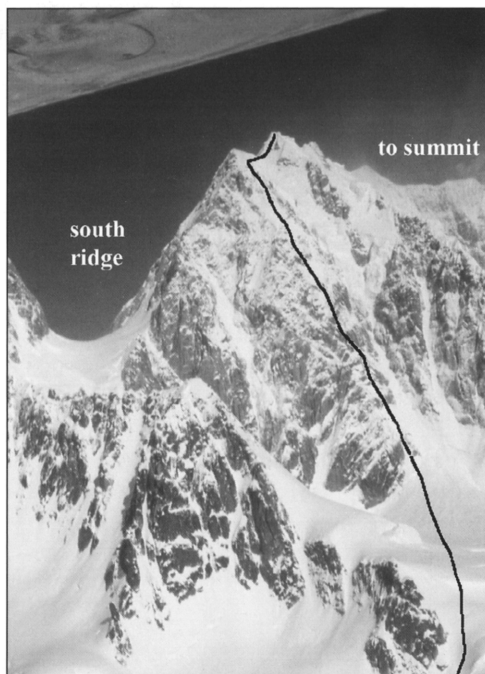


8,300 feet, in the gully below the hanging glacier to the left of the southeast spur. After crossing the bergschrund, the route immediately takes a snow ramp up and left for 1,000 feet and then traverses pretty much up and right through rock bands, snowfields, and mixed ice to join the original South Ridge route at 11,500 feet. The difficulty to this point is 5.8 WI3. Most of this climbing was straightforward in fun alpine terrain. Where our route joins the South Ridge route, we found a bent ring angle piton, looking very old, and a Lost Arrow, looking newer but still dated. We wonder if the pins were from the original Waterman ascent.

The true character of the route becomes clear in the snow climbing along the upper south ridge. The difficulty and associated pucker factor are almost entirely dependent on snow conditions. Surreal is the best way to describe the pinnacles and cornices that we found. We experienced mainly deep sugar snow and bottomless conditions, similar to temperature-gradient crystals. At times these conditions pervaded through the entire snowpack, while at other times we were able to dig deep and reach stable and firm snow. Progress was generally slow and required laborious trenching and swimming, while attempting to evenly distribute body weight over a snowpack that was extremely weak in compressive strength. The snowpack was most challenging at the steepest part of the arête, where in places it was armpit deep. These conditions resulted in much suffering and much trenching, especially past the Happy Cowboy Pinnacle (have spurs on for this pony) and the Changabang Arête. The climbing was exposed, marginally protected, and “heady.” These sections did, however, provide one heck of a view down plunging couloirs to the glacier 5,000 feet below. Cornices were unstable, and we each experienced a cornice fall (ride ‘em cowboy) on this part of the ridge. Conditions were consistent on the South Ridge from 11,500 feet to the summit plateau. We reached the summit after six days and descended the Southwest Ridge in three and a half days. On the descent poor visibility made navigation and route finding challenging. We found the descent to be involved and continuous from top to bottom, with a great deal of down-climbing and six to 10 rappels.



The south face of Mt. Hunter from the flight in, showing the Corliss-Taylor Route between the south ridge proper and the southeast spur on the south face. Rick Taylor

RICK TAYLOR, AAC

*Thunder Mountain, Deadbeat and Ring of Fire; Mt. Huntington, West Face Couloir.* “Sweet Jesus, man, this blows. I hate alpine climbing.” It had become our trip’s mantra. But short memory

resulted in Scott DeCapio and I climbing three routes from the Tokositna Glacier, all in pure alpine style, of course. We climbed light, leader and follower both with packs, and all free.

On the night of May 27 we headed for the obvious couloir right (east) of the central-spur rock buttress on Thunder Mountain's 3,500-foot south face. (The bottom of the couloir is labeled "3" in the photo on p. 205 of the 2001 *AAJ*.) After soloing 1,000 feet to the first ice step of the couloir's left fork, we roped up. The next 1,500 feet rose at 50 to 70 degrees, with vertical steps. It was followed by a broad basin leading left, toward the summit, that was unseen from the glacier but offered 700 feet of phenomenal mixed climbing. Even the steep exit bulges had bomber névé. We finished with obligatory scary snow groveling and a short, scrappy Grade 6 mixed crux. A final 200 feet of nasty snow swimming brought us to the summit, eight hours and five roped pitches after starting. Thunder had reportedly been summited only once before, and the topo map didn't indicate easy ground up top, yet we had convinced ourselves we could simply walk off. Feeling idiotic we rappelled the route as the sun gained the couloir, thus descending in terror, along with chunks of snow, ice, and rock. Relieved, we reached our skis 14 hours after leaving and named the route *Deadbeat*, after our hero and role model in "The Big Lebowski." And perhaps after ourselves.

