

## The North Wall of the Grand

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**I**N the 50-odd years it has taken for the Grand Teton to progress from an impossibility to "an easy day for a lady," many memorable ascents have been made. The peak that was once considered unclimbable has now been surmounted by eight distinct routes—and several variations.

The first ascent, which must certainly be recognized as one of the great feats of mountaineering in this country, was made by the Owen party in 1898. Then followed a lull of 25 years; the Grand was not climbed again until 1923. In 1929 Henderson and Underhill succeeded in putting a route up the East Ridge. The big year was 1931: Underhill and Fryxell pioneered the North Ridge (referred to at that time as the North Face); Underhill, Phil Smith and Truslow did the Southeast Ridge; and Glenn Exum made his epic solo climb of the Southwest Ridge. No new ascents were recorded thereafter until 1936. This year saw the first party on the North Wall. Paul and Eldon Petzoldt, and Jack Durrance, put a route up this precipice that followed the true North Wall for a little over three-quarters of its height. At the upper snow ledge it joined the North Ridge. (This climb was repeated in 1941 by a party of four on two ropes: Paul and Bernice Petzoldt, Glenn Exum and Hans Kraus. Bernice Petzoldt is the only woman who has ever been on the North Wall.) In 1937 Paul Petzoldt, Smith and House did the Southeast Face. When Jack Durrance and Coulter climbed the West Face in 1940, the mountain's last defences had fallen.

Some of the variations which have been made (and others yet to be done) offer plenty of first-rate climbing, but the aforementioned eight routes cover the only major faces and ridges of the mountain. On my return to the Teton in 1946 I began a study of the North Wall to determine whether the remaining (and, as it seems, overhanging) portion could be climbed. That summer Jim and Kirk Smith and I made an attempt. We had great difficulty passing the overhanging ice cornice above the bergschrund of the glacier. It took us three hours to reach the rock wall. Our plan was to try and push a completely new route. We purposely avoided both of the large snow

ledges—and got hung up on the east side of the wall fairly close to the East Ridge. We rappelled down to the glacier. Our failure had consumed 18 hours and given us great respect for the mountain. It had also convinced me that the only practicable route would include both of the large snow-covered ledges.

It was not until the summer of 1949 that I had the opportunity to join another attempt. Dick Pownall and Art Gilkey had been looking it over for three years, too. They were both guiding professionally with the Exum-Petzoldt School at Jenny Lake. We planned to make our try as soon as they had free time. The unexpected arrival of Mike Brewer, one of Glenn Exum's former guides, made it possible for both of them to be away at the same time.

On the night of August 12th, Dick, Art and I put our camp in the center of the lower portion of the Teton Glacier. Both Dick and Art had climbed the mountain that day. Dick had made the North Ridge (and descended by the East Ridge!), while Art had taken a party up the Exum Route. We had intended to spend the next day in rest and reconnaissance, but another party of climbers who had not previously signified their intentions were also planning an attempt on the North Wall. We decided to make our try the next morning.

Long before dawn of the 13th we started up the glacier. The weather was perfect, but the condition of the glacier was far from being so. It has been receding year by year, and new cracks are opening all the time. In the dim light we had to move cautiously to find a safe track through the maze of gaping fissures. Two or three times we heard the ominous crunch which presignifies the cracking of a snow bridge—and we were quick to shift the scene. At the top of the glacier we stopped to eat breakfast. A half-hour later it was light enough to begin the climb. This time the bergschrund gave no trouble at all. We walked right up to the rock and found a convenient gap in the ice cornice. We were on the wall at 5.00 A.M., less than two hours after leaving our camp.

We left our ice-axes and crampons at the bergschrund. This equipment, and the tent and sleeping bags from our camp below, were to be taken down by Marshall Hurwitz and Dennis Denitch, who had spent the night at Amphitheatre Lake.

