
DEREK RUBIO

North America 1996

Alaska

From the immense peaks of the Alaska Range and the Canadian Rockies, to the big walls of Yosemite and warm sandstone of the SW, North America provides a wide array of climbing experience. The geographic variety of the continent offers vastly different terrain that captivates climbers of all interests. New areas and new routes continue to abound in these vertical playgrounds.

In the **Alaska Range** a new route was established on the Washburn Wall of **Denali's** West Buttress. On 23 June Steve House descended to the Peters Glacier from the 14,200ft camp on the West Buttress. In order to view the possibility of the route through a rock band, he ascended 1800ft of moderate ice. Spindrift obliterated the planned line through the rock band. However, water ice adjacent to the couloir proved promising. Steep ice linked with mixed terrain provided passage back into the main couloir above avalanche hazards. Easier climbing joined the *Collins-Powers-Walter Route* to the 16,030ft top of the West Buttress. House soloed the 6400ft route, named *Beauty is a Rare Thing*, in 10 hours.

Slovaks Jan Svrcek and Juraj Hreus climbed a new route on the NW Face of **Denali**. Their line parallels the *Messner Couloir* before traversing W for 10 pitches. 25 pitches of rock pillars to the W of *McClouds Rib* provided mixed rock, ice, and snow climbing from 45° to 75°.

The **Ruth Gorge** saw a small amount of new activity. Jim Donini and Greg Couch established *The Bourbon Bottle Route* on the SE Buttress of **Mt Bradley**, ascending the 41-pitch route in Alpine style. The first 27 pitches climbed a big wall, over three days, with a single bivvy. The climb is rated at 5.8+ A1+ to indicate the irrelevance of ratings to climbs of this scale. The route encounters free, aid, snow, and mixed climbing through both good and bad rock.

The Fédération Française de la Montagne et de l'Escalade made a strong showing in the Ruth. On 3 May Manu Guy and Manu Pélissier put up a new route on the **Werewolf (2286m)**. *Freezy Nuts* is a 500m Grade IV couloir that ascends W of the pillar on the 1990 *Orgler/Rutter Route*. The same day their team-mates Manu Lestienne, Mathieu Desprat, and Fred Salles established *Wake Up* (IV W15), a 1000m ice route on **Mt Wake (2775m)**. The Frenchmen's main objective was the 5km unclimbed NE Pillar of Mt Wake. The team fixed 60 pitches before completing the 1500m route in a 37-hour final push on 12-13 May. All five members were involved in the ascent of *Tolérance* (A2/5c).

Mt Koven, the last unclimbed named peak in Denali National Park, lies to the E of Denali between the Muldrow and Traleika Glaciers. Mike Litzow, Randy Waitman and Matt Hage gained the W Ridge of the peak from the W Fork of the Traleika Glacier. Litzow and Waitman summited the 12,210ft peak in three days. Another first ascent was the NW Face of **Wedge Peak**

Question and Answer Session

Have you had many cases where you've said 'The weather is lousy and we should call this one off' and someone has said 'I've paid 20,000 dollars, you should take me up'?

No, because they're invariably more tired than I am. But I did have a case this summer, when we were making a summit bid on Peak Communism and I could see that two of the guys weren't up to it, one of them was slow and the other was sick, so I turned them round and there was a bit of grumbling. But in the next group, one guy died and one was injured and then my guys appreciated that I had been right to follow my gut feeling. So I always say that I can't guarantee the summit.

I do find, though, that Everest, in particular, is the mountain that gets to people and I've seen some very bizarre behaviour. For instance, on one of our summit days my friend George, a Russian, was leading and they came upon this bloke just sitting there at the foot of the Second Step. He had wanted to have the highest bivouac in the world, which in fact it wasn't. He had climbed the mountain and had been so addled by it that he had decided to sit out the night. Not only was he obviously mentally unstable, but he ruined the trip for a couple of my Sherpas who had to be sent down with him. It was extremely selfish behaviour. Luckily he was all right in the end, but I think on Everest people sometimes get totally possessed by the mountain. On summit day they forget about their fingers, they forget about their families or about the Sherpas, and you see this great dichotomy whereby the best or the worst in people comes out. The best you can do is to aim for as much damage limitation in advance as possible and make sure that no Sherpas especially, as vulnerable people, are damaged.

That question raises an issue of commercialism to which there may be no answer, but these people are paying for something which is putting other people's lives at risk and surely raises all sorts of moral dilemmas?

