you had another couple of hours until the chopper leaves?" "And by the way, have you seen the group of skiers who are supposedly getting that food cache?" she continues, talking to me as if I'm part of their commercial group.

"What d'ya mean — we're them !" I crow back.

"Oh my, you're them," responds Grania, looking very surprised.

Grania and her husband, Mike, greet

us with a very warm welcome. As the hosts of utopia, they certainly make us feel right at home. Hot showers and a warm place to recover are offered for the next two days. The time is well spent doing a little drinkin', gamblin' and recuperatin'.

After two days of rest, we choose to move on. Our faces have recovered enough to withstand more of the alpine elements. Bomber weather greets us as we continue west. Over the Albert Icefield and into the Akolkolex valley we head, skiing 7000 ft. of vertical along the way. Rollers and natural booters call to my unrelenting ADD personality. I find myself constantly scoping my next hit and looking for flawless landings. However, past multiple injuries keep my freestylin' vibes in check, and my vision refocuses on the tour.

Revelstoke rain moves in for the next two days. Our existence consists of getting soaked in the rain, searching for any meagre shelter, and trying to dry out by campfire under the old-growth canopy as we fight the lingering potential for hypothermia. With rain and thunder in the alpine, we're just about ready to "call 'er a tour".

The weather clears for our final day, the sunny skies making us determined to re-enter the matrix. "EZ living" is just around the corner. Contouring around Mount Cartier, Ghost Peak and Mount Mackenzie is a good way to end it. More sick terrain to come back to, I tell myself.

Remember the "keyhole", Colin. I'll let you tell that story on your own, buddy!

The last of the evening light brings us to the final 5000 ft. of melted-out switchbacks. The spring smell of life and the warmth at our valley elevation remind me that the final minutes of my ski season are coming to an end. It has been a good year, capped by an even better tour.

This story is for everyone who helped us pull it off and for those who carry the mountain spirit, and is dedicated to Darcy McRae, who, tragically, has since died in a climbing accident. His generous spirit and good old Kootenay vibe

Unusually good weather on Pierrway photo R. Wallis

mounts quanstrom and pierrway area

roger wallis

DURING A VISIT to the mounts Quanstrom and Pierrway area in late August, 2004, we endured a week of high-level mist, low-level cloud, and rain, sleet and snow. Climbs included: a second ascent of Peak 2545 m, which lies immediately south of the well-defined col at the head of the Pierrway glacier (this peak had been traversed from south to north in 1969 by Art Maki and Art Wilder); a first ascent of Peak 2190 m, which lies northwest of the river exiting from "Silt Lake"; and the first ascent of Peak 2740 m.

We meant to climb unnamed Peak 2760 m; see *The Columbia Mountains of Canada, West & South*, 1992 edition, p. 49: "This peak lies 3.6 kilometers northeast of Mount Ardan. There is no information on routes or ascents." Having navigated the "Gemini Glacier" in thick cloud and steady rain, we traversed steep ice below unnamed Peak 2760 m in a whiteout and snow showers and ascended the south ridge / west face of a perfectly pleasant peak. On the summit, however, it became apparent through a gap in the clouds that we had made the first ascent of Peak 2740 m and that the still unclimbed Peak 2760 m lay 0.8 km to the north.

Very helpful correspondence with Art Maki has clarified the location of the various peaks climbed in 1969 and described by Art in *CAJ* 1970, Vol. 53, p. 70, and in *The Columbia Mountains of Canada, West & South*, 1992 edition, p. 46–49. Note that since 1969, deglaciation below 2300 m is quite dramatic and has radically changed the approach to many peaks, e.g. the presence of "Silt Lake". However, there are relatively few changes above 2600 m.

Party*: Chris Fox; Cathryn, Nigel and Roger Wallis*

back at bob's

chris weidner

As the storm intensifies, torrential rain and hail cause stones from near the top of Mount Temple to crash frighteningly close to our exposed, shivering bodies. Bill Serantoni and I are delicately bivied on a tiny arête of stacked library books over 1000 meters up the north face of this Canadian Rockies nightmare. Although he is not a believer, Bill is talking to God. Fear penetrates my psyche as I figure the odds of seeing my 26th birthday are about fifty-fifty. I fantasize about being safely back at Bob's.

I first met Bob Enagonio on Alaska's Tokositna Glacier in 1998. We had both failed on different routes on Mount Huntington, but became close while 'doing time' up North. Since then, Bill and I have visited Bob at his home in Canmore, Alberta, every winter, as well as during a few summers.

My fantasy materialized as Bill and I dragged ourselves up and over the north face of Temple, and then back to the sanctuary of Bob's place. Sensing we were looking for a less traumatic adventure, Bob suggested we check out his favourite climbing destination just five hours away: the Bugaboos. We took the bait, and were introduced to a magical place that inspired our imagination.

Now, four years later, I am back in the Bugs with my good friend and fellow Coloradoan, Duncan Burke, who bears a striking resemblance to *Seinfeld's* Kramer. At nearly six and a half feet tall, he is bold, driven, talented, but best of all, hilarious. Good humour trumps every other criterion for a compatible climbing partner. Our first outing left me doubled over on the trail, gasping for breath as tears of laughter streamed down my face. I was under a continual barrage of witty humour that day, and the energy I expended laughing simply devastated my climbing performance on the Diamond of Longs Peak. I am still surprised he didn't write me off as a partner immediately.

On August 11, after a spectacular yet exhausting approach, even Duncan can't make me laugh as we descend into the East Creek basin of the Bugaboos. Almost ten hours after leaving the van, we stagger into camp under clear skies and immense backpacks, carrying ten days' worth of food and fuel, plus as much climbing gear as we could pack. Despite our fatigue, we eagerly anticipate exploring the surrounding granite spires, which seem close enough to touch, but whose grand scale deceives us.

Cedar Wright, Nick Martino and Renan Ozturk are our only neighbours for the duration of our stay. Each of these burly gentlemen inhabits his own tent! Additionally, they have six weeks' worth of food, loads of climbing gear, art supplies, and a hula-hoop to share. Baffled, we later understand that everything, including the hardmen, had been flown in via helicopter. Nick and Renan paid their hiking dues last year, so we can't give them too much hell. I just hope that others give Duncan and me the same courtesy in 2005!

The *Beckey-Chouinard* on South Howser Tower contains miles of excellent rock and no crowds, and has relatively little climber impact. It provides us with the purest fun we experience in the Bugaboos. Sunshine warms our sunburned faces as ravens soar effortlessly from our summit to the central and north summits of the majestic Howser massif. With just one 70-meter rope, we are forced to rappel from a couple of sketchy intermediate anchors down the shady east face. Early afternoon finds us back in the sun wandering toward Bugaboo Spire — unroped.

Accidents most often occur in situations that are perceived as safe. Bob Enagonio perished in May 2004 on a ski traverse from Rogers Pass to the Bugaboos. He and his partners were enjoying some turns on a glacier when they noticed indications of nearby crevasses. Rather than risk continuing untethered, which is far safer on skis than on foot, they stopped to rope up. The snow bridge that Bob unwittingly stood upon collapsed before he could even take his pack off. He fell 25 m to his death.

I realize that we have made a huge mistake by remaining unroped when the soft snow gives way under Duncan's shoes, and his lanky body disappears in an instant. Uncontrollable panic rises in my gut. Luckily, his albatross wingspan prevents him from plummeting past his armpits, and he is able to escape from the bottomless crevasse unscathed. We immediately rope up and become aware of the minefield we are forced to negotiate, mostly on our knees, back to the main path on the glacier. Once the adrenaline dissipates, I feel stupid and angry for allowing this preventable incident to occur. How horribly ironic it would be for another friend to meet the same fate that Bob met just three months earlier.

Back on the solid stone of Bugaboo Spire, we relax and enjoy another fantastic climb — the *Kain Route*. When the legendary Conrad Kain first climbed the peak in 1916, it was one of the most difficult routes in the world. Duncan leads the breathtaking "Gendarme Pitch", and soon we absorb another amazing summit view. Sixteen satisfying hours after leaving camp, we flop back into our tent.

Remarkably perfect weather allows little time for relaxation as our rest day flies by with lots of coffee and preparation for a new-route attempt in the Pigeonfeathers. The northwest face of Lost Feather Pinnacle is capped by a spectacular, angular dihedral that is as appealing as it is intimidating. Even with binoculars, the shadowed feature will not reveal whether it is climbable.

Aid climbing is sometimes necessary but rarely fun. Since our backpacks at the trailhead already overflowed, aid gear topped the list of items to be discarded. We have brought just enough to get us into trouble: One set of Jumars, a handful of pins, a pair of pocket aiders, and a small third tool ice axe/hammer. Fortunately for us, our neighbours are resting up for a proud, first free ascent on the Minaret, above camp, so before we took off, they gladly lend us some crucial big cams that they will not need.

About an hour of circuitous rock scrambling and glacier travel deposits us at the base of our objective, now bathed in the day's first light. The left-angling chimney system that divides the west face of Lost Feather Pinnacle succumbs in three rope-stretching pitches of mostly mid-fifth class, with a .10a start, a few 5.9 boulder problems, and a final section of overhanging off-width. The offwidth is coated with large flakes of black lichen, and is without a doubt the dirtiest, most undesirable blue-collar pitch of the route. However, the satisfaction of sending the gruesome beast gives birth to a savage, animalistic scream of triumph that shocks even me as it roars from my parched throat, "Yeah, *bitch*!!"

We re-establish the belay on the highest section of ledge, from which Duncan races up 35 m of wide cracks, ending at a

sloping ledge. Though grovelling up dirty chimneys and wide cracks provides plenty of perverse entertainment, the upper half of the route actually looks like incredible rock climbing.

Until now, the climb goes free at 5.10. However, the next two pitches — the overhanging triple cracks, and the eye-catching dihedral — require almost every placement to be cleaned of moss, lichen and loose, flaky rock. Five metres into the thinning triple cracks, armed with a pared-down free rack and increasing doubt, I revert to my basic sport-climber response to adversity, "TAKE . . . TIGHT!" I quickly haul up the pins, hammer, extra RPs and more 'biners now that the illusion of freeing this pitch on-sight has been exposed. In typical Bugaboos fashion, the cracks are actually bottoming seams in many spots.

Insecure progress is made by back-cleaning every other piece until I place the first bomber cam in 15 m. The sucker is textbook, so in the interest of speed, I hastily yard my full weight onto it. I hear the terrifying sound of grinding granite as the crack suddenly grows wider. To my astonishment, the cam lurches downward in the crack yet holds my weight, expanding like a startled puffer fish. A flake about 7 m high and 1 m wide has shifted and is poised to teeter off with the slightest breath. I manage to reach left with my nut tool, rapidly clean some lichen from a seam, and place a tiny RP that I mentally command to stay in place as I gingerly shift my weight onto it. The remaining 10 m of thin crack may go clean with a couple more sets of RPs, but I am forced to pound in some manky pins in order to tiptoe around the Guillotine. After nearly two hours on lead, I gain a small perch below the dihedral that offers three bomber cams for an anchor.

The sun is sinking low and we are without bivy gear. After Duncan cleans the triple cracks we allow optimism to skew our judgment and we decide to continue, despite an almost guaranteed epic. However, when I try to retrieve the free-hanging end of our lead line, it becomes snagged in a crack 30 m below. Our best team effort cannot even budge the stubborn cord. Solving this frustrating dilemma saps just enough daylight and energy to tip the scales in favour of descent. We fix our lead line, untangle the end, and rappel back to the ledge atop pitch 3. From there, we rap the route with our 9 mm haul line, with hopes to complete the climb after a rest day.

Clear skies prevail throughout our rest day, and by mid-morning the following day we are once again at the belay beneath the mystery dihedral. Revealing a thin crack in its back, the worrisome feature turns out to be awkward C1, and if cleaned would be a stellar free pitch. Duncan has a bomber yet uncomfortable belay hanging from a #4.5 Camalot placed in the final roof backed up by gear at his waist. His cramped position irritates him enough that curses flow from his mouth while I prepare for the final, intimidating pitch.

The dramatic 4-inch roof crack spits me out when I attempt to climb it like an off-width. On my second, more successful effort I undercling the crack and smear on lichen attached to the vertical wall underneath the roof. Strenuous underclings are followed by overhanging fists that narrow to hands before eventually easing off to a slabby squeeze chimney. With 300 m of exposure and excellent rock, this is one of the best pitches either of us has ever done in the mountains. Duncan follows it with aplomb at mid-5.11. A pleasant chimney completes the last metres to the summit, where we are awestruck by a dramatic clash between pressure systems in the distance, visible as boiling storm clouds that are finally conquering the clear blue sky we enjoyed for the past week and a half.

A light but cold wind licks my face and hands as I pause briefly on top and reflect: Bob's absence will always be felt by his family and friends, but his presence remains palpable, especially here in his favourite alpine environment, the Bugaboos. Instead of seeking refuge at his home in Canmore as I have for the past seven years, I realize now that I am back at Bob's place right here, on top of Lost Feather Pinnacle. After just a few minutes, Duncan and I prepare for an unknown descent that will require our full attention.

Back at Bob's *IV, 5.11 A2. West face of Lost Feather Pinnacle, Bugaboos.* F.A.: Duncan Burke, Chris Weidner, August 2004

13th avenue & 13th street

glenn reisenhofer

How does it all start? Is it ambition that drives us to partake in these trips? Is it burning desire that makes us need to know what's beyond that next col? Can we sneak around that rib without having to descend to the darkness of the valley bottom? Whatever it is, it sure isn't fame. Without any answers to satisfy my boggled mind the next trip was tossed into the pot with the usual assortment of ingredients. The terrain that we had travelled through to the north had falsely led me to believe that an extension to the south would be as natural as breathing. I was wrong.

Inevitably the trip got off on the wrong foot. Difficulties arose in rounding up the prerequisite foursome. Various work schedules, commitments, moral decisions and lack of ambition all played factors on who ended up coming along for our sado-masochistic joyride. All the players knew what they were up against, I'm just not so sure that we were ready for it.

With our foursome finally congealed an ample cache was packed and dragged by beer drinking porters to the Dewar Hotsprings. The goal for this tour was to manipulate our way from Jumbo Pass to Kimberley along the spine of the Purcells. Our now nude beer drinking porters discussed such lofty ambitions while soaking in one of nature's finest. As thick white clouds slowly descended sparsely treed ridges the ingredients in the pot started to warm up.

Before the trip was underfoot we were down to a threesome. Liam had damaged his lower back days before the trip was to start. After a period of indecision Liam reckoned that he would drive us in, but wouldn't be able to participate in our fine event. While we were putting on our boots a small butterfly alighted on Liam's arm. It remained with him like company while we three slogged away. The butterfly did little to aid Liam in his sadness. Unknown to us tears rolled down his face.

As we headed up the remains of an old logging road we passed a cabin of unknown origin. The grunt up was particularly annoying due to the contents of my food bag. For the first time of my life I decided that I would prepare a fresh dinner instead of my normal meals. On this occasion I had brought onions and garlic that needed to be sautéed. My downfall was that I had sliced them up before we left Calgary. Bad mistake. I felt nauseous all day long for they reeked like rank sausage.

At the head of the valley we aimed for a pass between Redtop and Blockhead Mountain (GR 299729). The scree-bashing proved to be extraordinary good value. The person "out in front" carved a track through this nasty bit of nature. For a period of five minutes we carefully picked our way through this land of instability. A fall from here would have meant a non-stop roll to Albuquerque with small cliffs included in the package tour.

On the other side of nicknamed "Soapstone Pass" our new world opened up for us. Massive high-angled grassy slopes descended from the summit ridges that rung around the entire basin leading towards Earl Grey Pass. Interspersed rocky ribs protruded slightly as they descended the verdant slopes. Cloaked in their finest summer wear the grand summits of Hamill and Toby stood proudly to the south. The north face of Hamill poured into a fine looking waterfall beyond the toe of a glacier.

Our immediate concern was to find a campsite with a flat spot in this land of slopes. We managed to find a wondrous hanging shelf after an hour of strenuous side hilling. The small distance that we covered from the pass had taken its toll on one of my partner's lower appendages. As Scott lightly limped into camp I began to wonder what tomorrow would yield. The terrain didn't look particularly nasty. "Ah, he's just rusty. He'll be fine." I pushed this thought aside and concentrated on ridding myself of the unpleasant build up of toxic gases in my food bag. Lying around the campsite were a few flat rocks with small, perfectly straight, square holes. As the evening antics proceeded the aptly named "Squarehole Camp" was dubbed.

The pot's contents started to boil, seemed for a brief while the mixture of ingredients were starting to blend.

We woke up to a perfectly sunny day with the Hamill waterfall pounding in the distance, a great day to traverse over to Earl Grey Pass and get onto the Toby Glacier. What's wrong with a bit of side hilling anyway? Loads, I was told later. After hours of side hilling and a multitude of insults hurled at the back of my head, we still hadn't reached Earl Grey Pass. We had greatly underestimated the difficulty of the terrain. In retrospect we should have gained the ridge system and worked our way along its length, instead we chose to suffer.

Upon reaching our long sought after Earl Grey Pass we met four others who had hiked on the trail along Hamill Creek. They couldn't believe were we had come from and they certainly couldn't fathom where we were going. We parked ourselves for the night by the slow moving outflow of the Toby Glacier. Dark, gray boulders dotted the wash plain providing places to sneak out of the wind. Kevin had lost one of his camp running shoes in the bush and quickly constructed a shoe out of foamie and a Sam splint. With one running shoe and his newly designed, solitary, Japanese slipper he proceeded to make one heck of an Asian dish for supper.

Since we were three, and only owned two person tents, we had to compromise. Kevin insisted on bringing along his new one-person "tent." Without too much thought Scott and I agreed. Now it was zero hour and I had to take my turn in Kevin's "tent." I managed to squeeze in and became instantly trapped. My head was rammed up against the top and my feet were pushing at the seams at the bottom. Next problem was that I couldn't get in my sleeping bag or take off my clothes. I had to abort ship, disrobe and rethink my entry strategy. In the end I had a miserable night, with too much cursing, too little sleep and vowed never to sleep in the coffin again.

We woke up in the gloom. Low clouds persisted in every direction. Before we had reached the glacier lightening decided to brighten up our day. The Toby Glacier had enormous runnels of water coursing through its pale blue veins. We were heading for a pass between Mount Katherine and Griswold Peak (GR 345613) and the lightening decided to rejoin us just before we reached the passage way. On reaching the far side of the pass the tension could still be felt amongst us. The lightening had passed but our mood continued to sour. At one point, Scott stood by himself in a state of general "pissed offness" and stared off into the distance.

We had to negotiate turning the south west ridge of Mount Christine. We knew this was going to be difficult, but had no idea how involved it would be. From a slight level spot on the ridge we checked out the terrain below and made our deci-

sion to try to find a way down. The steepness of the terrain was frightening, particularly since we weren't tied into anything. Steep, wet grass, with the ability to careen us into the abyss, caused us to continue down with the limited security of our ice axes. This would have been a great time for Liam's spidey legs. He's come up with the idea that we could adapt spider like legs to our front arms to aid travelling down, through, around steep and nasty terrain. Not having these we continued to be concerned. However, the grizzlies didn't seem to worry about the terrain. We were flabbergasted at the amount of bear diggings. Guess they've got there own spidey legs built in, including crampons.

Eventually we came to a spot were we had to rap. Dang! Well, one rap turned out to be five. At the bottom of the fourth rap I had snuck off to check out a possible exit. Upon doing so I found myself down climbing terrain that I knew my peers wouldn't be comfortable on. As they prepared for another rap I sat below and watched the world go by. A massive cloud, filling the entire valley, came boiling towards us. It instilled awe as the gray wall slowly, yet thoroughly, washed over the trees and ridges of my dreams. I glanced back up at the lads and wrote in my journal..."Five raps. They are going to be pissed. They were in a fairly bad mood already, now, I don't know..."

The fourth rap had been off a ten centimetre stump with absolutely no chance for a back up. As we jockeyed for positions on the small, down sloping, mossy ledges, our oversized packs felt like battering rams ready to knock each other into oblivion. As I think back on that station I realize they must have hated it more than anything else on the trip. Their sense of insecurity was starting to reach a breaking point particularly when small quantities of gravel and soil started to dislodge from beneath the stump once I had started to rappel. They had had enough and wanted out.

As if to cement their resolve heavy rain pounded the valley floor as we ascended towards a pass between Mount Christine and Saffron Peak (GR 367586). Upon reaching treeline the debilitating rain now had a ferocious wind as company. The rain hammered the tarp incessantly as we cooked beside a squat wet boulder. In the cold, damp unfriendly environment the lads told me that they were aborting the trip. With injuries, unforgiving conditions and difficult terrain only that one option remained. The continual aggressive snapping of the tarp confirmed the decision. The lid had blown off the pot and the ingredients started spilling into the fire.

During the night the storm increased in power. It tore at the tents. Snow started to accumulate on the sides and blew up between the fly and the tent body finding its way in and adding to our mounting frustration. I laid there in a stupor, sick and

coughing heavily, unable to sleep. In the distance beyond the storm I could here Kain calling, mercilessly taunting me onwards. Mount Findlay was just around the corner and just beyond that was our destination. The Purcells were showing a side of herself that we had previously not known.

In the morning twenty centimetres of snow was distributed in all the wrong places. Scott was buried in the deservedly dubbed coffin. Kevin had to aid in his rescue. I refused to leave the sanctuary of the tent and wouldn't until we were totally packed. I was a miserable sod and performed an ungrateful act that I still need to amend. The snow continued to blow harshly as we descended towards South Toby Creek. Alone, we travelled back towards the road.

Upon reaching the trailhead Kevin built a tripod with our ski poles to insure that a vehicle would stop and give us a ride. Weary and saddened we waited. After an hour we were in the back of backfiring truck that spewed diesel exhaust into the canopy. With thoughts of salvation now firmly established I lowered my guard and allowed myself to relax. Little did I know that the worst part was still to come.

After a half an hour drive towards Invermere our two rescuers drove into a hunting camp about nineteen kilometers from town. Everyone present was dressed in the latest insulated camo gear. Beers and joints flowed freely as we, cold, hungry and wet, warmed ourselves by the fire. Their use of language and degrading discussions brought flash backs to the movie *Deliverance*. Scott thought we had entered an environment akin to a bad strip bar in interior B.C. Kevin stated it best..."If they had had a sign at the camp it would say Welcome to REDNECKVILLE! Where all the bad hunt'en stereotypes live — *%$@ YEAH!"

I simply couldn't believe the situation we were in and it got decidedly worse when a hunter's son, a ten year old, went and got his gun. A male deer had wandered near shooting range and the potential for blood got the all the wolves raring for a killing frenzy. Twice Dad swung the loaded gun carelessly in our general direction. I headed back to the fire. I couldn't handle the situation any longer. If I died here I might as well be by the fire. As I sat down to ring the rancid water out of my thoroughly wet socks, I placed my head in my hands and started to cry. I wasn't able to take it anymore. In twenty four years of travelling through the mountains, this constituted the worst type of suffering that I've experienced. By this time our rescuers had consumed seven strong coolers I knew we weren't going anywhere quick. I told Kevin that I was almost on the verge of leaving and setting up camp somewhere far away from this hole. Just as he was trying to convince me to stay Myles, one of our rescuers, came back to the fire. With zero pride left I told Myles exactly how we felt and begged him to take us to town with the promise of a case of beer. Surprisingly, we were in the back of the diesel-choked canopy within five minutes, driven by a slightly impaired hunter.