The first pitch led straight up to, and through, the gap in the ice cornice—a vertical distance of 40 feet. Dick and Art joined me here. Art, anchored by Dick, belayed me as I made an 80-foot traverse

to the left across the snow on top of the cornice. Here the snow and ice swept sharply up, and I climbed 60 vertical feet with ice on the left and firm rock on the right. All three of us gathered on a large ledge. Here we placed the first piton, and here we made our only *courte échelle*. With Art working the belay, I stepped on Dick's rock-like back, shoulders and arms until I was easily able to pull up to a comfortable ledge. I took up a stance 30 feet above Art and brought him up to me. On a 45-degree diagonal to the right, I went another 70 feet. From the beginning the climb had been on firm rock, but moisture and loose dirt had made the footing insecure. Art and Dick joined me, and we switched the lead.

Art led diagonally, to the left, along a slab for 80 feet. We were carrying food, cameras, bivouac sheets and extra climbing iron in two packs. These were naturally carried by the second and third men on the rope. As I was slipping into the harness of the pack Art had left, I hooked my wrist watch on the straps and tore it loose. I watched in dismay as it slid off the ledge and down the cliff face. It missed Dick's head by inches. Had he been looking up at the time, he could easily have caught it. This was the first of a series of losses which made our ascent an extremely expensive undertaking.

When we joined him, Art led up another 80 feet—slightly diagonally to the right and then straight up a broken face. From this point he led a 60-foot traverse to the left, and brought Dick up. We had switched positions again, so that I was now last on the rope. I found this the best position for making notes—the leader is continually climbing or belaying, and the second man is feeding the leader's rope or belaying the third. Only the end man has the opportunity to touch pencil to paper—or just plain sit.

Art and Dick were now in a chimney which was completely chocked by a rock as big as a house. Here Art made the best technical lead of the climb so far. He worked out on the right side of the chimney onto the face. From here he went straight up over an overhang (and we were already high enough above the glacier to make this sort of thing very interesting) to a point where he could cross the top of the chockstone to the left side of the chimney and then climb straight up to a broad ledge—a total distance of 70 feet.

Following Art's lead on this pitch was a tricky proposition. The rope was now pulling over toward the left wall, and Dick had to climb the overhang on the right. When he reached Art, he was able

to swing the rope over so that I could climb out to the left of the chimney and go up the wall with perfect protection.

Art's next lead was a full 120 feet up an easy broken chimney. Then followed a long traverse to the right in the course of which we gained only 20 vertical feet. All three of us walked up a sloping ledge for the next 60 feet.

We could now see the beginning of the first large snow ledge, seemingly only 200 feet above us. I led 100 feet up a chimney which was full of loose rock. It was impossible to move here without dislodging some of it. Yelling to Art and Dick to take cover, I pulled out and threw down some of the larger and more offensive pieces of rock. One of these caromed off a ledge and headed toward Art and Dick. It missed them, but it struck the rope where it lay on the ledge, parting some of the nylon strands. This was a serious blow to us: we had only two ropes along, and now one of them was rendered unsafe. We knotted it so that I could belay Dick up.

The next lead was an easy 90-foot face climb. When Dick again joined me, I climbed another 90 feet of face and then entered a chimney. From here on the going became a little tougher. The chimney was at first too broad to use opposing side pressures. I climbed the right wall on very small dirt-filled cracks. At one point I had to retreat four times. It was one of those problems of balance and pressure which take a little study to solve. The angle of the rock was less than 70 degrees, and the left wall of the chimney gave psychological security, although I could not reach it. Dick was just about to take over when I made it. A firm splinter of rock two feet to the left gave just the amount of side pressure necessary to achieve balance on the tiny footholds. A few feet above this point Dick joined me, and I continued on up the chimney. On a single narrow ledge I found no less than five pitons hammered into a crack. These were coated with rust and were all of the homemade strap iron variety which Petzoldt sometimes uses—probably relics of the 1936 ascent. Conditions in this chimney must have been very different 13 years ago. Possibly it was running with water at that time. Since the rock was quite dry when we passed, we used no pitons at all. As I went higher, the left wall of the chimney closed in. Now it was possible to use continuous pressure with my back on the left wall and my hands and feet on the right. This chimney measured 160 feet, and it ended just at the lower portion of the large snow ledge. In a crack

deep in the corner I found a piton and karabiner in place. The karabiner was well rusted, but the hinge was still serviceable. This has been presented to the Museum at Jenny Lake.

