

# A New Route on the North Face of Mount Temple

HENRY L. ABRONS

EVER since the Sourdoughs lugged a fourteen-foot pole from Fairbanks to the North Peak of McKinley, climbers have adopted the custom of beginning their adventures in barrooms. Out of respect for this tradition, Denny Eberl, Dave Roberts, and I established a base camp in the Cascade Lounge in Banff early last summer and waited there for the rain to stop. Our objective was a new route on the 4600-foot-high north face of Mount Temple. Our route lay left of the one climbed in 1966 by Brian Greenwood and Charles Locke. (*A.A.J.*, 1967, 15:2, pp. 287-290.) A week of soddenness threatened to prevent our arrival on the summit. As we discussed the possibility over our beer, Denny commented, "At least no one else will get up anything either." This was a great consolation to us.

Eventually the weather cleared and we drove to Lake Louise. Fresh snow plastered the face and we heard rumors of three feet on the normal route. A postponement was definitely indicated to give the snow time to melt and consolidate. However, we well knew that a day or two of decent weather in the Canadian Rockies was only a momentary aberration, and the prospect of coming home without a single heroic victory to recall around the winter fire was too depressing to endure. Glory-fever overrode caution, and we started up.

We climbed the prominent buttress left of the "Dolphin", directly under the summit on rock which was steep but solid enough to permit continuous movement except for occasional F5 and F6 pitches. After 1800 feet the buttress splits into two arêtes enclosing a series of snow and rock bands surmounted by an enormous ice cliff representing the lip of the summit snowfield. The angle of the bands is not steep, and driven by constant awareness of the great height of the face we were able to progress

rapidly to where the bands culminate in a series of two 100-foot rock cliffs that were vertical, rotten, icy, and wet. Here the route made serious demands on technique. Denny led through, placing pitons as a symbolic gesture, and Dave and I were quite impressed as we gorilla'd up with the heavy rucksacks.

Together with the difficulty, the condition of the snow on the upper part of the face now created a mood of rising tension, for deep saturation avalanches began to come down around and occasionally over us. Several times only the steepness of the cliff protected us from the torrent thundering like wet concrete overhead. The sad truth dawned on us that we could be killed trying under such dangerous conditions to complete the intended route by continuing directly up the overhanging ice cliff. Regretfully we decided to chicken out by moving far to the left to join the east ridge, but we could not agree on the safest way to get there. As avalanches tried to wipe us out, Denny argued that we should go up and over, whereas Dave and I wanted to go down and over. Yet, in spite of the pathetic absurdity of the situation, we all grew very contentious, and Dave and Denny denounced each other's routes as foolhardy while I tried to act as arbiter although my mind was already made up. Finally, Denny had to give in democratically to the will of the majority (I wonder if we lived under another political system whether we would have *ever* gotten off the face!) and convinced that he would never survive to say "I told you so," he followed us to safety with silent fatalism.

Toward dark we reached the ridge, and soon afterward, as what seemed like the Universe's last photon sped off to leave us in total darkness, we gained the summit. Disagreements were laid aside in our joy at being alive and in the satisfaction of having made a new, though technically moderate, route on one of the Rockies' most beautiful faces. But for me, the satisfaction is diluted by disappointment that we were unable to complete the direct line we had envisioned. The route is waiting for a better ending.

#### *Summary of Statistics:*

AREA: Canadian Rockies

ASCENT: Mount Temple, incomplete north face, July 9, 1969; NCCS IV, F7

PERSONNEL: Hank Abrons, Denny Eberl, Dave Roberts