The blackened stained pot lay on its side in the damp ashes of the fire. Drained and emptied, its defunct dreams having gone up in smoke.

The next day we felt much more human as we strolled around Invermere. Kevin and Scott decided that a tall beer was in order. I kept walking around the town and thought about the experience we had just travelled through. From the beginning something had gone wrong with this trip, but why? A sullen sadness crept over me like the low lying clouds that clung to the town. Absentmindedly, I looked up at a street intersection sign: "13th Ave and 13th Street." A smile appeared on my face and for the first time I had found the answer.

the rockies

striving for the moon

scott semple

I SNUCK A GLANCE AT MY ALTIMETER as Greg clipped into our umpteenth rap anchor. Greg saw me looking at my wrist. "How much further?" he asked.

We had climbed the first 900 m of *Striving for the Moon* in 10 hours. Except for the crux pitch, we had simulclimbed most of it. We arrived at the top of the Big Step at around 3 p.m. The great thing about simulclimbing is that huge amounts of terrain shrink into bite-sized chunks. The bad thing is that having to rappel said terrain magically turns it back into the whole elephant. Prominent features that seemed close together on the way up become several rope lengths apart on the way down. And like eating that elephant, consuming it in one sitting is a daunting task.

By the time Greg asked me for an altimeter reading, we had been rappelling for the better part of six hours. The fingertips of our gloves had gradually worn away as each anchor demanded a tedious search through snow-covered quartzite, rarely revealing any weaknesses. The rap anchors that we did get were usually single pieces or a shaky combination of two bad ones. Hour after hour, we ate through our already small rack, cutting up slings when we ran out of cord. I hoped we wouldn't have to start cutting up rope. Every few rappels, we found enough ice for a solid ice thread. And it had started to snow, heavily. My original estimate of a two-hour descent wasn't panning out. The opening in the hourglass had ballooned, and the sand ran through a gallon at a time.

I looked up from my watch and, discouraged, blew through my dry, cracked lips. "Do you really wanna know?" I asked.

Greg paused for a second and smiled a little. "No," he said.

Just as our stove had done many hours before, our conversation fizzled. We reduced our speech to vulgar curses and the occasional "Got something over here."

Hours after checking my altimeter, my headlamp shone on a sharp dihedral that I thought I recognized. "I think I know where we are," I said. "Only a couple more, I think, but this is all I've got."

After an exhaustive search on both sides of the gully, we had come up with one shallow, horizontal flare about 5 m to the right of the gully proper. It would take an okay nut sideways, but the direction of pull had to be maintained. A worthless cam backed it up.

Enough snow had fallen that the gully had started to spindrift. Our last few anchors had been out of the line of fire, so we timed our rappels in between sloughs. We set up the nut and the cam while a slow, heavy shhhhh of spindrift snaked down the gully to the left. Just as I was threading the ropes through my rappel device, the mountain growled and let loose a much larger slough. It would suck to be on-rope in that, I thought. When it stopped I started rappelling as fast as I could, out into the gully and then over the lip of a steep ice pitch. I hoped the nut would hold. If it ripped, would I scream, or just fall silently? I buzzed down to the ends of the ropes, hanging in space. The white glow from my headlamp showed fat ice in front of me. This must be the first steep pitch, I thought. Only a couple more to go. I tried not to rush as I unclipped a long screw from my harness.

As if on cue, as I touched the teeth of the screw to the ice, the mountain roared and the avalanche ripped.

BARRY BLANCHARD AND WARD ROBINSON first climbed *Striving for the Moon* on Mount Temple in 1992. Leading the crux, Barry felt "like a moth clinging to a light bulb". Barry and Ward bivied on a protected shelf above the crux, and then on Day 2 pushed through to Moraine Lake in 24 hours. Over the next 12 years, *Striving for the Moon* formed in a variety of shapes and sizes and received a similar collection of attempts.

At a small bridge east of Lake Louise on Highway 1, an opening in the trees briefly reveals the southeast face of Mount Temple. The creek and the break it creates perfectly frame the striking, icy line that is *Striving for the Moon*. If you're not sure where to park — or if you blink — you'll miss it. A good pair of binoculars shows the route starting out as low-angle snow and ice which quickly arches up into a steep, striking pillar about halfway up the face. From there the line continues directly to the top of the Big Step — the prominent bench that leads to Temple's east ridge. Since my moving to Canmore in 1999, parking and looking from the bridge had become an annual winter ritual. And any drive to Lake Louise without a stop would have the route flash in my peripheral vision like a subliminal temptation.

The start of the 2004 ice season was big and fat. *The Terminator* on Mount Rundle formed early and stuck around until temperatures plummeted on Christmas Day. The Pencil on *Polar Circus* formed as a stout crayon that lasted through the three-week deep-freeze and then through an equally long pineapple express. The range was "goin' off" and the southeast face of Mount Temple was no exception: the crux pillar on *Striving for the Moon* formed quickly and big and taunting.

Rob Owens and Eric Dumerac headed up in the first week of November. They climbed through the first burly pillar, put a screw in the second crux, and turned around. Rob described the crux pillar as steep, overhanging in parts, with airy, questionable screws.

Greg Thaczuk and I racked up on November 15. Like Eric and Rob, we skied in and bivied at the base on the first day, and then intended to climb the route in one go, camp to camp, with one stove, no bivy jackets, no tarp. In retrospect, our strategy was the climbing equivalent of a multiple-personality disorder: a bizarre mix

of traits that made sense to us at the time, but very little in retrospect.

Greg is strong. He's a natural athlete with an enviable physiological response to exercise: if he even imagines a dumbbell, he gets stronger. But Greg's at the top of my list for big, challenging objectives for much more important reasons. When he was 18, he convinced his dentist to do a root canal without anaesthetic. Greg said that as he sat in the chair, his whole body flexed in resistance, it reminded him of Arnold Schwarzenegger being strapped down and tortured in the movie *Total Recall*. But the only thing that kept Greg's bulging arms clamped to the chair was his desire to see if he could take the pain.

After living on $110 and what he could barter for homemade banana bread in June 2004, Greg lost 15 lb. and then off-the-couched a marathon. His pre-race, anti-preparation logic was impeccable: "Oprah's fat. If Oprah can run a marathon, anyone can run a marathon." He bought running shoes the day before. By the time he hobbled across the finish line (11 seconds faster than Oprah), his blisters had bled through his shoes.

We started climbing at 5 a.m. and arrived at the crux pillar in the perfect pink of a clear morning. The snow glowed and the pillar shone. I felt strong. We were moving well together. I drilled in two solid screws for the belay and started re-racking for the lead. "I think we're gonna send this thing," I said.

Greg chuckled to himself.

"What?" I asked.

"I just realized that this is my second day of the season."

"Perfect," I said, and laughed. "It's my third."

THE AVALANCHE ROARED OVER ME. It sounded like a dragon breathing fire. How can snow make such a horrible sound?

Hanging in the steep part of the pitch saved me from being hit with the full force of the flow, but I still felt as if I was caught in a raging waterfall. Two huge liquid hands pressed down on my shoulders and increased the load on that *%$#ty sideways stopper. I pressed my helmet and headlamp against the ice and squinted in order to see through the rush and choose where to place the screw. I jabbed it in and twisted, begging the teeth to bite with the first turn. The snow kept pouring over me as I cranked the screw as fast as I could. Half of my brain waited for God-knows-what if that stopper popped. Would there be a moment of weightlessness? Or just a freight train to the ground? As my glands opened up and flushed my system with adrenaline, I wondered if I would be able to hang on to a half-driven screw.

The rush of white eased off as I clipped a leaver 'biner into the screw's hanger and then clipped myself to the 'biner. I sat on the screw, freed the ropes from my rappel device and yelled up to Greg, "OFF!"

"ARE YOU OKAY?" Greg yelled. Having our anchor out of the gully saved Greg from getting pummelled — or worse — by the full force of the avalanche. Days later, he admitted to me that as he saw the mass of snow rip down the gully, he assumed that at that point he was on his own.

"YEAH! I'M FINE!" I yelled back.

Greg cleaned the worthless cam and played for all the marbles on the now well-tested stopper. I didn't bother building an Abalokov as he came down. We rapped off the screw, threw in my last cam for our last rappel, and then ran stumbling away from the base of the route.

Days later, I forwarded some digital photos to my friend Will Gadd. It wasn't what I intended, but Will innocently posted them on his ice-conditions Web site and congratulated us on-line on the second ascent of *Striving for the Moon*. Will rightfully qualified his congratulations with "to the ridge". Greg was nonplussed with the public display. As a sponsored climber, I can't pretend to be annoyed by publicity, but the Quiet Road does have a particularly pure appeal. For me, the bigger issue to address was changing our "ascent" back into an attempt.

I responded to Will with:

> Although I'm happy with Greg's and my performance (and the education we received on the descent), I don't think that our ascent qualifies as the second ascent of *Striving for the Moon*. We decided to turn around due to tactical errors, not because our original intent was to stop at the top of the Big Step. In 1992, Barry and Ward continued to the summit and down the tourist route to Moraine Lake. In my mind, a true second ascent has to be faithful to the style of the first ascent. For *Striving for the Moon*, it's still waiting to be done.

A couple of days later, still drained and dull, I got a phone call. Immediately, a bellowing voice that I soon recognized greeted me with, "SNOOOOOW BOOOLLAAAARRRD."

Yes, if we had been digging our way down with snow bollards, we probably wouldn't have saved much time, but we would have left less gear behind. But one or both of us would also have been standing in the centre of the gully when the avalanche ripped. We'd be dead.

"*%$# you, Josh," I said. "Go climb it, then we'll talk."

"I have climbed it."

"The whole thing," I said.

Perhaps it was the call from Josh, perhaps it was because our original plan was to go on the full moon. I think it was because

the route was still there, waiting. A few days later, Greg and I had made plans and recruited a third — the most remarkably consistent person and climber I have ever met.

Eamonn Walsh is tall and quiet. Most, myself included, underestimate him shortly after being introduced. Without a few Guinnesses in Eamonn's belly, a stranger is unlikely to hear much more than "Nice to meet you." In challenging terrain, Eamonn's moods and ability vary about as much as a lighthouse does its position. And they offer as much reassurance. Several years ago, Josh stole the sign off an ice machine and put it face out on the dash of Eamonn's car.

On November 26, the night of the full moon, I was looking up at *Striving*'s crux pitch again, but this time I was belaying. Eamonn had chosen a line out left, a steeper start to the final pillar than what Greg and I had climbed on Round 1. Either way, the first half of the pitch consisted of steep ice and short sections of overhanging mushrooms. All the 2004 attempts chose the left-hand side of the final pillar — an unrelenting, chandeliered column that offered a slight concave stem and the occasional step out left onto rock. The column shot up for about 15 m to where it was capped by a solid, overhanging bulge. Perhaps as an exercise in Canadian reticence, Barry and Ward had graded it WI5+. We found it weighing in at solid WI6.

Eamonn had started the pitch at 4 p.m. The photographer's "magic hour" had begun, and by the time the sky turned from blue to pink to black, all three of us were thumping up the next snow slope, headed for Crux Number 2.

So far, things were going according to plan. We had met for breakfast at 7 a.m., leisurely driven to Lake Louise, and clicked into our skis at 8:57 a.m. We each had one or two litres of water already in the gastrointestinal tank, and each of our day packs held a bivy jacket and over 4000 calories in bars and gels. Instead of bringing bivy gear, we had opted for three pairs of thighs over two, and the intention to keep them pumping until we got back to the car. Considering the horrible sugar snow we were bound to encounter on a high easterly face in the Rockies, my "Time, Calorie & Hydration Forecast" had estimated 40 hours.

The two cruxes had landed on my block on November 15, so I was content to ride in the back seat on the 26th. Yet another lesson to learn: allocate energy when it's demanded, not before. Eamonn wanted out of the driver's seat, so the second crux fell to me. *Damn*, I thought. Enough cloud obscured the moon to put us in near-total darkness — not what we had hoped for, and a factor that I think negatively affected our energy levels throughout that night.

On the first ascent, Barry and Ward had opted for the right-hand branch above the crux pitch, followed by a rock traverse back into the main gully. In 2004, the original right-hand pillar formed, along with a pillar in the left-hand gully. The left-hand pillar offered a more direct line at a deceptively short price. An easy apron led up to a hug-sized pillar that can best be described as "full value". The combination of leading it twice — once in the dark — and a nasty intestinal turmoil that was starting to build, had me starting to wimp out and whine. I handed the sharp ends back to the other lads and hoped I would be able to get my harness off and pants down fast enough if I needed to. I suspected that my stomach bubbles were coming from an overconsumption of caffeinated energy gels. Caffeine and I have a love/panic relationship.

Above the second crux, more-moderate terrain led to a final pitch of Grade 5 followed by a three-hour wallow through chest-deep facets to the top of the Big Step. True to form, Greg led the way.

We topped out on the Big Step at 1 a.m. We shared two freeze-dried meals and drank two litres each. Greg had brought along an expensive and tasty sports drink mix that made this relatively easy. We had taken two stoves and pots in order to minimize our brew time. By 3 a.m. the stoves were packed up and we were winding our way up to the east ridge, staying off the big slopes of the south face, and putting in the odd piece to keep ourselves attached to something.

I stood on a shelf and waited. Eamonn was out front, and Greg, tied into the middle, was around the corner. I idly waited for the rope to come tight as the full weight of my fatigue settled into me. I noticed a slight sway to my legs and assumed that my balance was affected. We would have to consciously try and stay sharp until we hit the ridge and the (thankfully) mindless descent down to Sentinel Pass.

"AHHH!" Greg yelled. A loud *poomph*! suggested that something large had landed in snow.

"Greg!" I yelled. "Are you okay?"

Greg had been dry-tooling a short but awkward corner when one of his picks had broken unexpectedly, snapping off despite an in-line downward pull. He had fallen about 5 m and landed in deep snow. I heard a muffled "*%$#!" as I looked around. It would be a cold night if we had to sit and wait, but where we were was relatively flat and free of overhead obstructions. Without high winds, I thought, it would be a dead-easy pickup.

"Greg!" I yelled again. I could hear muffled yells from Eamonn's end of the rope as well.

"Yeah! I'm fine!" Greg yelled back to us.

Eamonn had been taking a piss just as Greg fell. Like a ship anchor, Greg's frame had snatched away all the loose rope until it came tight on Eamonn's harness and yarded him off his feet. Eamonn too landed in snow — yellow snow, but still snow. We had lucked out.

Greg had exhausted himself getting us to the top of the Big Step. As we made our way towards the exit gully in the Black Towers, he repeatedly fell asleep on his feet, head pillowed by the crumbling limestone that he leaned against. Eamonn and I swapped "leads" through the slopes of Temple's south face, placing rock gear to protect us against each other and any chance of avalanches.

We topped out on the ridge at 1:19 p.m. on November 27. Including a detour up and down the wrong exit, it had taken us roughly 10 hours to wallow up to the correct gully and the final ridge. In the summer, that section normally takes about two hours. At 2:37 p.m. we stood on the summit of Mount Temple, having completed the second ascent of *Striving for the Moon* and looking at a descent where the greatest hazard was frostbite from the fierce, howling wind. We spent very little time on the summit and started down, opting to return to the Moraine Lake road along the north side of Temple through Paradise Valley.

Unbeknownst to us, a friend had already gone in to retrieve our skis from the base, so choosing not to go to Moraine Lake was a groggy but good decision. We stopped once to brew up and burn our last fuel, and then continued stumbling our way home. Eamonn said afterward that as he pulled up the rear, in between hallucinations he could see Greg's and my tracks wandering back and forth along the Moraine Lake road as if we had just spent an overindulgent night at the Canmore

Hotel.

A week later, Pierre Darbellay, my new roommate visiting from Switzerland, went to *Striving for the Moon* on his own. Winds were high that day and he worried about the bowls above being loaded. He turned around halfway up the crux pitch.

SINCE THEN, I'VE OFTEN BEEN ASKED, "Why did you guys go back?" I think the question is strange. I furrow my brow, shrug my shoulders, and try to sum it up quickly. "We didn't finish," I say.

"Going back" usually always makes good sense. Any failure immediately yields a ton of new information about an objective, and any increase in familiarity always creates a corresponding increase in confidence. Returning to a failed objective close on the heels of a failed attempt is a perfect use of new-found knowledge and, hopefully, skill. At my current level of experience, "on-sighting" a big objective is a fifty-fifty proposition at best. What I learn the first time is often what I need for success on the second. While many thought it was strange of us to go back so soon, I would have thought it was strange not to.

When I started rock climbing, I said that I would never ice climb. When I started ice climbing, I said that I would never alpine climb. Ice climbing was "too dangerous", and alpine climbing was so shrouded in arrogance and vague comparisons to female anatomy that I had no idea what it was. But now alpine climbing offers a depth and breadth of experience which I find hard to equal anywhere else. The scenery is heart-stoppingly spectacular, the introspection razor-sharp and unending, the physical and mental challenge total, and the acid test of true partnership complete. In a word, it is perfect.

For me, any big effort — whether successful or a failure — is followed by a period of intense calm. Any other peaks or objectives which are in shape momentarily don't matter. Where I am is enough. The constant chatter in my head settles down to a whisper. Tiny gigantic things like hot showers, dark roast coffee and that lime-like smell of cilantro take on special meaning. Just sitting quietly can be satisfying. I am numb and aware at the same time — quite the way I imagine catatonics must feel as they stare out the institution window. And did you know? You can tell which alpine-climbing catatonics have come back successful. They're the ones with the small, self-satisfied smile.

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a winter on temple

raphael slawinski

"It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain; but, once conceived, it haunted me day and night."

— Edgar Allan Poe, *The Tell-Tale Heart*

I MUST HAVE ALREADY BEEN THINKING of a winter attempt on the *Greenwood-Locke* on the north face of Temple when, immediately after climbing the route in the summer of 1999, I drew up a detailed topo complete with potential bivy spots. Of course I knew the long history of winter attempts on the route: the stories of storms, retreats and stubborn returns. The mountains we climb are only partly made of inanimate rock and ice; they are also made of the fact and legend of climbers' struggles upon their flanks. My own first winter attempt (if it could be called that) came in 2001. Eric Dumerac and I made the mistake of camping below the route the night before, so we were already cold and uncomfortable when morning came and it was time to start climbing. Muttering something about the face being too snowy and out of condition, we turned our skis back towards the parking lot. Attempt Number 2 in 2003 bogged down in the parking lot when we got out of the car and realized that thirty centimetres of snow had fallen overnight. To blow off some steam, Ben Firth and I drove back towards the front ranges and, over two days, scrambled over the four summits of Mount Lougheed for its first winter traverse.

This past winter we took the whole thing seriously indeed. We spent several days on Yamnuska climbing steep 5.8 corners with big boots, gloves, and tools, learning what works and what does not. Ben and I were veterans of the young discipline of M-climbing, with its deadpoints, figure-fours and heel hooks. We liked to believe that this seemingly contrived activity had a relevance that went beyond the Gulag and the Cineplex. The *Greenwood-Locke* in winter, a snowed-up alpine rock climb, would give us a chance to walk the talk.

The alarm went off at 3 a.m. We wolfed down some breakfast on the short drive from Canmore to Lake Louise and soon were out of the car and skiing through the starry darkness. By the time we broke out of the trees below the face, it was broad daylight. After stashing our skis at the base of the initial couloir, we headed up. For the most part, snow conditions were good, though in a couple of places we found ourselves wallowing up disconcertingly steep slopes. Sometime in the early afternoon, we bumped up against the steep rock of the upper face. We banged in a belay, geared up and, after a swig of water, started up.

To begin with, the initial groove even had a vein of ice in it, but that soon ran out. After that it was hooking small limestone edges and then front pointing up them, cleaning snow from cracks for cams or blasting through it with pins. We had the leader climb with a light pack; the second brought up the rear on jumars with a rather heavier one. Freeclimbing mattered a great deal to us, and jugging represented a definite stylistic compromise. But there was no denying that it was faster.

By the end of the afternoon, we had climbed five rope lengths. Rather than continue and frig around in the dark, we fixed a rope and rappelled to a ledge we had passed one pitch lower. After chopping into the crest of a snow rib, we had fashioned a platform that would take most of our bivy tent. It is amazing the difference that getting zipped up inside even an imperfectly pitched tent makes. The thin walls shut out the exposure, and once we had finished brewing up, sleep came easily.

The morning was well advanced by the time we had jugged our fixed line and sorted ourselves out for the next lead. As we chopped through the cornice topping a groove and gained a small and windy stance, we congratulated ourselves on our decision to stop early the night before. Pitch followed pitch, none desperate but all challenging: a knife-edge of snow traversed à cheval; a steep, snow-choked groove; a clean headwall where front points bit into tiny dimples. We were moving fast, wasting no time, but also intensely enjoying ourselves.

Dry-tooling over a bulge at the top of the last "hard" pitch, we were ecstatic. The few moderate traversing pitches that remained were a mere formality, and before long we were on top, if that is what an incongruous scree slope two hundred metres below the actual summit could be called. The Ten Peaks and the Goodsirs beyond stuck out of a sea of valley cloud. We lingered in the yellow rays of the setting sun, not wanting the moment to end. Then it was time to go. Eschewing the summit, we traversed the windswept west slopes and ran down the tourist route. After reaching Sentinel Pass a few minutes ahead of Ben, I lay watching the stars beginning to appear in the cloudless sky. The following morning we retrieved our skis from below the face, and by early afternoon we were back at the car. The adventure was over.

During the drive back, we were already making plans to return in order to attempt the obscure *Robinson-Orvig*, a.k.a. the *Sphinx Face* of Temple. A couple of days before the appointed date, however, Ben e-mailed me with bad news: a long-neglected artificial-intelligence project demanded his attention, and he was unable to go. Weather and snow conditions were good, and I urgently tried to think of someone else who might be interested. The guidebook, with its talk of "atrocious rock", was not going to make it easy to find a partner. Then I thought of Valeri Babanov, who had just moved to Calgary. We had only met the previous weekend at the Canmore Ice Climbing Festival, but of course I had long known of him by reputation. I picked up the phone. "North face of Temple... probably no more than one night out...." Never having even seen the face before, Valeri flipped through the guidebook. Yes, it looked nice; yes, he was interested.

I picked him up on Saturday at 4 a.m. During the drive, we sorted out translations of such terms as "secure" and "on belay". By 10 a.m., we were stashing our skis below the face. It was surprisingly cold; within a few minutes of stopping I was wearing everything I had, and I was still shivering. There was nothing for it but to start climbing. A short quartzite band yielded quickly, and soon we were slogging up the snowfields that make up the bulk of the route. As hour after hour went by, the steep buttress of the *Greenwood-Jones* on our right flowed down and past us, yet the crumbling yellow bastions guarding the top of the *Sphinx Face* did not seem to be getting any closer.

It was late afternoon by the time we were finally anchored at the base of the crux chimney. Valeri, unfazed by this being his first climb in the Rockies, racked up for the lead. As he fought up the chimney, a week of late nights preparing lectures and grading papers caught up with me and I struggled to stay awake. But I woke up soon enough when I followed the pitch; the rock and the protection were better then anticipated, but the climbing was steep and demanded attention. From the belay, I looked up at the exit, which was blocked by overhanging chockstones. It was getting late, and the narrow confines of the chimney would not be a comfortable place to spend the night. I grabbed the rack, stepped over Valeri and, crampons scratching on the smooth limestone, started squirming upward. A few metres higher I hooked what looked to be some blocks frozen in place. When I weighted them, however, they yielded; slamming onto my other tool, I could only watch helplessly as they crashed down the chimney.