As I scrambled out onto the broad platform of the large snow ledge, I could see two very desirable things—warm sunlight and running water—both no more than 50 feet away, but both quite out of my reach for the moment. It was now past 8:00 A.M. We had been on the wall for more than three hours. Our last drink had been just above the glacier. Since starting the climb we had been in heavy shade. My throat was so dry that it ached, and my body longed for the warmth of the sun, but I could reach neither water nor warmth until Dick and Art joined me on the ledge. This took time because both were carrying packs, and Art was still 100 feet below Dick's position. When all three of us were finally assembled, we walked rapidly up the 45-degree slope of the ledge to a spot where both sunlight and water were abundant. Here we ate a hearty lunch.

Glenn Exum had mentioned that we would find some very interesting climbing on the exposed cliffs between the two large snow ledges. This was what we had been saving Dick for. He was in the pink of condition from a summer of guiding; and, despite little rest and the extremely difficult climbs he had led on the days preceding this attempt, he still seemed not in the least tired. Dick led the way, kicking steps, up two 100-foot snow slopes. Then he climbed 40 feet up a rock wall. A 100-foot traverse to the right brought us to the base of the cliff separating the ledges. Using two pitons for protection, Dick did a very fine lead of 30 feet up a shallow chimney in the exposed face. The drop was practically vertical all the way down to the glacier, a distance of some 1400 feet.

Another 30 feet of exposed face brought Dick to a broad ledge where he was able to belay us up. From here the angle of the face eased off the vertical, and Dick led up another shallow chimney, using another piton for protection. Here he was faced with a six-foot overhanging wall. He brought Art up to his position; and, after trying to find a way to either side, he decided to go right up over the overhang. This was a little tricky because of the lack of hand-holds; but Dick was hotter than a firecracker by this time, and he easily wormed his way up. A minute later he stood safely on the upper snow ledge. The vertical distance between the two large snow ledges was exactly 120 feet.

This upper ledge had the same lateral slope as the lower—about 45 degrees. It should have been an easy walk, but it was covered with a slime compounded of lichen and water from the melting snow. This held us up for a good hour. A tongue of snow hung down to the point where the ledge joined the wall. We tried to cut steps with our piton hammers, but it was much too hard. We saw that the only way would be out to the edge of the ledge, where the rock was reasonably dry. We rigged a double belay using both ropes. Dick held one rope on about a level with Art, and I climbed as high as I could on the snow to decrease the arc of Art's swing if a fall did occur. Art made an extremely delicate traverse out over the slimy rock. Our double belay would prevent a long fall, but we could not have helped his smashing into the wall if he had slipped. Near the outer edge of the ledge he found firm footing and was easily able to scramble up to a secure anchor position. He held the rope firmly while Dick and I went up hand over hand. From here on, the ledge was a simple walk. We went up, diagonally, about 200 feet more.

It was now 4.00 P.M. If we continued on this ledge, we would soon come to the North Ridge and could be on the summit in an hour. This was the way the Petzoldt-Durrance party had finished their climb in 1936. Above us, the unclimbed upper section of the North Wall rose vertically for several hundred feet before it broke away toward the summit. Our objective was to climb this remaining section of the wall—but only if it could be done without direct aid.

