

Climbs and Expeditions, 2000

Accounts from the various climbs and expeditions of the world are listed geographically from north to south and from west to east within the noted countries. We begin our coverage with the Contiguous United States and move to Alaska in order for the climbs in the Alaska's Wrangell Mountains to segue into the St. Elias climbs in Canada.

Unless noted otherwise, accounts cover activity in the 2000 calendar year (January 1-December 31). First-person accounts from winter 2000-2001 activity and shoulder-season areas (e.g., Patagonia) are included when possible. Winter climbers and those returning from the southern hemisphere can help us in future volumes by submitting accounts as soon as possible. We encourage climbers to submit accounts of other notable activity from the various Greater Ranges to help us maintain complete records.

A chart on page 471 gives a useful comparison of the various rock climbing ratings readers will find in the accounts below. For conversions of meters to feet, multiply by 3.28; for feet to meters, multiply by 0.30.

NORTH AMERICA

CONTIGUOUS UNITED STATES

WASHINGTON

Mount Rainier National Park

Mount Rainier, Backstage Pass. Claiming an entirely new route on Mount Rainier in the year 2000 is impossible; claiming an exciting variation to an old climbing line isn't. *Backstage Pass* is a distinctive couloir that cuts through a rime-encrusted mosaic of volcanic rock of the romantically named Sunset Amphitheater to gain the upper *Sunset Ridge* and Liberty Cap. Its climbing conditions fall in and out of favor and are risky to gauge unless the long approach is made, and it remained untouched until the Rainier climbing rangers and I decided it was an excellent location for our mountaineering and alpine rescue workshop last May.

The climb begins on the Westside Road at 2,800 feet and follows the normal Tahoma Glacier approach. Ascend through old growth forest, subalpine and alpine meadows to gain the Puyallup Cleaver, a rocky ridge that divides the Tahoma and South Mowich glaciers. Most teams need two days to reach an advance base camp. Our variation left the Puyallup Cleaver at 11,300 feet above St. Andrews Rock. There, we traversed north across the South Mowich Glacier into the impressive Sunset Amphitheater, an immense cirque of near-vertical headwalls of vibrantly layered rock capped with ice. This is one of Rainier's most beautiful, and rarely visited, destinations. Our goal was the large 1,500-foot couloir that bisects the amphitheater headwall to secretly gain the upper mountain.

We placed camp at 11,600 feet on the South Mowich Glacier and prepared for a rapid ascent the next morning, May 25. Shortly after sunrise, Paul Charlton, David Gottlieb, Glenn Kessler, Dee Patterson, Jeremy Shank and I took off for the couloir. Feeling good about the terrain and preferring to avoid belays, we stashed the ropes in our packs after crossing the bergschrund right of a large rock buttress near 12,300 feet.

Once on route, the climb became a crank-fest up ideal 45- to 60-degree snow and ice conditions. About 600 feet into the ever-narrowing chute, we veered to the climber's right. Here, the couloir grew increasingly steep as it made its way through rime ice and snow-encrusted rock bands. The crest of *Sunset Ridge*—and a 360-degree view—was gained at 13,800 feet. From there, we pushed through intense winds up the last 400 feet of glaciated ridge to top out at Liberty Cap. Descent was made via the Tahoma Glacier Sickle.

With 30-plus Rainier routes' worth of experience amongst the team, everyone agreed that *Backstage Pass* surpasses the commonly lauded standards on Rainier.

MIKE GAUTHIER

CALIFORNIA

Yosemite Valley

Yosemite Valley, Various Activity. Big news was the free climbing of two El Capitan routes. The first to go was *Lurking Fear*, which fell at the able hands of Beth Rodden and Tommy Caldwell (see note below). In 1994, Steve Schneider, with help from Alan Lester and Jeff Schoen, had freed 95 percent of the route. All that remained was a single move on the second pitch and a 60-foot traverse on pitch seven. Caldwell and Rodden freed these sections at 5.13c, climbing the entire route in team free style, with both members leading or following every pitch.

The second route to fall was *Golden Gate*, a combination of the *Salathé* and *Heart* routes (see note below). Forty-one pitches long, it stands as the longest route on El Cap excepting the girdle traverse. The route has three pitches of 5.13 and many of 5.12, and was completed in October.

The other big news was Dean Potter's free solo of *Astroman*. He is only the second person to make this climb in this manner, the first being Peter Croft. Although Dean used an easier variation to get around the technical crux of the third pitch, he deserves full credit for having mastered this climb.

On the speed climbing front, little was done to continue the mass destruction of records established in 1999. Partially responsible for this slowdown was the fact that many record breakers were exploring the remote walls of Baffin Island and Pakistan. Several notable solo records caught the spotlight, however. Foremost was Hans Florine's solo linkup of two El Capitan routes in a single day in June. *Lurking Fear* went down first in a record-breaking 9:20. After descending his newly established rappel route to the left of the West Face, Florine also made quick work of the West Face in 8:16, also a solo record. This is the first time anybody has soloed two El Cap routes together in a day; his time for both routes was just under 21 hours.

Ammon McNeely made the fastest solo ever of *Eagle's Way* in 51:14 in August. Ten hours into the route, he exhausted his water supply, but he still went for it, hoping to find some water on the climb. He found none, and ultimately got pretty darn thirsty, at one point contemplating drinking his own urine.