



Infinity Direct on Denali. The snow ridge on the right is the lower West Rib, with the upper portion continuing above Infinity Direct. *Raphael Slawinski*



Valeriy Babanov on Infinity Direct. *Raphael Slawinski*

*Mt. McKinley, Infinity Direct to Upper West Rib.* Valeriy Babanov and I landed at Kahiltna International on May 23, with ambitious plans for new routes on Hunter and Denali. The weather was unsettled, so we figured our time would be best spent by acclimatizing on the West Butt. Two days later we were ensconced at the 14k camp. Weather turned us around on two separate summit attempts, leaving us with wounded pride from being denied on the normal route. Things were getting tiresome, but we finally summited on our third try, in  $-40^{\circ}\text{C}$  temperatures, making the round trip from 14k in 9.5 hours. Now, finally, to quote the inimitable Scott Backes, "We could get off the Butt and go climbing."

After resting at the airstrip for a couple of days, we packed light packs and skied up the Northeast Fork of the Kahiltna to the base of the

West Rib (our chosen line lay on the recessed face left, i.e., west, of the Rib). The start of the route is a bit of a terrain trap, and we were hoping to start shortly after midnight, but during the evening a thick fog settled over everything. In the end this may have been for the best, as at least we got a good night's sleep. We crossed the 'schrund (3,100m) at the un-alpine hour of 11 a.m. and swam up through thick spindrift over interesting thin ice. Escaping the garbage chute couloirs as soon as possible, we gained a slight rib which, we hoped, would offer safe passage up the face. The climbing was never desperate but always interesting: steep deep snow, calf-burning ice, short sharp rock steps. And it went on and on and on, much like this report. Clouds kept moving in and out, but for the most part the weather held. It was not until we topped out at the base of the Upper West Rib (4,700m) at 1 a.m. that we received the full blast of the storm that had been moving in over the last few hours. We had originally hoped to rest and brew for a few hours before continuing up the Rib, but under the circumstances we decided to declare the route finished (Infinity Direct, A14) and to traverse off to the 14k camp. Even bailing was

not devoid of interest, as we blundered among ice cliffs in wind, snow, and that weird Alaskan twilight, but eventually around 4 a.m. we stumbled into camp. Locating a tent belonging to some of Valeriy's Russian friends, we had little compunction inviting ourselves in for what was left of the night: five people crammed into a three-man tent.

There is not much more to tell. The following day we postholed down to base camp through more crappy weather (realizing how much getting around without skis really sucks). When the weather finally improved a couple of days later, we borrowed skis and toured up the Northeast Fork to retrieve ours. We flew out that evening to veggie burgers in Talkeetna and were back in Calgary on June 12. After this first taste of Alaska I will definitely be back for more (hopefully next time there will actually be ice on Hunter).

RAPHAEL SLAWINSKI, *Canada, AAC*

*Mt. Hunter, Diamond Arête, second ascent.* When Freddie Wilkinson asked what I thought about trying for the second ascent of Hunter's Diamond Arête (2,000m, Alaska Grade 6, Donini-Tackle, 1985), I was pretty much hooked, as it had been a dream route of mine for years.

First we had to get someone to drop us at the base of the route, in the tight, dangerous western cirque at the head of the Tokositna. Paul Roderick of TAT agreed to drop us there, with the understanding that we would do our best to climb over Hunter. This is not a place a pilot wants to visit too many times in one career.

Our packs weighed 30 pounds each, including five days of food and six days of fuel. The rack consisted of five ice screws, five or six cams, most of a set of nuts and two pins. Paul dropped us at noon on April 29. We began belaying the first pitch about 1 p.m. as the sun was leaving the wall. We found a mixed crux off the deck, and after more great mixed climbing we continued up steep snow ramps and mixed ground to the base of steeper mixed terrain. A couple of more pitches, and we found ourselves in a mixed corner, which we belayed.

Several pitches in an amazing bomb-bay system of thinnish water ice and mixed climbing then brought us to the crest of the Diamond. We simuled about 500', dug in on a 50° slope sheltered under a large rock at about 10,300', and bivied at 10 p.m.

On the morning of the 30th we left camp around 10 a.m. and climbed a stellar mixed pitch off our bivy ledge. From here, in several blocks we simuled 3,000+' of 50-60° ice on the arête proper to gain the base of the final serac barrier separating us from the summit plateau. A pitch through steeper serac ice brought us to a large hanging walkway between two seracs. I took an unprotected fall on a short pitch of rotten, slightly overhanging serac ice into a snow moat, then climbed an easier pitch slightly to the left. Freddie led us to the summit slopes and we began our descent of the West Ridge. We bivied at the base of the second plateau (as you head down) in seracs, just above the start of the ridge proper. By 3 p.m. the next day, we found ourselves at the top of the northwest basin/Bocarde variation. After several hours of down-climbing and rappelling and a run underneath the seracs, we reached Kahiltna base camp at 8 p.m. on May 1, 55 hours after starting.

On the route we found difficulties of about WI4 AI5 M5 and climbed every pitch with our packs on. We belayed about 15 pitches and simuled many, many more. The Diamond Arête is a stellar route with great technical climbing and nice exposure. The mandatory traverse and commitment of the landing zone made for a full-value Alaska experience.

SAMUEL JOHNSON, *Alaska*