Valeri was doubled over in pain; I desperately hoped that he was not seriously injured. After a minute or two he straightened up and indicated that I could continue. A couple of metres higher I sent down another block. Miraculously, yet again we narrowly avoided disaster. Dry-tooling over the chockstones proved easier than anticipated, and soon I was cruising up the lower-angled but loose gully above. By the time I found a solid belay in the shattered tile, it was almost dark. Valeri came up the pitch on Tiblocs, manhandling the pack I had left halfway up the chimney. After scratching a small platform out of frozen scree, we settled down to Ichiban and tea. The night was relatively warm, and from our small perch we could look down on the lights of Lake Louise twinkling a kilometre and a half below.

A blast of snow on my face woke me up. From inside the warm cocoon of my sleeping bag, I looked out on a changed world. Clouds enshrouded most of the neighbouring peaks, and a fierce wind drove powder snow across the face. Foregoing breakfast, we packed up and kicked steps across the ledge to the base of the exit gully. One long pitch later we were sitting astride the crest of the east ridge. The plume of snow blowing off the upper ridge convinced us to give the summit a miss. We rappelled down the south side and suddenly found ourselves in a different world: no wind, no visibility, and bottomless snow. Looking for the descent couloir under these conditions would be dangerous at best, which left but one option.

Fortunately, we had not pulled the ropes yet, and we yarded on them liberally as we wallowed our way back up to the ridge. A long rappel landed us on the traverse ledge where we had spent the night. We retraced our steps to the top of the crux chimney and set anchors down it, keeping a wary eye out for dislodged rocks. Cramponing down the slopes below amidst streams of spindrift, we kept the rope on in case the first person down set off a fresh slab. But luck was with us and we reached the bottom without incident. We laughed when we got back to our skis: pummelled by the wind blast of a serac avalanche the previous day, they stuck out of the snow at odd angles. After strapping them on and cutting across the fresh debris, we headed back down towards the waiting valley. Though Temple still reared up cold and white, the collapsed snow bridges over the creek already told of the coming spring.

conclusion, mount storm

ian hunt

KEVIN AND I FIRST SAW and attempted the route in the fall of 1998; from then on, we made regular pilgrimages to try to climb the line. Some attempts stopped at the road — "too thin" — others, on the trail — "too much snow". On the first attempt, there was so much snow on the first pitch that a shovel would have made a useful tool; eventually, I got to some thin ice and the climbing improved, but spindrift avalanches made us retreat from the narrows. The bowl settled as we walked out.

How long would this new route last without someone else getting it? A second attempt later that season failed when we turned back due to poor snow conditions in the bowl. On another attempt, in better conditions, we got above the previous high point; I then made a nervy traverse across a narrow ledge of ice, dreaming of protection only to find thin ice and little in the way of gear for the crux pitch. A dubious piton and careful downclimbing marked the end of this attempt.

By the end of fall 1999, the route looked fat and the snow slope to the base was perfect névé; it was time to gear up. How did I manage to get to the base of an unclimbed line two hours' drive and two hours' walk in, only to find that none of the three pairs of crampons I owned were in my pack? On our return the next weekend, there was a foot of new snow at the road. Then the road closed for the season days later. The route did not form in 2000 or 2001 — the dream festered.

Fall 2002 arrived, but Kevin was doing less ice climbing and I had hooked up with Brad. Feeling some guilt, but stimulated by early-season fever, I headed in again with Brad. I led the first pitch: thin ice, but fun climbing in the narrow groove to the block belay. Brad (thankfully) took over the lead — a few moves through the narrows, then right back across the ledge. Now he was in new territory. The ice above was plated across a smooth slab, then steepened in the groove. The lower section was great, but towards the top the ice was hollow, fragile, and difficult to protect. Brad got her, however, and disappeared over the lip. As the rope tightened, we lost communication, so I had to start following, but after a few metres Brad got the belay together and it really was my turn. I was glad I didn't have to lead it. I eventually poked my head over the top to find Brad sitting in the sun and the snow. There it was, five seasons later, a "conclusion" to the adventures! Oh yes — I have driven by again and tried to take others that way, but it seems just as fickle. Sorry, Kevin!

Summary

Approach: From the north end of the Lost Lemon Mine, pull out on the east side of Highway 22 about 4.4 km south of the Highwood Meadows parking lot. The climb is visible on the west flank of Mount Storm's south ridge. The trail is the same as the one used for the southern ascent route of Mount Storm, as per Alan Kane's description, and follows the left (north) bank of creek. Follow this trail into the upper valley and to the start of the more northern bowl, then cross the drainage and traverse south through small, open meadows into the more southern bowl, before following a low moraine ridge to the snow slope (avalanche danger) and the base of the route (two hours in good conditions). Although we climbed the route in two pitches (60-m rope; some simulclimbing needed), it is probably better as three pitches.

Climb: *Pitch 1* (40 m) starts with low-angle but thin ice gradually steepening to a belay at a large block on the left (piton), below where the ice narrows to a few inches wide in a slot. *Pitch 2* (20 m) goes through the narrows, then follows the thicker ice right across a rising ledge to a corner (dubious piton; hopefully, enough ice for screws). *Pitch 3* (60 m) climbs the ice in the corner, over a hollow section to the steeper but better ice above. Continue straight up the corner, getting whatever protection you can (ice/rock), until you reach the snow above. Belay from rock on the right a few metres up the gully (one piece of in situ rock gear).

Descent by rappel, downclimbing, then rappel again.

Conclusion *WI3+R. 120 m. West flank of south ridge of Mount Storm, Highwood (Mt. Rae, 82 J/10 466038)*. F.A.: Brad Cooke, Ian Hunt. October 13, 2002.

clean my teeth and i won't taste it

david marra

THE GOLDS GOBBLE THE GREENS; the skies grow gothic, then glisten in a crystal, cool and clear. This is the season of the Dead — all that is holy and wise and ancient lives here.

And so it begins, the seasonal ritual of seeking the Untainted, the Unknown, the monkey on my back. Father, forgive me, for I am about to sin: the iceman cometh... again.

Far away in the valleys and cities, a prep day is needed: e-mails, cellphones, airports, fast cars, fast foods and fast talks. Fast makes us feel cozy and safe for now.

The proposed route is a new ice line that forms 1 km right of *Slipstream* on Snow Dome. It's about 1000 m of serac-threatened, virgin ice. The most serac-threatened route I've subjected myself to.

How do I justify going up there? How do I slay the dragon and stay alive? "Up there", there is no pride or ego or honour, there is no ideal or belief or option, there is no romancing-the-stone cheezwiz*%$#. The very hard long of it is that there is nothing up there. Somewhere between turkey talk and exile lies the truth. The truth looked like Vegas from an airplane — good from afar, but far from good.

Up at the crack of Christ, we commit to it all: the weather, the conditions, the terrain, and the dark knights that guard the exit. Speed will be my defender. I will

attack with furious anger and vengeance, pain and sorrow, and the hatred of all that is unholy. Fear will fuel my fire; with my eyes wide shut, I will have to believe that all is fair in love and war.

The approach goes by easily, perhaps too easily. Is this an ambush? All is too quiet on the northern front. We gear up and go, watching our flanks.

The first obstacle is a 500-m WI3 glacial tongue that requires meticulous route finding. Stunning beauty surrounds us; like flies to a light, we are mesmerized. Once we gain the upper glacial bowl, there is no time for the wicked or wonderful — just move as if the Devil himself is chasing you, because he is. As the Reaper's breath is upon my neck, the terrain turns into a carpet-bombed serac village. There are no survivors, only a graveyard.

Once we gain the base of the ice line, there is slight relief. At least we're not exposed to the entire serac bowl, only the serac above us. The ice is good; we ascend hundreds of metres of up to WI4 ice, seemingly in a moment. Then, faced with a headwall of ice (90 m, WI6), I tighten my boots and climb out of the only ice cave on the route. Above the steep ice is a good belay stance on an ice rib providing many unwanted serac exits. Once we're off the exposed belay and on moderate ice flows, the seasonal ice turns to ancient, glacial layering. Stemming in a slight chimney, I breathe in history, see humanity and feel the ice age. Layer after layer passes by: some, 10 cm of black ice; others, 5ft. thick with giant facets. These seracs are foreign to me. We're faced with a symmetrical, segmented ice matrix — a far cry from the usual soft, malleable seracs I've touched before.

I dare not swing; using an ice crack perfectly fit for my hands, I gently move upward. When the crack ends, I am faced with all the fears and doubts I can muster. What if I wake this sleeping giant? Trying to chip a place for my tools is like coming home late on a school night. The beast lets out a wild scream; I look down at Tom as I make myself as small as I can (as if that's going to do anything) — shoulders shrugged, neck flexed, with a stupid look on my face — yet nothing happens! I relax slowly, and just as I'm about to swing, the monster releases its fury. I'm bombarded with TV- to fridge-sized shards of ice. Tom can no longer see me, only the massive ice avalanche ripping me to shreds. He holds my 45-ft. fall, but as the rope comes tight and I stop, the ice chunks continue to have their way with me as they pass by.

Dangling, I am motionless, I am dead. There's no pain. I am spinning with the stars. I look down to see Tom's lips move, but can't hear what he's saying. I look up; the ice giants scoff at me. There is just enough rope to lower me back to the ice-rib belay. Tom greets me in a calm, cool and collected manner. He takes care of me and does a primary assessment. We discover blood. I drift; my father is telling me not to show up for a gunfight with a knife. I check the back of my head — more blood. Drifting... Blood that will drip into the water that some plastic surgeon's wife uses to wash her poodle with. The mutt's name rhymes with mine.

The blood turns out to be a cut on my middle finger — cute, like *%$#-you cute. There's no other serious damage. Tom stuffs my glove with snow to minimize inflammation. We agree to continue, and try two other possibilities only to provoke the seracs to scream again.

So, boys and girls, with enough bells and whistles you can awake the dead. I mean, they're people, too. In fact, the dead should have more rights; the half-dead and the almost-alive have rights. So where's the moral line? Perhaps the three-quarters-dead — this could be dictated by the all-new dead-o-meter by Funco.

Anyhoo, we rapped and downclimbed, calling the route *For Father* (1000 m, WI6). Many congratulations and much spray followed, which I find very odd. It's like high-fiving your buddy after he does crack all night and other really, really bad stuff, so you give him a high-five for just doing crack all night and other really, really bad stuff.

traverse of the goodsirs

jason thompson

On August 14–16, 2004, Colin Wooldridge and I traversed the Goodsirs in Yoho National Park — possibly the first time this has been done. Contrary to some climbers' warnings (or confirming them, depending on your perspective!) regarding the aesthetics of an outing in the Goodsirs, the traverse should become the standard route for linking the triad of summits, as it is a moderate outing and a nice way to experience these high peaks, under the right conditions.

On the first day, after the requisite drive from Calgary, and plenty of missed opportunities to get lost on a maze of logging roads, we hiked up the Ice River and then Zinc Creek to the head of the valley below Goodsir's south tower. Our campsite beside the last patch of scruffy trees in upper Zinc Creek afforded some flat ground, and running water nearby.

The early morning saw us scrambling up the Southwest Ridge of Goodsir's south tower. The rock wasn't that bad — at least not by Rockies standards — so long as we stayed on the ridges and out of the gullies. The route was dry, and the ropes stayed in our packs until we reached the summit of Goodsir South about eight hours after leaving camp. Following a leisurely lunch, we began to descend the northwest ridge towards Goodsir's middle peak.

Approximately 200 m of downclimbing and two short rappels set us on a flat piece of ground from which the entire north face of Goodsir South was revealed. One more rappel put us into a notch that we climbed out of to reach the cairn on the middle summit.

Some seven hours after leaving the top of Goodsir South, we were rolling out our sleeping bags on a promontory just below the pocket glacier that splits the Goodsir towers, and wondering what to do about the clouds and lightning flashes building in the west. It rained hard and furiously for an hour and then cleared off for the night.

On the third day, we traversed into the sideways "V" of the South Face route on Goodsir North. Scree in the lower leg of the "V" led to snow in the upper half. One pitch of roped climbing put us on fourth-class ground to the summit. After another leisurely repast, we began the long journey down the "V" and out to our vehicle, stopping at the promontory to pick up our gear. The trip out was uneventful, with the exception of a vast meadow of beautiful flowers that maliciously hid from view our feet and the grapefruit-sized rocks over which we stumbled interminably. I also vaguely remember Colin almost forcing me into a trot for the last couple of kilometres, just so that we wouldn't have to don our headlamps! Giddy-up!

rivers of babylon

jon walsh

On November 26 and 27, 2004, Paul McSorley and I climbed a new nine-pitch route on Mount Wilson in the bowl between *Mixed Monster* and *Ice Nine*. *Rivers of Babylon* is the central line of three ice flows. The climbing is sustained, technical and fun the entire way. It was also quite delicate and often run out, requiring extra focus and making it difficult to "race" to the top. We climbed mostly rock that traversed left and right on natural weaknesses through the overhanging buttress, for four pitches to gain the thin flow, which provided excellent thin ice and mixed climbing for another five pitches. Good screws were rare to non-existent; however, tool placements came easily. No bolts were placed, and the rock is generally excellent by Rockies standards. We fixed three ropes on the first four pitches on Day 1, descended to Rampart Creek Hostel for the night, and the next day ascended our ropes and climbed the rest of the route. A one-day ascent would be an impressive feat, but doable by a very strong party. This route is probably best earlier in the season and will be extremely dangerous when the avalanche hazard increases.

Summary

Approach: Ascend the creek bed from the road to the base; 1.5–2 hours (600 m vertical).

Pitch 1: Move 20 m up a slabby left-trending corner, past ice patches to a steep smear for 20 m, then trend right up a rock weakness (crux) for 20 m to a ledge. One fixed piton at belay and one at crux (60 m, M6+).

Pitch 2: A pure rock pitch. Trend right towards a chimney and follow this to the top of a yellow pinnacle (65 m, M5).

Pitch 3: Traverse right, up a corner, then traverse right again and belay at the base of a left-facing corner (30 m, M4).

Pitch 4: Climb the icy off-width corner to a big snow ledge. Fixed piton at crux bulge (65 m, M6).

Pitch 5: We avoided a vertical thin-ice pillar by ascending a snow/ice gully to the right and traversing back left to the main ice flow (60 m, WI3).

Pitch 6: Climb 25 m of steep mushrooms to a narrow gully (1–3 m wide) of very thin (average 2 cm thick) ice (good rock pro' in excellent rock). Best pitch of the route. Belay at fixed nuts (rappel station) (60 m, WI5R M6).

Pitch 7: A braided creek of thin ice veins. Left and right up the fattest ice you can find (69 m, WI4+R).

Pitch 8: A thin, vertical curtain (15 m, no pro'), then straightforward thin WI3 to the final pillar (60 m, WI5R).

Pitch 9: Overhanging mushrooms and a steep pillar (30 m, WI5+R).

Rappel pitches 5 to 9 off V-threads except where noted above.

From the snow ledge at the top of Pitch 4, we descended a 35-degree snow ramp (climber's left) to where it flattens out around the middle of the bowl. One 65-m rap off a horn and one 60-m rap from a piton station above a small ledge will reach the ground.

Rack: 1 set of nuts, 2 sets of cams from 0.5" to 3.5", 1 #4 Camelot, a few pitons, screws; 70-m ropes recommended

king's couloir, mount belanger

tom schnugg

I came to Canada in the middle of the summer to find ice. My fellow urban Americans didn't bat an eyelash when I told them. Many Americans think that Canada is an extension of the North Pole and is covered in snow and ice year-round. I let them continue to think that. I like to keep best-kept secrets best.

I also like to keep the customs officials on their toes, especially in this post-9/11 era. The Canada-U.S.A. border patrol can thank us international climbers for that euphoric adrenaline rush experienced precisely at the moment when, during a summer baggage search, they pull out a couple of axes while flipping the pages of a passport littered with stamps from mountainous countries. Similarly, we climbers have the mountain gods to thank for that same feeling when, smack dab in the middle of summer, we come across a classic, sustained, aesthetic ice couloir that has never been climbed (or at least whose ascent has never been documented) — all under perfect weather and fine conditions. This is what Dave Marra, Dana Ruddy and I found on July 23, 2004.

Mid-July in Canada greeted me and my sticks with a temperate and dry Rockies welcome. Dave and I met at the Downstream Pub in Jasper, tossed back a few of Canada's finest and soon were jabbering about picking off a new ice route. When Dana Ruddy, fresh from a jaunt up Fryatt, came bounding into the bar with a digital camera in his hand and a *%$#-eating grin on his face, our mission materialized. He had spotted what appeared to be a stellar northwest line up Mount Belanger, immediately west of Mount Fryatt. The adrenaline drip commenced.

First and foremost, something had to be done about that 25 km (beauteous) slog up to the base of the climb. Our solution was to portage across the Athabasca River and cut off 7-ish km from the approach. So, at noon on July 22, we strapped a borrowed and beaten aluminum canoe to the roof of the Baron (Dave's red beater wagon, which can be seen, felt and mostly heard rocketing throughout the Bow and Jasper valleys year-round), and drove until we found a narrow section in the river. The Atha-B was fast-flowing, furious and frothy and we suddenly realized that we had forgotten two things: know-how and experience at canoeing. But hey, what's an adventure without an adventure? After almost sinking the boat upon loading our three packs, we knew that our only hope was to make two crossings. Once our shirts and shoes were off and our cameras in zip-lock bags, the river gods had their laugh at us: the whitewater leapt up, filling the boat and splashing us as shockingly as a scalding cup of java in the crotch. Desperate holy-*%$# strokes, profanity and hysterical laughter ferried us through the mayhem to the far side — twice.

The river gods then volleyed us to the valley gods, who decided to also have their laugh with us. They sent out a biblical squadron of repellent-immune mosquitoes to escort us to our base at the meadows just below the north face of Belanger. We mountaineers can endure what seems to be endless amount of suffering during big alpine climbs, but throw some proboscis-endowed pests into a "shorts and sandals" approach, and all hell breaks loose. Slappin', cussin', shakin', scratchin' — these

winged vigilantes were relentless, and at 11 p.m. under the summer twilight we quickly powered down some canned chili and dived into our bivies.

Well, my best guess is that the mountain gods were so amused by our previous day's perils that they decided to grace us with a phenomenal day. At 3 a.m. we slammed down a couple of breakfast bars and were en route to the northwest face. The day progressed like clockwork. Under starry and windless skies, we trekked northwest through upward-sloping meadows onto a friendly moraine that led to an obvious col. We followed the col towards Belanger until our vantage point offered a complete view of the northwest glacier. At around 4:30 a.m., the Rockies craned hard for the sun and angled just enough light for us to spot a short, steep talus descent from the col. This brought us to the edge of the northwest glacier proper and allowed us to avoid a north-face pocket glacier. We roped up and by 6 a.m. arrived at the base of the couloir, approximately 200 m further.

The ice route is a right-leaning, Y-shaped feature whose lower section and left upper arm face northwest and receive no sun. The highly aesthetic nature of this climb is accompanied by significant objective hazards including rockfall and sloughing of snow or ice crust high on the route itself, especially from the hidden yet sun-kissed upper-right couloir. The first five to seven pitches — the lower section — consisted of straightforward 55-degree ice. Given the playful attitude of the gods thus far, we decided to stay to climber's right, thereby protecting ourselves from any surprises they might throw our way from the hidden upper-right couloir.

The crux came shortly after entering the upper section (climber's left) of the Y: 5 m of vertical ice through a narrow gully. If it had been a warmer summer or later in the season, this section would quite likely have been more rock than ice. On this upper section we found a sustained slope of three to five pitches, starting at 60 to 65 degrees and gradually getting steeper. There was no cornice feature and we executed a textbook exit onto the ridge, which consisted of a fairly wide, low-angled snow ramp leading up to a 5-m, fourth-class rock climb to the summit snow plateau. Royal 360-degree views as far as the eye could see greeted us at the summit. Our safe and spectacular ascent to a place of such calm magnificence filled our "why I climb" tanks full — and then some.

The obvious descent is the regular route down the southeast ridge, as indicated in the route description for the North Face. But we were interested in checking out some other lines from the glacier below where we started, so we descended via our ascent route at around 10 a.m. and were down to the glacier by 12:30 p.m. We made our way back to base camp, packed up and headed back to the Baron. After braving the waves of mosquitoes once again and having a glacial dip in Fryatt Lake, we arrived at the stowed canoe — 25 km later — just after sunset. The starry skies were our light across the river, and the river gods celebrated our success by facilitating two smooth ferries just 30 hours after our near-capsize crossings.

Like every great adventure, we carried out the final phase where it had all started: the Downstream Pub. We agreed that despite the long approach, King's Couloir — with its sustained line, challenging objective hazards and spectacular summit views — just may be the best-kept year-round ice secret in the Rockies and is well-deserving of royal appointment to the Canadian "Tour de Couloir". I also decided to keep best-kept secrets best: upon my arrival back in the States, I confirmed that many Canadians still don't have electricity or running water.

King's Couloir *600 m. III. Northwest face of Mount Belanger (3120 m/10,237 ft.), Jasper.* F.A.: Dave Marra, Dana Ruddy, Tom Schnugg. July 23, 2004.

old goats 2004

rick collier

1.* Midnight Cowboy *(60-m WI4 ice climb); probable first ascent. February 21, 2004. *Midnight Cowboy* clings to the north face of Akamina Ridge, southwest across Wall Lake (82 G/1 122326). We reached the ice by ascending a 45- to 50-degree snow gully for about 100 m. The climb is one pitch, with overhangs interspersed with eggshell ice, all of it difficult to protect. A cornice threatens the entire route. *Blair Piggot, Dave Stephens.*

2. Ski traverse from Saskatchewan River Crossing to Natural Bridge parking area. February 28–29, 2004. This 37-hour epic covered over 100 km, and is a trip likely not done before as a single non-stop effort. The route followed the frozen Howse River and then climbed over Howse Pass; a difficult bushwhack led down the Blaeberry River to the unplowed road. After some route-finding glitches, we ascended to Amiskwi Pass and skied — interminably! — out the Amiskwi valley. *Bob Saunders, Istvan Hernadi.*

3. Mount Cook (Aoraki) (12,313 ft./3754 m). March 7, 2004. Seven Goats spent seven weeks in New Zealand, making alpine ascents from the Mueller and Plateau huts, attempting Mount Aspiring and cycling the coast roads. The literal high point of this adventure was a five-Goat climb up Aoraki (Linda Glacier route), during which we enjoyed a gorgeous rainbow sunrise while front-pointing the fifty-degree couloir below the rock pitch. *Manfred Czechak, Alda Sigvaldson, Denis Longuépée, Danielle Tardif, Rick Collier.*

4. Chapman Peak (9403 ft./2866 m); rare winter ascent. April 3, 2004. Chapman Peak is one of two prominent summits south of Waterton National Park and the U.S. border. We skied down Akamina Parkway and across Cameron Lake before climbing to the border at a col between Summit Knob and Mount Custer. We then continued over a second pass and down to Lake Nooney, where the actual ascent of Chapman began. We climbed up a steep bowl on the northwest face, intersecting the west ridge at GR 170279 (82 G/1). Only minor difficulties intervened between this point and the summit. Twelve hours, return trip. *Blair Piggot, Dave Stephens.*

5. Mount William Booth and unnamed Peak 8838 ft. to its north. July 1–4, 2004. Four Goats backpacked from Kootenay Plains to the headwaters of the North Ram River east-northeast of Mount William Booth. On Day 2, we continued down the main valley and turned northwest; after some bushwhacking and traversing above a canyon, we followed a narrow valley and scree northwest to the summit of rarely ascended Peak 8838 ft. On Day 3, we navigated rock steps and tight bush in the valley, but eventually reached the summit of

Mount William Booth with no difficulties other than the usual steep, loose rock. On our descent of the airy, loose south ridge, we climbed unnamed Peak 8700 ft. to the south-southeast of Mount William Booth. *Gail Des Moulins, Alistair Des Moulins, David Mulligan, John Duerden*.

