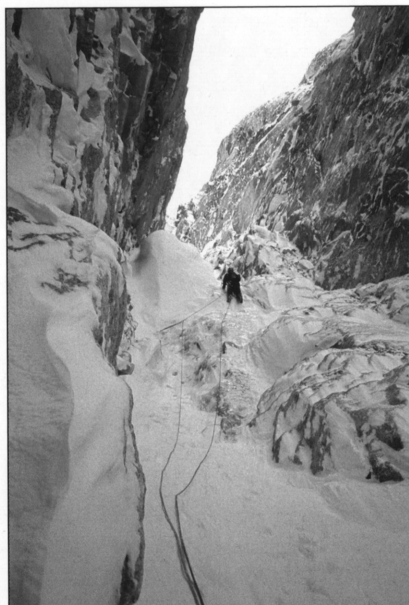


leads I have ever seen in getting us through this crux section, which began with a short curtain of rotten grade 6 ice. Forty feet up, he broke through into an enormous cavern behind the curtain. Because of rope drag, he brought me up before continuing. Above the belay rose a huge, dark cave with overhanging rock on one side, rotten, aerated ice on the other, and a small hole the size of a house chimney 40 feet up providing the only light. Strenuous and technical stemming got Eamonn to the hole, where he was able to chop and squirm his way through to the outside. What followed was a steep, strenuous, and runout squeeze chimney glazed with verglas and packed with dense snow, requiring laborious excavation. Higher, the chimney opened and the difficulties increased, with thin and desperate dry-tooling leading to powerful and insecure pulling over a small roof, protected by awkward piton placements.



Eamonn Walsh in "The Gash" on Once Were Warriors. Mark Westman

The terrain above eased off considerably, allowing for much simul-climbing. We bypassed a steep, rotten ice pillar with a high traverse, and overcame a short, difficult rock wall 400' below the summit. The weather, up to now good, began rapidly deteriorating, and we hurried up the final pitches of moderate ice. The route ended with an abrupt transition from steep ice to the flat summit. Our prior knowledge of the descent proved instrumental in our survival. The situation—total whiteout, wet clothes, no bivy gear, no shovel, and one hour of daylight remaining—had turned serious. The ensuing descent—racing darkness to find the col in zero visibility, then descending by headlamp through acres of rapidly loading avalanche terrain—was something we shall never forget. At midnight, we reached the safety of camp.

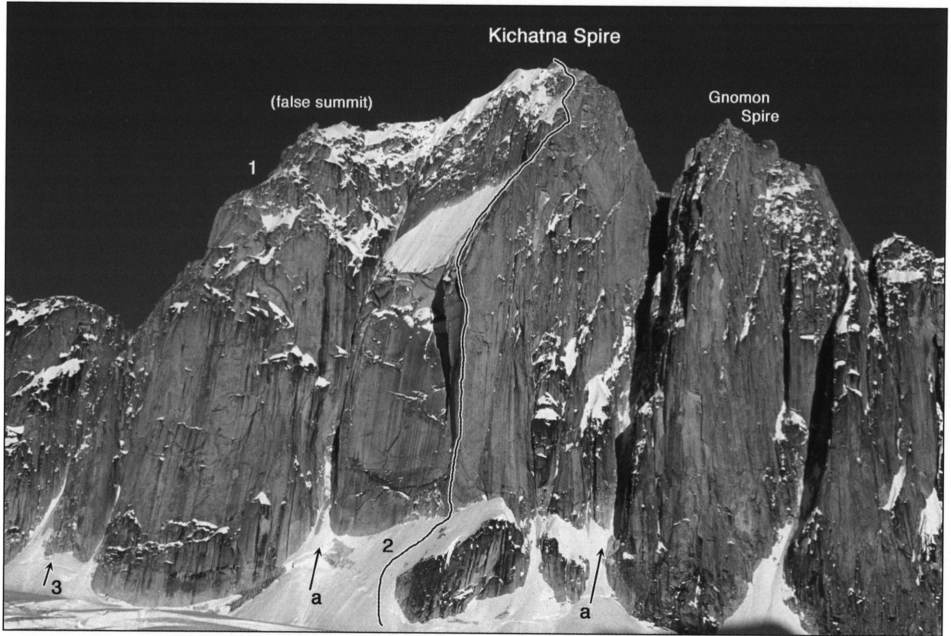
Once Were Warriors (17 pitches, V Grade 6 ice/mixed) is also the title of a book about the Maori people of New Zealand.

MARK WESTMAN, *Talkeetna, AK, AAC*

KICHATNA SPIRES

Kichatna Spire, Voice of Unreason to summit ridge, and Whiteout Spire, Front Butt. After we festered for five days in the rain in downtown Talkeetna, the clouds parted, and Paul Roderick of TAT was finally able to fly Rob Owens, Roger Strong, and me into the Cul-de-Sac (a.k.a. Cool Sac) Glacier. Our goal was the unclimbed laser-cut "super couloir" slicing the middle of the northwest face of Kichatna Spire. The day after arriving, we hopped on the route, only to be shut down by massive, overhanging snow-mushrooms blocking the narrow chimney on pitch four.