After a meager, failed attempt on the narrow cleft in the rock buttress immediately left (west) of the British couloir route *Dream Sacrifice*, site of Malcolm Daly's epic fall and rescue

in May 1999 (2000 *AAJ*, pg. 206), we returned on the night of June 1 to try again. Scoping the route from below, we assumed the climbing leading to the obvious crux rock band would be easy. Time for new binoculars. Between moderate sections we found considerable Grade 6 terrain. At least it was mostly quality climbing... mostly. The crux was a desperate pitch of overhanging roofs and flakes, a full grade harder than anything until then, though with good pro. My joy at having a top rope for Scott's brilliant lead soon ended. The next pitch, though at least a half grade easier, was gripping—steep and stacked with death blocks. Scott belayed in a narrow funnel below me, the only available spot, hiding behind his 15-pound pack. A worthless, overhanging, shite snow-ice-mushroom offwidth against smooth rock finished the pitch. Moderate ground led to a full-on battle through steep, unprotectable hell-snow and the summit. We were worked, and after 17 hours and nine pitches of character-building effort we relaxed and brewed for two hours on top.



Look out below! Scott DeCapio entering the crux roof section of *Ring of Fire* on Thunder Mountain. *Kelly Cordes*

We rappelled and down-climbed Deadbeat in the shade, hitting the skis 24 hours after leaving. I'd been saving a route name from one of my favorite Johnny Cash songs. The name seemed fitting: Ring of Fire.

Paul Roderick then flew us to Mt. Huntington, which supposedly hadn't been climbed in under a day. It was an obvious candidate for a lightweight sprint. But we did know that its summit is notoriously hard to reach. We left our 8,200-foot camp at 10:30 p.m. on June 8, crossed the 'schrund an hour later, and roped-up at the prominent ice ramp/couloir splitting the west face. Motivated by pizza and beer, we figured if we pulled this off, we could feel good about flying out. The couloir, with fixed pro and bomber moderate ice (a couple of steps of WI4, then easier), was a blast. Five hours from camp, we were starting up the broad summit slopes. These final 1,000 vertical feet proved terrifying, unquestionably the most challenging climbing of the route, with steep, unconsolidated mank snow, worthless ice, cornices, and, of course, no protection. Vertical trenching through collapsing sugar. At least we were tied together for the potential 4,000-footer. Now I understand why folks sometimes stop at, ahem, "the end of the difficulties" on Huntington. We summited at 7:30 a.m. but, not psyched about any descent route, we were unable to enjoy the spectacular view. The sun would hit the face in a few hours, and at this point in the trip we felt worked. Scott's deadpan statement said it all, "I want my mom so bad right now. I hate alpine climbing." The downclimbing part of reversing our path was a bit unnerving, but 16 hours after leaving camp we were back, enjoying whiskey and a fresh bag of Twizzlers. In an unprecedented display of will power, I had kept them unopened for a final celebration. "Yeah, ya know, alpine climbing ain't so bad."

KELLY CORDES, AAC

*Thunder Mountain, Walk of the Schnitzelkings.* On April 6, 1999, German climbers Christoph Duepper and Thomas Traxler climbed the right-hand fork of the split couloir to the right (east) of the central spur—the Lightning Spur—on Thunder Mountain's south face. This is the couloir starting at the "3" on p. 205 of the 2001 AAJ. After 1,000 feet the couloir forks. The route Deadbeat ascends the left fork, while the German route goes right. Duepper and Traxler climbed much of their 3,000-foot route unroped, encountering mostly 50-degree snow except for four short pitches of 80- to 90-degree ice. After about six hours of climbing, they reached the narrow col atop the couloir and rappelled.

TALKEETNA RANGER STATION FILES AND *High Mountain Sports* 232

*Ruth Glacier, Peak 10,370'; Peak 11,300' attempt; Moose's Tooth, Shaken Not Stirred.* On May 15 Jared Ogden and I were dropped by Talkeetna Air Taxi on the West Fork of the Ruth Glacier. Our plan was to try the east face of Mt. Huntington, but the weather was not cooperating. On our second day in camp we climbed a couloir in the middle of the east face of a 10,370-foot peak just north of our camp. The knife-edge ridge at the top involved a mandatory rappel, and since there was no anchor, we think we may have done a new route. We turned back in a white-out about 200 feet below the top and had an exciting descent down a different route from what we climbed. After an aborted attempt on the Southwest Ridge of Peak 11,300', during which a snow cave collapsed on us, we packed up our sleds and headed down to the Ruth Amphitheater, where the weather was clearly better.