6. Mount LeRoy (9750 ft./2970 m); possible second ascent. July 10, 2004. A long hike over south Burstall Pass in intermittent rain and bush brought us to Belgium Lake on the 9th; the next day, two Goats approached LeRoy by crossing a series of ridges and arêtes to reach a cirque north of the objective. Reversing the descent route of the first-ascent party (1973), we climbed steep snow to the summit ridge in a white-out and blizzard; a variety of bumps were ascended, one of which must have been the summit. *Manfred Czechak, Rick Collier, supported by Christine Grotefeld and Joanne Williams.*

7. Starbird Pass Camp. July 15–18, 2004. From the camp, we crossed the Starbird Glacier on the 16th, ascended the south slopes of Eyebrow Peak on moderate snow, and scrambled up the west ridge to the summit (11,030 ft./3362 m). On the 17th, we climbed unnamed Peak 10,000 ft. (3048 m) by crossing the Starbird Glacier and ascending the loose, third-class rock of its west slopes — probable first ascent. *Doug Brown, Sandra McGuinness, Delia Roberts.*

8. Mount Verendrye (10,125 ft./3086 m); recommended climb. July 24, 2004. On the 23rd, we packed in 1.2 km through the burn on Verendrye Creek, bushwhacked on up the creek (the original trail is overgrown), and ascended talus and hardpan to the col between Verendrye and Whitetail (3650 ft. elevation gain), finding good camping in meadows on the west side of the col. On the 24th, we scrambled up the south slopes of Verendrye (scree, friction slabs and exposed couloirs), intersecting the southeast ridge just west of the first tower. Excellent climbing over turrets (rope used once) led to the crux, a 60-ft. sheer wall, which was ascended on the right for 25 ft. (5.4), then traversed left for 20 ft. (unprotected 5.7), and finished straight up an obvious crack for 30 ft. to the crest (5.5). "Right" and "left" appear to be reversed in the guidebook. Enjoyable scrambling for 0.75 km then brought us to the true summit. Descent via west ridge (exposed) and snow slopes to the south. *John Holmes, Sim Galloway, Rick Collier.*

9. Mount Whitetail (10,050 ft./3065 m); possible first ascent. July 25, 2004. Mount Whitetail is the double-summited peak two km southeast of Verendrye; the higher west summit (82 K/16 665488), despite some confusion in the guidebook and the *CAJ*, appeared not to have been previously ascended. Our group walked west down the upper Whitetail Creek valley (*see item No. 8 for the approach to this drainage*) until we could ascend to the long southwest ridge of the objective; unfortunately, near the crest of this ridge, John twisted his ankle and could proceed no further. The remaining two Goats continued on up this complex and crenellated ridge — towers, notches, and downclimbing detours to the south. The scrambling was strenuous, unrelenting, and laced with catastrophic exposure throughout. The final cliffs were surmounted by traversing right (south) and up, then back left on smooth ledges to a delightful chimney; the obvious ridge above was followed back right to the summit block, which was breached on the west. We set three raps on descent. *Sim Galloway, Rick Collier.*

10. Glacier Trail in a day; extreme trail run. July 30, 2004. Two "epic" Goats started at Nigel Creek trailhead, continued over Nigel, Jonas and Maligne passes and concluded at Maligne Lake (most backpackers take several days for this trek). Our ultramarathon covered 90 km and 8300 ft. of elevation gain over a span of 23 hours. On July 1, Lisa had completed a 73.3-km circuit around Moose Mountain in 15 hrs. *Lisa Lee-Johnson, Istvan Hernadi.*

11. Molar Tower (9550 ft./2912 m); second ascent of the northeast arête and face. August 2, 2004. This imposing and formidable tower was first climbed in 1933 by Cairns, McCoubrey and Neave via a convoluted route involving three of the four sides of this tooth. The more obvious and direct route on the northeast side, first attempted by Ernst Feuz Jr. and J.W.A. Hickson in 1930, remained unclimbed until a superlative tour de force by Colin Jones and Charles Guillaume in 1991, and was not repeated until our group of four Goats floundered up the scree to the base of the arête this past August. One lead up an off-balance chimney-and-crack combination just north of the tower wall (5.6) brought us to a wide bench on which we could sun ourselves while cheering on our companions' scrabbles up the "yellow wall"; this 50-m vertical expanse, loose at the bottom, is

The Notch on Verendrye photo: R. Collier

broken by a right-central crack. One moves up to the base of this crack on shaky holds, then arm-jams partway up the crack, exits right, and climbs upward on marginal holds until the demands begin to ease (5.8). From the belay alcove, easy scrambling leads to the summit. A tough and exciting climb in the armpit of nowhere. *Dave Field, Bob Saunders, Andre Kerkovius, Rick Collier.*

12. Ice River Camp. August 8–13, 2004. Although a few climbers venture halfway up this long, wild and isolated valley every summer to ascend the Goodsirs, no record exists of anyone visiting the far northern end of the Ice River since the ACC camp in 1961. The trek from the car park to Martins Creek is about 15 km (7 hours), half on trail, half in meadows, swamp and bush. Most of our time ascending Hanbury Peak (9550 ft/2911 m) on the 9th was spent negotiating a route through the bush up Martins Creek; once out in the open, we quickly made the ascent up talus and ledges. On the 10th, Rick soloed the prize of the area, Martins Peak (9930 ft./3027 m), via the 1939 first-ascent route, the north ridge; near the summit are some short, steep and technical faces. The descent via the west face required a long traverse to the south above (and on!) a curtain wall (not recommended). On the 10th, we climbed the minor summit Garnet Peak (7650 ft./2332 m) from the bowl to the north — probably a new route, but clambering up cliffs by hanging on to willows is far from aesthetic. On the 11th, Rick soloed Teepee

The author on summit #1000

Mountain (10,230 ft./3118 m) via the Gardiner–Gest–W. Feuz–Hasler Jr. route from the west (directions incorrect in guidebook), enjoying marvellous views of the Goodsirs. *Mardy Roberts, Rick Collier.*

13. Mount Burnham (9446 ft./2879 m). August 16, 2004. We accessed the Burnham area in five hours of bushwhacking from Pingston Creek in B.C. on the 15th, and camped at 6160 ft. The next day, we climbed the excellent granite of the east ridge of Burnham in five pitches (up to 5.4). *Doug Brown, Sandra McGuinness.*

14. Mount Prince Edward (10,650 ft./3200 m); first ascent of the complete southwest ridge. August 18, 2004. Except for hunters and horsemen, Queen Mary Lake on the west side of the Royal Group is seldom visited; its 12-km approach from the parking area near the Palliser River, along with 3000 ft. of elevation gain and multiple stream crossings, discourages most hikers. The lake, however, is gorgeous and well worth the effort of getting there. Although Katie Gardiner and Walter Feuz ascended the southwest ridge of Edward in 1929, they accessed its crest halfway to the summit after a long valley traverse on the south side. We started up the ridge right from the broad col just above timberline. Notches and gendarmes involving some roped climbing up to 5.4 brought us to the final tower and, halfway up, to Katie's "belly roll" traverse and a thin dihedral above (5.5). From there it was scree, ridge walking, flatirons, and an icy niche glacier just below the summit. Prince Edward was Rick's 1000th ascent. *Bob Saunders, Martin Taylor, Rick Collier.*

15. Castle Peak on Windsor Ridge (8394 ft./2559 m); possible first ascent. September 5, 2004. We journeyed to the base of the west side of this massif, just above the Castle River (Beaver Mines 82 G/8 100603), on the 4th. The next day, it was some 3000 ft. of bush and scree to reach the weathered towers of the summit crag. Our route up this crag is to the left of the wind funnel between the two horns and takes easy ledges up towards the obvious dark crack. Instead of thrashing up this off-width crack, however, we went left up a broken face (cracks, flakes and overhangs) for 25 ft., then traversed across an exposed face on a tight ledge for 20 ft. A delicate step across the abyss took us into a loose, narrow dihedral, which we followed (thrutching and stemming) to the summit blocks (5.7). We rappelled the north end into the wind funnel. *J.A. Owen, Tori Owen (age 13), Rick Collier.*

16. Little Brother (9850 ft./3003 m); first Old Goats Death Race. September 25, 2004. Little Bro' is the smallest of a cluster of three peaks named "the Three Brothers" by Katie Gardiner; they are located near Dip Slope Mountain and "Lone-isle Lake", south of Clearwater Pass. A group of crazed trail-running Goats decided to attempt this peak as a one-day Death Race. We started at the Mosquito Creek parking area and trotted up over north Molar Pass, down to Fish Lakes and the Pipestone River, and then up through light forest, karst terrain and snow-covered ridges to the summit. That was the halfway point; then we went back again to the start — altogether about 45 km and 8000 ft. of elevation gain. *Miles Tindal and Blaine Penny (9.5 hours); David Henry and Michael Grahame (11.5 hours); and Rick Collier (12.5 hours). Other Goats — Lisa Lee-Johnson, Istvan Hernadi, Nancy Fraser and Mardy Roberts — did different and slightly shorter circuits.*

17.* Midnight Rendezvous *(90 m, WI2+ ice climb); probable first ascent. November 11, 2004. *Midnight Rendezvous* is the furthest right of three couloirs slicing the upper section of the north face of the western end of Akamina Ridge (82 G/1 110333). The four-hour approach ascends to Bennett Pass and then directly left (south) for 50 m to the base of the climb, which consists of two moderate pitches of ice of varying quality. We set rappels from pitons on climber's right. All dozen or so ice climbs on the north face of Akamina are threatened by cornices. *Blair Piggot, Dave Stephens.*

Note: Readers wishing for more detailed information on these tours, treks and climbs — and on the many Old Goats' trips not included in this report — should consult on-line with the *Canadian Mountain Encyclopaedia* (www.bivouac.com).

spring training

will gadd

THIS TIME OF YEAR, it's always hard to decide what to do: rock, ice, alpine? The options are endless. One evening, Kim and a few friends and I were sitting around and got to wondering what would be the ultimate spring link-up. After a few drinks, it was obvious to Kim Csizmazia: the North Face of Athabasca (the classic alpine route), *Polar Circus* (the classic big ice rig), and *Direttissima* on Yam (the classic rock route). "Classic" means that it typifies its genre, and is a good day out on its own. None of the routes are cutting-edge in difficulty, but all are respectable routes you could date and feel good about. I filed the idea under "cool stuff to do one day, maybe soon" and left it at that, as Raphael and I had plans to try a new alpine line on the Parkway.

On Saturday, Raphael Slawinski and I drove up the Parkway to climb our alpine line (top secret, dead obvious — yeah, that one), but we were shut down by the apparent avy hazard, despite the "moderate" listed in the avalanche report. Our suspicions were confirmed when we saw a healthy slide rake down a wall with the same aspect and angle as our intended line. Discouraged, we sat in the car until I remembered Kim's link. Raph and I had talked about it, and we had all the gear except rock shoes, so why not? Kim's hip is injured, so she's out of commission, but she was glad to help when I called from the Icefields, and she volunteered to meet us in the Yam parking lot with rock shoes should

we get that far (not likely, but hey, trying would be fun!).

We pitched the Bibler tent (serious gear overkill) at the Hilda Creek parking lot and slept until 11:30 p.m., then drove in the quarter moonlight to the AthaB parking lot. At 12:15 a.m. we crushed the "wake up" cans of Go juice, strapped on the packs and skis and headed up the moraine. We were both missing our friend Margot's birthday party and imagined all the people drinking and carousing at the same time as we battled a very cold wind in the middle of the night. We joked about how much more fun they were having, but it was cool to be just starting out on a huge adventure — as always, I wondered if we could do it. I had drawn up a rough schedule in the car the night before, but everything had to go smoothly for the plan to work. Big link-ups generally take planning; we hadn't really done any, but off to the races!

The snow was a bit slow, especially after we left our skis at the base of the *Silverhorn* and postholed in the dark to the base of the North Face. Our first doubts came as we huddled in the bergschrund while a frigid wind ripped snow across us; it was the darkest hour of the night, and the conditions were just about too much to handle. If the rest of the face was experiencing the same wind, it wasn't going to be fun. Strapping on crampons and digging out ice gear just sucked — our fingers froze, and we both felt tired after sleeping for only an hour or two. Later, Raph and I both admitted that we were close to calling it a day before the sun was even up; it was pretty miserable, and this was supposed to be spring!

The moon was gone, so it was totally black as we started soloing up. It was surreal to be climbing by headlamp up the endless ice in the middle of the night, the only noises the whack/crack of tools on ice and the cold wind ripping at us. The entire face was pure ice except for about 10 ft. of rock; I have never seen the face with so much ice and without snow anywhere. I almost started campusing at one point to take the weight off my burning calves. We belayed the rock section for safety; it's a bit weird, but there's a fair amount of fixed gear. We could see the headlamp lights of a party just starting up on the moraine below; we wondered if they could see our lights and what they thought — probably, "What the hell are those nutters doing up there at this time of the morning?"

At around 5:30 a.m. we topped out just as the sun started rising on the high peaks around us — a beautiful sight despite the savage wind. Raph froze his nose a bit; spring was not in effect up here! The sun was out and bouncing off the ice below the Silverhorn as we walked down having summited earlier than I normally wake up. Memories of the cold night faded when the sun rose; funny how that works. After an adventurous ski (hey, these bindings really do release!), we were back at the car at 7:30 a.m. More z and CALORIES, and we were on our way up *Polar Circus* by about 8:15 a.m. A little behind schedule, but pretty close!

Polar Circus looked to be in good shape, but we were both tired as we soloed up the lower sun-baked pitches. Raph and I kept a step of snow between us to avoid getting hit by ice as we soloed. I was a step ahead of Raph; every time I pulled the top of a step, I would look back and there he would be, seemingly urging me to get a move on. Later he said that he thought I was just waltzing along, while he was desperately fighting to move upward in slow motion. I laughed because to me it had seemed just the opposite — that I was getting chased up the climb by Raph! Perception is everything, but in reality we were moving well even though the lower pitches were sun-baked. We soloed to the base of the headwall, then roped up and used a few speed tactics to keep moving quickly to the top. We were back at the car at 12:30 p.m.

We both felt lethargic from being up all night, but we pounded down more water and Red Bull (drink of the gods for mortals [*and brazen sluttage to sponsors by author -ed*]) and drove to Lake Louise, where we raided the gas-station convenience store like locusts (leave no calorie behind!) and busted a move back towards Yam, calling Kim en route to let her know that we were early enough to still try *Direttissima*. Even though Raph and I had drunk at least five litres of water each, I noticed colours starting to "fade" a bit — a sure sign that I was dehydrated. Knowing that we possibly had time for Yam was sort of inspirational, but in a hazy, "Yep, sure would be great to do that" way. After the driving/hydration session, Kim met us at the parking lot with rock shoes, more water and food, and warm-weather clothes.

It was bizarre to be dressed in T-shirts below Yam after freezing in full conditions on AthaB: dark, cold, windy; then ice climbing; now it was summer. After setting off at 3:15 p.m., we both felt tired on the walk up — constant motion is not perpetual motion. We answered a few "Bit late for a route, isn't it?" questions with, "Yes." Raph kept slowing to stop and talk to friends coming down, but we were on a mission. All day we had been cutting our transition times as tight as possible; with so much climbing, five or ten minutes wasted here or there would add up to hours we didn't have. Besides, his pale winter skin was blinding people as he walked sans shirt.

The face was already in shadow and starting to cool, but compared to AthaB it was still tropical; why then were we cold again? Perception: we had just been warm; now cold, our bodies protested. At 4:20 p.m. Raph left the ground for his block, and at 7 p.m. I pulled over the top after mine. I'd never done *Direttissima*. The final "5.8" pitch was for sure the technical crux of the day; what a great climb! Even though it was chilly in the shade, I was happy to be on such a classic rock route, made all the sweeter by the day's earlier events. The wind was cold and the snow was starting to refreeze as we cruised back down to the car under headlamp power — tired, sore but happy to have had a full spring day of it. The options are endless!

IT WAS A GOOD SPRING DAY! Thanks go to Raph and Kim for the experience. It takes a certain kind of mind to conceive of this and then pull it off; Kim and Raph did that respectively. Today I hurt. Under perfect conditions (harder snow; snow instead of ice on the North Face of AthaB; fitter humans), this could of course be done in less time, but that's beside the point. What the point is seems rather vague and not sharp, but it was a lot of fun. We were helped by Raph's high fitness level (he has done two Temple north-face routes and a fair amount of other climbing in the last few weeks) and Kim's resupply at the Yam parking lot. Raph was a solid partner (not that many people would even want to try this, much less stay motivated after the initial setback of not going up a new route!). I'll bet he enjoyed teaching classes today.

I was supposed to be "resting" by going alpine climbing; my shoulders are hammered from trying to do the Game trickery-free. This wasn't exactly restful, but at least my whole body aches equally now.

The Spring Training Link: Athabasca North Face, *Polar Circus*, *Direttissima* (Yam nuska). Will Gadd, Raphael Slawinski. March 28, 2004.

the whiteout tour

glenn reisenhofer

The first thing Kevin did when he got to my house was construct a pair of short, wooden skis using pipe cleaner bindings and some old, yellow, rubber boots. When Steve arrived from Edmonton, he would find these skis and boots waiting on the sidewalk... "Steve Mo's skis + boots." Steve's Japanese friend Earl decided to join us. Even before the trip had started poor Earl was confronted by our loopy antics.

The idea was to tour along the divide between Elk Lakes and Peter Lougheed Provincial Parks. With luck we would be skiing past three eleven thousanders, each with its own unique charm. We stashed a vehicle near Engadine Lodge and proceeded to start our trip in the Elk Pass parking lot. The most dangerous part of the entire trip was the skiing down from Elk Pass on icy crap. With the tents set up on Upper Elk Lake we enjoyed the memories of playing on the multitude of frozen waterfalls that descended from Mount Fox, a beautiful place to spend a March evening.

The next day's plan was to skis up the Nivelle Creek drainage and get on the Elk Glacier. With one look at the steep forested terrain the lads shuddered and refrained from heading up that way. Instead we chose a more conservative line up the Pétain Creek drainage. We had some difficulty with the steep terrain, which led to our usual remove the skis and yard-up-on-trees routine. Instead of camping on the barren, windswept Pétain Glacier, we chose a bench just below which overlooked the entire Elk Lakes area. Surrounded by larches, we laughed and danced the evening away. Earl was so thrashed that he didn't partake in the antics and instead remained in his comfy sleeping bag.

The following day we headed onto the stormy Pétain Glacier and aimed for the col between Mount Joffre and Mount Pétain (GR 281994). Without seeing the tiniest glimpse of Joffre we descended the glacier that swept beside the length of Mounts Pétain and Marlborough. Even the mighty King George remained hidden. When we were resting at Aster Lake we discussed the lack of sights on this trip. We should be witnessing some of best views in the Rockies, instead, we saw whiteness everywhere we looked.

Our continuing desire to see greater whiteout conditions drove us on to the tiny glacier located between Mount Northover and an unnamed peak to the east. Reaching the storm-hammered col (GR 249055), a few of the lads laid on their sides to aid in removal of skins. An even-paced glide dropped us into our camp at Three Isle Creek, where fire and antics promptly followed.

All too early we were thrashing up the sidehill that led to the bench where Lawson Lake peacefully sat. For a good chunk of the day skis were pointed upwards and to the right. I was going mad breaking trail while performing the same endless action through the steep trees. A cold, yet happy night was spent near snow-filled Turbine Canyon.

On the Haig Glacier, our "Tour of Whiteness" fulfilled its own prophecy by remaining... whited out. No lycra-clad skiers came tearing around a set track once we reached the home of the cross country training facility. Only distant, vacant shelters stood as lifeless as giant boulders in a white sea. Again, the elusive eleven thousander, Sir Douglas, evaded our sights. Using braille, and a variety of other techniques, we luckily found our exit onto the French Glacier. Grand turns led us down towards the Burstall Pass trail. With time at a premium we bailed going over Birdwood and Smuts Pass and headed back towards the Smith-Dorrien.

We highly recommend this fantastic trip, even if we didn't see a thing. Our imaginations thought it was magnificent. We want to go back and ski it again, just for the missed sights. I can imagine skiing along viewing three majestic eleven thousanders, high up on a snow bound glacier... If you're interested I would suggest poking your nose in the Nivelle drainage. If successful, you could ski through two passes that separate DeGaulle, McCuaig, Ney and Castelnau, thus adding a significantly interesting part to the tour. You'd also have to tack on Birdwood and Smuts Passes, just for fun. I truly hope you don't have a "Whiteout Tour."

the beckoning of the block lakes peaks

glenn reisenhofer

As the Labour Day weekend approached, Colleen, Keisha and I found ourselves hoofing along the trail to the overcrowded Inkpots. Luckily for us we weren't planning on hanging around and continued on the trail that led up towards Mystic Pass. After a kilometre, we headed off into the light bush and made our way up an infrequently human used valley. Passing the Block Lakes Cave, we continued up towards the marvels of the alpine. Sneaking through the blocks of "Marmot Pass" (GR 811902) we set up camp in the stark hanging valley above Block Lakes.

We hadn't intended on ascending any peaks in the area, but the lure of the peak to the south proved too much. After a lengthy sleep in, we slogged up the snow covered north side to a col (GR 802896) and easily continued on towards the summit. Upon approaching the cairnless top we could see the Louise Group far off to the northwest. Slowly, as if obscuring clouds were parting from my eyes, I remembered that today was Karl Nagy's wake. His infectious bright light was one that shone intensely. The overcast, cool breezy day hurried us back down towards camp.

Upon approaching the camp I realized that I had now lost three friends to the mountains. I remembered studying Biochemistry with Simon Parboosingh. Often he would blow a puff of breath skywards to free his eyes from his dangling hair. Hounded by his parents to succeed, he only wanted to climb and chose his own destiny. Larry Ostrander was a dark horse with an inner strength that matched Samson's. A genius with a strong desire to climb led the poor man to his demise. In remembrance of my three friends I nicknamed the summit Wake Peak 2987 m (GR 806897).

We continued down towards the sparkling waters of Block Lakes. These rarely visited lakes remain so for the simple reason that they are difficult to access. It took us some time to figure out how to get off the massive headwall and down to the Cascade River. After a lengthy look, a relatively easy fourth class gully (GR approxi-

mately 818914) dropped down a break between some cliffs. Keisha needed a bit of aid at one spot, otherwise she fared pretty well on her own. At the bottom of the gully we found meters of steel cable that was used to ascend the gully and aid in fish rearing at the lakes. An early season snow storm ended our trip and we settled for the slog out Forty Mile Creek.

