

(5.10a). The full climb of the tower was grade III+ 5.10a and distinctly subalpine, perhaps even arboreal in a way that only a Cascades mountain climber can appreciate.

A rare blessing came with the formation of a deep high-pressure cell on President's Day weekend, 2006, and, bolstered by the previous weekend's report of good ice even at low elevations, along with relatively easy travel below timberline, everybody seemed to go climbing. Climbers around the state enjoyed great conditions on a variety of peaks. On the east face of Whitehorse Mountain, near the town of Darrington, on February 19 Peter Hirst and Rolf Larson climbed a line (III/IV AI4) unseen from the road but prominent from the air, which they had targeted after viewing a Scurlock aerial photo. This face had reportedly seen no prior ascents, though rumor of an unreported ascent subsequently appeared on the Internet (presumably a summer ascent).

Internet discussion and Scurlock's aerial photography continue to stimulate not only mountaineering, but a number of exciting ski descents, including formerly unskied lines on Hurry-up Peak, Jack Mountain, Mount Goode, Sinister Peak, Mount Maude, Robinson Mountain, Bonanza Peak, Spider Mountain, Argonaut Peak, Three Fingers, Big Four Mountain, Guye Peak, and Mount Formidable. Nearly all of these descents were directly stimulated by the Scurlock collection. An active bulletin board at www.turns-all-year.com hosts frequent discussion of Northwest ski mountaineering.

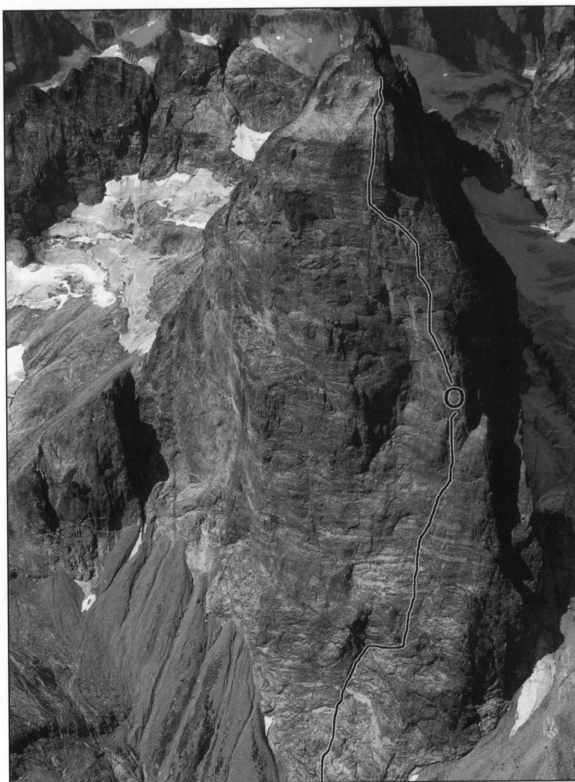
For further information about these and other climbs, see the *Northwest Mountaineering Journal* at www.nwmj.org

MATT PERKINS, *Northwest Mountaineering Journal*, AAC

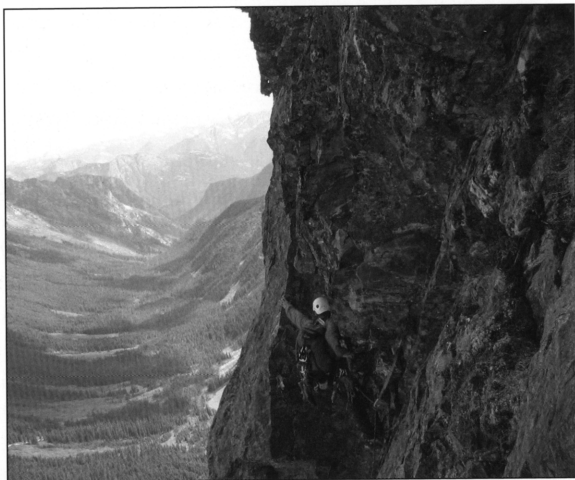
Southeast Mox Peak, Devil's Club to top of east face. The east face of Southeast Mox Peak (a.k.a. Southeast Twin Spire) is something I never expected to climb. The 2,400'-vertical face rises out of mist and clouds deep in the heart of the North Cascades and had an almost legendary status for being unclimbable. Its reputation came from Cascade legends like John Roper, who called it "the greatest face in the North Cascades." North Cascades historian Harry Majors wrote, "The intimidating 2,500'-high east face of Southeast Mox is one of the 'Last Great Problems' of the North Cascades, and should probably remain so. The rock on the Southeast Spire is notoriously unstable and treacherous. ... There are routes of great difficulty, which should be climbed only once, and there are routes of such great danger and unfeasibility that they should never be climbed. The central 800' of the east face of the Southeast Twin Spire probably falls into this latter category. The Northwest Spire has already proven to be deadly. The Southeast Spire has an even greater potential." I stumbled upon a description of an earlier attempt on the face: "Each hold required testing—most pulled out like drawers. Pitons could not be solidly placed, and firm projections for runners did not exist—all ledges were piled high with loose rock. It seemed that one had only to locate and pull out the keystone, and the entire mountain would collapse into a heap of smoking rubble. What, we wondered, was holding this precipitous pile of junk together? Every crack you find—and they're pretty scarce—means that something's ready to peel off the mountain." Fred Beckey had made an attempt on the face years earlier, and the experience left him shaken enough to never ever want to go back. Fred told me that it was "a good place for a funeral." Pilot John Scurlock told me that he had flown over just about every peak in the Cascades and admitted that the east face of Southeast Mox was the biggest, most awe-inspiring face he has seen. Scurlock took me on a reconnaissance flight, and when we flew over the gut-churning east face, I knew I had to climb it.

