

Canada

ST. ELIAS RANGE

Kluane National Park and Reserve, mountaineering summary. Weather in the Kluane Icefields during the 2006 climbing season was predictably unpredictable. As a result of sustained storms and snowfall, the Mt. Logan massif in particular saw fewer climbing parties than usual in recent years. A total of 86 persons participated in 29 mountaineering expeditions. This accounted for 1,535 person-days in the icefields of Kluane National Park and Reserve.

Expeditions are usually concentrated in the Mt. Logan area. However only nine parties made it to the massif, with all but one expedition attempting the standard King Trench route. The East Ridge was attempted by one group, but it was unsuccessful due to lack of snow. The mountain allowed only two expeditions to successfully reach its main summit. Uncooperative weather for aircraft and foot travel was the main factor in the low number of successful expeditions.

Other mountains that received climbing activity included Pinnacle Peak, Mt. Wood, Mt. Walsh, Mt. Steele, Mt. Queen Mary, and McArthur Peak. There were three ski-touring expeditions into the Icefields.

Of note was an Alpine Club of Canada 2006 Centennial Camp, which was held in the vicinity of Donjek Mountain. The group of approximately 10 established their camp on the Eclipse Glacier and spent two weeks exploring various routes in the area. Successful ascents were made on Mts. Walsh, and Badham, and other peaks. The last major ACC expedition was organized in 1966 in the Steele Glacier area.

No major search and rescue operations occurred in the icefields during the climbing season.

Mountaineering in the Icefield Ranges of Kluane National Park is an inherently dangerous activity, but with proper preparation and planning most groups have very positive experiences and return with memories that last a lifetime.

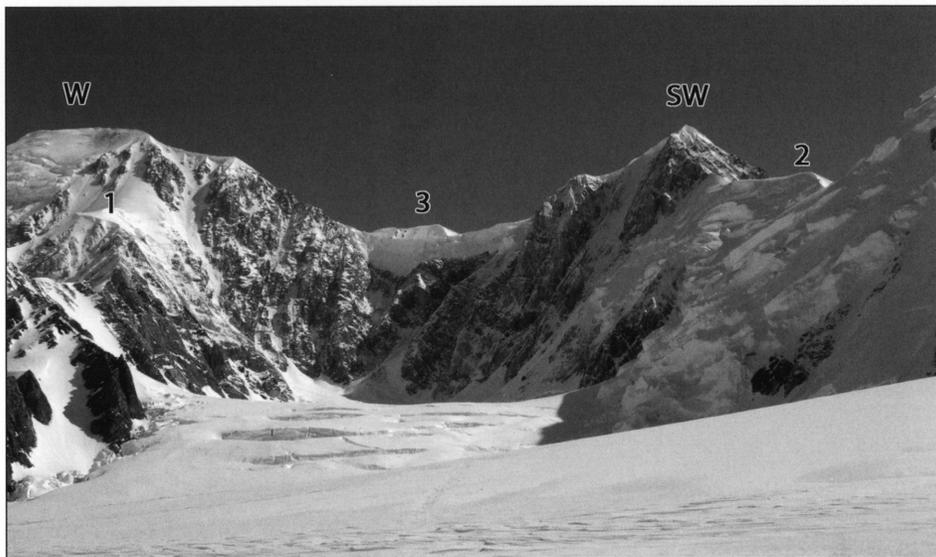
Registration is mandatory for all overnight activity in Kluane National Park and Reserve. Anyone interested in mountaineering should contact:

Mountaineering Warden, Kluane National Park and Reserve, Box 5495, Haines Jct., Yukon, Y0B 1L0, CANADA. Phone 867 634 7279; Fax 867 634 7277; e-mail Kluane_info@pch.gc.ca. For a mountaineering application package, visit the Parks Canada web site: www.pc.gc.ca/kluane

KLUANE NATIONAL PARK AND RESERVE



South Walsh, first ascent; Mt. Walsh, Southeast Ridge; other ascents. On May 28 Graham Rowbotham and I reached the pointed summit of South Walsh (4,223m). This was the highest unclimbed peak in the St. Elias range and, as claimed in *AAJ 2006* (p.199), in North America. Prior to our visit the complex south side of the Walsh massif seems to have been untouched* apart from minor Peak 3,450m, climbed in 2005.



