

Moria, Thunder Ridge; other ascents. On May 28 Ilona Barash and I flew into Bettles, with the Arrigetch under a heavy blanket of snow. Gates of the Arctic National Park rangers advised us that travel would be impossible without snowshoes this early in the year and suggested that we choose an alternate location for our trip, but we were bullheaded and less than 100 air miles from our destination. Lance, of Bettles Air, flew us over the Arrigetch, and after seeing the snow pack firsthand we decided to have a go at it.

The reality of a trip only sinks in when I find myself sitting by a small lake in the middle of the tundra listening to the fading whine of a propeller, as our last connection to the world turns into a small speck in the sky. The second time is no different from the first in that respect. Nine days after landing at Circle Lake, we attempted a direct start to the Brill-McGregor-Merrand route on the north buttress of Central Maiden. We found a bail piton atop pitch 1, and were turned back by loose rock after climbing a second pitch.

The following day, we climbed the North-northwest Ridge of Parabola. Previously, Jeff Pflueger described climbing this route to a subsidiary summit, but not topping out due to iced-up slabs (AAJ 2003, see photo p. 220). Climbing earlier in the season, we found kinder conditions and were able to climb the remaining pitches to the true summit, where we found a cairn. We topped out in the midst of a multi-hour Arctic sunset after a perfect bluebird day. The severe and awesome cirque to our south glowed orange as we downclimbed several hundred feet to the first rappel point. Snow and ice in the escape gully denied us an easy decent and forced us to retrace the up route.

Both Ilona and I consider climbing Parabola to be our finest day in the mountains. The climbing is enjoyable and engaging, and the small summit offers fantastic views of the entire Arrigetch. At IV 5.7, the North-northwest Ridge of Parabola is destined to become a moderate classic.

After moving our camp over a pass to the Hot Springs Creek valley, we set off on an unclimbed spur ridge of Moria that we later dubbed Thunder Ridge (IV 5.6). Upon reaching a subsidiary summit, we began hearing ambiguous rumbling noises far off. Rain, thunder, hail, lightning, copious downclimbing, several traverses along wet ledge systems, and about 10 double-rope rappels through the night got us back to flat ground.

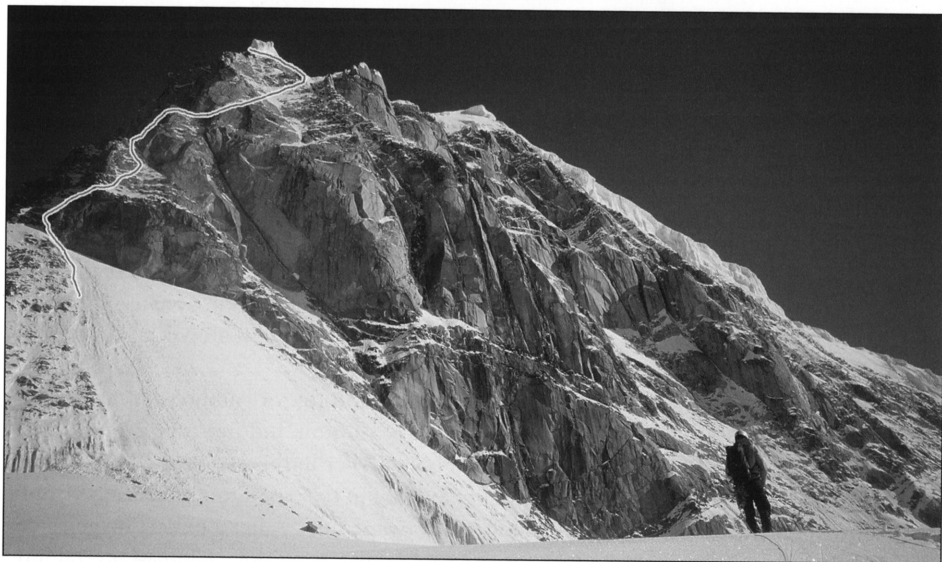
We spent our last few days in the Arrigetch decompressing at Takahula Lake before Jay of Brooks Range Aviation brought us back to Bettles. Despite rain on nine out of 22 days, we had better, more stable weather than on our July 2003 trip.

Addendum: Ilona and I climbed two new routes (previously unpublished) in the Arrigetch in July 2003. Citadel, South Face (5.9) ascends the obvious chimney system for four pitches. We found a bail sling on the second pitch, then no other sign of previous attempts. Aquarian Wall (5.7) wanders up the face just north of the first lake in the Aquarius Valley.

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ALASKA RANGE

Geographical note: While the well-known peaks in Denali National Park are often called "The Alaska Range," these peaks form just one part of the immense Alaska Range, which contains many significant subranges, including the Hayes and Delta ranges, and the Revelation, Kichatna, and Tordrillo mountains.

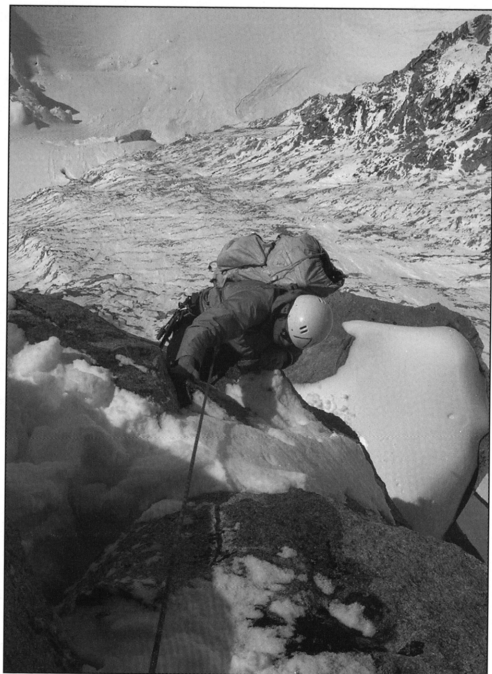


The Handicapped Ramp on Mt. Balchen. *Jeff Apple Benowitz*

HAYES RANGE

Mt. Balchen, The Handicapped Ramp.

The granitic massif of Mt. Balchen (Peak 11,140') sits at the head of the east branch of the Gilliam Glacier. Jed Brown, Seth Adams, and I landed eight miles (via Talk-eetna Air Taxi) down from the peak's West Buttress (climbed in 2003 by Michael Williams and me, descended by us in 2005). We got a slight break, after 16 days of uncooperative weather, and on May 25 we climbed Balchen's south ridge in 16 hours camp-to-camp, mostly in a whiteout. Along the way we found enjoyable rock climbing at a moderate grade, on pristine granite, in a truly wilderness setting. We dubbed the route The Handicapped Ramp (700m, 5.4c) due to my non-unionized tibia and fibula. Jed led the entire route, Seth carried a pack with gear, and I dragged a leg that resembled John Holmes' limp. It was the peak's fourth ascent.



Seth Adams jamming his way to the "handicap parking belay." *Jeff Apple Benowitz*

JEFF APPLE BENOWITZ