

Otterbody to become too soft and dangerous.

Our timing was perfect. The slightly scratchy crust on the east face turned to perfect corn in the 50-degree crux of the couloir leading to the Otterbody. The Otterbody itself was just emerging from the shadow of the east ridge, and the 50-degree double fall line skiing on frozen, slightly runneled snow over a big cliff (the east face) isn't something I feel compelled to repeat any time soon. In fact, the snow became so firm once we reached the sun/shade boundary that we decided to pull up in the hopes the hot sun would quickly soften the snow in the tail of the Otterbody. The tail leads to a 140-foot cliff and the Teepee Glacier snowfield, and at over 50 degrees was the second crux of our descent.

Unfortunately the snow and ice in the rocks above us softened much faster than the ice-glazed snow in the couloir below. As larger and larger chunks began to loosen their grip on the rock above and rain down on us, we were forced to flee the scene and ski the frozen, crusty snow as best we could. We made it about 50 feet into the tail of the Otterbody before a shallow, ice-glazed runnel made the skiing a little too nervy for me, even side-slipping. A fall at that point would have been fatal. That, plus a handy anchor left by Andy and Doug on their previous retreat, made it a good stopping point.

Using the anchor, Doug rappelled on skis to see if the skiing became any more possible. It didn't. To expedite our retreat in the face of an increasing barrage of snow and ice from above, I coiled the rope and we downclimbed the remaining 200 feet of the Otterbody's tail to a final rappel over a cliff to the Teepee Glacier. From there we skied to the morainal camping zone, climbed back to the Lower Saddle to retrieve our camp, and skied as far as we could back to the valley.

As with many accomplishments in mountaineering, improvements in style await future descents of both the Otterbody and the Hossack-MacGowen. A combination of perfect conditions and the formidable athleticism displayed by today's free riders may yet result in a descent of the Grand on skis or snowboard without rappelling or downclimbing.

MARK NEWCOMB, *unaffiliated*

*The Cathedral Group, Various Ascents.* The north face of the Middle Teton was the scene of some new route activity in early August. *Buffalo Gals* (III 5.10), an excellent four-pitch crack climb on good rock, was climbed by Ron Johnson and Renny Jackson. Just left of this route the *Dew Drop Inn* (III 5.10) was discovered by Eric Gabriel and Andy Byerly. Both climbs are located just east of the regular North Ridge route. On Mt. Owen, Alex Lowe soloed *Jennifer's Way* (IV 5.10a), a three-pitch variation at the start of the *Serendipity Arête* on Mt. Owen. After reaching the summit of Owen he then continued up the North Ridge/Direct North Face finish on the Grand Teton to get home.

RENNY JACKSON

## BIG HORN MOUNTAINS

*The Merlin, Superfortress.* In August, Mike Lilygren, Steve Bechtel, and Bobby Model returned to the Big Horn Mountains to finish a free climbing project on the Merlin, a castle-like tower located to the southeast of Cloud Peak. In 1994, they had prepped the route and climbed to within 100 feet of the Merlin's summit. Fierce afternoon thundershowers kept the top 100 feet soaked, thereby making it impossible to free climb. However, in 1996, beautiful weather and dry conditions allowed the team to climb the Merlin from bottom to top in a single day.

The Merlin arches up from a talus slope 100 yards east of an alpine saddle connecting the leg-

endary Bomber Mountain and Cloud Peak. Bomber Mountain was the final resting place for a World War II bomber that crashed into a mountain now appropriately named Bomber Mountain. In fact, shattered wing parts still litter the notch where the group camped. Because of this, the route is named after the bomber's common name: *Superfortress*.

The route begins near the middle of the face and follows faint dihedral systems to the 1,600-foot summit. A mathematician would describe the steepness of the Merlin as increasing at an increasing rate. The route starts as easy fifth class and gradually becomes more difficult. The top six pitches are 5.11 with four of the pitches at 5.11+, making the route one of the more continuous long routes in Wyoming. Each pitch has a combination of fixed and natural gear and ends with a bolted belay station. In total there are 11 pitches ranging from 5.4 to 5.11+. Climbing the *Superfortress* first try required the climbers to remember key holds from two years before. The climbing was challenging and varied, ranging from hand jams to puzzles of razor-sharp crimps. However, the top portion, which had not been climbed in 1994, was of the greatest surprise. The holds were a vast array of water-sculptured chicken heads and huecos spaced just far enough apart to make the climbing interesting.

BOBBY MODEL, *unaffiliated*

## NEW YORK

*Adirondack Mountains, Various Ice Ascents.* Two hard mixed climbs were established at Poke-O-Moonshine in the Adirondack Mountains. Jeff Lowe put up *Gorillas in the Mist* (M6+). On Jeff's suggestion, Alex Lowe visited the area with Randy Rackliff. The pair established *Bloody Mary* (M7) as a winter climb. The route, which goes at 5.10 in the summer, was coated with quarter- to half-inch ice.

## NORTH CAROLINA

*Whitesides, Three Routes in a Day.* On the 800-foot cliffband Whitesides, Jim Corbett and David Young climbed three routes on the formation in a single day. The pair climbed *Traditions* (5.11c/d), *Perversions* (5.11R), and the *Original Route* (5.11a) for a total of 2,400 feet of climbing in a day.

## ALASKA

### BROOKS RANGE

*Philip Smith Mountains.* A striking 6,400-plus foot massif rises prominently three miles to the north of Porcupine Lake out of the upland tundra fields. George Budenbender, Katy Elwyn and I were able to attain the summit from the south face by traversing westerly two miles along the harrowing summit ridge.

This summer was to gain worldwide notoriety for the unprecedented number and severity of bear attacks in the western arctic. A severe berry crop failure was a contributing circumstance. In 30 years of exploring the region it was the first time I found myself without alternative but to take down a stalking bear.

DENNIS SCHMITT