

The West Ridge of Mount Crillon

LOREN H. ADKINS, *Unaffiliated*

ON May 16 Bruce Tickell, Marsha Adkins and I set out from Juneau in a 13-foot Boston Whaler outboard. In a day we traveled to Johns Hopkins Inlet in Glacier Bay, picking up Dick Benedict at Bartlett Cove. Our heavily-loaded craft performed amazingly in the heavy seas as we dodged giant bobbing icebergs. Although our immediate objective had been unclimbed Mount Abbe, which rises 8300 feet directly from the ice-choked inlet, the ice and a shortage of time forced us to try the more accessible P 6780. Three days of bad weather and severe avalanche danger made us beat a retreat. We simply had to push on to our primary objective, 12,726-foot Mount Crillon.

Although tide-water also reaches to within ten miles of Crillon on its eastern, Johns Hopkins side, our approach here had to be made from Lituya Bay on the Pacific Ocean side. Marsha and I dropped Tickell and Benedict at Blue Mouse Cove and sailed on through the notoriously rough open ocean between Cape Spencer and Lituya Bay. On May 26 the plane bringing Walt Gove from Juneau picked up the two at Blue Mouse Cove and flew them to Lituya Bay to join us for the big climb.

Mount Crillon, like most of the peaks of the Fairweather Range, lies in Glacier Bay National Monument. Because the Park Service prohibits airdrops in National Parks and Monuments, we were faced with ferrying loads to Base Camp, in the spectacular cirque nine miles up the North Crillon Glacier. The climb up the moraine-covered snout of the glacier, which ends in an ice cliff that overhangs the waters of Lituya Bay, provided the worst objective danger any of us had ever experienced: frequent, unpredictable barrages of huge boulders. On June 2, the day of the last carry, Jerry Buckley flew in to join us and Walt Gove had to fly out.

Camp I was on a 6000-foot col on the west ridge and Camp II at another col at 6500 feet. Between these two camps we avoided much of a bad section of ridge by dropping down, traversing the south face of a jagged subsidiary peak and reascending by way of a treacherous avalanche slope. The real climbing lay above 6500 feet.

We left Camp II with minimal gear and food. The ridge started off very steep and terrifically exposed. At one point, while doing direct aid up a very rotten, overhanging rock face with a belay from a powder-snow cornice, I peered between my legs to see a continuous blue-ice chute

that swept down a full mile below. Unforeseen technical problems such as this forced a retreat to a reasonable bivouac spot at 7800 feet. Pushing on in the morning, we moved steadily, pausing only to knock off cornices, vanish in bergschrunds, and be thrown by an avalanche head over heels for 60 feet down the awesome north face. We crossed a deep notch at 9000 feet with a 175-foot rappel; we left a rope to jümar back up on the descent. Above 9500 feet the ridge widened and problems became fewer. The upper mountain was totally arctic. We rested out of the wind in a crevasse which split the tiny sharp summit. This was a second ascent by a new route*. Exhausted out of our minds, we descended, bathed in the cold, pure beauty of the Fairweather Range with the great ocean surging at its margins and experienced for hours a rush of power and clarity.

* The first ascent was made on July 19, 1934 by Bradford Washburn and Adams Carter up the southern slopes. This pair returned a second time to the summit two days later with Waldo Holcombe. See *National Geographic Magazine*, March 1935.

Summary of Statistics:

AREA: Fairweather Range, Alaska.

NEW ROUTE: The West Ridge of Mount Crillon, 12,726 feet, June 9, 1972.

PERSONNEL: Loren and Marsha Adkins, Richard Benedict, Jerry Buckley, Bruce Tickell.

