

Mount Temple's North Face

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WHEN I tried to climb Temple a couple of weeks after first arriving in Canada, I bogged down on the apparently unending scree of the ordinary route from Sentinel Pass. A few years later I finally climbed Temple by a route worthy of such a beautiful and impressive mountain, the east ridge. Yet the big question, that of climbing the huge north face, still remained to be answered. Several climbers had looked at it from the highway and considered the possibilities. A few had walked to Lake Annette to attempt a climb, but as far as I knew, no one had even come close to a solution. The 5000-foot north face consists of three sections. The lower half, with a moderate angle of perhaps 60° , is dominated by a great ice couloir which because of its shape has been named the "Dolphin". Above this rises a steep 1500-foot rock wall which I call the "Depression", crowned for over half its length by the steep ice cliffs of the summit glacier; to the left of the Depression the glacier hangs down onto the face. It is this ice that poses the big question, for any direct route must work its way through it; a climber wishing to make such a route must be prepared to face considerable danger of falling ice.

When we met in Banff at the beginning of August, I discovered that our party, Heinz Kahl, Charlie Locke and I, had conflicting ideas about a route. Heinz believed that by climbing the rocks to the right of the Dolphin we could reach the lower ledge of the Depression, along which we could traverse left to gain the hanging glacier, which we could climb to the summit. Heinz felt that thus we would face a minimum of technical difficulty and only a short exposure to icefall. I was equally sure that a safer and more direct route could be made at the right of the Depression where the rock was not overhung by ice. We would still have to traverse below the ice cliffs to where I was sure a ramp led through the cliffs to the easier slopes above. We discussed the two alternatives at length, but the only decision was to postpone our start for twenty-four hours. The decision as to route would have to wait until we reached the ledge below the Depression.

The following day on the short walk to Lake Annette a violent thunderstorm proved that we had exercised sound judgment in delaying our start. Under a sheltering overhang, we cooked supper and settled down early with the prospect of a midnight start. At midnight it was still raining, but at four o'clock Charlie woke us. The sky was rapidly clearing. We started immediately even without breakfast, for it was essential to move fast to avoid rockfall on the lower face. After crossing the scree and following a small moraine, we soon reached the snow of the couloir, where conditions were excellent. Charlie and I made rapid progress up the snow while Heinz fell behind. He had earlier complained of feeling ill. At the rocks between the couloir and the Dolphin's tail he was feeling worse and decided to return, a terrible disappointment to all of us, since it had been his enthusiasm that had first started us on the climb. With his food and equipment resorted, Charlie and I continued, climbing rapidly on the easy rock to the right of the Dolphin. We were unroped, having learned on an earlier attempt the need for speed on this part of the face to avoid the constant stone bombardment later in the day. We roped between the top of the Dolphin and a couloir on our right on a small ridge, which ended above our heads in a steep buttress. The only practical route was to skirt to the right below the buttress to a chimney which cut through the rock band; it was not difficult climbing, but there was always a nagging doubt about the stability of the snow which lay on the smooth ice. Nor did the few pitons which we placed in the loose rock of the buttress inspire our confidence. On the third rope-length we reached the chimney and a fourth put us on the ledge where a decision had to be made about the remainder of the route. I began the traverse of the ledge, if indeed soft snow on smooth ice at 45° can be termed a ledge. Usually by treading the snow down carefully, I could form a step that would hold my weight; otherwise I had to sweep clear the snow and cut a step in the ice beneath. In this way I reached the upper rim of the ledge and continued the traverse with feet on the ice and hands on the rock, where an occasional piton consolidated the gain I had made. We traversed for about 200 interesting but slow feet. The thought of going a further 2000 feet like this was not to be contemplated. At the first opportunity I left the snow, ascending diagonally on the rock above. The whole nature of the climb changed. The rock became firm, that excellent limestone which if found more often would give the Rockies a better reputation among rock climbers. Charlie climbed a full rope-length past me. I joined him as quickly as possible and traversed the few feet to the edge of the Depression, whose possibilities we had previously been unable to see.

Depression was certainly a good name for what I saw. The "ledges" proved to be steep snow slopes with less reason for existence than the one we had just left. The rock steps between were even worse. The chimneys, which from Lake Annette had seemed to be a possible route, turned out to be water-worn corners; and the rock was completely devoid of cracks. Until very recently the whole of the Depression must have been filled by a hanging glacier, but now only the ice cliffs above remained. Looking up toward these cliffs, I could see that on my ramp through them we would have sixty feet of direct-aid ice climbing. We were simply not going to make a direct route on this climb!

Disappointment rankled as I turned to the rock above, but I knew we had made the right decision. Now we unexpectedly found ourselves making a very pleasant rock climb, good fifth class with an occasional piton for direct aid. Toward the end of the afternoon a small plane flew by, obviously looking for us. Four times it flew over, and later we learned that the pilot, Bill Smythe from Moraine Lake Lodge, with Heinz as passenger, was checking our progress. There is little point in trying to describe the individual pitches, but I remember the last one of the day. We had ignored the signs of approaching bad weather, but this did not keep it from raining. As I belayed in a small notch, the next twenty feet of smooth, bulging rock above my head looked anything but promising. Thirty feet to the left was a slick chimney that appeared to lead nowhere, but at least the lower part could be climbed. Charlie edged along the small ledge towards the chimney but then to my surprise he moved around a completely hidden corner; the rope began to pass rapidly through my hands until he reappeared above the bulging rock. At that time of day and in rapidly deteriorating weather such surprises are more than welcome. He continued over the slab above on small but adequate holds, stopping at one point to engineer a masterpiece of psychological protection: four pitons and great quantities of sling, all of which I removed without using my hammer as I hurried to join him at our bivouac site.

We rapidly made ourselves comfortable. Well protected from the rain, we discussed the day while waiting for the soup. Then, as if to settle our doubts about the direct route for all time, a huge piece of ice broke away from the ice cliffs, shattered on the ledge and swept over the Depression. It was a convincing argument, and we ate our supper in silence.

We awoke next morning to find ourselves isolated by the clouds. Wet snow was falling but fortunately did not stick to the rocks. With cold fingers I tried to climb the groove above. Perhaps it was difficult or maybe it was just because it was the first pitch, but I finally had to resort to a

couple of pitons for aid in order to start. Now only about 500 feet below the ridge and confident that we would soon be there, we found the climbing tough but not excessively so. As our fingers became warm, we began again to enjoy the climbing. A final steep pitch required aid for a short way and ended with a strenuous pull on good holds over a bulging overhang. Above only caution was required to cross the rotten snow and rock to the northwest ridge, where we unroped before continuing to the summit.

Our climb would probably be classified as NCCS IV, F7, A2. It was a pleasant climb far removed from the horror we had anticipated, but we really did not answer the question of the *direct* north face. Others will follow and no doubt climb a direct route. I wish them luck, but I do not think they should count on having it.

Summary of Statistics.

AREA: Canadian Rockies.

FIRST ASCENT: Mount Temple by the north face, August 3 and 4, 1966.

PERSONNEL: Brian Greenwood, Charles Locke.