The climb did indeed live up to its reputation, once we got to it. With a 14-hour approach, spread over two brutal days in the rain, and enough bushwhacking to beat the life and every ounce of will to climb out of you, Southeast Mox must be one of the most heavily guarded mountains in the range. We will need years of therapy to deal with the dehumanizing, savage, brutal beating we received. Our path took us in and out of the ice-cold river and the carwash of sopping wet slide alder, devil's club, and blueberry bushes. Things went from shitty to wretched in the forest. It just went on and on and on in an endless valley of tangled vegetation. The forest seemed to mock forward progress and took delight at screwing us over almost every slow and horrid step of the way. I uttered the most violent string of expletives to ever pass my lips, cursing every rock, tree, bush, tree, river, mountain, and valley in this godforsaken hole. Finally, Erik Wolfe and I arrived at the Mox basin, exhausted and unable to see anything in the mist.

Unwilling to accept defeat, the next morning, August 31, we began to climb, and the clouds parted long enough for us to spend two days forcing a line up a face that did not want to be climbed. The leader could not see where the next piece of protection would be on the upper 1,500' overhanging headwall, so every move required total commitment. The climbing spiraled out of control as the run-outs grew longer



The Devil's Club on Southeast Mox, shot on a fly-by during the climbers' (circled) second day on-route. Lifelong Cascade climber John Roper said to Layton afterward: "You tamed the beast!" Layton's reply: "No, the beast tamed us." *John Scurlock*



Mike Layton on the crux pitch of The Devil's Club. *Erik Wolfe*

and the rock became steeper, coming to a climax at a 5.11- X pitch to surmount the final overhangs. The pressure of forcing a way up, constantly trying to dig for gear, and getting very little, worrying about poor belay anchors, not knowing if I'd totally blank out, and just the whole enormity of the situation almost got to me. I tried to seize control of my mind and calm down before Erik got to the anchors, so he wouldn't see how fucked up I was.

We both pushed and pushed until we were spread to the limit of our physical and mental capacity. It was full-on until the very last pitch. Our route stuck to the right edge of the east face, and I could see the summit up ahead. The rock above was devoid of cracks and solid rock, so we traversed over to the northeast ridge to get a look at our planned descent (over the summit and down the back), then traversed back to the face. It looked like a short scramble to the summit of what's been called "Hardest Mox" [the unclimbed sub-summit atop the east face but before the true summit of Southeast Mox—Ed.] would lead to a heartbreaking full day's climb over ridges and gendarmes to the true summit of Southeast Mox, then an unknown number of rappels into the extremely broken glacier on the backside. One more easy pitch to the Hardest Mox summit, but on sandy blocks of stacked garbage where we wouldn't be able to get a rappel anchor, would have committed us to another full day of trying to get off the peak. John Scurlock told me later that he saw this on his flight and hoped to God that we wouldn't try going that way to get down.

We had to regain control of the situation and get off this mountain. We had completed the east face and were so close to topping out, but we felt that if we summited we would have climbed past the point of no return. So we put a Joker playing card in a plastic bag to mark our ascent (The Devil's Club, 2,400', V+ 5.11-), shook hands, and decided to rappel the entire face, in places staying closer to the northeast ridge than our ascent line did, especially down the lower half. We placed no bolts. I can barely describe how relieved we were when we heard the whump of rope on the talus below. A few hours later, at 3:30 a.m., after wading chest-deep in the river to avoid more punishment from the alder and devil's club, we finally found our camp. We had to retrace the entire approach later that day in order to make the next morning's ferry ride back to our car; we didn't want to be reported late and deal with a rescue cluster. By the time we returned from our adventure, the rains returned and Mox Peak went back into hiding.

MIKE LAYTON, AAC

Silver Star Mountain, Central Couloir to near West Summit. Anne Keller and I had both noticed a classic-looking alpine couloir splitting the west face of Silver Star (8,800'), and I couldn't wait for spring. The 1,900-foot-long ribbon of steep snow and gully ice shoots the whole relief of the face and seemed to cut deep into the face at uniform width.

On March 15 we began our day at 6:15 a.m., and the morning started off with demoralizing post-holing until we gained the bare trail. We finally got to the base at 8:30 a.m. and noticed a flow of water ice marking the couloir entrance. The ice was not climbable, though, so we scrambled around on easy rock and began to simul-climb perfect névé and smears of gully ice. The walls became high around us and the couloirs slightly steeper as we progressed. We came to the first of two mixed cruxes: a large chockstone with steep ice smears pouring off both sides of the rock's interface with the couloir walls. The left side offered rotten ice, but the right side went at fun M4 for a short pitch. The couloir again narrowed and became slightly steeper, and conditions and climbing continued to improve with every step. We looked out to the Cas-