

the snowy cornices overhanging the 6,000-foot north face. I decided to follow Carlos on a line to the right that appeared to offer nominal relief from the exposure, as it was only 2,000 feet to the hanging glacier and the customary industrial size crevasses. This proved an interesting trade-off. On this route, as the angle increased to 50-plus degrees, the snow gave way to glare ice. I slowed to a crawl. With one tool and lots of air beneath my toes, I first cursed my climbing partners for talking me into leaving my second tool, then myself for being dopey enough to listen. Needless to say, the story had a happy ending, and at the top of the dome we took a break for lunch.

While we ate, Carlos cut a huge bollard for the rappel over a 25-foot overhang that barred our way. From the bottom of the rappel, we spied for the first time wild snow and ice formations beneath the ridge cornices. Monster horizontal rime feathers formed by storms from the gulf defied both gravity and solar radiation. It was as if we were climbing inside a massive natural turbine temporarily down for repairs.

With Paul leading the way we made a short stroll across the col to the summit cone, then slogged another 1,000 feet up several steep sections and across a crevasse or two to a modest snow slope and the summit of Mount Miller. It was only 11:30 a.m.

After the obligatory photos and back-slapping we marked the summit like a pack of hounds, left a wand, and began our descent. The short jumar back up the overhang proved to be the usual pain in the ass, but provided good photographic opportunities. The 1,000-foot climb down the ice dome went smoothly and we made one rappel on the steepest section of the route Paul, Ruedi and Reto had climbed up. The Carlos/Charlie variation looked way too hideous.

The rest of the descent was uneventful and we skied into Base Camp at 6 p.m., having spent only 32 hours on the mountain. The next morning Don Welty, who works for Paul, picked us up and we were back at Ultima Thule's lodge and sauna by noon.

It just goes to show that Alaskan mountaineering is not all about snow camping.

CHARLIE SASSARA

*The Golden Fleece, First Ascent.* *The Golden Fleece*, otherwise known as Birdman Falls, is a formation of ice that has attracted lots of attention from the minuscule number of people who have had the luxury of seeing it. Tucked into a tight little drainage cirque on the south side of the Chitina Glacier, it is a very impressive 400 foot vertical pillar of ice. Laying eyes on it is extremely difficult. Without the vast services of the Ultima Thule Lodge, 40 miles down the Chitina valley, this sort of objective might just as well be in Antarctica.

Paul Claus, pilot and owner of the Lodge, flew Charley Sassara and I over the deteriorating ice formation in April, 1995, just to make us drool. We were extremely impressed and eager to return. The cost of a couple of such flights for a day climb would inhibit most sane people from even considering the line. Paul, on the other hand, made our attempt possible by dropping us off within a two and a half hour ski of the pillar's base on his way to another scheduled pickup.

An awkward ski up 2,000 feet through dense underbrush is only manageable because you cannot wait to see the hidden pillar. It is not disappointing. Three impressive pitches of superb steep ice took us to the lip of the vertical cliff. An additional WI 2 pitch completed the falls. We finished the climb by 7 p.m. and rapped off in the fading light. The 2,000-foot descent to the valley floor by head lamp was nasty, as ski descents go. However, Paul's punctual Super Cub pickup the next day was right on target. How could anyone hope for a more rewarding 24 hours?

Comparable in quality to *Hydrophobia* in the Canadian Rockies, the route would be quite pop-



*Charley Sassara and Carlos Buhler on the first ascent of Birdman Falls. Ruedi Homberger*

ular if it were nearer to a road. As it is, it represents a spectacular outing in a very remote setting.

CARLOS BUHLER