

the glaciers in this area, but the broken glaciers, long approaches, and several more days of poor weather discouraged us from attempting any others. I did manage, however, to race to the top of a nunatak (elev. 2,200'+) two miles from the snout of Alsek Glacier at the lake.

We floated to Dry Bay, the exit of the river, and were flown out on August 24 by Gulf Air.

JIM EARL, *unaffiliated*

Mt. Newton, Ski Descent, and Mt. St. Elias, Attempt. The Abruzzi Ridge of 18,008-foot Mt. St. Elias, the second-highest peak in the United States, was first ascended in 1897, but by 1997 it has become nearly impossible to approach safely. The Newton Glacier route to Russel Col has been the sight of fatal accidents; it is heavily crevassed and constantly swept by ice-fall avalanches off the 9,000-foot northeast face. Instead, Jim Hopkins, Julie Faure and I attempted to reach the elusive, but perhaps skiable, Abruzzi via 13,811-foot Mt. Newton to the north.

We were landed by expert Yakutat pilot Kurt Gloyer at 6,800 feet on a spur of the mighty Seward Glacier in Canada's Yukon Territory on May 12. Four days of storms, sled hauling, and route finding got us established at 10,000 feet below the spectacular north arête of Newton. Negotiating a bergschrund there, we slogged up the knife edge, building a 'schrund camp at 12,000 feet and another on the summit. We skied between camps to ferry 15 days of food and fuel to the apex of Mt. Newton. The snow was wind-affected, but avalanche stable, and we managed linked turns on all portions of the 25 to 50° ridge using telemark and randonnée gear.

Next we attempted the increasingly exposed, undulating coxcomb toward Russel Col (12,000'). Two south-facing steps offered enjoyable ice climbing with decent screw protection. The first crux was a 600-foot rotten ice cliff (70° at the top and 45° at the base). We fixed the upper half. We were turned back, however, as several other parties have been, by the double-corniced, wickedly exposed final 1,500 horizontal feet to the col. The snow was like sugar cubes, providing no solid pro whatsoever, and our boot steps washed out on the near-vertical flutations.

Given the excellent weather pattern and preparedness of our team (we had ten days of food and fuel remaining), backing off was a painful decision. The Japanese team that succeeded on this traverse in July, 1964, found blue ice that accepted "ice pitons." However, by July the upper Abruzzi would likely become uncarveable ice. Hence, we must someday return to ski the world's highest maritime peak, the loftiest unskied summit in the Americas, from another side.

TYSON BRADLEY

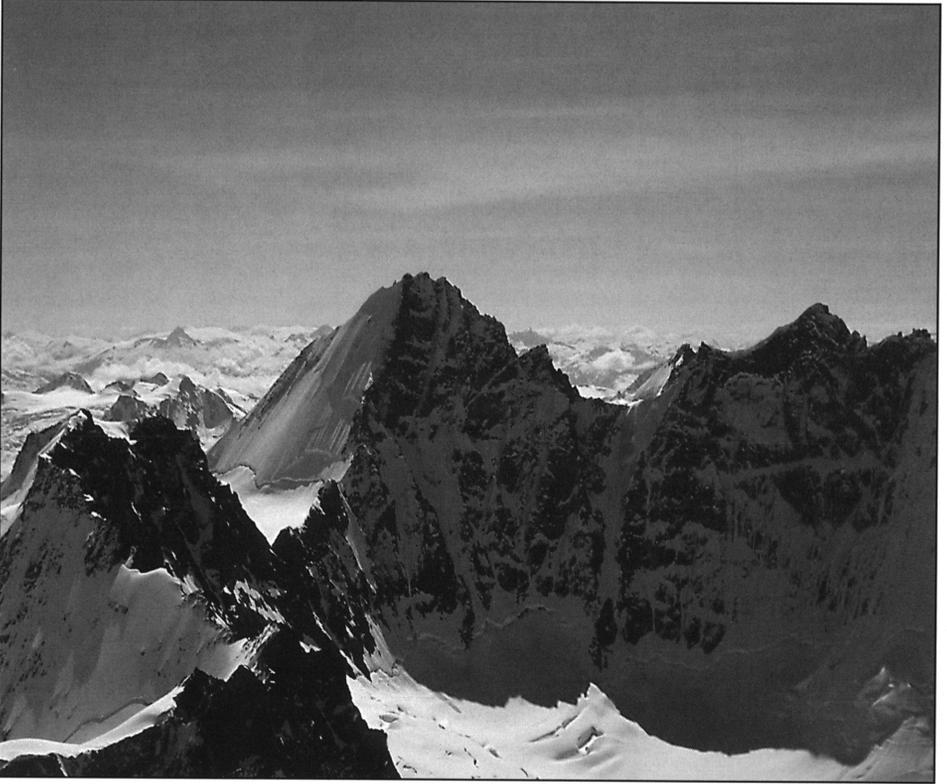
STIKINE ICE CAP

Noel Peak, West Face and Mt. Ratz, West Face. Fred Beckey, Dave Creeden, and I arrived in Petersburg May 24 at the tail end of a rare month-long streak of excellent weather, hoping to access a group of three 10,000-foot peaks approximately 50 miles northeast of Petersburg just east of the Alaska border. Fred was the only person in our party to have climbed in the Stikine, having completed the first ascent of the striking Devil's Thumb in 1947 as well as the first ascent of Mt. Ratz (one of our objectives) in the early 1970s. Climbing accounts and/or photographs of the area proved to be practically non-existent, so our intended route(s) were limited to analyzing the topographic maps and depended a lot on what we saw on the helicopter flight in.