The following year my good friend Steve Morris and I went back up towards the Block Lakes area. He had always wanted to go there since his dad had visited the lakes years before. Leaving the tent, stove and sleeping bags behind, we decided to try the trip "Donnie Gardner style." Upon reaching the Block Lakes area, I was once again overcome by the temptation to ascend a new peak. Directly northeast of "Marmot Pass" an enticingly lone peak stood. Keisha decided to stay at the pass while Steve and I climbed up the northeast ridge to an angular summit with no cairn.

Upon returning to the pass, we picked up Keisha and continued to a col between Block Mountain and an unnamed peak (GR 796919). Our legs had zero ambition to pound up the scree to the top of Block Mountain. Our first camp was situated beside the stunning "Open Bivy Lake" (GR 789923). White goat fur stuck in clumps in the small, thickly spaced trees. Unfortunately, some filthy rodents chewed our over-the-cliff-placed food bag which momentarily delayed our breakfast.

After crossing Badger Pass we headed down Johnston Creek for Luellen Lake. At this point I wanted to bail. Keisha had torn a piece of padding off her foot and suffered two seizures. This was also my first overnight trip since the birth of our daughter Elsa, the silent companion of our first foray. Being a new dad and all I was feeling a bit antsy and wanted to get back home. Steve, sensing my unease, was gracious and soon we were homeward bound. We nicknamed yesterday's peak Little Elsa 2835 m (GR 817905). Maybe one day I'll get to go back with her and climb it.

Steve on Little Elsa

the AA gully: roadside alpine cragging

sean isaac

After a winter of mainly clipping bolts on sport mixed routes, Shawn Huisman and I thought we had better get some alpine terrain under our belts before heading off to Alaska. In early April, weather and conditions seemed fairly settled, so we made the pre-dawn drive to the Icefields, intent on a short, new alpine route I had been spying. The prominent buttress between Athabasca and Andromeda has an obvious X feature formed by two gullies / chimney systems slicing across each other. This "X marks the spot" is very prominent when one is driving south along the Parkway. The previous spring, Raphael Slawinski and Pete Takeda had made the first ascent of the more obvious left-to-right gully. Raphael compared their *West Chimney* route (III, M5) to *Sidestreet* on Little Snow Dome due to its snowed-up dry-tooling and low commitment. Shawn and I were intent on the right-to-left line.

As we approached the wall, it became clear that trying to get into the right-hand lower gully would be contrived, so we took the lower snow gully of the West Chimney to the junction of the X. Up to this point it was easy, ropeless cruising on hard, spindrift-packed snow. When I spoke with Raphael before the climb, he mentioned that on their ascent the lower gully was unnerving, waist-deep, bottomless powder. Ahhh, Rockies snow is so condition-dependent.

At the junction, we slammed in a couple of pins for an anchor just in time for me to clip in and lean back to unload my churning bowels. With brown stains streaking down the snow below our belay perch, I nobly offered the first lead to Shawn so that he could escape the odour. After a false start in an awkward corner out right, Shawn fired straight up the face above our anchor. Good hooking on flat edges brought him to a ledge where he frigged some gear in before committing to a 6-in.-wide vein of thin ice. A few body lengths higher, the ice ended under a roof. Some strenuous moves leftward and over the roof led to a snowed-up groove that Shawn ran out to a belay below chockstones.

Upon re-racking at his belay, I launched off, dry-tooling over the chockstones and finding good gear. Unfortunately, the good gear ended and I was left grovelling up that not quite vertical snow-covered ground that is not too desperate to climb but where it is impossible to find pro'. This eventually gave way to a steeper rock corner that offered good dry-tool slots and decent protection. Just before the angle once again eased off to snow grovelling, I wielded a perfect Spectre deep into a choss crack, then set off up the steep snow gully. The 60-m twin ropes came tight just as I reached a set of cracks that willingly accepted nuts and 'blades.

Pitch 3 involved easy snow climbing in a narrow gully, except for a single wedge chockstone at half-height. Shawn managed to get good pro' just below the impasse, then squirmed his way over it, performing a beautiful belly flop. Seconding proved even less graceful, since the much-needed footsteps in the snow beneath the chockstone had collapsed. Once we were on the ridge, it was just a matter of finding the correct snow gully leading down to the Athabasca north glacier and onto the well-trodden moraine trail back to the parking pullout.

Sean Huisman on AA Gulley

Both the West Chimney and the AA Gully are great, low-commitment alpine "cragging" routes perfect for an end-of-season spring outing. It is truly amazing that two such accessible and obvious lines had never been done before.

AA Gully *350 m. III, M5+. The AA Buttress* (*see p. 191 of* Selected Alpine Climbs in the Canadian Rockies). F.A.: Shawn Huisman, Sean Isaac. April 2004.

verstiegenheit

shep steiner

Roughly translated, "Verstiegenheit" means wandering beyond a limit. A loose translation from the German would implicate climbing too high, or so high as not to be able to return to ground without a rescue. In the existential psychoanalysis of the great Swiss clinician, Ludwig Binswanger, the word gains special significance as a term with a unique purchase on the poetic personality; a type typically carried into heights by the power of his/her imagination. One must be wary of getting carried away by such Romantic sentiments: the freedom of the hills and the cult of action are poor and feeble fictions to live by, even if they do get one up routes again and again. In fact, in view of the route itself, which climbs a meandering line just left of *General Pain* and above *The Calgary Route* on Yamnuska, the very poor quality of rock, the run-outs, the potential for clipping ledges, and the general level of anxiety provide rare insight into Binswanger?s notion of mental pathology. The feeling of groundlessness should be detected here about, and if one were to properly sketch in a definition of the word as well as adequately describe the route, one would have to include all of the anxieties that come bundled up with feelings of height, espe-

cially the dizziness of vertigo. In all such experiences of verticality, death is near at hand, and pitch for pitch Verstiegenheit lives up to this grisly possibility.

The symptomatology the climber will encounter here is that of one-upsmanship, for in both cognitive and imaginative difficulties, as well as simply in terms of standard of difficulty, the stakes are considerably higher than encountered elsewhere on the cliff. (Like canonical literature, the route faces up to the high tradition of climbing in the environs of Banff and aims to surpass its historical precedents — including *Astro-Yam*, *Yellow Edge*, *CMC Wall*, *Balrog*, *Freak Out* — in seriousness, continuousness, exposure, poverty of rock, and sheer ugliness of moves; in sum, the absolute inversion of all things aesthetic that hold sway on Yamnuska, but nevertheless from which the aficionado derives an exquisite pleasure). Inasmuch — and this is all confirmed by Binswanger's own clinical experience during his prestigious directorship of the Sanitorium Bellevue at Kreuzlingen, Switzerland from 1911-56 — Verstiegenheit galvanizes or distills the ideal of extravagance.

Thus in the language of Daseinanalysis, the good doctor informs us that Verstiegenheit "is conditioned by the fact that Dasein has 'gotten stuck' at a certain experiential locus (Er-Fahrung) from which it can no longer, to use a phrase from Hofmannsthal, 'strike its tent.' Robbed of communio and communicato, Dasein can no longer widen, revise, or examine its 'experiential horizon' and remains rooted to a 'narrow minded,' i.e., sharply limited standpoint. In this respect, Dasein is 'stalled' or ob-stinate, but not yet extravagant, for an additional precondition of Verstiegenheit is that Dasein rises higher than is appropriate to the breadth of its experiential and intellectual horizon, that, in other words, breadth and height are not proportional to each other.? [1]

The situation should be familiar enough to a climbing scene like the Sanitorium Berghof we call Yamnuska. Ruled over by the ethical, aesthetic and climbing standards of successive generations who have continually managed to make the cliff over in their own name by pushing standards, the experiential horizon or ideological ceiling of each fitful hegemony, is keenly and oppressively felt by the next in line to the throne. Such was the case when Steve Lovenuik, in later years Todd Guyn, and finally in 2004, Scott Milton—who remains the only person to have freed all eight pitches to date—and I set out in the wet Spring of 1996 to climb the gently overhanging headwall left of *CMC Wall*.

BUT ALLOW ME TO BREAK OFF HERE, for climbing is not the crux of *Verstiegenheit*. If it were, then *Verstiegenheit* would be reducible, like every other run-of-the-mill test-piece on the mountain, to making what Binswanger flags as breadth and height proportional to each other. The equivalence he poses as normative — an equivalence that the reader has no doubt let slip by without thought or consequence is itself the crux. The disappointing and pervasive conception of climbing as a curative power on par with psychotherapy is not at stake on this route at all. Why we allow our deepest hopes for the sport to commingle and blend happily with bourgeois notions of the cure and self-improvement is unfathomable, but no less a fact of life. This blinding to the colonization of everyday life, and further the wealth of lived experience at the extreme margins of life — where life borders on and brushes uncomfortably up against death — by capitalism, corporate interests, the ideology of leadership, and the less than literary genres of self-help and self-empowerment, is immanent (I mean internal and identical) to sublimation or the summit drive. Little more than a satellite program for a sociology's, a psychology's, and a philosophical anthropology's empirical study of man, climbing today has lost touch with the ontological 'truth' of falling — and not even the recent developments in the pastime that render the fall more and more transparent, first in sport climbing and now in bouldering has put things right. Betterment inevitably outdistances failure. The overcoming of odds cannot but make our hearts sing. The achievement of therapeutic balance, even when built into Binswanger's program for the modernization of self' that is, the striving for always expanded and heightened existential plateaus that would be ridiculous to dismiss in any case — reads like a cheap *bildungsroman*. That climbing literature in general feeds solely on the fiction of autobiography, and that every history of climbing on Yamnuska written so far reads like an impoverished interpretation of The Sentimental Education — one oblivious to the permanent parabasis of irony constitutive of it — proves the point.

In a sense, then, the curious question that demands inquiry in face of *Verstiegenheit* is when, if ever, has the overcoming of obstacles, the fact of achievement, the possibilities of expanding the self, or the sublimation of the self, not been the point? And I would respond, at no time in recent memory. It is here that *Verstiegenheit* points to the future, by memorializing the just past. This is not messianic prophecy that reaches back to the first ascent of the mountain as a guide, nor the privileging of contemporary, lived experience — that should be clear enough from Binswanger's existential worries. Rather Verstiegenheit values the movement in which history comes to nothing. (No single figure comes closer to capturing the uncertainty and lost cause of this movement than Giusto Gervasutti — the climbing writer who has always occupied the privileged place in my mountaineering library. Think of the final chapter of his fine autobiography when he captures both the needlessness and loneliness of a near death experience while soloing an unnamed peak, is carried by these reminisce to ask why, and unfortunately responds by taking sides with a life given over to deeds and individual notabilities instead of interpretation and reflection. I always think of Gervasutti's moment in connection with the absolutely singular and discontinuous moments that I remember most vividly — so many of which crowd around the eight pitches of *Verstiegenheit*. I wonder if these moments come into their own, after the fact, because there is some essential correspondence between their assumed condition of existential plenitude (of life lived at its fullest) and the fact of writing or narration? I wonder if these moments only come into their own in retrospect, because they are narratives in the first place — all haunted by the likes of Gervasutti's account, I mean repetitions of his, and other, literary precedents, of his and other ascents? If so, this abysmal content that answers the why of climbing, through recourse to a nearly tautological formulation of nihilism with a positive valence, is possibility itself. It is the perhaps of *Grillmair Chimney*; the indecision of *Prosopopeia* or *The Lugubrious Game*; the uncertainty of *La Part Maudit*, and *If Tuzo and Heidegger Had Kinder*. It is the dark mirror of Acéphale writ large on a sunny face, in the language of base materialism, and dubbed Verstiegenshite. Rejoice the essential negativity of the fiction has come to light!

1 Ludwig Binswanger, Being-in-the- World: Selected Papers of Ludwig Binswanger, *trans. J. Needleman, New York: Basic Books, 1963, 343-344.*

humbled heart

brian wyvill

IT IS A TRUTH UNIVERSALLY ACKNOWLEDGED, that a climber in possession of a good drill must be in want of a new route. At least that was the thought in my head as I stepped heavily onto the trail to Bataan in the spring of 2001. *Heavily*, because the darn drill and extra special waist-loaded-Trevor-Jones-special battery pack weighs as much as a small horse and the road to Bataan is a long one.

I was on the death march trail (the terrible WWII event for which the Bataan crag is appropriately named), complete with heavy burden. "I have a *son* for this sort of thing", I thought, but that day Simon had found some kind of school homework excuse to avoid the death march, so I was trudging my lonely way upwards.

The reason for my enthusiasm over this particular piece of rock was a big heart shaped feature that not only cried out to be climbed, but was also 15 minutes closer to the car than any other piece of Bataan.

Once I'd figured out that the proposed route looked to be on brilliant rock (well, after the first ten feet of terrifying loose flakes), the first step was to hike to the top and rappel down to look for holds.

I have often thought that a good imagination is a really bad asset when it comes to climbing, especially when rappelling. This time, in my mind's eye I saw trees breaking, the rope fraying, my harness buckle buckling and the ropes hanging so far out in space that I would be left dangling not able to reach the tree at the top of the first pitch.

None of this apparently came to pass. The route proved to be feasible. The top section was 15 metres of somewhat overhanging 5.11-ish wall, covered in nice sideways holds. Then there was a tiny ledge, oh joy! I could stand in relative comfort. The lower 15 metres was not so steep, but was blank apart from the curious heart-shaped feature. The top of the heart formed a 3-inch overhang, and at its base was a hold, which I excavated from the crud after drilling a work bolt.

I was contemplating setting up the route when the patent Trevor Jones waist battery pack gave a little sigh and died after one hole. I descended to the ledge, packed up and went home.

Not much happened for a year. Chris Perry inspired me to persevere with the Heart route and equipped with his gear-carrying-son, we advanced on the crag. This time I was determined to clean and top rope that lower section. It could not possibly be as blank as I remembered it; there had to be more than one hold in 15 metres! I descended again, this time feeling more confident and did not have the horrors of my first lonely visit. I should have, as I ended up stuck at the work bolt with a rope too short to get anywhere. It took all kinds of contortions to get down.

Weeks later, I discovered three one-finger pockets in a line above hold Number One. They gave access to a few fingery edges a body length below the top of the heart. After various silly antics I figured out the combination and having unearthed hold Number Two on the route, I was able to reach it via a very small rectangular, droopy finger hold, "the moustache," but the crux sequence past the 3-inch overhang was still beyond my abilities.

Another year rolled by. Once again Chris informed me of his plans to go for the death march. The night before I made dilligent progress on my son's math homework, so the next day Simon lacked an excuse. There was still plenty of cleaning to do and the last few bolts to place. What was important was the sequence. It started at hold Number One and continued past the pockets, clip, then to the Moustache, to be held with the fingers of the right hand, (most important, because hold Number Two had to be held by fingers of the left). This gave access to a giant stretch to the 3-inch overhang, which acted as a very poor undercling until intricate footwork brought it low enough to be of real use. Once the feet had been gathered up high enough, and sufficient spring was experienced in the legs, a lunge could be made to the safety of the halfway ledge. The second half of the route was 5.11b max and presented nothing but good climbing. I tried to lead the route and fell off before the Moustache. The second time I fell off before hold Number One. It was time to give up for another year.

2004 felt like it was going to be a good year. I decided it was now or never. The day of the try, my wife, Shawna, sent us out up the hill with strict instructions to be back by 1:00 p.m. The pressure mounted. It was 11 a.m. and at noon I had to start down. I had a half hour to rest and a half hour to complete the Heart route.

My own heart was beating so hard I could hardly remember the sequence that had been going through my mind every night for the past week, but I reached hold Number One without incident and could slow my breathing down. Up I went on the one-finger pockets and reached the difficult clip. For some reason my brain stopped working properly there and I found myself clipping with the wrong hand. I stopped, calmed down, climbed down slightly and brought my hands back into sequence. I had lost valuable energy and the clock was ticking, counting away the vital seconds that I could stay in contact, as well as counting down to noon and the wrath of Shawna. I reached the Moustache, then hold Number Two. Only the crux remained. I reached up for the poor undercling beneath the 3-inch overhang and realized that there was nothing left, the clock had finished for my left arm, always my weaker. I fell, lowered to the ledge and rested in the sun.

The cell phone rang. "Where are you? Did you do it? Can we leave now?" It was Shawna. "Err, hi Love", I said trying to hide the disappointment I felt at failing so close to the last lunge. "Could I have a half hour rest and try again?"

She was not very happy about this request but since she was fed up with repeated attempts on the Heart and didn't want to have to put up with us talking about it anymore, gave in. I lay on the ledge, Simon hung sleeping, Matt played with the dog. After half an hour the phone rang. I always find I climb better if somebody shouts encouragement from below. Simon can't bring himself to shout at his poor aging papa, but Shawna had no such inhibitions.

With cell phone earpiece in place, I proceeded on my last attempt. Every time I started breathing too hard, I heard, "Get up there, you fat bastard", or, "No sex for a month if you don't make it!!"

With that terrible threat in mind, I reached Number Two in double quick time and got the crux without even thinking about it. Somehow, the whole thing had gone from left to right brain and I found myself lying on the half way ledge hardly knowing that I had done the route thanks to Shawna's encouragement. "Humble Heart", I thought. It certainly humbled me.

foreign

the mountains call to me

margaret imai-compton

BARRY BLANCHARD'S e-mail came out of the blue in late August.

> "Hey gang what do you think of New Zealand? I'm planning a trip to the Southern Alps in January 2004. We could start near Wanaka with Mt. Aspiring as an objective and then drive up to climb in the Mt. Cook Area for the second week. I hope this sounds good to you. It is a magical country and I know that we will have a blast!"
>
> *Happy Trails, Barry*

I was enjoying the last few days of a sunny, languid summer vacation with my daughter in the Algonquin area of eastern Ontario when I got this message. Barry's e-mail instantly propelled me to images of Middle Earth and brooding mythical landscapes. My first thought was, "New Zealand? Sure!", followed by a stab of anxiety, "I'm not good enough", and finally, "What the heck, when do I ever get another chance to be invited by Barry? Even if I don't climb a thing, I'll just go along as a cheerleader."

Within the week, we had signed on; Paul Potvin of Toronto, Bill Standley of Ketchikan Alaska, John Blakemore of Cleveland and me. With the exception of John (who had climbed and skiied with Barry for over 20 years), the rest of us had summitted el Pico d'Orizaba (Star Mountain in native Mexican Nahuatl) with Barry and Catherine Mulvihill in January of 2003. This was the follow-up trip we had teased Barry about: "Hey Barry – where to next? Can you find another Star Mountain for a January expedition next year?"

Part One: Tititia (Glittering Peak)

BARRY PICKED US UP in Christchurch on Jan. 12 and we immediately set off for Wanaka in a van stuffed with our gear. Our first break was in a little town called Geraldine where we stopped for lunch and I had my first introduction to savoury pies (a Kiwi specialty made of puff pastry and various cheese/meat fillings).

Little did I know that stopping for food was to be a major theme throughout this trip, so much so that at times I wondered if we were on a climbing trip or a gastronomic motor trip. As I review my journal from the trip, there are as many notes on restaurants and meals, as there are about our climbs. It's amazing how often the male appetite needs to be fed. It became quite amusing to watch the men saunter off in a pack to search out meals while I trolled for the perfect cup of Kiwi coffee.

The next day, the heli dropped us off at Bevan Col, high up in a sea of mountains within Mt. Aspiring National Park. The views were clear and stunning and it still hadn't hit me that I was in the Southern Hemisphere, on the other side of the world from my home in Toronto. Once we were cramponed, harnessed, helmeted and roped in, we set off across the Bonar Glacier towards the Colin Todd Hut, perched high up on a rocky outcrop, with Mount Aspiring poised majestically in the distance.

The Maori name for Mount Aspiring is Tititia, which means Glittering Peak. At 9931 ft/3027m, Aspiring is often called the Matterhorn of the South due to its three distinct knife-edge ridges. Aspiring's triangular shape and construction are a sharp contrast to Orizaba, the "Star Mountain" we had summitted with Barry the year before.

Whereas Orizaba is a volcano with graceful sloping lines, Aspiring is rugged and geometric in profile. Barry explained that the unique shape was created by glacier ice backing up to a common point and scooping out glacial bowls on each side, resulting in a glacial horn. The Canadian equivalent is Mount Assiniboine in the Rockies.

Barry and Kevin Nicholas from Alpine Guides studied Mount Aspiring throughout dinner, negotiating best approaches, configuring the optimal rope teams and discussing departure times. For the rest of us, our al fresco dinner on the rocks was frequently and annoyingly interrupted by attacking Keas – alpine parrots that are known for their aggressive and unrelenting attacks in search of food and general mischief.

Wake-up was set for 3:00 a.m., with departure at 4:00 a.m. I was just starting to doze off when I heard shouting from Barry, Paul and John's tent.

"Hey, there's something sharp poking my back" screeched John.

"Throw something at it!", Barry said.

"It's a beak – it's jabbing me through the tent," John called back.

And then I heard the zip of the tent, and Barry yelling, "You goddamned parrots!" as he pelted rocks and snowballs at the fleeing Kea.

Moments later I heard the swoosh of powerful wings overhead our tent and the flutter of plastic.

"What's going on Bill?" I whispered.

"They're ripping the plastic bags in the vestibule."

A short pause then a sharp intake of breath, "Oh my God, our boots are in there." I had visions that a precious climbing boot would be jabbed by a Kea beak and dropped miles away in a crevasse.

The kea eventually flew away, bored with the sport of harassing us, but they were distracting enough that sleep was elusive for a long time, combined with the excitement and anxiety of climbing Mount Aspiring in a few hours.

Barry, Paul and John left first, taking the more challenging SW Ridge approach to the summit while Bill and I roped up with Kevin planning to intersect the NW Ridge route a little further along the "Kangaroo Fields" on the glacier. I was feeling tired and dozy, having had just a few

hours of sleep.

"Focus Margaret, focus", I kept repeating as I tried to still the chatter in my head. My thoughts were like ping pong balls, I was feeling so emotionally off-base. The quiet concentration required to climb Aspiring was in sharp contrast to the emotional chaos I left behind in Toronto.

Bill pointed out the Southern Cross constellation overhead as we headed for the shortcut on the glacier that would get us to the buttress where we would access the NW Ridge. After about two hours of glacier travel, Kevin began building an anchor using a snow picket for a few pitches of steep ice climbing. Snow pickets were new to me. They reminded me of a carpenter's balance, but without the little coloured liquid bubble device. As Bill and I dismantled the first anchor I held up the picket and stupidly looked at it. Does it hang off my harness? Do I stuff it into my pack? Do I shove it into the front of my jacket?

Eventually we were on the rocky ridge, short-roped and making progress on the buttress when Kevin noted the change in weather. To the south, it was clear with spectacular visibility but to the north cloud packs were forming and the upper winds were briskly moving strands of cloud toward us. At this point, my shoulder injury was starting to cry out, coupled with the fact that I was getting hot spots on my feet from poorly fitting boots because somehow, my boot insoles got left behind in the van. And the chatter in my head just wouldn't go away, it was always there, a recurring loop of toxic thoughts.

Kevin announced that we had finished the most technical part of the climb and he turned to continue. Then... I snapped. I just lost it. Wave after wave of sadness, rejection and loss gripped my chest. I leaned into the mountain and wept, heaving tears on to the ice and rock. Kevin and Bill were bewildered and solicitous and called an immediate rest stop, thinking I was in pain from the shoulder injury. I apologized to Bill through my tears, knowing I was ending his chance for the summit.

