

East Kahiltna Peak's Southeast Face

TERRY KENNEDY, *Dirty Socks Club*

ON MAY 19, PAT CALLIS AND I established Base Camp at 9400 feet on the east fork of the Kahiltna Glacier below the southeast face of East Kahiltna Peak (4096 meters, 13,440 feet). The mountain is a satellite of Denali and is contiguous with the Cassin Ridge. Only three previously documented ascents have been found in the *American Alpine Journal*, including the first ascent via the south ridge (AAJ, 1961, page 353), a traverse of the west peak over the east peak to Kahiltna Notch at the base of the Cassin Ridge (AAJ, 1981, pages 155-6) and apparently a summit climb in 1988 (AAJ, 1989, page 134). The idea to climb the southeast face was conceived in 1984 when I passed below it during the ascent of the south buttress of Denali.

The stable and unseasonably warm weather had continued during four days of carries to our base. Our original plan called for a rest day, but finding the face in such fine condition, we couldn't justify wasting perfect weather. We raced the sun to the couloir on a few hours' sleep.

By the time we had third-classed the névé of the apron and began simul-climbing 55° ice, the sun was bathing the face. The couloir became a rushing white-water stream of cascading ice fragments from a honeycombed surface. From our camp, this texture reflected white, suggesting secure névé and easy climbing but it was in fact a thin veneer over hard, gray Alaskan ice. I swung into the lead, overheated by the direct sun, and headed out of the couloir to the shelter of a rock band, where we perched uncomfortably for five hours.

The stream slowed to a trickle when the couloir was restored to shade, but rockfall from the sunny buttress prompted us to move on into "The Hose," which angled out of the main gully and away from the lines of trajectory on the rest of the face. Ten pitches of belayed ice climbing took us through this interesting section. Curiously, with every pitch increasing amounts of running water began to appear on the ice. The last pitches led over a 70° and then a rotten 80° bulge. Water ran down my ice tools and saturated my gloves and bib knickers, but I was on a roll and didn't take the time to get into Goretex pants. The Hose led to the base of the upper ice face and an unexpected 20-foot-square level spot, hidden by a granite pillar.

Since mild low temperatures had ranged from 11° to 26°F, we were climbing without sleeping bags to save weight. We also opted not to spend the