I think anyone who steps on a mountain, especially when there are potential dangers, has obviously made a lot of moral evasions about how they are going to deal with family and friends, being away from home for so long, and if they have an accident.

The same is true on an Alpine peak, though, isn't it? But when you hire a guide in the Alps, the guide takes responsibility for you.

I'm not an Alpine guide but I have friends who are, and I think they are able to give a high degree of care because they and their clients can be roped together most of the time. In the Himalaya that's not possible. Also, it is in the interest of Alpine guides not to breed too much self-reliance because they want their clients to come back year after year, whereas on a Himalayan trip, I might be at Camp 1 with the client at Camp 4 and going

They climbed a large rounded southern spur which joined the W Ridge at 8000ft. The ridge continued for 3.5 miles over increasingly difficult terrain to the summit. The crux of the climb was a large, steep ice dome. The route gained 7000 vertical feet and was climbed in 32 hours.

Canada

The tremendous walls of **Baffin Island** in the Canadian Arctic set the stage for *The Great and Secret Show* (VII 5.11 A4 W13). This route rose up into the 4400ft N Face of **Polar Sun Spire**. Mark Synnott, Jeff Chapman, and Warren Hollinger established 1000ft of fixed line in three long efforts. Above remained the 2000ft crux of severe aid up constantly overhanging rock. Ten days were needed to aid the first 700ft of the crux. Lower-angle climbing led to the top of the wall. The route consists of 34 pitches, eight of which required between 8 and 13.5 hours to lead. The group spent 39 days climbing and 36 nights on the wall. (See article 'The Great and Secret Show', pp 52-58.)

In the **St Elias Range** of the **Yukon Territory**, Jack Tackle and Jack Roberts played out their *Pair of Jacks* on the 6000ft N Face of **Mt Kennedy**. 21 pitches of big wall mixed climbing were required to surmount the 4000ft rock wall in the centre of the face. 55° snow and ice led to the N Ridge at 12,500ft. Avalanche conditions prohibited the ascent of the final slopes of the 13,900ft summit and necessitated a rappel down the N Ridge. The pair spent 10 days on the climb.

Paul Knott and Ade Miller made the first British ascent of **Mt Queen Mary (3928m)** via a new route on the S Ridge. A first ascent of **Peak 3118m** by the NW Ridge was made in order to gain the S Ridge of Mt Queen Mary. The pair also made a first ascent of **Peak 3089m** by the E Ridge. (See *MEF Reports*, 96/14, and front cover photograph.)

In the **Northwest Territories**, the SE Face of **Proboscis** found its fifth line. *The Grendel* is a 15-pitch aid route, with 4 pitches of A4. The party consisted of Kevin Daniels, Chris Kalous, Chris Righter, and Greg Epperson. The group fixed rope for two days and then spent an additional five days on the wall. The crux consisted of hard A4 with as many as 30 Birdbeaks.

In the **Ragged Range**, 20 miles south of the Cirque of the Unclimbables, lies **Mt Nirvana**. Jack, Dan, Tom, and Hope Bennett climbed a new route on the peak's E Face. The crux 500ft band of granite did not stop the group from becoming the third party to summit Mt Nirvana. The Bennetts made the second ascent of **Nightwind Peak** on their walk-out.

The Bugaboos received the hardest free route to be established in the range. *The Power of Lard* (5.13c) ascends the northern corner of the E Face of **Snowpatch Spire**. Germans Toni Lamprecht and Gunther Dengler spent three days aiding and cleaning the line and placing 15 bolts, of which 11 were for belay anchors. The 8-pitch route has two pitches of 5.13 and six of solid 5.11.

Kennan Harvey and Topher Donahue made the first free ascent of the 2800ft W Face of the **North Howser Tower** on the route *All Along the Watchtower*. A 800ft 5.10 dihedral led to a 5.12 crux which required underclinging out of a roof. The upper section consisted of less than vertical 5.10+ and 5.11+ climbing.

A new route was established on the 4000ft N Face of **Mt Geikie** in the

Canadian Rockies. From 23 July to 2 August Scott Simper and Seth Shaw climbed continuous crack systems through the overhanging headwall to the R of the *Lowe/Hannibal Route*. Two ledge systems split the route into thirds. The first section was mostly fourth-class climbing with a few pitches of 5.9. The second section was nearly vertical with sustained free climbing and some aid. The third section was overhanging but with moderate climbing of A1 with a few hard spots. The currently nameless route goes at VI+ 5.10 A3+.

