

and made three moves before it snapped off above his tools. He rode it down, ripping the first piece of gear before simultaneously hitting the snow slope and being stopped by a good cam. After a rest, he climbed back into the cave, onto the remaining ice, and through to a steep, but thin pillar. The pitch was very sustained, with dubious protection for 35 meters to a semi-hanging belay below a huge chockstone and snow mushroom—a true two-and-a-half hour lead.

On day three, we opted to leave the bivy gear behind and go as fast as we could for the top or to where difficulty stopped us—“fast” being a relative term, as the 15th pitch (A3) took Blitz three hours to lead. The “Super Three-Hour Pitch” involved aiding off ice tools used as hooks, tied-off knifeblades, real hooks and a lot of back-cleaning (the rack was too small for the type of climbing encountered). The gully opened up above it and we made good progress to a dead-end below another massive chockstone. Two difficult mixed pitches got us past it on the right, and led to more moderate snow. As darkness fell, we confronted yet another chockstone, but managed to sneak through “The Glory Hole” behind it on 90° ice. At 8 p.m. we reached the col at 8,700 feet. Four hundred feet of easy snow separated us from the summit, but true to my nature, we started rappelling, reaching our bivy at 1:30 a.m. We arrived at Base Camp on March 10 after a leisurely descent the next afternoon.

*The Gift (That Keeps On Giving)* follows a huge gully system west of *The Pearl*, a difficult rock route put up by Andy Orgler on the most obvious pillar dominating the south face. *The Gift...* is 3,200 feet high, and 23 (60m) pitches if you use the rope all the way. Thirteen of these pitches are “hard.” The technical ratings are 5.9 A3 WI6 XX. Our grade, a Texas “two star,” is as ambiguous as any other alpine grade and means absolutely nothing.

MARK F. TWIGHT, *Groupe de la Haute Montagne*

*Mt. Huntington, West Face, Attempt.* After flying over 1,200 miles of seamless clouds, Brad Grohusky and I were assured that the rumors of a particularly wet season in Alaska were true. The clouds looked just as permanent from below as the Talkeetna Shuttle Service van drove us to the end of the road. Four wet days later, we were still waiting for the weather to clear from the narrow entrance to the Tokositna Glacier. In a magnanimous gesture, our pilot, Jay Hudson, turned around from another flight destination when he saw a window in the weather, and at 10 p.m. on June 13 we moved into our Base Camp on the upper Tokositna Glacier.

Our objective was a new route on the west face of Mt. Huntington that consists of about half rock wall and half mixed climbing. After scoping out the wall and assessing the sizeable avalanche hazard (a result of heavy recent snows), we decided to set our immediate goal as getting up the wall, at which point we would re-evaluate the snow-choked upper sections. On June 14, we hastily packed the haul bag and then broke trail to the base of the wall, thus beginning our daily commute.

The rock was excellent Alaskan granite, although it was even more compact than we'd reckoned from the ground. We soon fell into a routine of getting to the base of the wall before the morning sun made the bergschrund too soft to ascend easily and then alternating days on the lead. Thankfully, the route is well situated and steep enough that any rock/ice fall was off to the sides. This allowed the leader to concentrate on the thin (A3) nailing that comprised the majority of each pitch. At night, the belayer would handle all of the camp chores and we would crawl into our sleeping bags after a typically long Alaskan day.



*Brad Grohusky on pitch 4 (A3) of an attempt on the west face of Mt. Huntington. ROD WILLARD*

After five days, during which we had climbed about half of the wall, we declared a rest day. A bit of sunning in t-shirts was quickly replaced by an afternoon storm and our efforts to keep the runway firmly packed. On June 20, another large low-pressure system, coupled with work commitments, forced an early exit for me. Luckily, John Lohuis had arrived in Talkeetna early and was able to fly in with Hudson that evening and make the partner exchange a simple one. The weather returned to its wettest, forcing Grohusky and Lohuis to spend more time in the tents than on the wall. Upward progress continued when possible, with the seam system opening up to allow some clean aid. A decision had to be made before the Tokositna Glacier became too crevassed to allow a plane landing: keep going and risk having to leave all of the fixed

line on the wall, or leave a clean route and return another day. From Brad's high point he could see easier ground ahead leading to the mixed section above. "I shed a tear realizing that the route goes, but that we were out of time," wrote Brad later. The pair stripped the route, waited out another storm and then cleaned out camp and winged it back to Talkeetna. Having learned many lessons and tasted the endless possibilities of the Alaska Range, we cannot wait to return.

ROD WILLARD

*Mt. Russell, North Ridge.* On March 2-7, Colby Coombs, Caitlin Palmer, Meg Perdue and I flew to Mt. Russell in the Alaska Range. Colby, Meg and I made the sixth ascent of Mt. Russell, the fourth ascent of the North Ridge, and the second ascent in winter; Meg is the first woman recorded to have summited Mt. Russell. It is a beautiful alpine route in a remote edge of the Alaska Range. The North Ridge route offers a safe and very aesthetic line to an awesome summit that is way off the beaten path, with many climbable peaks surrounding the upper Yentna glacier.

MIKE WOOD, *unaffiliated*