We quickly shook off the disappointment and re-racked and re-packed for the following day, not wanting to waste good weather. We climbed a 10-pitch ice gully separating Kichatna

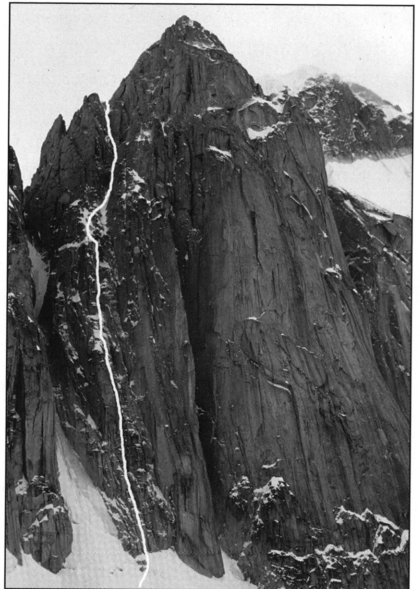


Kichatna Spire (8,985') from the Cul-de-Sac Glacier. (1) North Ridge (Davidson-Millikan, 1966), starts from Shadows Glacier, on other side. (2) Northwest Face (Bridwell-Embeck, 1979). (3) Voice of Unreason (Isaac-Owens-Strong, 2005), ends at North Ridge. (a) 2005 attempts. Sean Isaac

from Gnomon Spire to the southwest. This line had been tried at least three times, but all suitors were stumped by hard aid on Kichatna's west face, above the notch. We were no exception. One pitch up the granite above the col, Roger encountered thin, loose aid that would involve full big-wall tactics.

After these two slaps in the face, we figured we should just try to get up something for the sole purpose of standing on a summit. We made the first ascent of Whiteout Spire's northwest face via a scrappy gully line. The feature probably would have had ice in it, but after last year's record dry summer we were left with shattered rock and frozen dirt. Our Front Butt (D+ M5, 450m) had three technical mixed pitches, with steep snow climbing below and above. The guidebook calls this diminutive peak "one of the easiest peaks in the range." Better than nothing, I guess.

With the bluebird weather still holding, we made one last effort on Kichatna, via a line that looked interesting: a steep chimney system, on the far left margin of the northwest face, splitting the



Kichatna Spire, showing The Voice of Unreason. The obvious rocky point is a false summit; the true summit, covered in snow, is barely visible farther right in the background. Sean Isaac

slight buttress immediately right of the gully that separates Kichatna from the next peak to the north. On May 1 I crossed the bergschrund around 7:00 a.m. and launched up an impressive steep chimney system that we followed for six pitches. This eventually gained a 300m ribbon of blue ice that led to the ridge. The chimney involved sustained mixed pitches that went all free, except a few meters of A1 on pitch three. We climbed all day, leading blocks of three to five pitches, with the two seconds jumaring for speed. The seconds' packs contained the bare minimum gear: two liters of water each, Clif Bars and Shots, bagel sandwiches, a stove and a liter of fuel, belay jackets, and a light tarp. We gained the north ridge around 10:30 p.m. in a building snowstorm, so we exercised good judgment and began the descent. We rappelled all night in constant spindrift, reaching the glacier and our skis at sunrise.

We named our new line The

Voice of Unreason (700m, ED2 M7 WI5 A1), and it required a 25-hour round trip "day" to complete. Our 13-pitch route terminated at its juncture with the 1966 original route up the north ridge, about 200 vertical meters below the summit. Of course, we would have liked to stand on the summit of Kichatna Spire, since it had only been climbed seven times before. We were impressed with how sustained the route was, with its many consecutive M6 and M7 pitches. Both M7 crux pitches involved three-dimensional body English, technical torques, and a whole lot of groveling to pull through overhanging off-width/chimney features. In addition to hard dry-tooling, the route featured aesthetic ice features, like an inch-wide vein of ice on the second pitch and a foot-wide, super-tight runnel on pitches six and seven. The final handful of pitches wound up fun WI4 punctuated by M5 chockstones.

Our trip would not have happened without the generous support of the Mugs Stump Award and Arc'teryx.

SEAN ISAAC, *Canada*



Roger Strong on pitch four of the unclimbed "super couloir" on the northwest face of Kichatna Spire, before overhanging snow mushrooms ended the attempt. Sean Isaac

Kichatna Spire, Black Crystal Arête. Chad Kellogg and I completed a new route (to the summit) on Kichatna Spire (8,985') in the remote Kichatna Mountains. The Black Crystal Arête (3,000', 5.10 A2) climbs the striking south ridge of the spire, and is the first route to ascend the peak's