

Mount Hunter from the Northeast

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As I swung around and around on the jammed rope, I wondered how I had ever managed to get involved in this trip. The narrow chest loop choked me back to reality and I began fumbling with the fastening on my pack hoping to relieve the awful pressure.

I really could not blame anyone but myself. When Jeff Duenwald mentioned Mount Hunter that spring, my mind filled with the picture of a beautiful mountain rising in bold lines from the sterile ice of the Kahiltna Glacier. After rereading Beckey and Harrar's account of the first ascent, we started prospecting for a better, i.e. safer route. Most sides of the mountain could be eliminated easily, but then we noticed the northeast ridge on the map. This ridge sweeps down from the north peak of Hunter and levels off at about 11,000 feet to point an accusing finger at Mount Huntington. This digit just fails to tap Huntington's shoulder and falls instead to the jumbled ice of the Tokositna Glacier a mile below. A careful inspection showed us that if one approached the side of this ridge where it separated from the bulk of the mountain all the tortured ice of the ridge top could be avoided. Thus, 1800 vertical feet of steep ice and snow seemed to be all that separated the northwest fork of the Tokositna Glacier from a straight-forward path to the summit. On the strength of this potential route, Jeff and I (Don N. Anderson) invited Don W. Anderson to make the trip with us.

After discussing the dinner-to-breakfast ratio (4 to 2), and scurrying to and fro for all the little necessary items, we were off to Alaska, shoe-horned into my tired Volkswagen. Three-and-a-half days later we were dusting ourselves off in front of Don Sheldon's hangar and praying for more good weather. The next morning Sheldon deposited the three of us and luggage at 8500 feet on the Tokositna Glacier. That afternoon we spent moving camp up the glacier to 8800 feet, appraising all the while our proposed route. At midnight the wall assumed less formidable proportions, and we crept out of our tent and climbed up to the schrund. Our

study had revealed that to gain the first 500 feet, we would need to travel under the threatening gaze of some huge ice walls. A few pickets got us past the schrund before it started to snow. Jeff was feeling ill and so we used the snow as an excuse to rappel back to the schrund.

The next evening Don W. and I were off alone as Jeff was not improving. We passed our previous high point alternately placing ice screws and crawling up through waist-deep powder. After pushing our route to a snow rib to the left of the ice cliffs, we dug a notch for Camp I and then rappelled down a growing line of ropes. Jeff was much worse. After he and Don W. argued for a while about the diagnosis, we radioed Sheldon, and Jeff was flown out. Losing our companion so early in the trip was a blow to our morale. The mountains seemed to close in on us and the daily avalanches appeared to come closer and closer to camp.

Choosing another good night we moved onto the face, but after pushing up another 500 feet, we found small sloughs hitting us periodically. We retreated to Camp I. The weather continued bad, and so down the ropes we went as avalanche after avalanche of soft snow passed over and around us. We hastily returned to Base Camp in the swirling clouds of snow, now having gained a new respect for this thundering wall. The relative safety of camp was paradise as we hacked and coughed up the ice particles we had inhaled.

All of our 1700 feet of rope was on the face, but we both agreed that a further attempt would be made only in ideal weather. For days we waited as the avalanches roared down the walls around us. We read book after book until the perfect day arrived. Thinking we might start in the afternoon, we trudged up toward the schrund only to have an avalanche come down over our route as we were watching. We then deemed dinner appropriate and headed back to Base Camp. At nightfall we started again and climbed rapidly past the site of Camp I adding it to our loads as we passed. A large ice avalanche roared down across our lower route and we remembered with apprehension that we must make one more trip across that traverse. After passing our previous high point, we left the fixed ropes and continued more slowly under heavy packs. However, our progress was steady and after a tussle with a short ice pitch below the ridge we reached the site for Camp II. This camp was established at 11,100 feet on a broad-backed ridge. Sleeping until eight P.M., we set off for the summit, taking pictures as the sun crept behind Mount McKinley and then back out again about 1:30 A.M. Finally we crested our ridge and looked out at the basin below the summit, a glistening wedge in the low rays of the morning sun.

We were almost on the ice of the final slope when I felt the slope break beneath my feet. Throwing myself into a double somersault, I nearly cleared the path of the avalanche. However, my momentum gave out and I found myself riding amid the ice-blocks toward a cliff. Then a reassuring tug let the blocks rush on to their destruction while I looked back at Don W. who had managed to step free and stop me with a perfect hip belay. At this point we agreed that straight up was the only reasonable route, even though a schrund caused considerable difficulty, and a good deal of cutting was required on the slope above. We reached the summit at four A.M. on the 21st of June.

After taking pictures amid the summit flags left the day before by the Japanese party on the Beckey-Harrer route, we worked our way along the cornices to the north ridge and then descended. That night we retreated down the wall using 400-foot rappells. Rushing over the last section, I misestimated the position of a knot in the rope and was left hanging for a strangling few minutes until the knot released and I fell the remaining 25 feet into the half-filled schrund. With a sigh of relief we snatched up the tremendous load of ropes and ran down out of the avalanche zone to our tent and a huge victory pot of *clam mung*.

Summary of Statistics.

AREA: Alaska Range.

ASCENT: Mount Hunter, 14,570 feet, (Donald N. Anderson and Donald W. Anderson), June 21, 1966—fourth ascent and first ascent of northeast ridge.

