

In Memoriam

TERRANCE MANBECK “MUGS” STUMP

1949-1992

Snow swirls softly in the gray sky and settles deeply over the fractured ice, muting its soft edges. Higher, the bitter wind hurls itself against the ridges and buttresses of Denali, the Great One, the soul of the Alaska Range. Here it is calm, even peaceful. For the party of three climbers, the tension of the struggle with the storm above has given way to the lesser anxiety of being out of the maelstrom but still miles from home. Suddenly the edge of the crevasse collapses—that happens often in places like this—and a climber is sucked into the abyss. The rope comes tight on his companions, drags them toward the void, then stops, disappearing into a jumbled mass of ice. All is still.

Mugs is gone—even months afterward it’s difficult to say the words, let alone grasp their meaning. When I heard of his death on the South Buttress of Denali, it was as if a piece of the earth or the sky had suddenly disappeared. He was one of the constants of my universe, sharing tales of his most recent grand adventure in Zion, Yosemite, Alaska or the Antarctic, or trying to tempt me into joining him on one of his upcoming projects.

A true “climber’s climber,” Mugs was always psyched—long free routes, big walls, frozen waterfalls, alpine faces, sport routes, as long as it was climbing. His dedication was complete, and he never strayed far from his own demanding set of standards; above all, he wanted to be out on the edge, pushing the envelope of what was possible in the mountains. He was a survivor, but more than that he had an intuitive sense of how closely to tread the fine line between the reasonable and the risky, something he did far longer and more skillfully than most climbers of his caliber. He also had an intuitive sense of his partners’ limits—and he respected them. Mugs helped me to push myself. Yet, when I wasn’t up to the task, he would harness his own incredible strength and drive, take over, and get us up that pitch or to the next bivouac.

Born and raised in Mifflintown, Pennsylvania, where his parents still live, Terrance Manbeck (“Mugs”) Stump started fishing, hunting and camping with his three brothers at an early age. Although he never took well to authority, he excelled in sports, finishing high school as an all-state quarterback. He attended Pennsylvania State University on a football scholarship, where his teammates came up with the moniker he’s been known by since. He played in two Orange Bowls before graduating in 1971 with a degree in Recreation and Health. After college he played a year of semi-professional football but, disillusioned with that, moved to Snowbird, Utah, in the winter of 1972-3 in hopes of pursuing a career in freestyle skiing.

After two year’s of competing in local freestyle events and skiing virtually anything that held snow, Mugs found himself increasingly drawn to the back-

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country. He spent his summers roaming the Wasatch wilderness surrounding Snowbird and by the winter of 1974-5 had given up lift skiing in favor of touring. As he ventured into steeper and wilder terrain, he sought out local climbers and avalanche experts for advice, and in the summer of 1975 made his first roped climbs.

Mugs developed his climbing skills rapidly, and in the spring of 1977 he made the first ascent of Merlin (V, 5.10, A3) in the Black Canyon of the Gunnison, Colorado, with Bob Sullivan. That summer, he spent two months in Chamonix climbing classic ice-and-snow routes. The trip culminated in an epic attempt on the Dru Couloir (then regarded as one of the most difficult ice climbs in the Alps) with Randy Trover, Steve Shea and Jack Roberts. Starting out with no bivy gear, and food and water for a single day, the four got off route, were trapped by a storm for two days and barely made it down alive when their ropes repeatedly froze to the rappel anchors during their descent.

Mugs had plenty of drive and quickly came to know how far he could push himself. The climbs only got harder. In the spring of 1978, Mugs attempted the Hummingbird Ridge on Mount Logan, Canada's highest peak, with Trover, Jim Logan and Barry Sparks. After ten days of climbing, they reached the point where the original party had gained the ridge, but with several thousand feet and many corniced miles still to go, Mugs and his party retreated. Later that summer, Mugs and Logan made the first ascent of the often-tried Emperor Face on Mount Robson in the Canadian Rockies, a landmark mixed climb that has yet to be repeated. In 1979, Mugs and Sullivan climbed the Shield on El Capitan in Yosemite Valley, California. A year later, they made the fifth ascent of the Pacific Ocean Wall, then one of the hardest aid routes in the world. Mugs would climb numerous other big walls in Yosemite and elsewhere. He made the first ascent of the Streaked Wall in Zion National Park, Utah, with Conrad Anker in 1990 and the first winter ascent of the Hallucinogen Wall in the Black Canyon of the Gunnison with John Middendorf in 1992.

