

BRITISH YUKON SPRING EXPEDITION 2018

Introduction

The expedition started in October 2017 when the author of this piece (J Wakefield) received an email from his long term climbing partner. The phrase used was “I feel I’ve got one more Yukon trip left in me”.

I packed for a trip down into the cellar of my house, late one stormy night, where I can remember picking up two shiny Petzel Climbing tools in favour of a pair of battered, straight shafted Mountain Technology tools, from about the late 80s. The thought that came to my head was “for something like this, the old weapons are the best” – very Game of Thrones I’m sure you’d agree.

Background

Upton Peak stands at just over 3500 m to the north east of the Logan massif. It is part of the Canadian half of the mighty St Elias mountain range. I had climbed once, in 1992 by Barry Blanchard and four others. It was named after one of the original glacier pilots to venture into the area from this trip, the surrounding glaciers have never been touched.

The purpose of this expedition was to climb unclimbed peaks on either side of Upton. We first tried to access the area in 2011, then in 2017. It was thwarted by high winds that prevented our plane landing. The second attempt was stopped by a burst appendix in one of the team in the UK. Accordingly, we felt, in 2018, with a combined age of 116 years, that our moment had truly come.

Itinerary

We flew from Heathrow, meeting up in Whitehorse, capital of the Yukon, on 4th May. After the normal round of shopping we flew to the airstrip at Silver City, three hours north of Whitehorse, on the shores of Lake Kluane. As inevitably happens we landed on the glacier immediately and spent a couple of days, trudging about in the dust, gazing hopefully up at the sky.

Our planes, pilots, weather and snow conditions were all in the same place and we were able to fly up onto the Kluane icefield.

Preparation

We camped on our lonely patch of ice in the middle of the afternoon and immediately set about pitching tents and building up the camp.

The first day (09/05) was spent exploring the glacier on skis and acclimatising. As the weather appeared to be holding, we set off (10/05) up the Scottish lump behind our tents. A long winding 3000 foot couloir, at Scottish grade 2, with a rock step in the middle, led us to the glacier floor to a misty, windy summit. The next day the weather closed in but the delights of John Le Carre and

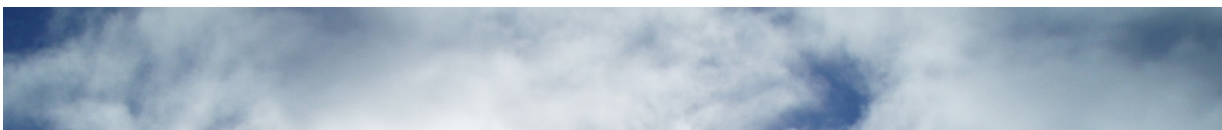


a lot of snow. Our route follows the obvious left slanting couloir.

s climbing again. A long walk across the glacier took us to a couloir that lead up to a plateau with hard, committing rictions and a stunning view towards Logan. One solitary summit on the skyline looked to be roughly the highest point active.

g slog in the Yukon sun brought us to steep snow slopes. These were climbed to the base of a crumbling rock tower glacier. With the assurance of a knotted sling jammed into a crack as a belay, this was climbed. As there was only room for one climber, we had to take turns to balance on the top and wave flags and axes in the air.

and stumbled back down to the tents delighted we had now got two peaks under our belts.



ite takes the left slanting gully, on the far right of the picture. Once on the summit plateau, a walk to the peak in the centre of the
another storm lashed day that kept us pinned down in tents and thankful that we'd built proper walls.

day, 14/05, the storm had abated somewhat but it was still snowing. The skies partly cleared in the middle of the m
ave and have a good look at the peaks at the southern end of our glacier. We set off towards the peak that I could see
ery morning, skirting some enormous holes.

., we realised we were making good time and that another summit was possibly within reach. We continued up the
snow slope on our left and a not quite vertical, very rocky drop on our right. We arrived at another tower of loose roc
ing care not to kick our mountain into the glacier below, we took turns to tiptoe to the top. Having taken yet more p
r, we stumbled back to base, very pleased with life.