"Oh Bill, I'm sorry. I'm so ashamed. I'm so sorry but I'm done. There's too much David in my head right now. I just don't have the heart to keep going. He's ruined it for me. I'm so sorry about the money and what it's costing you."

I gulped more tears, rejection and bitterness.

"My confidence is shot. David said I'm not good enough to climb anything. He told me to choose the marriage or the mountains. So I told him to screw himself and I came anyway. Bill, I am so deeply sorry. I hate David for doing this to me. I can't go on. I am SO SORRY."

Kevin consoled me by pointing out that the weather wouldn't hold in time for us to summit anyway, and as we turned back, two other climbing parties were descending, having abandoned their attempt at the summit.

Bill gave me the gift of profound understanding and friendship when he said, "I'm only going where Kevin's going and if that means going back, we'll go back."

I embraced Bill and Kevin in gratitude, then descended feeling small and spent. I was so disappointed for Bill and I was humiliated for putting an end to our day.

Back at the tents, we waited for Barry, Paul and John. The skies were dark and ominous by mid-afternoon, and as we began to prepare dinner in the hut, we heard the rain lashing the tin roof. The others returned about 5:30 p.m., beaming from a successful climb, but tired and dripping wet.

Kevin determined that the rain and wind would make it impossible for us to sleep in the tents so they were hastily dismantled and we took refuge on the floor of the hut. Despite being wedged between the cooking pots and the kitchen benches, I was grateful to be warm, dry and in the company of compassionate caring friends.

"So much for 22 years of marriage" I told myself, as the day's events blurred into sleep.

Part Two: Aoraki (Cloud Piercer)

Mount Cook is the highest mountain in New Zealand (12,316'/3754m), and is located in Mount Cook National Park, a Unesco World Heritage site. It is also called Aoraki, which is Maori for Cloud Piercer. Barry had worked on the film *Vertical Limit*, in which Mount Cook stood in for K2, so he was quite familiar with Mount Cook Village, as well as the mountain itself.

We split into two separate parties at the Mount Cook airport. Bill and I were teamed with another Kiwi guide, Lisa Auer, to climb in the Upper Tasman Valley, while the others flew into the Plateau Hut where they would be positioned to climb Mount Cook.

On our second day at the Kelman Hut, Bill and I overheard Lisa on the radio with the Alpine Guides office, discussing Barry and Kevin's progress on Aoraki. Barry and Paul were headed for the "Middle Peak Hotel" where they would bivouac one night while John and Kevin were already closing in on Mount Cook's summit via the Linda Glacier and would descend later in the day.

With that information, we took note of the time to keep our sights on Mount Cook from where we would be on Hochstetter Dome. Sure enough during our lunch break, we saw two dots in our binoculars, descending the top of Linda Glacier from Mount Cook's summit. We were convinced that was John and Kevin. Meanwhile, on Mount Cook's East Ridge, Barry and Paul were having their own adventure.

According to Paul...

Here I am, climbing Mount Cook with Barry. All I could think about through the entire two days we were on the mountain was that I couldn't do anything to jeopardize his safety. I didn't want to be the one responsible for killing him and then I'd have to explain to Catherine (Barry's wife) what went wrong. Besides, I didn't want to become known as "The guy who dropped Barry Blanchard."

It was a real privilege to climb with Barry; I was amazed at how well known he is. It seemed that wherever we went in New Zealand, somehow people knew him. Remember when we were in the park office in Wanaka and Barry was looking at some maps? Some guy comes up and says, "Hey Barry — remember me? We climbed in Banff." And when we were loading up the van in Christchurch one of the bell hops saw our gear and asked if we'd seen *Vertical Limit* and Barry said, "Yeah, I was part of the film."

But the real kicker is when we're almost on the summit ridge on the second day, Barry is 60 m ahead with the rope strung out its full length and I hear someone behind me saying, "Hey, how's it going? Is that Barry Blanchard up ahead? I heard he was on the mountain and I want to meet him." I couldn't believe I was on Mount Cook with the Climbing God and he was guiding me!

The first day out we were aiming for the Middle Peak Hotel which we would access from the East Ridge route. I was staying focused and didn't talk much, but Barry would occasionally recite some classic lines from *Pulp Fiction* like, "Be cool honey bunny, be cool" or something.

On the first morning, there was one sloping pitch where I reached down to pull out a snow picket but it wouldn't budge so I took off my glove, tucked it in my armpit

and gave a yank. In the split second I pulled and took a half step, my glove was gone — gone into glacier oblivion. I was so embarrassed and I knew we had at least another 24 hours out there, but I had to tell Barry cause I couldn't go for a whole day with just a liner glove.

Barry heard the news, grinned, and pulled out an extra pair from his pack. The gloves were snug for me and I was surprised that Barry's hands were so small.

At the end of the first day, below the middle summit, we were looking for the Middle Peak Hotel, a sheltered crevasse where climbers bivi. Just before the sun went down, we took shelter in the bottom of the huge curving crevasse. I was so tired I was sitting outside on my pack with my head in my hands and fell asleep in that position until Barry finished setting up safety lines inside. That night we slept in our harnesses with a prussik tied to the safety line.

Most of the second day we were traversing on or near the summit ridge. Barry said that in 1991 the top of the eastern face collapsed, which turned the summit into an exposed ice ridge. Some places we were actually just below the knife ridge, facing in and front pointing as we traversed. I couldn't believe it when four people overtook us, doing the same thing but they were soloing! They just had two ice tools each and crampons and they were front-pointing along. If any one of them slipped, the snow was so windswept and brittle that there was no way to self arrest; they'd be goners. It was thousands of feet to nowhere.

There isn't really a summit on Mount Cook, like there is on other mountains. In fact, it's just one spot on this beautiful long ridge and we just walked past it. We were told the Maori revere mountains and it's considered insulting and insensitive to stand right on the summit. I was disappointed that I didn't get a summit shot because it was absolutely the picture perfect day, but honestly, I was concentrating so hard on my footing, I don't think I realized exactly when I passed it. And don't forget - I was responsible the whole time we were on Cook to keep Barry alive!

Barry told me that this was his first ascent of Cook; that even though he had filmed parts of *Vertical Limit* on the mountain, he hadn't actually had a chance to climb it. When we were heading down, and out of danger, Barry told me, "Paul, you did really well up there. You held your own. This was no gimme. We fought for it."

Barry and I were really really tired, by the time we got back to the Plateau Hut about 8:00 p.m. John and Kevin had left earlier in the afternoon by heli, back to the village. I was hoping we'd get to fly out too so we could shower and get our free dinner at the Hermitage (all Mount Cook summitters get a free buffet dinner at the swish hotel) but instead, we celebrated with wine, oysters, crackers and cheese at the hut.

Mount Cook photo Paul Potvin

When I left the next day and looked back at the mountain, I just had this great feeling — I did that! I stood up there!

While Paul and Barry were having their modest celebration in the hut, John, Kevin and I were in the very upscale Hermitage dining room in Mount Cook Village, awash in good wine, congratulatory wishes and excellent food.

The next day we heard Barry and Paul couldn't get their heli due to dicey weather and they were walking out from the Plateau Hut, a good 8- to 10-hour hike. Shortly after lunch, John and I hitched a ride to the trailhead and hiked in planning to intercept Paul and Barry on the trail. We carried empty packs, planning to offload some of their gear when we met them. Perhaps because good eating had been such a constant theme throughout the trip, I stopped by the Mountaineer's Café for some savoury steak pies and shoved them in my pack, thinking Paul and Barry could use a treat on the trail.

As John and I hiked the hot and dusty trail we constantly surveyed the narrow winding ribbon of a path, high up on the moraine above the Tasman Glacier. No sign of Paul and Barry. We searched and searched, scanning each rise and dip in the trail, but finally resigned ourselves to the fact that they had been picked up by heli, or maybe they were out already and we had missed them in passing.

I started to retreat when John shouted, "I see some people Margaret, I'm going to run ahead and meet them. Catch up to me!" In a flash John was gone, an ultra marathoner in superb form! As I came up behind him, I saw that it was indeed Barry and Paul, somewhat dusty and bent but in great spirits.

I ran hard towards them and collided with Barry first. "I'm so glad to see you! I've missed you, Barry!"

"Me too" he said with a wild grin.

Then I jumped all over Paul, "You're a star Paul! You did it! Put some of your stuff in my pack. I'll carry it for you."

Paul laughed but he remained firm in his resolve. "No Margaret. On principle I'm going to carry everything until I get to the van at the trailhead. I want to know I've done it on my own, right to the last step."

It seemed like a good moment to serve up the savoury steak pies and ketchup. I have seldom seen such appreciative appetites as the pies were devoured.

Within six hours of leaving the trail above the Tasman Glacier, we were celebrating our last evening together at a McDonald's near Christchurch. The next morning we were to fly back to North America and Barry was awaiting Catherine's arrival and his next clients. It seemed fitting that after a gastronomic tour of New Zealand, we should end our trip with a stop at the Golden Arches!

Looking back on that last afternoon, high up on the moraine wall above the Tasman Glacier, it's curious how deeply I felt about going out with John to find Paul and Barry. What was the motivation? Friendship? Worry? Love of teammates? Maybe that elusive emotion of trust and commitment that binds one to others on a rope?

And when they were sighted, I was taken aback by my joy and relief. "It's them! It's Barry and Paul!" How ironic that I was rejected by my husband in Canada and yet so completely accepted by these wonderful comrades in New Zealand.

Back in 1892, the founder of the Sierra Club, John Muir said, "I live in the natural world because the mountains call to me." In 2004, the mountains of New Zealand called to me. And I went. But alas, my husband left the marriage.

china ice

guy lacelle

LOIN DE CHEZ MOI — *yes, that would be an appropriate name for this beautiful new route*. That's what I was thinking as I topped out on this new 500-metre ice route. This time my quest to find the best ice climbs in the world had brought me *Far away from Home*. I was in the Shuanqiao Valley, (pronounced *Schwan-chow*), in the Sichuan province of China. As I set up my first V-thread for the long descent, I took a good look around. Even though I was well above 4000 metres, tall, magnificent mountains towered all around me — it looked like the Canadian Rockies on steroids. Across the valley were some rock walls rivalling El Capitan in size.

The first time I heard of the ice potential in China was in an article in *Climbing* No. 219 by Craig Luebben. That same winter, Craig came for a visit to Festiglace in Quebec and shared his photos and stories from his recent ice-climbing trip in China. I had a chance to climb with Craig the next day and tried to find out as much as possible about the country and its ice-climbing potential. It didn't take me long to be convinced that China would be my next destination.

Craig informed me that the best time to ice climb in the Shuanqiao Valley is from December to the end of February. The next winter, I entered China in early February in the company of François Damilano, Stéphane Husson and Monica Dalmasso. We quickly found Craig and our super-guide, Kai Zhao, in the airport. Kai is a very good ice climber and highly knowledgeable about the ice-climbing scene in the Shuanqiao Valley. Craig was now on his fourth trip to the valley. We were extremely fortunate to have Craig and Kai with us. They were great company and they enriched the quality of our trip in many ways. In addition to being excellent climbing partners, they made it possible for us to focus on climbing and to minimize the time spent on organization.

After a day in Chengdu getting food and mingling with a few of the 11 million Chinese in town, we set off for the small, remote town of Rilong. We had to hire someone to drive us, and the trip cost approximately 250 US dollars. The drive was difficult; I worried that the van would die at the 4500-metre-high pass and that we would have to spend our first night on the side of the road. But we did manage to make it to Rilong and we spent our first night at the Ma family home. Craig is a good friend of the family and we were all warmly received.

The next day, we moved into the valley. Staying with Mr. Ma would have meant paying a fee every time we entered the park gate. Another family took us in, and there we also quickly felt at home.

Our accommodations were very basic. There was no running water and the rooms were not heated. The only place there was heat was in the eating area, where we spent much of our spare time. The outside toilet was a bit daunting, but the view through the openings in the wall made up for it. Breakfast and dinner were prepared for us by our host. Everything was cooked on a wood stove. We always got lots to eat. The cost for room and board was approximately five US dollars per day.

We paid a local fellow to take us in his van to the climbs. For 20 US dollars per day he would drive us to the routes in the morning and pick us up at the end of the day. Foreign travellers are not allowed to drive — a blessing when you are travelling with the French.

ON OUR FIRST DRIVE to the upper valley, which is at between 3000 and 4000 metres, we saw lots of good ice. There were 60 to 70 climbs: many Grade 3 or 4 routes, a dozen or so of Grade 5, and a few pitches of Grade 6. Their length varied from 50 to 500 metres. We realized that there would be a lot to do here, including several new routes, but that none of the climbs would be outstanding. I had been dreaming of finding some fantastic routes rivalling the best ice climbs in the Canadian Rockies or Norway. After my initial disappointment, I turned my energy around and saw that the valley offered many worthwhile adventures. I figured I would be climbing something good every day. The surroundings were exceptionally beautiful and I was in great company.

Stéphane and François concentrated their energy on a big mixed route. Monica immortalized their experience on film and also got to climb some quality pitches. I climbed good ice every day with Craig and Kai, or occasionally went alone. On one occasion we climbed with a few members of the Chinese Mountaineering Team. It was

great to share the day with these gentle fellows. They didn't exude the macho attitude often found in these situations in our culture. We were all having a good day out, enjoying every moment. I was especially impressed by how comfortable the Chinese were with laughing at themselves. One day our driver was helping us cross the river by setting some logs across the water. He lost his footing and fell in the icy current. He and Kai started laughing out of control. Watching them, I realized that I could learn a lot from my new friends.

For me, the best moment of the trip came at the end of our stay. The Chinese climbers invited us over for an evening celebration. For the occasion, the local people gave us a wonderful feast, and put on their traditional dancing clothes and give us a marvelous show of traditional singing and dancing. Then the visiting Chinese climbers put on a pretty good performance of their own. We were asked by our host if we wanted to do a little show. The French, who are usually very good showmen, didn't know how to respond to the challenge. So I went up and sang a French-Canadian song. I may have missed a few words, but nobody noticed. I think they were just glad that I gave it a shot. It was a great evening.

I WAS A BIT NOSTALGIC when I left the valley, knowing that I probably wouldn't come this far to climb ice again.

A few days later I was at Festiglace in Quebec. My friend Guy Tremblay told me that he too had just returned from China. While biking in the mountains there with his girlfriend, Eloise, he had seen some huge alpine ice routes up to a thousand metres long. I started thinking that I might go back to China after all.

aconcagua: wind and wine

andrew mckinlay

BIKING TO WORK FOR THE "LAST" TIME, I had to laugh out loud with the sheer joy of anticipation of another adventure. Here we go again! I was looking forward to climbing Aconcagua, to being back in the high mountains. And to the simple pleasures of travel, of being in new places and meeting new people. South America was one of the few continents Shelley and I hadn't climbed on, and Aconcagua, as the highest peak, seemed an obvious choice. At almost 7000 m, Aconcagua is the highest peak outside of the Himalaya. And it didn't hurt that Chile and Argentina both produce excellent wine.

We made it safely to Santiago with all our baggage intact after 35 hours of hanging out in airports and airplanes. (Although Air Canada flies direct from Toronto to Santiago, we were using Aeroplan points and ended up with less than ideal connections.) We couldn't find a Starbucks in the Toronto airport but did find some decent coffee in the Sao Paulo airport.

Our hotel in Santiago (Presidente) was small but nice. It was close to the subway and the park that runs across the city. Despite being a big smoggy city, Santiago didn't seem so bad when we could walk through the park along the river all the way from our hotel to downtown. We walked up Cerro Santa Lucia, a rocky hill near the centre, and got some great views although it was too hazy to see the mountains.

We checked out the supermercado (supermarket) to see what food was available, and were pleasantly surprised by the selection. Almost everything we wanted seemed to be easily available. We decided to leave the grocery shopping until Mendoza so that we wouldn't have to haul it around as much. (As it turned out, the selection wasn't quite so good there.)

Ordering food in restaurants was a challenge. There seemed to be less English spoken here than in most of the other places where we've travelled and climbed. Our Spanish was limited to what we could mispronounce from our phrase book; luckily, however, everyone was good natured about it and most restaurants had at least one copy of the menu in English. On the subway, we resorted to holding out a handful of change and letting them pick the right amount. Choosing from the extensive wine lists was even more of a challenge, so we relied on recommendations from the waiters — all of which were very good (not to mention inexpensive). We especially enjoyed Malbec, a local variety of grape.

We had booked transportation from Santiago to Mendoza through our trekking agent; sure enough, our car and driver showed up at the hotel on time. It was a tight squeeze to fit all our gear in the small car. The drive from Santiago to Mendoza is about six hours, across the spine of the Andes. We looked forward to getting out of the city and into the mountains. On the plains around Santiago and Mendoza, it's hot and dry, almost desert. Up in the mountains, it's cooler; we passed several big ski resorts. They were all closed, since January is summer there. To reach the highest pass, we had to negotiate thirty curvos (switchbacks) in the road. The weather was clear and we got our first glimpses of Aconcagua. It looked impressive.

Our driver, Luis, also kept the trip exciting by using whatever part of the road he felt like, as long as there were no cars coming the other way (well, most of the time). But this didn't stop him from tsktsking and shaking his fist at the ones that drove on "his" side of the road. The signs with "PRECAUCION" or pictures of sharp curves, rockfall or steep hills just seemed to spur him on. On a positive note, Luis did manage to get us through customs in record time, well ahead of the huge lineup of cars and buses.

Mendoza is a beautiful city. After an earthquake in 1861 destroyed the old colonial city, it was rebuilt in the style of a European city. There is a central Plaza Independencia and four smaller plazas equidistant from it. (Our hotel, Cordillera NH, was beside one of these smaller plazas.) A pedestrian mall with shops and sidewalk cafés leads from the main plaza. There were lots of trees everywhere. Our first night, the main plaza was full of all sorts of craft booths and street entertainment — drummers, dancers, mimes and jugglers.

Our first task in Mendoza was to get our climbing permit. We linked up with a couple of other climbers from our hotel and together we walked across town to the tourism office. It was a long walk, but pleasant in the morning sunshine. The office is in the beautiful, tree-filled San Martin Park, on the south side of the city. We had some minor difficulties finding the right building, but once we did, it was no problem to get the permits ($300 US per person in high season).

Our next stop was to meet with our trekking agent (Aymara) to make final arrangements and pick up white gas (for base camp) and butane cartridges (for up high). And last but not least — grocery shopping. We managed to fit the contents of a full grocery cart into our backpacks for the walk back to the hotel.

The next day, we drove back to Puenta del Inca on the highway to Santiago. The end of January seemed to be past the peak of the climbing season, and there was lots of room in the hostel; we had a room with five beds to ourselves. After we finished packing, Leo, the English-speaking guy at the reception, told us that once we gave our loads to the mules we wouldn't see them again until base camp. We'd assumed that we would have access to our loads each night and had packed accordingly. We went back to our room and repacked. The bad part was that it meant heavier loads for the walk in. As it turned out, Leo was wrong — the mules and loads camped with us each night. On the positive side, it meant that we weren't tied to the mules and were able to spend an extra acclimatization day on the walk in.

To avoid some of the crowds and for a more interesting route, we headed for the Plaza Argentina base camp, on the east side of the mountain. (The standard route is via the Plaza de Mulas base camp, on the west side.) Normally, people take three days to hike the roughly 50 km up the Rio Vacas to Plaza Argentina. It was a pleasant walk but very hot, well over 30°C, and there was little if any shade in the rocky valley. Sunscreen seemed ineffective, and we had to stay covered up to avoid getting burnt to a crisp. Most of the elevation gain — over 1000 m — is on the last day, so we chose to spend an extra day at 3100 m to acclimatize before moving to base camp at 4100 m.

Base camp was a pleasant surprise. Despite the heavy climber traffic, it was amazingly clean and well-organized. Several park rangers were posted at the camp and they kept a strict eye on the residents. There were a number of outhouses whose barrels were flown out by helicopter. Drinking water came from a small glacial stream at the edge of camp, and no one was allowed to wash (dishes or him/herself) in the creek itself. There was even a park doctor who checked out everyone when they arrived to make sure that there were no serious altitude problems.

In keeping with Sask. Section tradition, we made sure that we ate well at base camp. Since mules carried our supplies, we didn't have to live on freeze-dried. We brought fresh eggs, potatoes and vegetables and canned food. Our canned food got dented and beat up on the mule ride in; happily, however, 24 of our 30 eggs made it intact. We brought our Outback oven and used it to make pancakes, pizza, cornbread and other treats. We could even enjoy bacon and eggs and hash browns for breakfast.

Unlike the two of us, most of the other groups on the mountain were guided commercial groups. They seemed well led and organized. Unfortunately, they all seemed to be on tight schedules. The problem with this is that acclimatization can't be rushed and a lot of these people seemed to be suffering from mild altitude problems, making their trips much less enjoyable. Anyone who couldn't keep up had to turn back. If you sign up with a commercial trip, make sure you pick one that will allow you time to acclimatize, and time to wait out bad weather. We took 20 days for our climb (the maximum on a standard permit). Most of the commercial groups seemed to be on 12- or 14-day schedules.

Another difference was that most of these other groups didn't return to base camp once they'd moved up to Camp I. We followed a more "Himalayan" style, returning to base camp after successively higher climbs. It might seem to be a lot more work, but it was quick and easy to drop down unloaded and we ate and slept much better at our base camp.

On one of our trips down to base camp, we caught up to a lone climber struggling down beneath a huge load. He explained that his partner had traversed the mountain, descending the far side to Plaza de Mulas and leaving him to carry all their gear down by himself! We split his load between the three of us, earning his gratitude and expensive ($5 US) cans of Coke from his outfitter at base camp.

Another time, we helped out an ascending climber who had taken an ailing teammate down to base camp and immediately headed back up to catch his team. We provided him with hot drinks and filled up his water bottles. In return he gave us a freeze-dried chocolate decadent cheesecake that was surprisingly tasty. (Shelley even made an exception to her "no freeze-dried" rule.)

Finally, after several trips up and down, we were ready to go for the summit. We climbed to our Camp 1.5 (Ameghino Col, 5300 m), spent the night and then packed up our tent and moved up to Camp II (5900 m) at the base of the Polish Glacier. We had originally considered doing the Polish Glacier route, but it was out of condition. That left either the Polish Direct or the Polish Traverse. We had brought our technical gear in case we wanted to do the Direct, but we ended up leaving it at base camp after talking to a number of parties

that carried all their technical gear up to high camp and back down without using it because they ended up doing the Polish Traverse instead. It's easy to be ambitious at home in the planning stages, but at altitude that ambition tends to fade! The Direct isn't that steep, but it's a sustained 1000 m with a couple of tricky rock steps. And it was mostly bare ice. We decided that we would be happy enough getting to the top. The big advantage to the Traverse is that it doesn't require any gear, not even a rope.

For the most part, we had great weather on our trip. It was clear and sunny every day. Clouds sometimes built up in the distance but they never amounted to anything. The only issue was the wind. On the walk in and at base camp, it got quite windy, especially in the afternoons. But Camp II was the worst. You could hear the wind coming like a freight train, and then all of a sudden it would slam into you. We waited two full days for the winds to die down before finally deciding to go for the summit despite the wind (there were a few lulls the morning we went).

