

terrain. We climbed the last bit of ridge down to a col at 8,800 feet in the dark. The next day we headed down into the fog. It took us eight days road-to-road to climb the peak.

JEFF APPLE BENOWITZ, *unaffiliated*

CHUGACH MOUNTAINS

Hunter Creek, Various Ascents. The winter of 1995-1996, with its initial snow drought and extremely cold temperatures, stimulated a modern Alaskan gold rush of new ice climbs in south-central Alaska. Areas that would have been high in avalanche danger, or inaccessible due to deep snow, were explored by Anchorage area climbers, most notably Harry Hunt and his recon of Hunter Creek. Briefly mentioned last year by Wayne Mushrush (see *Climbing* 149), this canyon has drawn considerable interest by the area's top climbers. Located in the Matanuska Valley, Harry, with Steve Davis, Dave Lucy, and Ernie Borjon, has mined several "solid gold" routes, with a lot more climbing yet to be done.

The Hunter Creek canyon had seen only limited climbing until this winter, with all known ascents concentrated along the main stem of the creek. By February, more than 25 new routes had been climbed in the drainage, with lots of routes to be climbed at all grades. Along the main stem, Steve Davis and Chris Morris climbed *Overlook* (WI3), a short but steep curtain. Closer to the junction of left and right fork canyons, Harry Hunt, Dave Lucy, and Ernie Borjon climbed *Hollowhead*, a 525-foot WI5+ ice flow that ascends a series of steps and curtains. Across from *Lost in Space* (WI3) and *Lost Chord* (WI4), Ernie Borjon and Gary Bocarde climbed *Lost Ice* (WI4), a 200-foot gully with an overhanging curtain on the top.

Upstream, where the creek forks, are two narrow canyons providing numerous high quality lines. The first significant route climbed in the left fork canyon was *Harry's Big Adventure*, a 475-foot WI3+, by Hunt and Lucy. This route is the first major climb you see in the left fork canyon and ascends three large steps to the canyon rim. This same pair then climbed a "testy" 220-foot WI4 located in the second amphitheater. On Christmas Eve, Steve Davis and Harry Hunt celebrated the holiday by climbing the striking *O' Christmas Tree*, a 325-foot WI5. Located in the first amphitheater, the route ascends a series of curtains and ends in a steep, rotten pillar. This route was followed by other ascents in the first amphitheater, including *Starbright* (325 feet, WI4), and *Ornament* (WI 3), by Hunt and Kristian Sieling. Steve Davis soloed *Squeem* (WI 4) and led the beautiful *High Noon* (125 feet, WI3), with Harry Hunt. Later in the spring, Dave Lucy and Ernie Borjon returned to the second amphitheater and climbed *Twisted Cross*, the canyon's first WI6, by climbing a series of vertical candlestick curtains over two rock overhangs.

The right fork of the canyon has been more difficult to explore. Here Hunt, Lucy, and Borjon climbed a beautiful 600-foot gully (WI2), and Hunt and Davis climbed *The Narrows*, a 200-foot WI3-4 located just before a large and very deep pool. To pass this pool required chest waders or a raft. Upstream, there can be found numerous ice route possibilities, the most awing being *Queen of Spades* (WI6-), which repelled several attempts before being climbed by Hunt and Lucy. This climb consists of 60 feet of thin ice on rock topped by a free-hanging 140-foot candlestick curtain. The committing nature of the curtain and questionable protection has caused numerous sleepless nights for area climbers.

STEVE DAVIS

Portage Glacier Valley, and Along the Seward Highway, Various Ascents. South of Anchorage, in the Portage area, Dave Miller and partners made a number of first ascents during the 1995-'96