

on the mountain's south side. We were 50 or 60 vertical feet below the summit, which was too rocky and wind scoured to descend on skis. The time was around 1:30 p.m.

The descent back across the east face and down the upper couloir offered incomparable skiing amidst spectacular exposure. The steady 50-to 55-degree pitch of the couloir kept our attention, though its width and the perfect snow enabled us to link turns the entire distance to its termination above a 1,500-foot cliff.

From there we traversed (skier's right) around two corners and across an apron of snow just about steep enough to keep our up-hill knee within biting distance of our chins. Near the end of our traverse we set up a half-rope rappel off a snow bollard that dropped us over an eight-foot vertical snow and rock step. A second half-rope rappel off a piton diagonaled down and to the skier's right across a four-foot runnel, and a final half-rope rappel dropped us over a 15- or 20-foot vertical rock corner, depositing us 60 or 70 feet above where we traversed (climber's right) on the snow ramps during the ascent.

Several turns down some of the steepest snow yet brought us into a 150-foot section of couloir narrow enough to force us to side-slip. Beyond that we skied for another couple of hundred feet before making one last 40- to 50-foot rappel over an 80-degree ice bulge. The skiing became easier below that as the couloir widened and the pitch eased, bringing us to the final five-foot drop over the bergschrund near the base of the couloir. We arrived back at the Teton Glacier around 4:15 p.m. and made it to the car by around 6 p.m.

This was the first successful ski descent of the complete Hossack-MacGowen Couloir. Also, according to Renny Jackson but unbeknownst to Hans and I at the time, it may have been the first successful winter ascent.

MARK NEWCOMB, *unaffiliated*

Grand Teton, Otterbody Snowfield, First Ski Descent. The successful descent of the Hossack-MacGowen on the north face of the Grand Teton in February left at least one major unskied route still open off the summit: the Otterbody Snowfield route. Exploiting a tenuous link between the East Face Snowfield and the Otterbody Snowfield, the window of opportunity for this route may be one of the shortest of all the other routes. Steve Shea, whose experience skiing the Grand Teton is hardly insubstantial, helped spark the notion in the mind of Doug Coombs that the Otterbody may offer the cleanest line of descent off the Grand Teton, requiring the fewest rappels and least amount of downclimbing.

Coombs made an attempt with Andrew McLean in February, one day before Hans Johnstone and I skied the Hossack-MacGowen. Deep, potentially hazardous snow turned them back near the top of the Otterbody.

After a wet, stormy spring, skies over the Tetons finally turned blue around May 30. Doug and I knew we would have a window of perhaps one or two days between when the snow on the east face firmed up enough to safely ski and when the intense June sun would melt the section connecting the east face to the Otterbody Snowfield. Fortunately, we both had enough time off to attempt the descent at exactly the right moment. On June 2 we over-nighted on the Lower Saddle, starting our summit bid around 4:30 a.m. We made good time climbing easy 70- to 75-degree ice up the lower Stettner Couloir and through a ramp connecting it with the bottom of the Ford Couloir. Kicking steps up the Ford, we found crusty snow barely strong enough to support a skier's weight. We made the summit around 7:30 a.m. and began skiing by eight. We were worried that any later start would allow the snow in the couloir linking the east face and the

Otterbody to become too soft and dangerous.

Our timing was perfect. The slightly scratchy crust on the east face turned to perfect corn in the 50-degree crux of the couloir leading to the Otterbody. The Otterbody itself was just emerging from the shadow of the east ridge, and the 50-degree double fall line skiing on frozen, slightly runneled snow over a big cliff (the east face) isn't something I feel compelled to repeat any time soon. In fact, the snow became so firm once we reached the sun/shade boundary that we decided to pull up in the hopes the hot sun would quickly soften the snow in the tail of the Otterbody. The tail leads to a 140-foot cliff and the Teepee Glacier snowfield, and at over 50 degrees was the second crux of our descent.

Unfortunately the snow and ice in the rocks above us softened much faster than the ice-glazed snow in the couloir below. As larger and larger chunks began to loosen their grip on the rock above and rain down on us, we were forced to flee the scene and ski the frozen, crusty snow as best we could. We made it about 50 feet into the tail of the Otterbody before a shallow, ice-glazed runnel made the skiing a little too nervy for me, even side-slipping. A fall at that point would have been fatal. That, plus a handy anchor left by Andy and Doug on their previous retreat, made it a good stopping point.

Using the anchor, Doug rappelled on skis to see if the skiing became any more possible. It didn't. To expedite our retreat in the face of an increasing barrage of snow and ice from above, I coiled the rope and we downclimbed the remaining 200 feet of the Otterbody's tail to a final rappel over a cliff to the Teepee Glacier. From there we skied to the morainal camping zone, climbed back to the Lower Saddle to retrieve our camp, and skied as far as we could back to the valley.

As with many accomplishments in mountaineering, improvements in style await future descents of both the Otterbody and the Hossack-MacGowen. A combination of perfect conditions and the formidable athleticism displayed by today's free riders may yet result in a descent of the Grand on skis or snowboard without rappelling or downclimbing.

MARK NEWCOMB, *unaffiliated*

The Cathedral Group, Various Ascents. The north face of the Middle Teton was the scene of some new route activity in early August. *Buffalo Gals* (III 5.10), an excellent four-pitch crack climb on good rock, was climbed by Ron Johnson and Renny Jackson. Just left of this route the *Dew Drop Inn* (III 5.10) was discovered by Eric Gabriel and Andy Byerly. Both climbs are located just east of the regular North Ridge route. On Mt. Owen, Alex Lowe soloed *Jennifer's Way* (IV 5.10a), a three-pitch variation at the start of the *Serendipity Arête* on Mt. Owen. After reaching the summit of Owen he then continued up the North Ridge/Direct North Face finish on the Grand Teton to get home.

RENNY JACKSON

BIG HORN MOUNTAINS

The Merlin, Superfortress. In August, Mike Lilygren, Steve Bechtel, and Bobby Model returned to the Big Horn Mountains to finish a free climbing project on the Merlin, a castle-like tower located to the southeast of Cloud Peak. In 1994, they had prepped the route and climbed to within 100 feet of the Merlin's summit. Fierce afternoon thundershowers kept the top 100 feet soaked, thereby making it impossible to free climb. However, in 1996, beautiful weather and dry conditions allowed the team to climb the Merlin from bottom to top in a single day.

The Merlin arches up from a talus slope 100 yards east of an alpine saddle connecting the leg-