Mt. Walsh (W) and the previously unclimbed South Walsh (SW) from the southwest, showing all visible routes: (1) Mt. Walsh, West Face to Southwest Ridge (ridge reached from a bowl on the left-hand, or west, side, not visible in this image; Clarke-Sowinski, 1996). (2) South Walsh, Southwest Ridge (Knott-Rowbotham, 2006). (3) Mt. Walsh, Southeast Ridge (Knott-Rowbotham, 2006), obscured from view by the foreground skyline ridge except for where it climbs over Pt. 4,227m (also previously unclimbed), which pokes up just below the numeral 3. *Paul Knott*

Twelve days before, Andy Williams flew us in from frozen Kluane Lake to 2,855m on the upper Donjek Glacier. As Andy flew off, our attention was drawn to the striking cirque formed by Mt. Walsh and South Walsh. The generous plastering of fresh snow quickly convinced us to attempt South Walsh by its southwest ridge rather than one of the possible routes on the west face. On our first attempt we retreated from 3,900m due to wind. Our second, successful, attempt is described here.

After skirting the avalanche-prone entry slopes, we weaved around rotten rock and waded 'schrund-infested snow to a spacious campsite at 3,700m. Above, we traversed a sharp corniced arête, before being forced onto the south face to avoid rime-encrusted rock towers. On the face we relied on a thin covering of sugary snow over shattered quartz-veined limestone. There were no belays. In our search for a viable route we traversed into a series of couloirs, crossing buttresses where the snow allowed. Luckily it was cold enough that the snow did not deteriorate, even in the direct afternoon sun. We escaped by trenching up steep wind deposits to a ledge below a huge triangular ice cornice.

Buffeted by a gale on the summit of South Walsh, we descended to the plateau connecting the massif. Since there was no effective shelter from the relentless maelstrom, we dug in the tent but found ourselves compressed overnight by deposited snow. The next day we traversed the long ridge over Pt. 4,227m (also unclimbed) to the main summit of Mt. Walsh (4,507m), via its previously unclimbed southeast ridge. Below the final wind-scoured slopes we found a sheltered, sunny bivvy-schrund in which we could revive the stove and our dehydrated bodies. From the summit we descended the West Ridge, the route taken on the 1941 first ascent (called the northwest ridge in *AAJ* 1942, p.348). In doing so we completed the first full tra-



Graham Rowbotham on day two, traversing into the couloir on the south face of South Walsh. *Paul Knott*

verse of the massif. After a more congenial night near the base of the ridge, we waded through a heavily crevassed bowl to reach the Walsh-Steele col. The postholing back to our stashed snowshoes was mild by St. Elias standards, as there was a wind crust on the glacier.

Earlier, on May 18, we had made the first ascent of Jekden South, a ca 3,745m summit west of our base camp, climbing via the shallow, snowy east rib. On our return flight to Kluane Lake, the controls were taken by Donjek Upton, son of Phil Upton, who flew climbers and scientists here from 1960-84. We found we had been lucky to complete our climb: the unsettled weather had disrupted the plans of practically every other party. We would like to acknowledge financial support from the British Mountaineering Council and UK Sport.

PAUL KNOTT, *New Zealand*

**Knott adds:* While researching the ascents of Mt. Walsh, I found the following route, which was not reported in the *AAJ. CAJ 1997* includes an account of a route climbed by Dan Clarke and Mark Sowinski on what they called the "South Face of Mt. Walsh" (pp. 34-37). Based on their description and annotated photo, the location of their route might be more precisely described as the southwest ridge of Mt. Walsh, reached at 3,800m via west-facing slopes. The route shares no ground with our traverse from South Walsh. Including ours, there are now four recorded routes to the main summit of Mt. Walsh (4,507m): West Ridge (1941), West Face to Southwest Ridge (1996), Northwest Ridge (1997), and Southeast Ridge (2006).

Eclipse Glacier area, various ascents. One of the Alpine Club of Canada's centennial activities was a ski mountaineering camp in the Icefield Ranges of the St. Elias Mountains, Yukon. The early June camp had 16 members, and we climbed 12 mountains surrounding the Eclipse Glacier and also made an ascent of Mt. Walsh. An interesting event was 12 hours of torrential rain at 2,840m (9,500') at our base camp. Rain in the St. Elias has become more common in recent years, and one needs to be prepared.

Four of the climbs were first ascents, and four were new routes. A "guidebook" (57 pages, 11" x 8", 36 colored photographs, and a colored 1:50,000 map) to the general Donjek area is available by contacting me (roger.wallis@sympatico.ca).