We set out at 4:30 a.m. in the dark. It was cold, maybe –25°C, and we had on all the clothes we'd brought: long underwear, salopettes, insulated pants, down jacket and Gore-Tex pants and jacket. At first I thought we'd overdressed, but when we reached the traverse into the Canaletta, we were hammered by the wind and I was glad of every layer. As it was, I was a little concerned about losing the feeling in my toes. Luckily, the sun reached us and we got some shelter from the wind and warmed up. Just below the top, I waited for Shelley to catch up. Reaching me, she said without looking up, "What now?"

"The summit," I replied!

Surprisingly, it was less windy on the summit than on the way up. We spent a short time on the top, taking pictures and admiring the view, and then headed down.

It took us about eight hours to reach the summit and another three to get down. We were lucky to have the mountain to ourselves; we didn't see anyone else until we had descended to the bottom of the Canaletta (although the beaten path made it hard to imagine we were alone).

Many climbers dismiss Aconcagua as a big, unattractive heap of rubble. But from the Plaza Argentina side, it's actually quite an impressive mountain, thanks to steep cliffs and the Polish Glacier. Once you get up higher, the views of the surrounding snow-capped peaks are fantastic. It's also easy to underestimate the mountain. By the normal routes, it's a straightforward hike for the most part — an easy scramble by Rockies standards. But it's also a very high mountain. A summit elevation of almost 7000 m is not something to take too lightly; the altitude and the weather can easily beat you. We were happy to be successful.

The next day, we descended all the way to base camp. It was a long day, with heavy loads, but it was nice to be back down. We took a rest day to clean up and to repack our loads for the mules. And, of course, to try to eat as much of our leftover food as possible.

Hiking out from base camp turned out to be almost as challenging as the climb. We had planned to do the three-day hike out in two days and had arranged for the mules to stop where we would spend the night. We left base camp before the mules, but were assured that everything was in place. In contrast to the walk in, this time we carried only our lunch and some water. But when we got to where we were going to camp (already tired, hungry and wind-blown), our mules were nowhere to be seen. We asked the park ranger to radio base camp to see what had happened. He was told that our mules were "too tired" to make it. So there we were, with no sleeping bags, no tent and no food. Rather than spend the night out, we decided to keep going for another three or four hours to the road. As we hiked, the afternoon turned to evening and it got darker and darker — no sign of the moon. The last hour was pitch-black. In case you're thinking that this is a nice, foot-friendly hiking trail, think again! The trail follows the river on terrain consisting of rocks of all shapes and sizes, from sand to boulders. The trail itself is often barely discernable. It's amazing that we didn't lose the trail, sprain an ankle, or fall over a cliff into the river.

After 12 hours of hiking, a few blisters and one blackened toenail, we made it back to the hostel just five minutes before the restaurant closed for the night. Our mules (and bags) showed up the next day and we headed back to Mendoza. We spent another 10 days enjoying Argentina and Chile, especially the great food, and wonderful wine. All in all, it was a great trip, and one I would definitely recommend.

patagonia en invierno

sean isaac

SINCE I BEGAN CLIMBING, I have lusted after the fabled towers of Patagonia. In 1997, with Guy Edwards, I made my first expedition to Patagonia. We hatched the overly ambitious plan to climb all three of the Paine towers. During the six-week trip, we only got up one of them. The rest of the time was spent festering in hateful weather, learning the art of patience. Our only real epic, I am sad to say, was not of the climbing sort but occurred when we accidentally burned down the base-camp hut.

I returned with Conny Amelunxen in 1999 to attempt the unclimbed east face of Cerro Mascara. During that six-week expedition, we spent 14 days living in a portaledge on the 800-m wall and climbing through constant storms. The ascent took its toll on our bodies as we both lost too much weight and froze our toes. I decided that I was finished with Patagonia and the suffering it had to offer.

Five years and the memory-erasing effects of time later, I had the urge to explore Patagonia once again. However, as a parent I could not afford the time, nor did I have the desire to be away for months from my family. Could a Patagonian summit be had in a one-week trip? Can you climb in Patagonia without having an epic? I appreciate the motto "It doesn't have to be fun to be fun," but could I have fun in the more traditional sense of the word? The catalyst for an expedition was a work engagement in Santiago, Chile. Why not tack an extra couple of weeks onto the trip and try to get up something? I talked fellow father Will Mayo into my tightly scheduled plan. The odds were not favourable, especially since we planned to go during the southern winter. If Patagonia has a reputation for bad weather in summer, surely winter was going to be absolutely abominable.

I met Will in early September in the Santiago airport, where we commenced three days of non-stop travel. Our hideously huge duffles were schlepped from plane to taxis to buses and eventually onto horses and up to the mountains. The Rio Blanco base camp, at the foot of the Fitz Roy massif, would be our home for the next week. We had the snowy base camp, typically overcrowded with international climbers, to ourselves. In fact, we were the

only climbers in the entire range!

As soon as we arrived, we were given a chance. The evening sky cleared, revealing the spires, and the wind settled to a whisper. The cardinal Patagonian rule of thumb is "Waste not a single moment of good weather," so we packed that night despite our travel lag. The alarm went off early the next morning and we shouldered our packs, intent on covering two days' worth of approach in one and, hopefully, climbing something the same day.

Our plan was quickly halted at sunrise as we were crossing the frozen lake at the toe of the glacier leading to Paso Superior. The overnight clearing turned out to be a sucker hole big enough to sucker us. The mighty *viento* returned with all its force, making walking impossible. We sat huddled with our backs to the wind, barely able to communicate despite the fact that we were only a few feet apart. The bitter cold was intensified by the hammering wind chill that ripped through our clothing. Bare skin was immediately searing from the wind's sting. Having admitted defeat even before stepping foot on the glacier, we struggled back down to camp. Will was understandably shocked. Hearing stories about the infamous Patagonian weather is one thing; being confronted with it head on is a severe reality check. We were getting tossed about on flat, horizontal snow. What would it be like to climb in such wind?

The next day dawned clear and windless and I scorned myself for sleeping in. Will consoled me by offering that we needed the lie-in after all our travel. I reluctantly agreed with his logic while we wolfed down breakfast and repacked our packs. After leaving basecamp at noon, we hiked back up to the lake, then continued slogging up the glacier to a small pass some distance below Paso Superior. Our goal had been to dig a snow cave at Paso Superior, the standard bivy for routes on the east side of the range, but a route-finding error combined with a late start dictated stopping early. I did my best gopher impersonation and my two hours of digging had resulted in a subterranean cocoon roomy enough to set up our small single-wall bivy tent.

Beep, beep, beep! The alarm jerked me into action. Will is a coffee addict, therefore his day does not begin until the first cup (or three) is down the hatch. I fired up the stove and got the snow melting to begin the morning post-bivy ritual: hot drinks (mmm), oatmeal (argh), cold boots (brrr), and the other formalities of getting going in the darkness of pre-dawn.

Only five minutes after leaving the cave, we found ourselves under a leaning serac wall threatening our path. I have a strict no-serac policy, but momentum had us scurrying beneath it before I could put on the brakes. The exposure was short-lived but still had the fear sweat flowing while we struggled to move as quickly as the broken, glaciated terrain would allow. Once in the clear, we took a breather and both agreed that once more on the return would be our limit.

The slog to Paso Superior was excruciating. I was nursing a recent knee injury, and it was being put to the test as I busted through breakable wind crust. Cresting the ridge at the pass presented us with a postcard view of Fitz Roy and its satellites: Poincenot, Mermoz and Guillaumet. We were also immediately struck by the lack of ice on routes that are supposedly ice and mixed climbs. The Andy Parkin route on Mermoz, *Vol de Nuit*, looked like powder snow on rock, and even that was minimal. *Tierra de Hombres* on Guillaumet was barely a dribble of verglas over smooth slabs. We kept traversing the glacier, passing routes that we had hoped would be icy, but the cold, dry winter had left them bony.

We settled for the classic *Amy (French) Couloir*, on the northeast face of Guillaumet. We racked up in the bergschrund, then simul-climbed a 200-m pitch of shoulder-width ice in a deep gully that thinned down to nada, forcing fun dry-tooling in perfect granite cracks. The cleft was reminiscent of *The Big Hose* on South Howser Tower in the Bugaboos: narrow, aesthetic, well-protected and, above all, fun.

The gully ended in a notch on the north ridge. Will stretched out a 70-m pitch of rock to the top of the first gendarme. What the topo called 5.7 in summer turned out to be sweet, gloved jamming as our crampons skated over perfect granite. I downclimbed the back side of the gendarme to another deep notch, where an imposing and impassable-looking tower blocked the way. Will levitated across vertical, wind-packed snow to gain a ramp on the east side. A thin covering of snow provided insecure yet straightforward climbing, allowing us to deek around the main difficulties.

In total, the route only took about four hours, thanks to simulclimbing and stretching out our 70-m ropes. On top we were treated to a rare Patagonian experience: no need to rush.

As we began the descent, the first breaths of wind licked at our heels while high clouds crept in over the southern Patagonian ice cap. A gravity-aided stumble down the glacier and another panicked run beneath the serac had us back at our snowhole bivy as the sky went dark, concluding the short winter day. That night, our weather window slammed shut. Morning greeted us with low visibility and blowing snow. We descended to base camp in the beech forest far below. I was happy with our blitz trip. We summited a Patagonian peak in winter during a one-week holiday. We called it good and headed to El Calafate for Argentinian beef and red wine. *Muy delisioso*!

lentil soup

karen mcneill

THE SUNRISE THAT MORNING was spectacular. The few clouds in the sky turned deep purple, fiery red, then orange. The snow glistened and sparkled, reflecting the light from our headlamps. The peaks of the mountains revealed themselves, and then became pink from the alpenglow. After our two-hour approach, we drove our skis into the frost-hardened snowy surface at a col and began climbing in earnest. The ridge seemed like a good old-fashioned, traditional mountaineering route: varied in nature and never too difficult. From the col we wound our way through crumbling rock interspersed with a steep, snowy arête.

After some time we noticed lentil-like clouds appearing in the sky. Their flat bottoms and rounded tops were an ominous sign of approaching bad weather. At a belay, we had a conversation regarding the clouds. If you see lenticulars in New Zealand, you get the hell out of there.

"Maybe they'll go away — let's do another pitch, as we might not get to climb again."

And so we continued. However, at the next belay stance, the wind was now so obvious that we unanimously agreed to descend. Back at the col, we were buffeted by fierce gusts. Peter, Amy and I had taken off our crampons and were getting ready for the ski down when a sudden gust of wind instantly brought all three of us to our knees. The other side of the col was a drop-off and we didn't fancy being blown over the edge. We now understood the beauty and venom of the sunrise. The ski back to the tent took all of our strength and will to stay upright. The final kilometre back was a blast. On a very gentle slope, I put both my arms out to my side and sailed into camp.

The storm raged for two days. This was how I had imagined Patagonia prior to my visit: fast and furious winds followed by rain. The rain, however, was mostly absent from the equation. We did get a little snow. During the first night of the storm, we all felt the roof of the tent being battered about by the raging winds. We amended this by sawing more snow blocks and making the wall around the tent higher. By the time we left for home, the wall was so high that you couldn't spy our tent from the outside.

Amy had organized the trip, which originally was a proposed ski traverse of the Southern Patagonian Ice Cap from Mariano Moreno to Estancia Christina on Lago Argentino. However, a local ranger had shown us photographs taken 10 days prior to our arrival. The images depicted the southern portion of the ice cap in summer conditions, yet we were there in early spring. Bare, dirty ice and ugly, open crevasses barred the way. The terrain would be difficult and time-consuming to navigate through, especially since we would be pulling heavily laden sleds. We therefore opted to complete the first half of the original plan and then ski down to the Cordon Mariano Moreno range. Here we would climb before retracing our ski tracks back over Marconi Pass.

The three of us had begun shuttling loads on October 22 from Piedre del Fraile. We encountered our first storm while staying at a Chilean refugio. Although still under construction, the hut looked as if a plague had suddenly hit and it had been abandoned; garbage, food waste, building materials and expensive scientific equipment alike were strewn about the place with disregard. We were happy to spend our time inside while the wind howled outside.

The 32-km ski down to our peaks was a hot affair; in a clear sky, a burning sun blazed upon us. We skied for two and a half days under the shelter of our scarves. Base camp was established between Nunatuk Viedma and the Cordon Mariano Moreno. From photographs, Amy had selected potential new routes on Dos Cuernos and Dos Cumbres. However, these steep, eye-catching lines were all crowned with seracs. During the day, as the sun heated the ice cap, rock and ice poured down the lines. Despite it being circuitous, we chose the only safe route, which travelled up the southeast ridge of unnamed Peak 2800 m, then up the north ridge of Dos Cueros to the summit.

OUR STORM EXPERIENCE had left us nervous, and it was on our fourth attempt that we eventually climbed the route. In hindsight, our chosen summit day was perfect. Low-lying clouds dissipated to reveal blue sky. Until about 100 m below the summit, I climbed in just a next-to-the-body layer of clothing. The route had a little bit of everything: fourth-class rock; a steep, snowy arête; WI2 ice; and the summit mushroom. At over 5 km in length, it took us nine hours to climb. We took five hours to descend. It was a perfect day. The ski back out to the pass was quick, with close to perfect snow conditions. We were back in town on November 20, eating beefsteak and fries.

Dos Cuernos. F.A.: Amy Bullard, Peter Carse, Karen McNeill.

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from bermuda to kilimanjaro

richard jansen

WHEN MY WIFE, KATHY, and I moved from British Columbia to Bermuda in October 2001, I knew that we would enjoy the beaches and island lifestyle but that I would miss the mountains. However, despite living on a subtropical island, I still managed to get in a few days of hiking each year. In 2002, I hiked in the Tiroler Alps while Kathy was on a training course in Frankfurt, Germany, and in 2003 I did some hiking in the Terrace area while visiting the in-laws. In early 2004, we started discussing our vacation plans for the year, and as usual I was thinking about how I could fit some hiking into these plans.

We both wanted to do something different and to do something we'd been wanting to do for a long time. Having hiked extensively in the Rockies and the Alps, I wanted to climb a big mountain or go trekking, and Kathy wanted to do something more relaxing such as Club Med. My suggestions of the Inca Trail in Peru and the Annapurna Circuit in Nepal were rejected by Kathy because there was too much hiking and not enough relaxing. Then the idea came up of climbing Mount Kilimanjaro and going on a safari, which piqued both our interests, as I had always wanted to stand on the roof of Africa and

Kathy had always dreamed of going on a safari.

Two friends who work and live in Bermuda also and heard of our plans decided to join us for the trip. In April, once we had all decided to go, we had to get the travel arrangements in place. Being in Bermuda, that can be a bit of a challenge at times, and we ended up booking quite different flights to Kilimanjaro. Renn would go home to Calgary before the trip, and Graham, originally from England, would go through London and Nairobi before arriving at Kilimanjaro International Airport. Kathy and I would go from Bermuda to New York to Amsterdam, and from there directly to Kilimanjaro International Airport. Kathy and I chose this route mainly because it lands directly at Kilimanjaro, and secondly because I was born and raised in the Netherlands and had not been back there since moving to British Columbia in 1990 when I was 18.

Our departure date of August 13 arrived quickly, and we were all very excited to go. The flights went fine, and there were relatively few problems during the 24-hour journey. We landed at 10 p.m. on August 14 at Kilimanjaro International Airport, and a shuttle was waiting to take us to Ilboru Safari Lodge, which kind of became our home base during our stay in Tanzania. Once we arrived at the hotel, Graham and Renn were already waiting for us, as they had arrived earlier in the day via Nairobi. They gave us the rental gear (sleeping bags, Gore-Tex jackets and pants) and a big duffle bag in which to put the stuff that the porters would carry.

Our guide, Ernest, picked us up and we were on our way to the Machame gate, which is at 1800 m. On the way, we picked up Jay — an American guy who also ended up on our team — a few porters, fuel and eggs. At the gate, there were already several other teams waiting to start their trek. First we had to sign in; there were two lineups for the one registration book, and a South-African guy got a bit lippy about us cutting in (which we had not). We figured, Whatever, and let him go ahead, but then he proceeded to wave the rest of his team in before us. Of course, right then I knew that we would see this arrogant guy each and every day.

After signing in, we eventually received our permit and could get started. There were a lot of potential porters at the Machame gate, hoping to get picked for a trip and make some money. To ensure that the situation would not get out of hand, there were a few park rangers with rifles watching the scene. However, Ernest told us that the porters going with us had already been told the night before. After our duffle bags were all weighed, we were finally on our way at about noon, one of the last teams to leave. Our porters and guides were all dressed in their Sunday best (and had probably just come from church), and after a few hundred feet they all disappeared in the bushes and reappeared in their trekking outfits! The first day was actually quite nice and not very strenuous. We got our first glimpse of Kilimanjaro after a few hours, and we were all excited about getting closer. We arrived in good spirits at the Machame camp (3000 m) after about four and a half hours.

Our tents were already set up in a nice location at the campsite, and popcorn and hot tea awaited us in the common tent. This was a nice treat that was to be repeated each and every day. In addition to the big blue common tent, there were four yellow tents for us: one each for Graham, Renn and Jay, and one for Kathy and me. The common tent was used by the porters to sleep in after we finished our dinners, and it was amazing to see how many porters piled into it to sleep each night! We had read on-line that one could rent equipment such as tents, jackets and sleeping bags from local outfitters but that the quality would be poor. With assurance from Good Earth that their equipment was very good, we did take this gamble, however, and we were very impressed. The tents were some of the best we saw each night at camp, and the sleeping bags and Gore-Tex jackets kept us nice and warm during the whole trek.

At 6:30 p.m. we had a great dinner consisting of spaghetti, fish, potatoes, bread and avocado. Each day this feat was repeated, and we had some amazing dishes on the mountain — from chicken to pancakes to rice and various fruits. If we had had to make our own food, I'm sure we would have been down to basics, so it was a nice surprise each day. It was amazing what they brought up the mountain, and how everything stayed in such good condition. For example, Ernest also carried a few crates of eggs, none of which broke — or even moved, for that matter — during the trek up the mountain.

We all went to our tents after dinner, did some reading, and turned off the lights at about 8 p.m. It felt quite cold, especially considering that we had just come from 35-degree weather in Bermuda a few days earlier. The sleeping bags did keep us nice and warm, but the middle-of-the-night washroom breaks were a bit more chilly. We wore T-shirts and shorts for the first day, and added sweatpants for the night.

We woke up to a nice sunny day at seven and had breakfast at seven-thirty. The porters gave us some hot water to wash our faces and also boiled water for our water bottles. Breakfast consisted of porridge, avocado, bread and eggs, which gave us lots of energy to start the day. We left camp fairly late, at about 9 a.m., after packing up our duffle bags. The first hour was very frustrating, as we had to contend with a few other parties who were moving quite slowly and it took a while to pass them on the increasingly smaller path. But once we were past them, the day got much better. Graham and I moved ahead of the others, taking the odd quick break to take pictures. We arrived at the Shira Plateau camp (3840 m) at about 1 p.m. after a four-hour day. Kathy and Renn showed up about an hour and 15 minutes later. We were all feeling quite well, except for the slight headaches we had due to the higher altitude. We took it easy during the afternoon and explored the plateau. We all did some reading at night and went to bed at around 9 p.m. Of course, due to the three- to four-litre water intake each day, I had to go for a washroom break shortly after I was settled in for the night, and it was actually freezing for the first time on the trip. Short of a bit of an on-again/off-again headache, none of us had any problems at all with the altitude, and an Ibuprofen solved the headache.

We got up at seven the following morning, and took off just before nine after another great breakfast. We were all feeling okay, and went at a slower pace than during the first few days in order to get used to the altitude difference. During our lunch break we decided to split into two groups. Graham, Jay and I would go to the Lava Tower (4500 m) and then down to the Barranco camp (3950 m), whereas Kathy and Renn decided that they wanted to go around the Lava Tower with the assistant guide, Dismas.

We took a break at the Lava Tower, where we were all feeling the altitude and were a bit tired and sluggish. The way down to the Barranco camp seemed long, but we were more energized towards the end due to the lower altitude. We arrived at camp at about 3 p.m. after a six-hour day, and Renn and Kathy arrived an hour later. We had our customary tea, popcorn and nuts in the common tent and followed that with a quick rest. The sun went down at 5:30, at

which point the temperature definitely dropped. We did wear the long johns and bring out the Gore-Tex jackets at night. We decided to head to bed early, as it would be the last night to get some decent sleep. As usual, I had to go for a pee break at about ten; unfortunately, someone hadn't aimed in the hole in the outhouse, which made it quite a smelly affair.

We awoke before seven, packed up our stuff and had a breakfast consisting of porridge (it has never tasted as good as it did on the mountain), eggs, bread and tea. We left at about 8:15 a.m. and started with the 300-m-high Barranco Wall. It looked quite intimidating but was actually quite easy, and we all made it up no problem. We stopped for lunch after crossing a few valleys; a few more valley crossings later, we went up for the final ascent to the Barafu camp (4600 m). We all had a bit of headache, but Ibuprofen still did the trick. Our muscles were a bit sore after a few days of trekking, yet we all arrived at the Barafu camp at about three-thirty in good spirits. We had some hot chocolate and followed that with a quick nap before dinner at five. We then tried to arrange our gear and outfits and had a snooze for a few hours.

Our guide woke us up at 11:15 p.m. and we were all ready to go at midnight. We noticed that Dismas, the assistant guide, was not there, and we were later told he had some malaria-related issues and would not make it to the top. It was a cold, clear night; despite all the clothing, we could feel the cold during the increasingly frequent breaks. However, it was quite an amazing sight to see snakes of small lights going up the mountain, consisting of other teams ahead and behind. I slowly started to feel the lack of oxygen at the increasing altitude and was getting quite tired, but we all ploughed on and slowly got closer to our goal.

We made it to the ridge at about eight, and after a short break we went on for the final stretch to Uhuru Peak at 5895 m. It took us 45 minutes to do the ridge walk; we took about 10 steps and then a quick break and then a few more steps, and so on. We made it to the top at about nine and were all elated. We took some pictures, congratulated each other and had a shot of Drambuie. We enjoyed the incredible views for a while and then it was time to go back down. It was much easier coming back down the route we had taken during the night, and we scree skied down the slopes back to our Barafu camp. Arriving back at camp at about 12:30 p.m., we were greeted by some of the porters, who handed us a glass of lemonade. Did that ever taste great! Our tents were still there, so we took a quick nap and then had lunch.

At 3 p.m. we left for the last leg of the day, down to the Mweka camp (3100 m). We arrived there at 6:30 p.m.; despite the very long day, we could feel the energy increase in all of us on the way down thanks to the increased oxygen at lower altitude. The path was very dusty due to the lack of rain, and we all looked the part! Back at our tent after dinner, Kathy and I had a few issues with the zipper, as it didn't want to close. We ended up making so much noise with it that one of the porters came over and fixed it for us in about 10 seconds.

We all had a great night's sleep and woke up to some drizzle (the first day with some clouds). We then took some team photos with all the porters and guides and handed out the tips for all of them. We knew the guidelines for tipping, but gave each of them more than required, as they had done such a great job and made it possible for us to get to the top and back without carrying too much gear. We also gave them items we hadn't used (Power bars, spare batteries, socks, Diamox [none of us needed it], etc,), which they very much appreciated .

