

Preface

After a number of years of ever-more difficult and impressive ascents, the year 2000, at first glance, seemed to represent a bit of a lull in progress in the high and mighty mountains. There were few great ticks in the Greater Ranges that climbers will discuss decades hence, no Humar on Dhaulagiri or Whimp and Lindblade on Thalay Sagar (though the pair was spotted in typical fine form on Jannu). A cursory reading of the year might seem to indicate a solidification of good climbing on the walls and peaks of the world, but not an advance. Observers might call it a good year, but not a great one.

But...wait. Dig a little deeper, as we have tried to do in the pages of this volume, and the *style* in which climbs were achieved begins to stand out. What about Michael Pennings and Jonathan Copp, who arrived for their first time in Pakistan below its wildest spires and proceeded to establish one Grade VI first ascent, fire a Grade VI new route, and repeat a Grade VII climb, all in three-day pushes? Here at last was the fast climbing fostered in Yosemite Valley (or, in this case, the Black Canyon of the Gunnison) writ large on the great walls of the world. Their approach was exemplary, harking back to the simplest of styles: two men, no drills, no portaledges, no other "jiggery-pokery," as Mick Fowler calls it, picking off lines any one of which would make for a successful expedition. There was little fanfare, no Internet connections or made-for-TV movies, just two friends out having a good time. How refreshing.

They weren't the only ones out there going for big objectives in good style, either. On the nearby Trango Towers, Tim O'Neill and Miles Smart were trying their own blasts of the gigantic southwest ridge of Great Trango Tower and a one-day shot of the *Eternal Flame* route on Trango Nameless Tower. That they fell short of routes should not dissuade us from tipping our hats to their strong efforts, efforts that we hope will inspire climbers everywhere to reach within themselves for similar aspirations.

There were many other fine climbs done in the year as well. Werner Stucki and Christian Zinsli made a 24-hour single-push ascent of the *Thunderbird Variation* to the *Hummingbird Ridge* in one of the unsung climbs of the year. Steve House, Scott Backes, and Mark Twight brought the single-push ethic to an extreme with their 63-hour ascent of the Slovak route on Mount McKinley. House continued his exploits, when, at the end of the winter season, he paired up with Barry Blanchard and Rolando Garibotti to climb a hard new route on the east face of Mt. Fay in the Canadian Rockies. Coupled with his ascent with Blanchard and Scott Backes one year earlier of *M-16* on the east face of Howse Peak, House has done much to reinvigorate alpine climbing in that range, and at a standard that invites match on remote, committing objectives in other parts of the world.

Further good news in the style department included an entourage of lads from the United Kingdom who trotted down to La Esfinge, a peak in Peru's Cordillera Blanca that has gone from obscurity to world attention in the space of a few years. They proceeded to up the ante by establishing one new free route and the first free ascents of two others. Wall climbs of note included the well-traveled Welsh partnership of Twid Turner and Louise Thomas going alpine style on a new route on La Mascara, while the Spanish rope team of Adolfo Madinabeitia and Juan Miranda put up an A5 route on Pakistan's Amin Brakk, which is now home to two of the hardest aid climbs in the Greater Ranges. Ian Parnell and Julian Cartwright's new route on the north face of Mt. Hunter underscored that formation's reputation as the benchmark of Alaskan alpinism (the *Moonflower Buttress* on the

same wall can now be referred to as the *Nose* route of Alaska, complete with numerous aspirants and queues at the base, and the routes to either side are quickly gaining a reputation as even harder testpieces). Granted, many of the wall routes in vogue today require substantial expenditures of time and equipment, but as Pennings, Copp, O'Neill, and Smart suggested with their efforts in Pakistan, and as is suggested on a regular basis in Yosemite, Squamish, the Black, and the Bugs, that style, too, will some day soon be subject to revision in the history books that document our pursuit.

The issue of style receives its proper due in this year's volume. A series of articles examines the current state of climbing from the vantage point of five areas: Alaska, Patagonia, the Alps, the Karakoram, and the Himalaya. What may be concluded is that the best routes today connect back through time to climbing's earliest roots, when a partner or two and the gear and provisions you could carry in your rucksack were what you brought into the mountains. What these articles also infer is that, regardless of how much media attention a particular route receives just after completion, the test of time enshrines those routes done in good style. We remember Buhl on Nanga Parbat, Lowe and Kennedy on the *Infinite Spur*, Kurtyka and Schauer on GIV. Controversy can also guarantee a certain longevity, so that we remember Maestri on Cerro Torre and Česen on Lhotse, but a black asterick beside a climb is a dubious way for it to enter the collective memory.

Beyond all the new routes and first ascents, beyond the photographic imperative that enshrines small bits of rock with scenic backdrops, beyond the gentrification of the sport and the media's appropriation of its tragedies, I am reminded of something that is all too easy to lose. When introducing a friend to a favorite ice climb tucked into the folds of Wyoming, I was awakened to see her walking with head up and gawking at the play of light far off on the hills to the west. My head was down, pursuing a usual tumble of thoughts; the climb was one I had done before, and my mind was not preoccupied by its proximity. But watching her wide-eyed and absorbent, I remembered that I, too, once walked into valleys and canyons in wonder, mesmerized by what lay before me and eager to inhale, imbibe, ingest all that the day would bring. How easy it is to lose that beginner's mind, and how beautiful to recall it. May you enjoy the beginner's mind in your climbing, wherever it brings you.

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