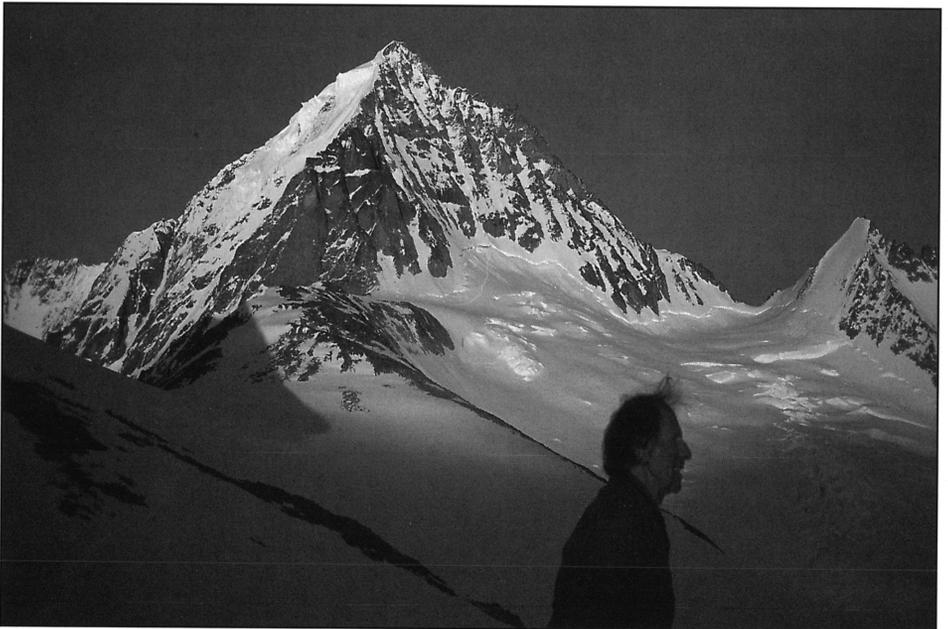
We flew up the Baird Glacier, eventually arriving on the Icecap at the head of the Dawes

The Abruzzi Ridge on Mt. St. Elias is the prominent feature in the background. Mt. Newton sits just in front.

TYSON BRADLEY



Above: Mt. Noel. Below: Mt. Ratz, with the first ascensionist, Wes Bunch



Glacier. We made base camp on a sheltered rocky knoll at approximately 6,000 feet. It snowed several inches that night; given the poor visibility the following day, we were surprised by the sound of the chopper arriving with Wesley Bunch and Judd Stewart. After guiding them through the fog with the radio, it took almost an hour to de-ice the rotors so the pilot could lift off. The next five days of snow and sleet kept us close to camp. Day six dawned clear so Stewart, Bunch, Creeden and I set out for an attempt of Mt. Noel's west face. Fred, leery of the weather as he monitored the barometer, opted to remain in camp. An easy hike up on firm snow on the lower northwest ridge brought us even with the head of the glacier, from where we traversed out to the approximate center of the west face. After roping up and negotiating the bergschrund, we moved up steadily, using running belays. The route provided wonderful, 45 to 50° alpine snow and ice climbing for 1,800 feet. Three separate ice gullies were used to ascend the face. A short, strenuous pitch of loose 5th class climbing was required to exit the face and join the northwest ridge a few hundred feet from the top. We found a short piece of cord tied to a rock on top as an temporary testimony to the first ascent, pioneered on the south-east side of the mountain by a Canadian team. We carefully descended the route with a combination of rappels and belayed down-climbing as the sun began to overheat us. By 7 p.m. we rejoined Fred in camp, anxious to relate the day's adventure.

Two days later, the pilot arrived to retrieve Dave, Fred and I. Wes and Judd had another week to use so they waved goodbye and set about planning the next project.

(The following is reported by Judd Stewart:) While on the summit of Noel, Wes and I scoped a promising line on Mt. Ratz. The northeast face is a shining 2,000-foot sheet of 60 to 70° ice, approached via a broken glacier and a 1,500-foot couloir. The day after our friends left, we loaded our packs and skied the six or seven miles to the base of Ratz's precipitous north face. Once again the weather was awful. For six days we struggled to remain sane in the cramped Bibler tent. With only two days left until our scheduled pick-up, the weather cleared and we set off for the climb. Even though there were many crevasses, the snow was firm as we easily marched over frozen bridges, enjoying perfect visibility. The couloir above the glacier went quickly and we soon found ourselves under the face, challenged by a large bergschrund. Leaning across the maw at a narrow spot I could touch the overhanging snow on the uphill side, but it was soft and wouldn't hold a tool. I finally struggled over the problem by doing a few insecure snow picket aid moves—a first in my experience.

On the face, we were presented with perfect ice. We simul-climbed for 2,000 feet, switching leads as we used up the screws. At last we reached the summit ridge, from where we could look down the complex of gullies on the south side of the mountain. Beckey's first ascent route had worked up through that maze. A few pitches of exposed ridge traversing took us to the summit, the last pitch consisting of nasty, rotten snow studded with loose rock. At the summit I fashioned a hanging belay on a rock horn protruding from the snow a few feet from the top. Wes came up and we took turns crouching on the tiny summit, too concerned with the descent to celebrate. We rappelled the route using v-threads. The descent of the glacier was harrowing, with very poor visibility and soft snow. We postholed down in the murk and fell repeatedly into the small crevasses, fortunately never going deeper than our bellies. The climb and descent required 26 hours of continuous movement.

Upon returning to Petersburg, we enjoyed the hospitality of resident climber Dieter Klose, the self-appointed mountaineering historian for the Stikine region. While perusing his journals we discovered there had been several previous attempts on Noel's west side, but the ever-present coastal weather had prevented success.

SAM GRUBENHOFF and JUDD STEWART, *unaffiliated*