

The Ohno Wall, Mount Moby Dick

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I first heard about the immense granite west face of Mount Moby Dick while talking with Bob Kruszyna in 1970 after his return from three weeks in the Battle Range of the southern Selkirks. He described the 2700-foot wall as “an elemental surge of raw granite.” This dramatic description fired my imagination. I promised myself to climb the face.

It was a busy summer in 1971 and so I had to content myself with a few brief glimpses of the cloud-enshrouded peak from a plane. During the winter I sold Bill Putnam on the idea of an extended trip into the Battle Range. On July 31 a large party, with numerous projects, assembled at Rogers Pass. While my Boulder recruit, John Markel, was ferried with other climbers by helicopter to a campsite at the head of the south fork of Butters Creek, and while my other companion, Rob Wallace, hiked westward to join us, I worked with Bill and his cohorts on the reconstruction of the Glacier Circle hut. With the job done and on the arrival of Rob, we packed over high country south of Glacier Circle to rejoin the advance party at Butters Creek. Meanwhile, John and his companions had set up an advance camp among the séracs below the wall.

After a day of rest, bouldering in camp and rifling all the goodies out of the larder, we were ready. August 12 dawned bright and clear. We trudged up the monotonous moraine west of camp, over the Ahab-Pequod col and around Moby Dick’s northwest ridge to our advance camp. After a last sorting of equipment, we filled our haul bag with six gallons of water and at 2:30 P.M. were off for the wall.

Truly awe-inspiring here below the wall! A whistle or shout reverberates around the valley. What is the total height? John suggests 700 feet, while Rob gives a thousand. Generous fellows, but I am adamant that the wall is 3000 feet.

We attack a prominent line in the center of the face. Since debris lies scattered over the snow, we hunch apprehensively under our helmets as a few rocks rattle down. Getting started is messy—we are spaced out and my mind is churning over all the things that can go wrong. Five days from the highway—will the weather hold? Will the wall go? Oh hell, let’s get moving!

I lead up from the glacier to a wide ledge to tackle the rock. Looking

around for an anchor, I find nothing, not even a crack, so I use a sky hook. The others follow, shoving the haul bag over the ledges. John takes the first lead on very broken rock in large steps, highly polished by the glacier with few cracks. Fortunately it is not steep and he reaches a sickle-shaped ledge. I start pushing the haul sack as Rob starts leading. Maybe we should call this Hernia Wall.

Rob leads quickly and soon it's my turn. As usual I get off route and after two tricky attempts which end in downclimbing, I finally get squared away. There are undercling cracks on steep slabs, but the cracks are filled with dirt and moss. I alternate using chocks and pegs. Finally a dangling move on a spike gains me a small platform. Hammer in a bong and a few chocks and haul the bag just as it threatens to rain. It doesn't matter as we plan to sleep below tonight. Quickly we rappel, leaving our fixed lines, and dash back to camp to gorge.

I moan and hold my stomach all night and am not really hungry in the morning, so we're off to an early start. We jümar up to the previous days high and get down to business. John leads up over some small overhangs, tricky aid climbing on small copper heads as the cracks are very fine. Fortunately the belay anchors are good. Rob jümars up and leads through while I struggle with the bag below on the overhangs. To make my job easier, Rob dislodges an 80-pound clod of moss and dirt hanging in a crack, but luckily he breaks it up and throws off route all except for a shower of dirt and pebbles.

It is an age until he shouts "Tied Off." I jümar up, and almost have a heart attack. We are all anchored to one tied off leper peg! A large ledge, but not a crack. Just great! I hunt around for other cracks and place three more tied off pegs before John comes up.

My lead starts off very thin and I am constantly reminded of the "good" pegs below me. Fortunately it soon eases and ends in a scramble to the base of the next vertical rise.

