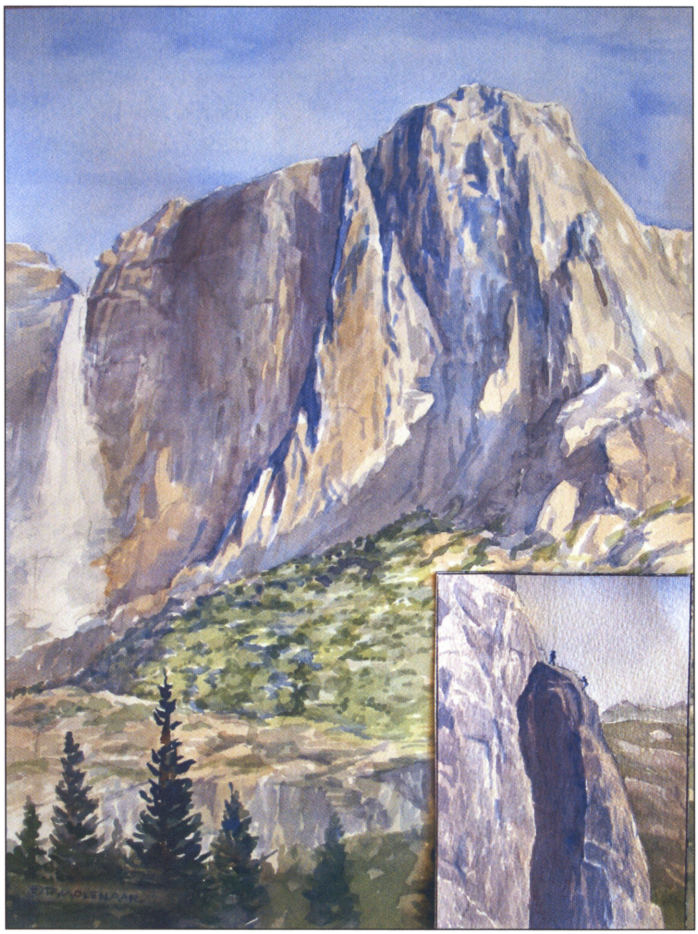
1947. THE LOST ARROW

ALLEN STECK



When Anton Nelson and John Salathé reached the summit of the Lost Arrow via the Arrow Chimney, they had just completed the most demanding climb yet in the brief history of Yosemite climbing. The ascent took five and a half days in early September 1947, and though agile climbers with modern gear can do the climb in far less time today, it is still one of the premier routes in the Valley.

Both Nelson and Salathé had been on the route several times prior to their ascent. Some of these were multiday attempts, and they had opportunity to work out many of the major problems facing them: the amount of water required, special equipment needs including bolts and pitons, proper rations for hot, dry climbing, and more. One of the most important items of equipment—without which the climb certainly would not have succeeded—were the hard-steel pitons that Salathé had crafted. Salathé was born in Switzerland and trained early as a blacksmith. He eventually emigrated to Canada and then to California where he started his Peninsula Wrought Iron Works. He became interested in climbing sometime in 1945 on joining the Sierra Club Rock Climbing Section and soon became aware of the problems regarding soft iron pitons: they deformed easily when used on Yosemite granite and did not last long under repeated usage. He solved this problem by using steel from Model A Ford axles to make his own pitons; these could be used and reused as often as needed during an ascent. On one eight-hour pitch during his Lost Arrow climb, Salathé often had to hammer his

pitons directly into rotten granite, which they penetrated without undue deformation. But this was not his only genius.

In August of 1946, with minimal climbing experience, he agreed to join some climbing friends at Yosemite Point to make an attempt on the Arrow Tip. Through a misunderstanding his friends did not arrive, and so Salathé decided to try it solo. He rappelled to the notch, and through the use of his special pitons and a bolt he succeeded in reaching a ledge some 100 feet below the top before retreating. Realizing that solo climbing is dangerous, he came back a week later with a friend, John Thune, to try again. Salathé climbed to his ledge and then Thune belayed him as he made his way up the discontinuous crack system leading to the summit. This effort took most of the day and when Salathé was just 40 feet from the top he called down to Thune to tell him he had reached the end of the crack system and that the drill was too dull to continue and besides it was getting dark. So they retreated. By virtue of his aid climbing skill Salathé had come within a few bolt holes of making the first ascent! A full year later he was back with Nelson to make the final ascent of the Lost Arrow.

Nelson's seminal article about the climb in the 1948 *Sierra Club Bulletin* was groundbreaking in many ways. Not only does he discuss the matter of equipment at some length, he ponders the question of motivation in climbing, perhaps the first American author to do so: "One cannot climb at all unless he has sufficient urge to do so. Danger must be met—indeed it must be used—to an extent beyond that incurred in normal life." In other ways, the climb was representative of a new era as it was the first big wall done with multiple bivouacs and hard steel pitons, and the first use of bolts for upward progress.

1953. K2 EXPEDITION

JIM WICKWIRE

Hillary and Tenzing's climb to the top of Everest earlier in 1953 provided the world with electrifying news. But the events on K2 that year were the stuff of legends, growing even more striking with the passage of time. The American expedition's struggle with wind, storm, sickness, high altitude, and the loss of a companion seems more poignant than other expeditions that achieved success. Why? As much as anything, because they did not succeed. When a great mountain is climbed for the first time—particularly if it is an Everest or a K2—the media attention is substantial. But when the effort falls short of the goal and the climbers are faced with a situation that threatens their lives, it can be even more compelling. This seems especially true in the face of tragedy—as on K2 in 1953.

For many climbers, K2 is the ultimate mountain. At 28,262 feet (8,614 meters), it is second only to Everest, a scant 773 feet higher. With its classic pyramidal shape, K2 is the perfect embodiment of our mental image of what a mountain should be. The climber who has designs on K2's summit must not only contend with extreme altitude and difficult rock and ice, but with sudden storms that deplete strength and erode willpower. Although K2 was first climbed by a large Italian expedition in 1954 when Achille Compagnoni and Lino Lacedelli reached the summit, the American expedition's attempt of K2 the year before ranks as one of the most memorable in the