

season. At the entrance of Bear Valley, Miller and Chris Brown and Cathy Charlton climbed *The River Styx*, an enjoyable WI3. The crux is climbing a steep pillar at the bottom of the obvious gully in the mountainside, followed by low angle ice with occasional short bulges. Across Portage Lake, about two miles from the Bogg's Visitor Center, is a collection of high quality routes on both sides of the lake. The climbs on the south side of the lake offer long medium angle flows of thick green ice and lots of good veggies to belay and rappel from. Four routes were completed here; all were WI3. Looking right to left, they are *The Triton*, a 1,200-foot route climbed by Miller and Brown; *Calypso*, 750 feet; *Circe*, 700 feet; and *Lotus Eater*, 700 feet. All of these latter routes were soloed by Miller.

In contrast to the sophomore nature of the south side, the north shore, like its Hawaiian counterpart, offers the more challenging undertakings of the area. Long, high angle verglas smears of quarter-inch ice required the use of 100-meter ropes, Spectres, short front points, and long necks to be successful. Most notably, *The Spectre* (WI5, 800 feet), and *Farm Payment* (WI5, 550 feet), climbed by Miller and Brown, required simul-climbing due to the inability to put in any pro until well off the ground.

Along the Seward Highway, the Candyland area, with its easy road access, has proven popular. The climbs here form as wide sheets of ice over a two-tiered rock buttress. This icefall provides a number of routes ranging from WI2-4. Steve Davis and Dave Miller climbed *Candycane* (WI4) in a single 250-foot pitch. Above the highway, lack of early snow allowed climbers to explore a number of gullies that otherwise would be prone to avalanche. Never very hard, these long WI2 routes make for an enjoyable afternoon.

By February, more typical winter conditions returned to south-central Alaska. Anchorage received more than three feet of snow. Climbers enjoyed a break from the climbing to take advantage of some excellent powder skiing. However, it wasn't long before people were back out prospecting for more ice climbing gold. Whoever says that local mountains are "mined out" just doesn't realize the surprises lying in store for those who make the effort to look.

STEVE DAVIS

*Cat's Ears Spire, Second Ascent, And Devil's Thumb, Attempt.* From May 12 to June 5, Jeff Selvig, Simon Elias and I lived on the standard southeast Base Camp of Devil's Thumb and made the second ascent of Cat's Ears Spire and attempted the south pillar of Devil's Thumb.

Following an arduous five-day ski trek up the Baird Glacier, we arrived at Base Camp with two days of hunger to find that all of our food was hopelessly lost. It had sunk upon impact into wet spring slush following the air drop and then was snowed upon further as we hiked in. By mere luck we located the haulbag with the majority of the technical climbing gear. Several hours after radioing a shopping list to Petersburg, we found ourselves a thousand dollars in the hole, but well fed and back in the saddle again.

After a week of attuning ourselves to the local weather pattern (or lack thereof), Simon and I descended into the Witches Cauldron, a black, ominous glacial carcass from which eerie rumblings issue forth and thick mists boil over. Clouds engulfed us, and snow began to fall at an alarming rate. We feared we were off route as we traversed through an endless whiteness; all around us avalanches roared and echoed as we peered through the fog and strained to listen for incoming slides. But we did find the left couloir of Cat's Ears, and after 150 meters of snow and ice (70°), the couloir constricted into an ice-curtained corner and chimney system, overhanging at times, with poor protection and awkward mixed climbing. Two long pitches brought us to the col, where an excellent bivy site exists.

The next day brought much better weather. Above the col we climbed the vertical and exposed west face to gain a series of shallow chimneys, bringing us to the Cat's Brow, the notch between the Ears. These pitches afford a foreboding view of the lower extents of the deadly and unfinished 6,000-foot northwest face of Devil's Thumb. One additional pitch of 5.9 led to the pointy and unanchorable east summit of Cat's Ears. We did not climb the higher west summit (damaged rope, dropped boot), and to my knowledge, this summit remains unclimbed. No bivy exists at the Cat's Brow, but we spent an restless night pretending that one did. The best descent is accomplished off the southeast side of Cat's Brow.

Avoiding a massive storm by only two hours after our return to Base Camp, we spent the next four days tent-bound. We were thankful for the chopped rope and dropped boot, realizing that we would have been riding out this whopper on the west face of Devil's Thumb had we pressed on for the next route.

After the storm Jeff, Simon, and I attempted the south pillar of Devil's Thumb. The best approach for this route avoids the Witches Cauldron by ascending the bivy saddle on the standard Southeast Face route of Devil's Thumb, and then descending the other side for 150 meters whilst traversing toward the pillar. The route ascends the prominent right-facing dihedral for nearly its entire length. A good bivy ledge is found about three pitches above the entrance to the dihedral. We had climbed about 1,400 feet of rock when we decided to turn back. Only about 300 to 400 feet of rock were left to the summit, but they appeared to involve a good bit of aiding. Bad weather was approaching, and rockfall had claimed one sleeping bag on the bivy ledge below. We didn't want to press our luck again. This route is an appallingly bad descent choice. The best descent probably lies on the southeast face.

In total we spent 24 days in the area; climbed on two mountains; lost \$300 worth of food, a boot and three ski poles; ruined one rope; and broke two bindings, three sleds, and my camera. Ah, Alaska!

CHAD McMULLEN\*

\*Recipient of an AAC Mountaineering Fellowship Fund grant.

#### WRANGELL-SAINT ELIAS MOUNTAINS

*Wrangell/Saint Elias National Park.* The 1996 spring and summer season in the Wrangell/Saint Elias National Park proved to be one of the most productive mountaineering periods ever for Ultima Thule clients, personnel and friends. In early April, Ruedi Homberger, Reto Ruesh, Tom Evans and Paul Claus tore up the slopes with multiple Piper Super Cub-assisted first ski descents. Later, I joined the group to help with Cub skiing customers and though the weather dictated several days of tree skiing, we snagged several awesome 6,000-foot first descents in the Goat and Granite Creek drainages.

During the third week of April, Paul, Ruedi and Reto continued to ski and climb spring waterfall ice. Their best achievement came on April 17 with a Super Alpine (Piper Super Cub, that is) ascent of an unclimbed and unnamed 11,500-foot peak at the head of Canyon Creek, which Paul dubbed "Ultima Thule Peak." Leaving the lodge at 4 a.m. the boys flew to the peak, climbed 5,000 feet of steep snow and ice to a tiny summit, then returned to the lodge by 2 p.m.

Other notable ascents include the first ascent of a 13,000-foot border peak just south of Mount Bear by Ruedi Homberger, Christine Kopp, Peter Stadler, Stefen Wyss and Paul Claus on May 11; a one-day ascent of the northwest ridge of Mount Blackburn, by Peter Stadler and Christine