We hem and haw about the route but finally conclude that it has to go straight up. John tries several starts but all is oozing with slime. It is getting late as John experiments with a combination of rups and logan hooks. After two hours of stalemate, reluctantly we place a bolt. It leaves a bad taste as we were using mostly nuts up to this point. This gets us over the crux, but the sun is setting. I have been busy cleaning off two ledges and setting up anchors. It is refreshing to sit together and eat oysters and sausage, discussing the day's progress. Since tomorrow promises to be a good day, we sack out, light-headed and euphoric.

The first thing I know day is breaking, but my ears are pierced by John's cries. "I've been hit, I'm hit."

A rock had struck John in the small of the back, but clothing prevented real damage. A nasty bruise! Not a pleasant way to start the day! Anxious to climb, we eat a hasty breakfast and John resumes the previous day's pitch. Things go smoothly until I clean Rob's lead. I lose patience

and the wall echoes with invectives and "ohno, not again" as my *étriers* catch for the nth time. It takes forever, but the pitch is clean.

Now I lead in a 2-inch crack for 50 feet, but we only have four 2-inch angles. Backcleaning. I try freeclimbing, get about six feet and ooze back down the crack. Finally I do some stacking but am getting nowhere fast; above me looms a blank overhang. The only option left is a pendulum but not on stacked pins. I try some logan hooks but finally place a bolt and swing. On the difficult pendulum I swing out of an inside corner onto a slight rib. I hang on tooth and nail until I get a knife blade in, conscious of the consequences of an uncontrolled swing against the other wall. The lead continues on tied-off knife blades in a dirty crack. Several pull out or shift as I move onto the next. Never was a ledge more welcome. We were now in a chaotic jumble of blocks, cracks and gullies. Nowhere are there good cracks. We find some spacious ledges for a bivouac where we can really savor our airy nest.

The third day dawns clear, but we are getting tired of oysters, sausage and cheese for every meal. Progress is more rapid; soon we are at the base of the final wall. The initial lead takes the wind out of our sails for I have to garden away, looking for rock and route. It's fine for the two below, sunbathing while I am covered with dirt. The next two leads go more quickly, Rob doing a great job of free climbing a 6-inch sickle crack.

Darkness is fast descending when I finally arrive at the third bivouac ledge. I wish that we could capture these fleeting moments in the resplendent sunset; an inner calm, yet one of ecstasy. Mixed feelings about a climb dreamed of for two years that would be over tomorrow. The others are silent, awed with the splendor and beauty before us. Nowhere can we see the hand of man, here nature rules supreme. Heady stuff this, tripping among the clouds.

Daybreak reveals a drizzle that soon turns into a downpour. John leads off up an inside corner, a natural funnel for water. All of a sudden hell breaks loose; my arms fly out like ramrods and John yells that he has been hit and is coming down. A bolt of lightning has struck in the vicinity. We had received a ground shock collected by the pegs and wet rope. Without further ado a bolt is placed in the now slippery rock. There are no further strikes, but my heart is still doing double time.

Jümaring in the rain on a wet rope in a water fall! It takes forever to sort out the ropes and change leads. The clouds swirl around and the route is in question. Progress agonizingly slow on the slippery rock. During Rob's lead the clouds break and the rain stops. Now we are on a spectacular knife rib. The sun teases us as it plays on the surrounding peaks. Our feet are soaking wet and cold but now it does not really matter. The slope rapidly eases. Soon we are on the summit.

Gear is packed and we start the descent, not knowing where we are going. Several rappels down ice faces and over bergschrunds into the

setting sun. It soon gets dark but we are still too cold to think about another bivouac. Over the moraine in the dark to stumble into camp just after midnight.

Summary of Statistics:

AREA: Battle Range, Southern Selkirks, British Columbia, Canada.

ASCENT: First Ascent of the Ohno Wall, the West Face of Number-Five Summit (the highest) of Mount Moby Dick, 10,250 feet, August 12 to 16, 1972 (David Jones, John Markel, L. Robbins Wallace).

TECHNICAL DATA: NCCS VI, F8, A4. 27 pitches, 12 pitches of aid, 2700 feet of vertical rise, 4½ days. About 70% nuts; pitons up to 6-inch bongs; 5 bolts.

