

Canada

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View east from base camp. Lower slopes of Peak 3,450m on left. Peaks in distance lie on far side of the Stairway Glacier. Glenn Wilks

Stairway Glacier, Peak 3,450m, south-southeast face and southwest ridge. Jonathan Wakefield and I arrived at Kluane Lake on May 16 and were able to fly within one and a half hours. We intended to make first ascents of peaks around the head of the Walsh-Denis Glacier confluence in Kluane National Park's icefields. Mt. Upton had been climbed some years ago, but the remaining peaks remained virgin. However, halfway into the flight strong winds forced the pilot to abort, and the following day, while we reached the area, winds prevented a landing. On the return we looked at Stairway Glacier, where I had climbed in 2009 (*AAJ 2010*), and scoped out a subsidiary glacier spotted on that trip. There seemed to be possibilities, so we returned to Kluane and discussed waiting for favorable conditions to go to the Walsh-Denis confluence. However, a party of nine was due at Kluane next day bound for Mt. Logan, and we didn't want to be waiting there for several more days, so we decided on the Stairway side glacier. This may have proven a bad decision.

That day we landed at 2,500m on the side glacier, which flows east into the Stairway. After establishing camp, clag set in, conditions that were to prove typical for the next four days. Temperatures were high, and we had only a few tantalizing views through breaks in the clouds. Over the next few days we attempted to explore the glaciers, but rising temperatures caused avalanches of both old and new snow. North-facing slopes seemed badly crevassed and seracked, while south faces were rocky

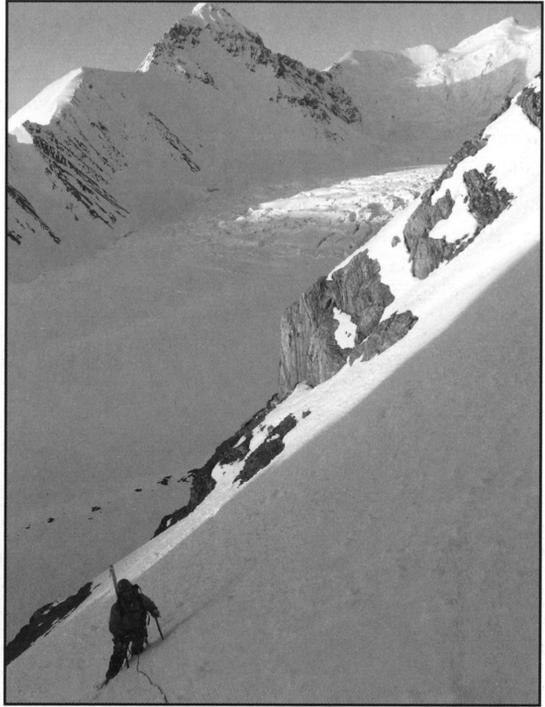
and seared by avalanche. The prospect of rich picking was not favorable.

On May 21 we left camp at 4 a.m. under clear skies. It was unusually warm. The ascent of Peak 3,450m behind camp took an old avalanche track with huge debris for the lower half of the slope. The upper half of this south-southeast face (average 45°) leveled out and led to a col. We then followed a broad ridge northeast, in knee-deep softening snow of 50-55°. We eventual summited at 10:00 a.m. Views were magnificent, and we enjoyed knowing that this was a first ascent. We made our way down without incident until the final quarter of the slope, which due to the temperature was unstable. Hard debris turned to knee-deep slush in places.

From the 22nd to the 26th we made attempts on other objectives, often unseen in dense fog. Discretion overtook valor. This was my fourth trip to the icefields and by far the worst conditions I'd experienced. Back in camp on the 26th, we called for a flight out. Three hours later were back at Kluane, feeling sorry for ourselves.

There are still lower-altitude peaks in this region that remain untouched, but some appear difficult, with broken approaches and faces. Given their height, it might be necessary to go there in late April, but it could be very cold. Thanks to the Mount Everest Foundation for its support.

GLENN WILKS, U.K.



Jonathan Wakefield on south-southeast face of Peak 3,450m. Glenn Wilks



Jonathan Wakefield on final part of south-southeast ridge of Peak 3,450m. Glenn Wilks