

peak. After about 200 feet of elevation gain, we found ourselves on the narrow two-foot by 30-foot summit of Peak 9,720'. We believe this was the first ascent of this unnamed peak. We returned to high camp, broke camp, and headed back down to base camp for the evening.

On our last day, we got hit by a slab avalanche on an 8,500-foot peak due north of base camp. Fortunately we were able to stay on top of the avalanche and ride it out. Both of us ended up with sprained knees and bumps and bruises. We managed to get safely back down to base camp, where the weather had changed for the worse. The weather improved by morning, and Paul was able to fly in and pick us up at 8:30 a.m. the following day, May 5.

LEE JENKINS

*Mt. Hawkins, First Ascent.* In this modern world that we live in, true wilderness that has never seen the human foot is more and more uncommon. My family is privileged to live in the heart of one of the greatest wildernesses left in North America, the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park. This park hosts three major mountain ranges and more peaks over 14,000 feet than anywhere else in North America. Combined with Kluane National Park in the Yukon, there are more than 23 million acres, most of it mountains. Not surprisingly, very few of the peaks have names.

On April 13, I was very honored to follow my 11-year old son, Jay, the last few steps to the summit of Mt. Hawkins, likely the last named unclimbed peak in the park. Mt. Hawkins lies on the same ridgeline and about ten miles to the east of Mt. Tom White in the western reaches of the Bagley Ice Field. Jay and I had made an attempt on the mountain in 1999, turning back due to poor conditions. This time the weather was perfect, the mountain was in good shape, and we had our good friend Ruedi Homberger with us. We climbed light and fast from the 7,000-foot level, accessing the east ridge via a rib on the south face. Ruedi climbed unroped, and I roped with Jay, belaying him on about six pitches.

As we joined Jay on the summit, our altimeters read 10,900 feet. We enjoyed a round of Swiss tea and marveled at the incredible view of endless mountains in this untouched wilderness.

PAUL CLAUD, *Ultima Thule Outfitters*

*Mt. St. Elias, Mira Face, Second Ascent, and First Ski Descent of Mountain.* In late April, the Colorado team of Doug Byerly, Lorne Glick, Andy Ward, and I were flown to 7,000 feet on the Columbus Icefield at the base of Mt. St. Elias. Despite much chiding from our legendary bush pilot, Paul Claus, about our freeheel gear (don't expect to visit Alaska with tele skis and get respect from anyone), it was our intention to climb the peak and make the first ski descent. Our plan was to ascend via a much-neglected, north-facing 1916 surveyers' route on the west end of St. Elias and establish camp at their high point of 13,500 feet. We would then finish the climb via a steep, 1000-meter headwall on the south face that had seen only one previous ascent (we dubbed the impressive headwall "The Mira Face" after Czechoslovakian first ascensionist Miroslav Smid, killed climbing in Yosemite just a few months after summiting St. Elias in 1995), and follow a two-mile long ridge to the summit.

Between bad weather days, hazardous glacier terrain, and an earthquake that triggered massive avalanches and serac fall, we finally found ourselves drinking, playing cards, and slandering each other for many days in our moldy tent at high camp. We threw an offering of herbs and chocolate to the winds and asked Mother Mountain to please let us pass.

After a necessary descent for more food and fuel, we were back at high camp the morning of May 8, which dawned clear and calm. We cramponed for six hours up 45- to 50-degree



*Lorne Glick on the Mira Face above Mt. Hayden.* JAMES BRACKEN

snow and ice to the long, broad west ridge, which leads to the 18,008-foot summit. We summited, exhausted and with wooden toes. Concerned about our feet, our stay was brief and we anxiously clipped on the boards.

From the summit, bulletproof sastrugi on the ridge required pumpy, gorilla-stance survival turns. Drained from the altitude, I had doubts about skiing the Mira Face with its icy, 55-degree entrance, huge exposure and tight choke through a cliff band halfway down. But after a few hundred feet of intense turns, the snow sweetened to a soft sun crust, the angle relaxed, and we carved turns, grinning in the evening sun, all the way home.

JAMES BRACKEN

*Mt. St. Elias, Homberger Route, Ascent.* In April, my friend Bean Bowers and I climbed the Southeast Face (Homberger Route) on Mt. St. Elias in a three-day dash, with one day pinned down by storm at 13,500 feet. We were in Alaska for about a week from Anchorage to Anchorage. We first tried the direct (and unclimbed) north spur, reaching 10,500 feet, but the snow was deep and funky. The day after we turned back, the whole route got an earthquake-triggered, ass-whooping avalanche down it! I guess my luck is still holding out.

Our summit day was a 5,000-foot climb to the top. We then descended all the way back to base, with the last 5,000 feet being ankle-deep powder skiing, arriving by early afternoon. All told, we avoided the notorious weather that "Saint Deny-us" is known for.

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