Breakfast was at 7:30 a.m. and we took off shortly after that. It was a leisurely walk back to the Mweka gate (1500 m), and we arrived there at about 11:35 a.m. Dismas was feeling much better and was back to his normal self. We all chatted with the guides and some of the porters on the way down; we definitely appreciated the work they did. We had to wait a bit at the Mweka gate while we got our certificates, so we truly enjoyed a nice Kilimanjaro beer in the meantime. All the porters cleaned themselves up to look their Sunday best; one couldn't tell that they had just came back from the mountain! We then went on a short walk down the hill and after about 15 minutes were met by our van. With Ernest and a few porters, we set off for Moshi, where Dismas and the porters got off. Following the trip back to Arusha, we said goodbye to Ernest and were very much looking forward to a shower. We then separated the rental equipment from our other dirty stuff and did some quick laundry. After dinner at the Ilboru Safari Lodge — and, of course, another few beers (Safari and Kili) — we packed what we needed for the safari and left our other luggage in storage at the hotel.

Our safari started the next morning; we went first to Tarangiri, followed by visits to Olduvai Gorge, a Masai village, and the Serengeti, where we stayed for a few days. On the way back, we spent a day in Ngorongoro Crater and saw pretty much all the animals around, thanks to some great work by our guide and driver, Felix. After five days of safari, we were back at Ilboru Lodge, and Renn left us the following day to head back to Calgary for a few more days of vacation. Graham, Kathy and I stayed another two days, as it was Kathy's birthday on the 27th and she didn't want to be in an airport or flying on that day. Good Earth Tours organized a one-day trip to Arusha National Park, and we had fun there canoeing on one of the crater lakes, in the process getting chased by a hippo and her baby! It was a good thing that our guide was very knowledgeable and knew how to safely retreat from the hippo! Following lunch we went for a walk with an armed guard in a field of wild buffalo on the slopes of Mount Meru. Quite exciting, to say the least! After that we did one more safari ride in the park before heading back to the hotel.

The following day Graham left at noon to catch the bus back to Nairobi, and Kathy and I hung around the hotel for the day and left at night in the shuttle back to Kilimanjaro International Airport. On the way there, we caught a glimpse of Kilimanjaro from the road — a fitting end to the trip.

The flight back went from the Kilimanjaro airport to Dar Es Salaam to Amsterdam, we then headed off to New York, where we almost missed our connecting flight back to Bermuda due to the political convention; the arrival hall was overflowing, and connecting flights weren't a priority. We boarded our flight with 15 minutes to go, and got back to Bermuda at about midnight.

It was definitely a great trip and one we will never forget. There is so much poverty and unemployment in Tanzania, but everyone looks happy and appears busy. The tips we gave the porters for their six days of work would be equivalent to a month's salary for a full-time waiter there, but only equate to a few hours of salary for most of us in North America.

My experience on Kilimanjaro inspired me to increase my number of hiking and trekking trips, and I am already planning the next one!

caves of the canadian rockies and columbia mtns by jon rollins rocky mountain books (2004)

Caves of the Canadian Rockies and Columbia Mountains stirred angst in the caving community long before its arrival on bookshelves. Jon Rollins' new book contains photographs and surveys of nearly 300 caves; and, here's the rub: it gives directions on how to find them. The concern is that most caves, especially those of the Rocky Mountains, are dangerous places fraught with rescue uncertainty and sensitive to human impacts that are essentially permanent. For these reasons, caving is usually done through clubs claiming high safety standards and codes of ethics, and a certain amount of secrecy surrounds cave locations outside of these groups.

In the months leading to the book's release, some cavers worried about the pending publicity, while others took a more sanguine wait-and-see approach. The issue of cave secrecy was brought home to me in the early 1980s when I wrote a series of articles for a Prince George newspaper about the newly discovered Fang Cave near that city. In so doing I incurred the ire of a few cavers in B.C. and Alberta; and despite my assumption that the cave's remoteness and difficulty of access would render it immune from trouble, I later saw nearly 30 people there on a Sunday afternoon, many of them ill-equipped and inexperienced. Another ruckus broke out in the early 1990s when a local caving leader with good media connections took BCTV up to Fang Cave. Later, after a near-disaster in Fang, much of the buzz died down as local cavers took a lower profile and went about the business of finding, exploring and surveying new caves, well below the public's radar. Until last fall, that is, when Jon Rollins broke the "taboo" on a grand scale.

So, how did he acquit himself?

Caves of the Canadian Rockies and Columbia Mountains is a landmark book that was bound to happen, and it is entirely appropriate that a man who is professionally involved in caving and environmental consulting should be the one to write it. It is well researched and comprehensive, and will encourage most people, after they read the opening sections on safety and logistics, to choose to join a caving club or to take a commercially guided tour if they wish to venture very far underground.

The book brought back memories of people, places and exciting days for me. The cover features a caver who played a significant role in the discovery and exploration of some of the caves of the B.C. Interior. In this photograph, Ian McKenzie is pictured rappelling past a spectacular natural ice sculpture called Dracula's Tongue in a cave near Fernie — an image that tells, better than words could, why people undertake this dangerous sport.

The author entices the reader with the excitement of discovery, of being the first to go where no human has gone before, of finding cave decorations, of experiencing dense, impenetrable blackness when lights are turned out, and a silence so complete that one can hear one's heart beating. All of this I experienced during our first forays into Fang Cave after its discovery and naming by the late George Evanoff, an ACC member, in 1981. On the naming of caves, Rollins says: "It also helps to have a name to curse when staggering around on a steep mountainside in a blizzard looking for a small hole." This speaks to the hardship of just getting to most of the caves in the book, which are generally located in high and often remote mountain areas.

My main quibble with the book is the inconsistency of some maps, such as the lack of distance scales, north direction arrows, and proofing of some feature names. More serious is the absence of a good index beyond a list of cave names. A significant content omission, but one for which B.C. Interior cavers, at least, probably breathed a huge sigh of relief, is Redemption Cave in the Cariboo Mountains east of Prince George — one of Canada's best, recently discovered, decorated caves. This may point more to cavers' wariness about sharing information than to an omission by the author. If the book is well received by the caving community, as I believe it will be in time, this will be less of an issue for a future edition. The book's size and landscape format make it awkward to use as a field guide, and as a consequence it may not physically stand up to the handling that a caver might give it; but it works well for its wide range of photographs and original cave survey diagrams.

This lavishly illustrated, 336-page, soft-covered book is an excellent addition to Canada's caving and mountaineering literature at $34.95. It includes sections on the geology and formation of caves; cave decorations; the flora and fauna of caves; and caving history. It is a must for cavers, as well as being a worthy acquisition for anyone with a broad interest in the outdoors. For Alpine Club members, the book will raise awareness of caves and help climbers and hikers to spot some of the many underground features that are still waiting to be found in Canada's limestone and dolomite mountains. Some may even have the privilege of being the first to enter and name a new cave, adding a fresh dimension to time spent in the high country.

mike nash

the 11,000ers of the canadian rockies by bill corbett, rocky mountain books (2004)

Any writer facing the task of compiling any sort of guide to this range faces an onerous challenge: dealing with the fact that the other available guides are out-of-print (the treasured *North* and *South* guides) or have been called inaccurate (Dougherty's much maligned—I think mostly unfairly—*Select Climbs*). The burden on the aspiring author is whether to feel a responsibility to those issues of unavailability and inaccuracy.

If you choose to do another "select" guide, for example, do you have to worry that yours might be only guide published for the next five years about the range (because every time a guide gets published in a relatively small population, it means that another will *not*) and therefore be as inclusive and corrective as possible? Do you need to mention *every* route on the peak you've selected, because people might not get that information anywhere else? If you show a photo of outlying peaks and you know there's a great route in that photo that's never been written up, do you have a responsibility to mention it in your book, because a visitor will never know about it otherwise?

Or, in the bigger picture, if you have the energy to write a guide at all (understandably rare), should you just commit to bringing the full guides up to date instead of just selecting out the climbs that fit your plan?

Bill Corbett chose to do the book he wanted with *The 11,00ers*. It's very much a select guide: not only select peaks, but a very limited selection of routes, primarily

the easiest ways up the 54 peaks on the list. On the one hand, there's nothing wrong with that choice. The book is a mouth-watering taste of the big guys. It gives you all the beta on the famous, infamous and obscure (for which he's a strong advocate). If you're the kind of person who likes to have your diet planned for you (a la Seven Summits), it's a great menu. It's clean, well-laid out, chock full of historical bites and built around some great photos, including some unusual views of the peaks.

On the other hand, it's limited by its singular focus on the standard routes alone (if you can call routes on peaks with, in a few cases, only a handful of ascents "standard"). Almost without exception, the most famous—and best—ways up the selected peaks are absent, except in quite hidden passing. And again, this is unfortunate, because the book had a chance to be a true guide to the 11,000ers with the simple addition of a bit more history and a few lines on photos of other sides of the mountain than the author climbed on his own way to the 54 summits.

As it stands, this book is an outstanding guide to the duffer's way up the peaks—but it could have been so much more. Bill's a good writer and if we weren't so in need of a bigger update, this would have plenty good enough. Buy it and drool—but let's get him to write the big one too.

geoff powter

classic climbs of the cordillera blanca
by brad johnson,
peaks and places, colorado (2005)

This is a beautiful guidebook to a beautiful mountain range. If you have ever dreamed of climbing in a relatively sparsely travelled mountain range containing 25 peaks over 6000 m, and many more just below this height, in generally sunny and stable weather, this guidebook will certainly fire up your dreams. The photography is outstanding; this book is simply the best guidebook I have ever seen. It is an obvious labour of love by someone with a very thorough knowledge of this intriguingly beautiful mountain range.

Brad covers all aspects, including route selection; equipment selection; detailed route descriptions; first ascents; difficulty; the use of the French system for alpine routes and of UIAA grades for rock moves or pitches; approaches; climbing time required; elevation gain; and descent information. The entire content is well organized. The best part is, of course, the beautiful photographs, with the routes marked in red. Everything is obvious at a glance. There are routes covered for a wide range of abilities — everything from PD (moderate) to ED (extremely difficult).

Also included are some very useful relief maps that give an instant overview of each *quebrada* (valley) and the juxtaposition of its surrounding peaks.

This book gives one all the necessary information to plan one's own climbing trip — even a lot of general advice regarding the nuts and bolts and possible annoyances of travelling in Peru: acclimatization, language, transportation, hiring of *arrieros* (donkey drivers), accommodation and restaurants in Huaraz, food, equipment, and fuel supplies. If you need guides or porters, or — banish the thought — mountain rescue, every eventuality is covered.

Before each chapter, Brad tells an amusing anecdote from his many travels and climbs in Peru. He has spent 18 seasons guiding and climbing in the Cordillera Blanca, as well as having extensive climbing experience on big peaks around the world. He would have us believe that he started swinging an ice axe at age 2 or 3, and includes a picture to prove it.

Brad is not only a good guide and climber but also an exceptional photographer. This book will inspire many an armchair mountaineer to get out of his chair. The only reservation I have is that the Cordillera Blanca will no longer be "sparsely travelled" if enough people see this book.

peter donitz

the rock warrior's way
by arno ilgner, desiderata (2003)

There's an old chestnut that, in theory at least, tells what to expect in your climbing grades: raw talent or strength will get you up 5.10; experience will earn you 5.11; time in the gym might give you 5.12; but only serious training and hours and hours on rock will take you any further.

What's missing from the simple equation is the complex role of the climber's mind. It's a surprising absence, as most every climber on the planet knows full well how fundamental the proper mindset is: if you don't *think* you're going to get up something, now matter how easy the climb is, or how buff or how well-travelled you are, nine times out of ten you won't get up it.

Most of the training books around nod to the need to train the mind, but none have given the attention it deserves — until Arno Ilgner's *The Rock Warrior's Way* bounced onto bookshelves. Ilgner's a talented climber from the American Southeast who's developed a model of mental training that's been acclaimed by several leading climbers who've sworn that their grades have jumped under the plan.

Like many successful cognitive behaviour modification or mind control routines, Ilgner's plan offers an holistic, progressive method of first understanding your thoughts, accepting their nature, and then working to progressively alter them.

Some readers might be put off at first by the philosophizing, "whole-life-enhancing" feel of the writing, but I'd suggest that you put aside the doubts until you've given the package a try. This step-by-step, all-encompassing process is based on completely sound psychological principles, (really the *only* ones that *work*, used in so many different forms of mind training, from cognitive behaviour modification in the west to yoga in the east) which recognize the need for comprehensive change rather than easy fragments of change, to really make a difference.

Yes, there are times where you feel you are being preached to by a self-help guru, but the process of mind change most often really does requires you to become just that kind of guru for yourself. Convincing yourself that you *can* make that move when you're 20 feet off a bad piece of gear *does* take a big change in perception; one that you have to sell to your common-sense mind. Ilgner draws the plan out for you, clearly and convincingly.

The root of Ilgner's book is a seven-stage program that looks at perceptions and interfering self-statements that will be familiar to most climbers who've ground to a halt on a climb (or for that matter, a job or a relationship). Ilgner writes the book in the voice of a gentle coach, urging you to believe that "better is always possible," "you don't have to think that way," "you just have to be more aware why you *do*" — and then you can begin to change. Much of what he says is completely self-evident, but like most good therapy, it probably has to be said, again and again, for its value to register.

I think any climber who has Ilgner's positive, supportive plan in his head (instead of the doubting, restraining voice that already there) would be surprised to discover the difference. If you even wonder whether you have the need, give it a try.

geoff powter

remembrances

scipio merler

Finally, sunshine and stable weather at the high camp on Mount Robson. Hugh and I had just finished supper when there were voices. Hans Gmoser and Scipio came up the ridge to join us. Shortly after, Hans Schwarz arrived with his friend from Hinton. The next morning all of us went up the Hourglass, then the ridge to the summit, down to the Pfisterer Ledges , and then we finished this beautiful climb with a swim in Kinney Lake.

So started my lifelong friendship with Scipio.

Scipio Merler was born in 1928 in Trento, Italy at the foot of the Dolomites, the son of Dr. Tomaso Merler and Maria Sella Merler. As a young boy he joined the Italian Alpine Club, and by 1948 he had ascended 48 peaks in the Dolomites.

Arriving in Canada in 1949, he joined the Alpine Club of Canada and participated in the ACC's General Mountaineering Camp at the Freshfield Glacier, where he met Margaret, who would be his wife for 50 years. It was the first of 11 GMCs that Scipio took part in. From the ACC, he received the Silver Rope for Leadership and the Distinguished Service Award.

In 1964 Scipio joined the American Alpine Club, and as chairman of the expedition committee, he hired me to guide an ACC expedition to Huantsan, Peru.

Scipio's passion for the mountain world was extraordinary. Whether the rock was steep, overhanging, rotten, dry or icy, his eyes sparkled and up he went. With the same excitement, he tackled snow and ice, and when he flew down the steepest of glissades, he was in his element. Sometimes no one dared to follow him.

During his lifetime, Scipio ascended 176 peaks on many continents – Europe, North America, Asia , South America, Africa and India. His dear mountaineering companions, Paddy Sherman and Fips Broda, joined him on many of his adventures.

When time permitted, he dove straight off the retaining wall in his garden in West Vancouver into the ocean, for a swim full of gusto. Or he went up to Whistler to satisfy his other passion, skiing.

Toward the end of his life, Scipio battled cancer. However, this did not prevent him from climbing with me up the 3-31/2 Couloir in the Valley of the Ten Peaks, followed by Mount Allen the next day, then back down and up Mother's Day Buttress on Cascade Mountain, all in four days.

Eight months before Scipio's death, I had the great privilege of accompanying him on his last climbs. From the Abbot Pass hut we climbed Mount Lefroy—Hut to summit: 2.5 hours. Scipio was so proud. The next day we sat on the main peak of Mount Victoria in brilliant sunshine. We were dreaming of days gone by — our first ascent of Srikanta in the Gangotri group in the Himalaya . . . our day on the beautiful peak of Illiniza South, Chimborazo, Ecuador . . .

peter fuhrmann

reese martin

Reese Martin was a true contemporary Renaissance man. Growing up, he was a constantly moving "Air Force brat", eventually expected to fill the shoes of a "Right Stuff"–era test pilot father and WWI pilot grandfather. Instead, as a teenager Reese developed a love for climbing and skiing in the Cascades when his family was living in Seattle, and he continued those passions for the rest of his life, in the Rockies, Sierras, Coast Mountains, Andes and Himalayas. But Reese was not just a mountain sports enthusiast. He spent time surfing, and was involved in the art scene in Ventura, California, where he lived for sixteen years. He was an environmental-engineering consultant and political advocate there, also participating in the Big Brother program for five years, building a sports car in his garage, and still staying involved in climbing, mostly by authoring new rock routes. He was a Southern California regional coordinator for the Boulder, Colorado–based national climbing advocacy Access Fund from 1994 to 1998 and a member of its board of directors from 1998 to 2002. During this period he was also drawn to western Canada for skiing, mountaineering and rock and ice climbing.

Reese moved to Aspen, Colorado, in 1999, and the following year married Charlotte Fox, a ski patroller, climber and fellow Access Fund board member. Together, they remodelled a home and at the same time built a "getaway" cabin at 10,000 ft. on nearby Chair Mountain. Still, Reese found time to "clean up" the bolts on Independence Pass rock climbs and to add, with his wife, his own crag, called Reese's Pieces. And he learned to paraglide. This later became a passion eclipsing all others, and so he was finally able to assume the role of heir to his family's piloting dynasty, in a rogue sort of way.

The stock phrase "I'd rather be lucky than good" (unfortunately) did not apply to Reese on July 9, 2004, though he took great pains to be safe and disciplined in his new sport. When landing that day in a cross-country paragliding competition at Lake Chelan, Washington, Reese was caught in turbulent air and dashed violently to the ground. The "encyclopedic mind of useless information" (as he referred to himself) and the eclectic man of many interests and passions was suddenly gone.

Reese could be likened to Icarus, who fell from the sky while flying artificial wings too close to the sun in pursuit of deep insight and fulfillment.

Good night, sweet prince.

charlotte fox

bob enagonio

I guess I see two things. One, the setting of goals in the mountains cannot be too myopic. Yes, yes, you want to explore and return to specific areas, see walls on one trip, come back and climb them another time. Individual peaks and climbs loom as long-term goals. But, the overall goal has to be simply being in the mountains, and taking in whatever this environment has to offer on any particular trip. Even if you get up no summits, which is entirely possible, and even if you

spend most of the trip in a snow cave, it is an experience, and you have to value it for that. This is a goal that can always be achieved, on every trip. ... And hand in hand with this, of course, is that the education never stops. You come here to learn: about climbing, about an area, about the mountains, about your partner, about science or radios, or whatever. That can be, and should be, a goal in and of itself.

— entry from Bob's journal, summer 1993

I remember the first time I met Bob, more than 12 years ago. At a local watering hole in Canmore, I told Bob of my great adventure cycling solo from Vancouver Island to Panama City in Central America. As the conversations grew, we started talking back and forth and getting all excited about the different climbing and skiing adventures we wanted to do.

Whenever I was looking for a reliable partner to head off with on an adventure, I could always count on Bob. It did not matter what it was: expeditionary types of trips; climbing frozen waterfalls; alpine climbing; rock climbing; ski mountaineering; paddling; or simply going out for a beer. Bob was extremely enthusiastic in everything that he did. Here is a quote that was heard half an hour before he left us: "Hey, let's take some time and enjoy the beauty of this place before we leave." That was so much like Bob; if he had the time, he would never rush but would instead enjoy the moment.

Bob's accomplishments include big ski traverses such as Bugaboos-to-Rogers Pass, northern Selkirks, the Mount Clemenceau/Mount Columbia traverse and the Juneau Ice Cap. He climbed numerous winter and summer alpine and ice routes in the Rockies, including the Emperor Ridge of Mount Robson, and an epic ascent of Robson's North Face in a storm in 1994. There was the Devils Thumb in Alaska, expeditions in Peru, and a couple of trips to the Mount Waddington region. He also climbed the Sheila Face on Mount Cook in New Zealand. Of course the list goes on and on!

Bob was a multifaceted person. He loved listening to music and playing his banjo. In the summer months, he was on a soccer team and played a couple of times a week.

Born in Washington, D.C., and raised in Maryland, Bob moved to Montreal in order to receive a science degree in meteorology at McGill University, which is where he learned how to climb, through the McGill Outing Club. He later obtained a teaching job in Vermont, where he taught mathematics and outdoor education; this gave him the freedom to visit the Canadian Rockies during the summer months. However, that was not enough. In 1988, he decided to move to Canmore, to be at the heart of all the activities he loved so much. He became a building contractor and developed his own business, Storm Mountain Builders. His success in the construction industry compromised his freedom; he therefore went off to school in Calgary to become a computer programmer. Though he worked for a Calgary-based company, his terms were that he was free to choose the time of the day when he would work and when he would play. His philosophy is one I have always aspired to live by, from the moment I met him 12 years ago.

The community has lost a great person. I had a great time with Bob and shared many special moments with him that I will always cherish. He is my great friend, and I will forever miss him dearly. Goodbye, my friend!

marco delesalle

chris romeskie

Beeker had a presence few people could match. If you met him, you would never forget him. His 6 ft. 5 inches, vibrant red hair and very deep voice, combined with an outgoing personality, made for a man of great stature.

Beeker moved to Whistler at the young age of 18 and in the years to follow lived a beautiful lifestyle. Ski tuner by night, skier by day, he became molded, as many of us did, by the mountains and culture around him. From skiing the *Couturier* on the Aiguille Verte, to big-wall climbing in Greenland, to an ascent of *French Maid*, "solid" would be a word that described him well. His lifestyle was supported by carpentry, ski patrolling and ski guiding, and he aspired to become a Mountain Guide.

Beek's life was fulfilled with Nicole Mckay, the love of his life, to whom he was engaged. They shared many adventures together right up until his last day of skiing. For Nicole and their families, their moments with Chris will be cherished forever and the adventure of life will continue.

We all know that the lives we live as climbers, skiers and outdoor thrill seekers can change in the blink of an eye. We minimize the risks as much as possible, but accept them nonetheless. Beeker lost his life when he was swept over a cliff by a small slab avalanche while ski touring in the Cayoosh area north of Pemberton.

His spirit lives but his being will be missed. We love you, man!

andre ike

d'arcy mcrae

On December 15th 2004, D'Arcy McRae fell while rock climbing in Joshua Tree National Park California. He passed away a few days later in Palms Springs hospital from major head and spinal cord injuries. D'Arcy was climbing with his girlfriend Candace Plohman and en route to the beach in Thailand. His Kootenay community of Wasa, BC warmly hosted a celebration of his life that reflected the passion and camaraderie of his life. His family and friends were all witness to the mountain spirit that will remain alive through all he touched, and inspired in the Kootenays and beyond. He brought us all together with his contagious psyche and permanent smile.

D'Arcy lived his dream financing his winter pursuits as a hiking guide for his own company *Kootenay Wilds*. He was a great partner to go into the mountains with, always ready at moments notice. D'Arcy's free-spirited character led him to many adventures. D'Arcy logged an impressive number of ski-descents in the Rockies, Purcell and Selkirk mountains; including the north couloir of Popes Peak, the north face of Mount Victoria and the NE couloir of Mount Dennis. He also completed a 17-day ski tour through the rugged terrain of the Selkirk Mountains.

D'Arcy McRae truly embodied all that was good, warm, generous and keen-about the Kootenay spirit.

He will be missed.

jonny simms

index

by author

Remembrances

by peak/feature/area

Location in brackets: N (northern Canada & U.S.); WC (West Coast); I (B.C. Interior); R (Rockies); F (foreign)


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Point by point, Dan Foster in Cascade Canyon, CO.
Photo: John Burcham

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