In the winter of 1980-1, Mugs made the first of four trips to Antarctica. He developed a special affinity for the pristine and barren continent and did much exploratory mountaineering there while working as a safety consultant for the National Science Foundation. In the Ellsworth Mountains in 1989, he made two of the best climbs ever, the 7000-foot southwest face of Mount Gardner and the 8000-foot west face of Mount Tyree—each done solo, without bivy gear and in a single day.

The Himalaya beckoned. Mugs and I attempted the west face of Gasherbrum IV in Pakistan in 1983. He and Laura O'Brien tried Thalay Sagar in India in 1984 and he returned to India twice to attempt the east face of Meru with various partners. But Mugs didn't like the organizational hassles and expense, or the sheer inefficiency of climbing in Asia. Instead, he turned increasingly toward the Alaska Range, which in many ways became Mugs' spiritual home. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, he earned his living between climbs by salmon fishing off the coast of Alaska; later he guided extensively on Denali and elsewhere in the Alaska Range. He returned again and again to peaks sur-

rounding the Ruth Gorge, attempting Mount Johnson and the Broken Tooth several times and climbing numerous routes on the less well-known peaks in the area.

His greatest climbs in the Alaska Range, however, were on three of the region's most celebrated mountains. In March, 1981, Mugs and Jim Bridwell made the first ascent of the east face of the Moose's Tooth, an exceptionally bold route climbed in frigid conditions with minimum food and equipment. The pair carried no bolts on the climb and the experience tested their well-developed skills to the maximum. A few months later, Mugs climbed the Moonflower Buttress on Mount Hunter with Paul Aubrey, a route that represented a quantum leap in technical difficulty for climbs in the Alaska Range. And in 1991, he made the visionary solo ascent of Denali's Cassin Ridge. Starting at the 14,200-foot camp on the West Buttress with his climbing gear, a liter of water and a pocketfull of energy bars, he descended the West Rib to the base of the Cassin, climbed the route in a storm, reached the summit as the sun set and returned to his West Buttress camp, all in 27½ hours.

Mugs and I shared some incredibly good and some equally bad times in the mountains of Pakistan and India. In 1983, we spent seven long, difficult days on the west face of Gasherbrum IV, including four storm-wracked nights at 22,500 feet, before retreating. When we reached the relative safety of the West Gasherbrum Glacier, Mugs strode out ahead, anxious to rid himself of the intensity of the face, to go the last few miles at his own pace. I trudged on well behind him, lost in my disappointment at not being able to fulfill a longtime dream. A couple of hours later, I crested a little bump in the glacier. There was Mugs, waiting so that we could walk into Base Camp together.

At his very best, Mugs was generous, enthusiastic and supportive. But he could be selfish, insensitive and moody. All of us who had the privilege to climb with him experienced both of these personae—in Mugs and, too often, in ourselves. The good spirit in Mugs, that warm part of his being that inspired me so much, was by far ascendant. In the past few years, it seemed to me that Mugs had really come into his own. He had great adventures in the mountains, but he was more at peace with the world and at home with himself. He had dreams sufficient for several lifetimes, and it's our loss, too, that those dreams won't be fulfilled. I'll remember Mugs for his boundless enthusiasm, for offering me a quick smile and a brief word of encouragement before a hard pitch, for laughing at himself while recounting some grim epic—for just being Mugs.

(This is reprinted with Michael Kennedy's permission from Climbing of August/September, 1992. Mugs Stump's climbing record was sadly unreported. He would often cheerily promise the Editor reports on his exploits and then be too busy to comply. For that reason, his friends will be happy to read a carefully researched compilation of his climbing career in Climbing of February/March, 1993.—Editor.)

MICHAEL KENNEDY