

Paul was able to come and pick us up, 23 days after dropping us off, for breakfast at the Roadhouse Grill in Talkeetna. We came out to the tragic news of the disappearance and deaths of Karen McNeill and Sue Nott. If we had forgotten amidst our own drama, this reminded us that the most important part of going out is not getting to the top, but coming home.

We thank the Mugs Stump Award for the generous support.

KATHERINE FRASER, *Canada*

## NEACOLA MOUNTAINS

*Neacola Mountains, first full-length ski traverse.* Next time you're in Anchorage on a sunny evening, go downtown to Fourth Street and have a pint at Simon and Seafort's Grill. As you hydrate, look through the picture windows across Cook Inlet. The big mountains you're seeing are the Tordrillos. At their left end is Mt. Spurr, with a tiny pompom of steam venting from the summit. Below the left side of Mt. Spurr is Lake Chakachamna, visible as a large break in the mountains. Farther left, beyond Lake Chakachamna, the Neacolas stretch southwest for 81 miles to the Tlikakila River and Lake Clark.

On April 6 Doug Brewer of Alaska Air West in Nikiski flew us to 5,000' on the Glacier Fork where we cached 150 lbs of booze and food. Doug then shuttled us to the east end of Lake Chakachamna. With six days of food and a 1:250,000-scale map, we headed back to our cache, across the high névés of the McArthur, Blockade, and Tanaina glaciers. Once at our cache, we base-camped on the Glacier Fork, Neacola Glacier, and North Fork for 10 days, fighting constant storms, skiing deep powder and couloirs including the likely first descent of The Gorilla Finger (2,600' vertical) off the west side of the North Fork Glacier at 4,150'. The final five days we toured onto the Tlikakila River via the Kijik River, Portage Lake, and Otter Lake, making another likely first descent of a couloir we dubbed Immortal Technique (3,000' vertical). The final 15 miles were alder 'shwacking on grizzly trails to Lake Clark. On April 27 Doug fetched us in his DeHavilland Beaver on a gravel bar.

We found the Neacola Mountains to be a heavily glaciated version of the North Cascades, with granite peaks rising to 9,000'. Along our tour, we compared 10 WAAS GPS elevations to 1958 1:63,360 USGS maps and found an average elevation drop of 70'. Our Neacola traverse was about 100 miles and 20,000 vertical feet. We skied 57,000 total vertical feet.

JOE STOCK, AAC, ANDREW WEXLER, and DYLAN TAYLOR, AAC

## CHUGACH MOUNTAINS

*Pt. 6,000' of Mt. Yukla, Gank'd and Slayed.* Often the crux of climbing in Alaska is finding a partner with the same goals and ambitions. Things came together for John Kelley and me in the second week of February, 2007, and we headed out to the northwest face of Mt. Yukla (7,535') with a new grade V route in our sights. We approached from Eagle River's Icicle Creek and topped out on the 6,000' subpeak that is roughly 0.75 mile northeast of Yukla's true summit.

An unclimbed left-trending ramp, a narrow chimney (climbed by Kelley and Varney [pp. 193-194, including photo, *AJ* 2006]) and a right-trending snow-and-ice couloir make up three forks, just to the right from the toe of the Icicle Glacier.

We left our base camp at treeline early in the morning and soloed roughly 700' of third-class terrain up to WI3. We had originally intended to attempt the left-trending ramp, but ultimately decided upon the coveted ice-and-snow couloir. I took the first lead up a WI3 ramp and encountered a rock headwall with a previous party's rappel anchor. Several moves up (mostly 5.9-ish laybacks), I encountered downsloping rock and poor feet. After struggling for an hour in vain, I lowered, and John gave it a try. He attempted to free it, but decided it would have to be aided. Using pins and a few birdbeaks (one of which popped out on him under bodyweight), he surmounted the obstruction and continued up, on virgin terrain, through a narrow snow chimney. I led the next pitch, which started in the snow chimney, then stepped up and over some WI3-4 steps. Higher up I was left scratching and picking at veggies. I went right at a fork and the rock blanked out, forcing me to tediously downclimb 10' and take the left chimney. With only a Spectre hammered into some frozen moss, I manned up and made my way through the rest of the pitch, which went at M6. We then had our first bivy on a small, protected ledge.

John led the next pitch in the morning, up and over a dicey dihedral to a right-trending corner system, then traversed a steep snow slope up to a rock outcrop. With the packs being hauled, I juggled up the ropes. On the way up my tool became dislodged from my harness and dropped off the face. Luckily John had a third tool and we were able to continue. Several pitches of WI3 and steep snow traverses put us at the bottom of the crux ice pitch. John led an intimidating 80' smear with thin protection and long runouts. He made a few impressive moves and then dominated his way through the crux, which went at WI6 due to its thin condition, runout, and a 15' overhanging section under a powder snow mushroom. We traversed over a steep snow slope that would be atrocious in the wrong conditions and dug a snow cave for our second night on the face.

In the morning we packed our soaking wet bags and climbed one more WI3 pitch, to put us on top of our route. We unroped and hiked up and over Pt. 6,000', then descended the Icicle Glacier from the standard Northeast Ridge route.

This was John's third new route on Yukla within the past year (see *AAJ* 2006) and my second attempt overall. Our route, Gank'd and Slayed, went at 2,800', V WI6 M6 A2.

CLINT HELANDER, AAC

*Abercrombie Mountain, Southwest Face.* For a few years Abercrombie Mountain (2,120m) had been in the back of my mind, for a time when conditions were decent and I had a good partner. Its southwest face starts at only 640m, presenting an unclimbed 1,480m face only a few hours' ski from the road. Alpine climbing is normally out of the question in Valdez due to the huge snow depth, but Valdez had just experienced six weeks with almost no precipitation and very high winds. Hence, while the Heli-ski hopefuls sulked about Valdez, Colin Haley and I skied up the Valdez Glacier to the top of the Second Bench on March 19, 2007. The NOAA forecast called for "a major change in the weather pattern" to show up on March 21, so we knew we would be racing the weather. We left camp under clear skies at 6:40 on March 20 and climbed steps of water ice and mixed terrain to around WI4- and 5.4b. Almost halfway up the face, there is a large snow bench on which one could casually stroll off the face. We knew we had to move a couple of gully systems to the right, but indecision and poor visibility caused us to go farther than we wanted. This caused us to hit the north ridge sooner than we would have liked.