Several areas in Canada were the scene of new hard ice routes. In **Bridge River**, B C Kevin Normoyle and Quang-Taun Luong put up *The Theft* (V WI6R). The 800ft route was climbed in 6 pitches (5+R, 5R, 4, 5+, 6, 5). In **Banff** Dave Thompson and Karen McNeil established *Deadeye Dick* (5.10 WI 5+). These 4 pitches of thin ice lie between the *Weeping Wall* and *Mixed Master*. In the **Canadian Rockies** Alex Lowe established a solid M7, *Troubled Dream*. A 6+ first pitch leads to 10ft of overhanging underclings to 15ft of gently overhanging ¾-inch ice. The third pitch is 90m of Grade 5.

In Ontario, on the northern tip of Lake Superior, lies a 12-mile-long gorge named Orient Bay. The area is emerging as a new site of water-ice activity. Centred around the town of Nipigon, Orient Bay has some 150 named routes. Nearby sites such as Kama Bay and Ice Station Superior offer another 75 routes.

Continental United States

Two young men, Bart Paull (16) and Doug Littauer (17), established a new route in the **Cascades** of their home state of Washington. *The Spindrift Couloir* climbs the N Face of **Big Four Mountain**. The 4000ft route contains three steps of hard ice and mixed climbing linked by ice and névé to 60°. This route sets a new standard for young alpinists in North America.

In **Yosemite, El Capitan** was the site of much activity. Thomas Huber, brother of Alex Huber who made the much publicised second ascent, made the third free ascent of the *Salathe Wall* (VI 5.13b). He led all pitches including the 5.13a 19th pitch and the 2 5.13b headwall pitches. Steve Gerberding and Scott Stowe put up a new route above the Lay Lady Ledge on top of pitch 7 of the *Wall of Early Morning Light*. The *Reticent Wall* climbs 14 pitches straight up from the ledge, crossing several routes. A full runout on skyhooks and Birdbeaks above a ledge make it the hardest A5 on the wall. Chris Kalous and Chris Righter made the second ascent of *Scorched Earth* (VI 5.11 A5). The pair used the first ascent tactics of Rob Slater and Randy Leavitt by using an extended hooking-pole to bypass blank spots. The climb was done in six days with no new holes or bolts being placed. Speed is always of interest to Valley climbers.

The following are the records set on **El Capitan** this year. Vera Wong and Abby Watkins set a women's record for *The Nose* at 16hrs 30mins. Conrad Anker, Hans Florine and Mark Melvin climbed the *North American Wall* in 21hrs 48mins. D Bengston, Steve Gerberding and Scott Stowe climbed *Iron Hawk* in 26hrs 55mins. The same trio set a record time of 23hrs 24mins on *Lunar Eclipse*. D Benegas set a solo record for *Zenyatta Mondatta* in 60hrs. Speed records on **Half Dome** are the *Direct Northwest Face* in 11hrs 20mins by Silvo Karo and Aishun Rupp and the *Regular Northwest Face* by Pete Coward and Hans Florine in 3hrs 1min.

On 16 May Austrians Christian Zenz and Christian Wassertheurer requested a rescue from *The Shield* on **El Capitan** which eventually involved 38 park personnel and two helicopters. In the debriefing it was learned that the two did not have a rainfly for their portaledge or other storm gear. Subsequently, the National Park Service filed criminal complaints charging disorderly conduct for wilfully creating a hazardous situation. The Austrians were asked in court how much of the rescue costs they could afford to pay. Having insurance, they affirmed that they could cover the entire amount. The judge ordered them to pay the the entire cost of \$13,325 and placed the two on one year of probation. Court decisions of this kind lead the way for detrimental regulations such as mandatory insurance to obtain climbing permits. The National Park Service's equipment expectations of wall climbers are: high-quality rain gear, insulated clothing that works well when wet, synthetic sleeping bags, sleeping pads, and a secure, seam-sealed water and wind-proof shelter.

The longest continuous free rock climb in the Continental US is now on **Glacier Point**. *Galactic Hitchhiker* is a 41-pitch, all free route which is 6000ft in length. The climbing is mainly moderate with a 5.11 a/b crux.