2: takes the ridge in the centre



tempts on above peak. From the tents, it looked like the rib on the centre would go all the way to the top – it doesn't.

is attempt our biggest and best mountain, the one I've got a picture of, on my kitchen wall. We crossed the by no
ier towards the peak we had climbed three days previously. After climbing most of the ridge, we then crossed the aval
left, figuring it would be safest to do it as high as possible, one at a time and without the rope.

e ridge on the other side, down climbed the opposite side onto a hanging glacier with enormous holes. We made our
ld get back onto the north ridge of our peak, where our tents came back into view. We followed this, broad at first
en very narrow at the top. At the top, we could truly see for miles, as the song goes, all the way to where the Logan g



After climbing the ridge on the right, the hanging glacier was followed to the summit ridge.

After setting up the tents and celebrating with a brew, there was a discussion about what we were going to do next. In the snow on the glacier there was an absolutely stunning peak that we had gazed at longingly each day. However, by this stage I was emotionally drained. Maybe if we'd had a fit keen youngster with us, we'd have given it a go.

As we didn't have one of those, we decided we'd ski out, at least some of the way. The next day, we loaded everything up and skied down our glacier, round our still unclimbed peak until we were nearly on the Logan glacier. All the way down, we had been up over our heads. A quick phone call to the air strip confirmed what we had thought. Bad weather was definitely coming and we'd return to our original camp site. The day hadn't been wasted as we'd got some good photos and we'd made a full traverse.

On the morning we were to leave, we saw the normal nail biting wait for the little plane as the clouds built up and the wind started to blow.

After getting back on dry land, we had a leisurely trip back to Whitehorse. Here we spent three enjoyable days, seeing one bear, going on a mountain biking and sampling the delights of the Yukon Brewery.

At the end of the trip was to be invited to have dinner at the home of Andy Williams. He was one of the original glacier pilots (and



mediately to the north of our peak B, still unclimbed.

over emphasised, there is still plenty that is untouched in the Yukon. Whilst the big peaks such as Logan, Kennedy, and skied all over, there's still plenty of smaller, elegant mountains out there.

ommendation would be to finish what we started. All of our peaks were the first summit on a ridge line. Finishing off I be a great adventure for someone with enough drive, fitness and youth.

ed peak (pictured above) would, also be a great objective with no obviously easy ways up. The peaks / long ridge at thacier were climbed / traversed by the team who climbed Upton. However, any of these would still be a first ascent since to the north/west of our base were numerous unclimbed peaks, some rocky and hard, some snowy, and presumably caught the eye as, in front of it, on the glacier, was a scaled down smaller version of itself, perfect for warming up on ttle Tryfan.

ne jaded rock jock who's seen and done it all, there was a great little outcrop on the south side of the hanging glacier c



from our peak 4, towards Mount Lucania and Steele. Whilst the peaks in cloud in the background have been climbed, everything in the foreground





ce to get liquid fuel is the Canadian Tire Company.

satellite phone from Yukon Wide Adventures (Peter) and I would certainly recommend them. Obviously, you do need a satellite phone device. An alternative and much cheaper option is an inreach. You can send messages, up to 150 characters long, via email. The recipient can see your GPS location and can reply via text. The problem is that, whilst most times, messages go through in seconds, if the network is busy, it can take hours. Also, if it was a real emergency I'd probably want to speak to a real person.

climbing in Kluane, it will be a plane from Icefields Discovery that drops you on the glacier. As mentioned above, the plane is run by Andy Williams and is now run by his daughter, Sian, with help from other family members. They also have a campsite on the airstrip. It really is worth contacting them early to discuss exactly what your objectives are.

Income Accounts

Flights -	1336
Accommodation in Whitehorse -	110
Food in Whitehorse -	250
Satellite phone and cost of calls -	180
Transportation Whitehorse to Kluane-	120
Gas -	920
	720
Permit / permit	84
	3720
	2000
Contributions	<u>1720</u>
	3720
Total in GB £s	



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