PLATE 27

Photo by Terry Kennedy

**On the Southeast Face of EAST
KAHILTNA PEAK.**

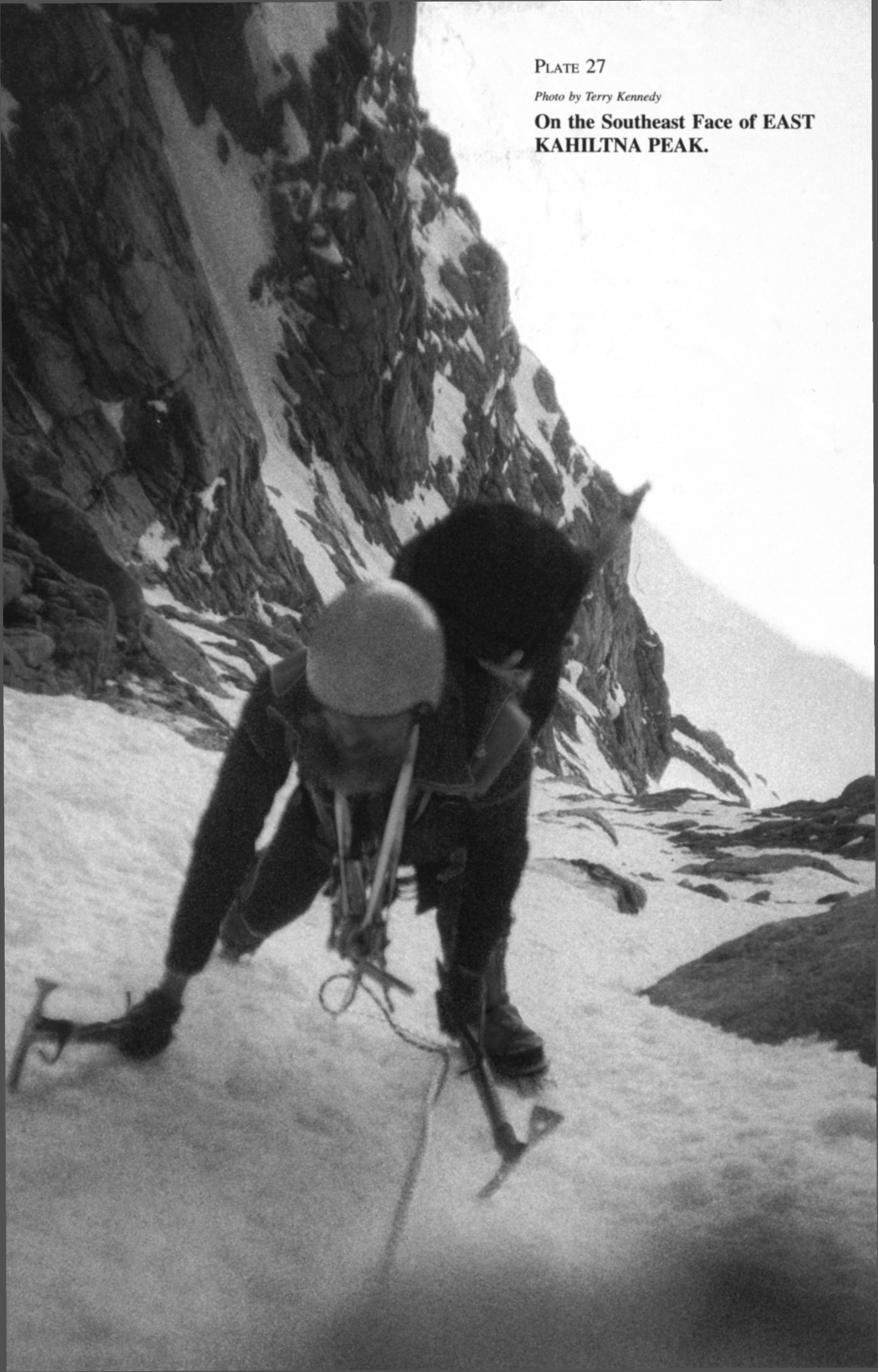




PLATE 28

Photo by Terry Kennedy

**The Southeast Face of EAST
KAHILTNA PEAK.**

energy digging a cave and thus bivouacked in the open. My knickers had become a useless frozen brick. I bivied in two pairs of long underwear and Goretex pants. I had to admit that Pat's idea of packing a down parka was better judgment than my deciding to tough it out with only pile. I spent much of the night digging a senseless trench to keep warm.

A light snow began to fall at four A.M., prompting us to mobilize. After four or five pitches, the honeycomb ice became thick enough to allow rest steps and we untied and each dragged a rope for 1000 feet. As the sun intermittently broke from the clouds, we became incredibly overheated. Yet, taking off our packs was too risky on the steep terrain without anchors.

As we worked our way into the upper flutes, we were back to bare ice and belays. Fatigue began to chew on us. I slapped myself in the face to keep from dozing. The summit ridge was not the romp we had anticipated and visibility threatened to abandon us. We continued front-pointing around a couple of gargoyles and stepped over hidden crevasses as the wind picked up. We passed over the summit without words or a hand shake and made a bee-line for the sharp crest of the south ridge. The only thing that mattered was our dehydration . . . and the fact that I was nearly asleep on my feet. We needed to get the stove lit, but it was too windy and there was no place to dig a shelter. We focused on the 11,800-foot notch where I had bivouacked at a high point on an unsuccessful attempt a year before (*AAJ*, 1993, page 136). I was sure we could dig another snow cave there, which we did after some interesting down-climbing.

We ran out of snow drift before it was bigger than one in which the two of us could sit side-by-side with feet just inside the entrance. Pat graciously took over stove duties to melt water while I whined about our measly little cave and spending another night in just underwear with deteriorating weather. I was on the verge of panic when Pat handed me a cup of hot water. Before I had gulped my half, the warm glow made me fall instantly asleep with the cup between my knees. For a few moments I dreamed prolifically, then woke up as Pat nudged the listing cup from my hands. I found myself transformed back to rational thought and comfortable with Pat's optimism that the weather would improve the next day and that we'd make it down the rest of the way.

And that's what we did, electing to bivouac once more to let the snow freeze hard before crossing unscouted crevasses at the base of the south ridge.

We named our route *Betazoid*, a plum that should have been plucked years ago. It offers 4000 feet of technical terrain but is never extreme. There is no immediate danger from sérac fall and a short approach.

Summary of Statistics:

AREA: Alaska Range.

NEW ROUTE: East Kahiltna Peak, 4096 meters, 13,440 feet, via Southeast Face; Summit reached on May 21, 1993 (Patrik Callis, Terry Kennedy).