

for Chris to remove and send up a piton from the belay; George falls 30 feet and loses the critical aid placement of the pitch. They are 4,000 feet up the wall. That night, their fifth on the wall, neither man sleeps until 3 a.m. When they admit to each other that they no longer have enough gear to retreat and that there is no chance of a rescue, they agree that there are no options; if they are to survive they have to climb.

The dawn of day six brings swirling clouds and snow. George leads an improbable and time consuming traverse across a snow-peppered slab, then escapes into an ice runnel that he gains by liebacking the edge of a roof and pressing his knees into the remains of the winter's snow/ice. Falling snow matures into hail, avalanches run, George leads through the storm for 15 pitches on ice. They have all of three ice screws. Chris and George summit and set-up their small tent right there. Accumulating snow collapses the tent twice in the night.

Writing in *Ascent* Chris stated that he and George had crossed an indefinable line. On their eighth day out, searching for the descent by compass atop the Columbia Icefield, they caught a brief glimpse of a helicopter and heard warden Hans Fuhrer's words, diced by the rotor, "ARE YOU OK?" "We realized someone cared about us," wrote Jones, "that we were not alone ... tears ran down my face."

I'll suggest that, in 1974, the route that George and Chris opened on the north face of North Twin was the hardest alpine route in the world. I believe that nothing then accomplished in Patagonia, the Alps, Alaska, or the Himalaya measured up to what George and Chris accomplished with "a rope, a rack, and two packs."

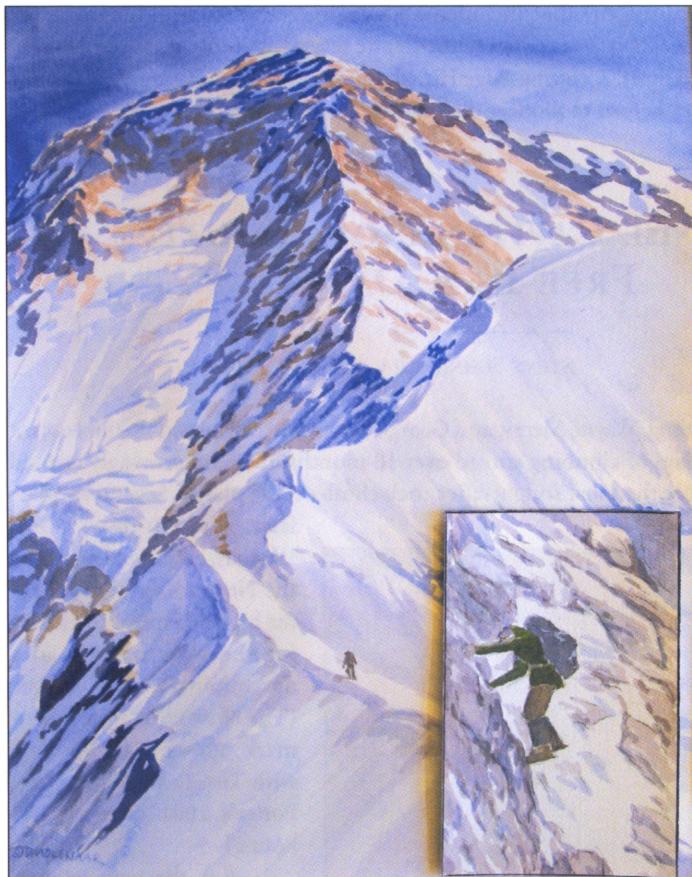
I980. MAKALU WEST PILLAR

DAN MAZUR

On May 15, at 3:45 p.m., a small bold team from Spokane, Washington completed the first American ascent of Makalu and the first lightweight ascent of its difficult west pillar. This was a seminal moment in Himalayan climbing history: it symbolized the budding acceptance of the lightweight Himalayan style, it showed that American teams were attempting the most difficult objectives in the Himalaya, and it stood proud in John Roskelley's incredible two-decade-long Himalayan climbing career.

Paying homage to someone as legendary as John Roskelley is no easy task. I can only share my own feelings of what it was like to follow in his hard-to-fill footsteps to the summit of Makalu. In 1995, when three friends and I reached the summit in alpine style via the southeast ridge, I swam through deep, sugary, avalanche-prone snow and nearly fell to my death from a windblown ledge at 8370m, just below an upper plateau leading to the tiny summit pyramid. When I read Roskelley's 1981 AAJ account of his own battle with the same "hip-deep, bottomless powder," I was swept by a feeling of *déjà vu*, and I shuddered at his painful description of how "[I] front-pointed my way toward the ridge, with nothing sure for my heavily gloved hands." Roskelley paints an evocative picture of Himalayan climbing at its most horrible.

