

The summit was not what we had expected. The top was a blackened, boulder-strewn world with intricate flowers hiding in cracks and crevices, and we felt like we'd put our heads in an oven. We hung out for an hour, took in the magnificent sights, and rappelled back toward our families in Utah. On our descent we removed all of our gear from the wall, as well as a fixed rope abandoned by the European team, and as many of their littered candy wrappers as we could realistically get.

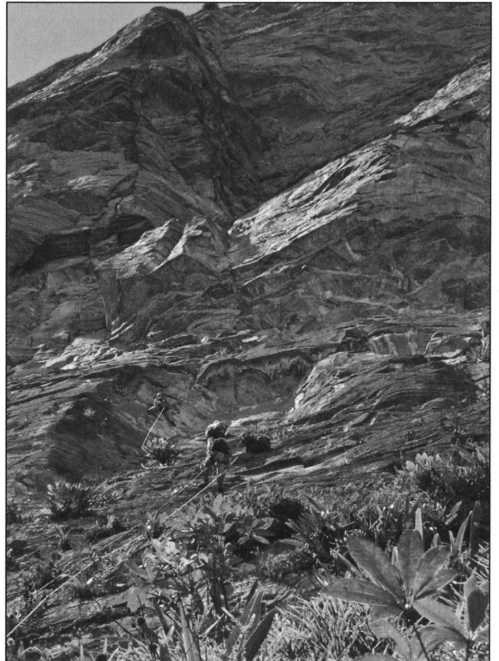
Going on a trip with Mike Libecki is a privileged experience, and the opportunity to climb with him in Venezuela was a learning experience that I will never forget. His positive philosophy and dominating love for life are inspiring and encouraging. As a University of Utah student my ability to participate in this Venezuelan adventure would not have been possible without gracious funding from the American Alpine Club's Mountaineering Fellowship Grant. Thanks to everyone at the Club, especially the old dogs, for all your generous contributions directed at enhancing the sport and safety of climbing.

KYLE DEMPSTER, AAC

Guyana

Roraima, Cutting the Line. Our expedition to the Pakaraima Mountains in the southwestern corner of Guyana had two objectives: to establish a new route on the east face of Mt. Roraima; and to set up solar power in the village of Wayalayeng, a small Amerindian community where we would begin our trek to the mountain. Our team included climbers Greg Child, Jared Ogden, and me, as well as filmmakers Scott Simper, Rob Raker, and Angus Yates. Biologist Bruce Means also accompanied us. This was my second expedition to Mt. Roraima with Jared; in 2003 we established a new route on the Prow (an overhanging north-facing buttress) called The Scorpion Wall. We arrived in Wayalayeng by bush plane and helicopter on November 7. Before heading off on the 40+-mile trek to the mountain, we helped install two solar panels on the roof of Wayalayeng's one-room school house. The panels were soon generating electricity, and it was exciting to watch the Amerindians' reaction when we turned on a light for the first time ever in their village. More importantly, the power would be used to operate a high-powered VHF radio with which they could communicate with the outside world.

The trek from Wayalayeng to the base of the Mt. Roraima took us five days.



Greg Child leading the first non-vegetated pitch (5.11) on Cutting the Line, while Jared Ogden belays and filmmaker Rob Raker jugs. *Mark Synnott*

About 20 Amerindians accompanied us, leading the way through the pristine rainforest and helping carry our equipment. We saw a lot of wildlife along the way, including a fer de lance, one of the deadliest snakes in the Amazon. In 2003 we climbed a section of the cliff about 200' to the left of the 1973 British Route, which takes a line more or less straight up the Prow. Both routes start on a high ledge accessed by a steep vegetated ridge. This time we traversed left for several hundred feet below the east face to a point below an obvious big red dihedral that started about 300' up the wall. Getting to the dihedral was a nightmare, as the bottom section of the cliff was nearly crackless and covered in thick vegetation. It took two days to get past this section, but once we did the cliff suddenly became severely overhanging, and we found ourselves climbing some of the most beautiful rock imaginable. We managed to climb the next six pitches almost completely free, with the hardest bit going at about 5.12a.

After fixing four ropes, we set up a portaledge camp 700' up the wall, beneath a massive roof. From this camp we fixed a few more pitches, before making a bid for the summit on Thanksgiving Day. The last pitch nearly shut us down, as it was almost completely blank and wove its way between two waterfalls. After seven-and-a-half hours, Jared topped out just as it got dark. While Greg followed, I was left to jug a free-hanging dynamic rope that was running through a waterfall. I thought I could just punch it, but after a few feet the water was pummeling me so hard I literally started to drown. Greg saw my predicament and managed to swing out and pull my rope into the wall. Our climb ended on a small ledge 15' below the rim. We could have scrambled unroped to the rim, but, as it was dark and pouring rain, we headed down instead, removing everything except 100' of rope that got irretrievably stuck. The route was 10 pitches and ca 1,500' high. We named it Cutting the Line (VI 5.12a A2+ J5), in honor of our Amerindian friends, without whom we could not have succeeded.

MARK SYNNOTT, AAC

Bolivia

General information. Unseasonably early snowfall arrived late in the climbing season, substantially increasing the avalanche risk. Local guides say the climbing season is moving earlier each year. Last year the weather was almost continuously bad throughout September. The political situation is always an important consideration in planning a trip to Bolivia's cordilleras. The February democratic elections saw unprecedented turnout and results. For the first time Bolivia elected an indigenous leader from a nontraditional party as president. Evo Morales from the MAS Party (Movimiento Al Socialismo [Movement Toward Socialism]) won by a clear majority, surprising commentators and observers. The victory has given rise to a populist-socialist government, with strong ideological affiliations to Venezuela and Cuba, and has been a resounding rejection of the United States' influence in Bolivian politics. Morales' spectacular ascendancy from poverty to power brought initial stability to the nation. The frequent political demonstrations and strikes that in previous years paralyzed the nation were not a problem during the May-September climbing season, but political tensions have again surfaced, and a struggle for autonomy in the Eastern Provinces may lead to serious unrest