There were two chimneys leading upward, but Dick chose a broken face for his next lead. He went straight up about 50 feet, and was then easily able to reach the third diagonal ledge. This parallels the second (or upper) large snow ledge, and also runs all the way out to the North Ridge. When all three of us reached this point, we walked diagonally up to the right for another 100 feet. The wall above us was now overhanging. We searched for a crack or chimney which might reduce the angle to the vertical. Dick again took the lead. He went up a shallow chimney and then swung out to the left onto the face. Some 50 feet above us he reached a narrow ledge just below an impossible overhang. Using three pitons as an anchor, he belayed Art up to him. The ledge they were now crouched on extended 15 feet to the left, but there ended abruptly at the corner of another chimney. Belayed by Art, Dick made several attempts to traverse out around this ledge. He gave a wonderful demonstration

of delicate balance climbing, but was not able to turn the corner safely. It looked as if we were stopped for sure. If we could not get into the chimney which now lay only a short distance to our left, we would be forced to go out onto the North Ridge. But Dick was not in the mood to be stopped. He called for the extra climbing rope. Then, with a fixed rope in position, and with Art working the belay on the other rope, he slid down the face and gradually worked his way to the left. He was safely belayed, and he had a fixed rope to hold on to, but both of these actually hindered his progress to the left. When the drag became too great to continue, he hammered in a piton and so eliminated the side pull. Sliding down a few feet lower than the piton, he finally was able to worm his way over into the neighboring chimney. This was not only fine climbing, but sharp headwork under difficult conditions, for which Dick should be congratulated.

Dick then climbed up his chimney until he was opposite Art and some 30 feet to his left. Art pulled one of the ropes back from Dick's position and threw it down to me. We hoisted both packs up, and Art tied them to a piton. Then he belayed me as I climbed up to his ledge. Here we had to cope with as beautiful a mess of rope spaghetti as could be imagined. The first thing Art did was to anchor me to a piton, and then we studied the situation. There were some 200 feet of nylon in a hopeless tangle—plus Art, me and two packs—on that narrow ledge. With hardly enough room to move our arms, we finally untangled the rope and were able to tie the packs on the section of rope which ran around toward Dick. With Dick pulling and Art feeding rope, both packs were safely slid out around the ledge and into Dick's chimney. Then Art followed, belayed fore and aft. Dick maintained his belay position, and Art moved up the chimney to give me protection from above. With this double belay the trip along the ledge and out around the corner was a simple maneuver.

A short scramble brought us onto the fourth and final ledge. This was at a slightly steeper angle than the second and third ledges, and it was much shorter in length, but it too ran out to the North Ridge. We walked up along it for about 100 feet.

It seemed unbelievable, but Dick was still not showing the least bit of fatigue. He had made very difficult climbs on the three previous days, and had had only two hours sleep the night before, yet

he seemed to be at the peak of strength and endurance. Dick again took the lead. He went up a shallow chimney a distance of 80 feet until he was again stopped by a huge chockstone. The exposure was terrific, and the upper section of the chimney was coated with ice. He placed two pitons as anchor points and then belayed me up to his position. I could not imagine what he had in mind for his next move. There was no possible chance of continuing upwards, and the face on both sides of the chimney was hopelessly overhung. As I drew close to Dick, I could really appreciate the type of leading he had been doing. The final eight feet below his ledge stopped me cold. It was slightly overhung, and what holds there were—hardly any at all—were ice-coated. I did have a pack on, but this burden did not affect my eyesight. I just could not figure out how he did it. It was deep twilight by now, and time had become very valuable. I called for a fixed rope and went up to Dick hand over hand. There was not room enough for us both on his ledge. While he balanced on a single foothold, I crouched into belay position on the tiny ledge. I could get my seat and both heels on the ledge. With two pitons as anchors I worked the belay across my thighs. Dick climbed straight down for 20 feet and then started a traverse to the right. He travelled laterally another 20 and then entered a neighboring chimney. Forty feet straight up this chimney, and we heard him yell in triumph. He stood at the very top of the North Wall!

We still had our problems. Dick could not give me an adequate belay from the top of his chimney. I had to climb back down with practically no protection. Then I called for a fixed rope so that I could swing across to Dick's chimney. He called a warning about a loose slab halfway across. I could dimly make it out in the gathering dusk. It was a huge splinter of rock standing on a ledge and leaning in against the face. In order to avoid it, I climbed down a few more feet and took the giant swing. This particular rope was only three-eighths of an inch in diameter. It was quite a thrill to swing out on that thin strand of nylon and look down thousands of feet to the glacier. The rope had more stretch than I figured on, so I struck the face several feet below the aiming point. This final chimney proved to be quite a climb. Again I was amazed at Dick's ability under adverse conditions. This chimney would have been a nice test of skill on a Sunday afternoon practice climb. Dick did it, with seem-

ing ease, after 18 hours on the wall. By the time I joined him on the top ledge, it was thoroughly dark.