It was brave and audacious of the four from Spokane to choose the 1971 French West Pillar for their attempt on the mountain. Roskelley, Chris Kopczynski, Kim Momb, and James



States might have opted to make their speedy attempt on the classic French first-ascent route of 1955, but instead ventured onto a much more worthy and terrifying objective, originally climbed by an 11-member team in nine weeks using bottled oxygen. Roskelley, in the blunt style that became his trademark, states in the *AAJ* that “we had chosen to raise ourselves up to the standard of the mountain, not to pull the mountain down to our level with large teams of climbers and Sherpas.” The climb was highly significant for its time because of the small size of the party and the “self-sufficiency” of their style.

This four-person team employed no Sherpas above the base camp, nor did they use supplemental oxygen.

In order to ascend and descend the route several times for acclimatization, as well as to stock higher camps, Roskelley’s team fixed 1,200 feet of rope to Camp 4 at 25,000 feet. This rope was used in climbing the 1,000-foot crux, and to protect a traverse out onto the south face, aptly named by the first ascensionists the “Terrible Traverse.” In describing the crux, Roskelley paints an eerie picture of tracing tattered nine-year-old fixed lines, clinging precariously to frayed aluminum caving ladders, and climbing past spent gear in his team’s negotiation of this section of exposed thin face climbing.

On summit day, States tired and Kopczynski accompanied him down, while Roskelley continued on solo through difficult rock, mantling his way toward the summit. Momb was in base camp because his knees had already blown thanks to his converted ski boots. After capturing a few Kodak moments on top at 3:45 p.m., Roskelley began a grueling descent back down the ridge. Fighting off waves of sleep that threatened to smother him every 10 or 15 minutes, he finally staggered into Camp 4 at 10:30 p.m., after 21 hours on the go. Another 8,000-meter summit had been climbed by Americans, and this one in a lightweight style at the forefront of its era.

Makalu’s West Rib was a jewel in John Roskelley’s nearly unmatched crown of achieve-

ments (all without bottled oxygen) that included Dhaulagiri, Nanda Devi, Trango Tower, Gaurishankar, K2, Uli Biaho, Cholatse, and Tawache (despite several attempts at Everest without oxygen, that summit eluded him). A cutting-edge Himalayan mountaineer of rare qualities and exceptional power, Roskelley helped to pioneer the modern Himalayan ethos.

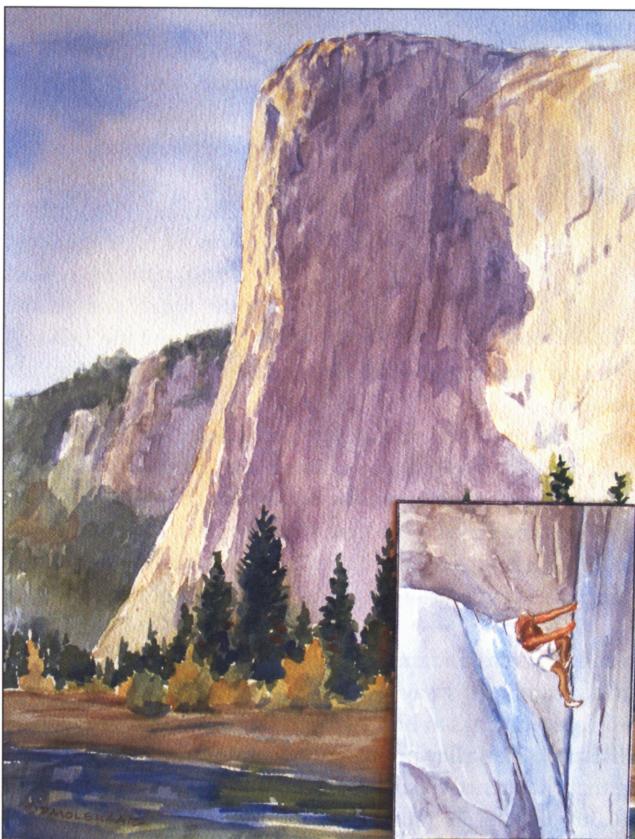
1994. EL CAPITAN NOSE ROUTE FREE IN A DAY

STEVE SCHNEIDER

In 1958, when Warren Harding, Wayne Merry, and George Whitmore completed the first ascent of El Cap's Nose after 45 days of climbing spread over 18 months, they unknowingly created what would become possibly the most sought-after rock climb on the planet. Seventeen years

later, Jim Bridwell, Billy Westbay, and John Long used the Nose to set a landmark for big-wall speed by climbing the Nose not just in a day, but in a mere 10 hours. (The Nose remains a benchmark for speed climbing, with Tim O'Neill and Dean Potter's 2001 time of 3:24 hours.)

But the coveted first free ascent of the Nose eluded all the big boys of free climbing. Two distinct pitches repeatedly bouted all comers: the Great Roof (pitch 23) and the Changing Corners (pitch 30). When Lynn Hill pulled through these pitches and continued to the top in 1993, all heads turned to mark the event. The crux of the Great Roof was underclinging a crack so thin that it would accept only the tips of a climber's pinkies. Here, Hill's diminutive size came to her advantage. Her fingers fit the crack, and although there were long reaches



THE AMERICAN ALPINE JOURNAL