Fred Beckey is still hard at work in the **Sierra Nevada**. Fred, along with Philip Karl and Steve Hyde, put up a new route on **Quarry Peak**. The party established an 11-pitch 5.10 line on the E Face of Quarry's S Peak.

In **Zion National Park** Cameron Burns and Warren Hollinger were busy putting the finishing touches on *Eye Shadow* on the **Mountain of the Sun**. The 15-pitch route climbs 2000ft at a grade of VI 5.9 A2+. The pair drilled only 13 holes on the entire route. On the W Face of **Red Arch Mountain** Michael Hill and Kevin Jones created *The Avatar*. The nine pitches are rated VI 5.8 A4. The pitch exiting the arch overhangs for a spectacular 60+ feet. Dave Goldstein and Dougal MacDonald put up *The Shadow Line* (5.11 A3+) on **Peak 6365ft** behind the Visitors' Centre. The crux of the 9-pitch route is 275ft of very thin nailing.

Stevie Haston and Laurence Gouault made the second ascent and first free ascent of the *Spinnaker Tower* on the NE Face of **Shiprock** in New Mexico. The six pitches went at 5.11+, 5.11+, 5.9, 5.9, 5.10+, and 5.9+. As Shiprock is located on Native American lands, climbers are encouraged to obtain permission from those Native Americans who hold the grazing permits for the surrounding lands.

In the **Grand Tetons** Jackson locals Hans Johnstone and Mark Newcomb made the first ski descent as well as the first winter ascent of the *Hossack/MacGowen Couloir* on the E side of the N Face of the **Grand Teton (4197m)**. The pair climbed their descent route unroped and began skiing on the E Face 15m below the summit. The average angle was 52° with 20m narrows of 60°. Steep rocky slabs midway down were bypassed by three 15m rappels. An additional short rappel was necessary to overcome an 80° ice bulge in the lower section. The 2100m vertical descent is one of the longest and most technically difficult in North America.

In north-central Wyoming is a 1700ft new route *Superfortress* (IV 5.11d). These 12 pitches are on the Merlin Tower on the SE side of **Cloud Peak (13,165ft)**. Four of the pitches are 5.11d and another four are 5.11. The route features

vertical face and crack climbing with knobs and chickenheads making up for the lack of continuous cracks.

In **Rocky Mountain National Park** the first one-day winter ascents were made on the Diamond, the 900ft E Face of **Long's Peak**. On 14 January Tophr Donahue and Craig Luebben climbed *D7* in 20hrs 40mins, car-to-car. In mid-March Kennan Harvey soloed the same route in 17hrs. Hard mixed climbs are also being established on the Diamond. Jack Roberts and an Icelander known as 'Helgi' climbed *Field's Chimney* (W14 M6). The route, which has thin steep mixed climbing, came into condition for the first time in 9 years. Will Gadd and Marc F Twight linked *Scobinger Crack* to *Eubanks Chimney* to upper *Kieners* to create a 5.8 WI5 M6 route. In the Loch Vale area Dave Sheldon put up *Free Strike Zone* (WI5 M7+R). 50ft of steep granite protected by three bolts and several camming devices lead to a run-out on a detached icicle.

Two new hard mixed water-ice climbs were established in **Vail**, Colorado. Alex Lowe established *Aberrant Behavior* (M7) to the L of the *Rigid Designator*. Even further to the L, Stevie Haston climbed above *Doctor Delicate* to put up *After 8* (M8+). The climb features a four-metre roof which is larger and less well protected than that of *Octopussy*. The route required strenuous hooking with free-hanging feet. *Bridal Veil Falls*, the 3-pitch W16 classic near Telluride, Colorado, is finally legal to climb. Steve Johnson, the Access Fund regional co-ordinator, is largely responsible for the opening.

Two hard mixed climbs were also established at **Poke-O-Moonshine** in the Adirondack Mountains. Jeff Lowe put up *Gorillas in the Mist* (M6+). On Jeff's suggestion Alex Lowe visited the area with Randy Rackliff. The pair established *Bloody Mary* (M7) as a winter climb. The route, which goes at 5.10 in the summer, was coated with 1/4 to 1/2-inch ice.

In North Carolina is the 800ft cliffband **Whitesides**. Jim Corbett and David Young climbed three routes on the formation in a single day. The pair climbed *Traditions* (5.11c/d), *Perversions* (5.11R) and the *Original Route* (5.11a) for a total of 2400ft of climbing in a day.