Art was still 90 feet below us, and the rope led straight up over an overhang. We lowered the other rope to give him a fixed rope as well as a belay. Our plan was to try and pull him up as he helped himself on the fixed rope. We had taken in about 30 feet when we heard Art call to be lowered again. Because of the friction on the pull rope, we were able to give him only a very little help, and the overhang swung him out of contact with the cliff. Thus, he was trying to pull himself, plus the pack, up on the strength of his arms alone. When Art got back down to his ledge, he tied the pack to the fixed rope, and we hoisted it to the top.

We set Art's pack down carefully next to mine. A few seconds later we changed our positions, and Dick's rope fouled the pack. We saw what was happening, but could do nothing to stop it. The pack rolled off the edge and disappeared into the depths below. The next sound to break the silence was Art's questioning voice. He heard the pack whizz past him, and it certainly did not sound like a falling rock. He thought it was me! When I asked him why he thought it was me and not Dick, he replied that it made a soft thudding sound as it rolled over the edge, and Dick would have made a clank.

We mourned our loss for some moments. The pack contained both cameras—two Retinas valued at about \$80 each, belonging to Art and Dick. As these were the only cameras we had with us, all the pictures we had taken on the climb were lost. The pack also contained Dick's Bramanis, bivouac sheet, clothing and some food.

After we stopped cussing, Art started up. He climbed the chimney on the left, as we had done, and then took the swing out around the splinter and into the final chimney. When he joined us we started the walk toward the summit.

At 10.00 P.M. we signed the summit register. This was done by match light. Then we sat around for half an hour, waiting for the moon to rise. During this interval Dick proved that he was human by falling fast asleep. The moon was, of course, on the wrong side of the mountain to light our descent by the Owen Route, but from reflected light we had sufficient visibility for a safe descent. Since I was not nearly in so good condition as Art or Dick, Art went on ahead to prepare the camp on the saddle while Dick went down

slowly with me. Several times we both felt ourselves nodding as we sat down to rest. We reached the lower saddle camp at midnight. Art had everything in readiness. We crawled into the sleeping bags and were soon unconscious. The next morning we leisurely packed the saddle camping equipment and hiked down to Jenny Lake. On the trail we gave a message to some ascending hikers to tell Marsh and Denny, at Amphitheatre Lake, that we were safely off the mountain.

Two days later the indefatigable Dick, with Mike Brewer, spent 19 hours scouring the glacier area for the lost pack. They climbed all the way to the top of the shoulder of the North Ridge and then a few hundred feet down on the Valhalla Canyon side. Here they were caught in a heavy snow flurry. Since Mike was wearing shorts, this proved to be quite an experience. On the descent Dick searched the area where the shoulder joins the North Wall, while Mike paralleled him 200 feet to the north. About 200 feet under the top of the shoulder, Dick spied a blue cheese wrapper. Several feet farther down he found more evidence in the form of bits of paper, food and food-bags. This continued for several hundred feet until the couloir became too steep for safety. Dick and Mike figured that if it had gone this far it had probably gone all the way to the bergschrund of the glacier far below. They retraced their route to the glacier, climbed across the bergschrund, and then some 400 feet up the couloir formed by the Wall and the shoulder of the North Ridge. Here they found the remains of the pack—only 50 feet below the point where they had abandoned the search from above! Dick's Bramanis were in perfect condition. He put them on before taking inventory of the cameras. Both had been in the outer pocket of the pack and were pretty well banged up, but the lenses were still intact. We mailed the remains to Eastman in the hope that something of value might be salvaged, and that there might be a usable picture on the film still jammed in the cameras.