Trango conclusion

J. V. Anthoine

Despite repeated 'never agains' from Brown and Boysen, June 1976 saw them once again among a small group of sahibs strolling up the Baltoro glacier under black umbrellas on their way to Trango Tower. Everything seemed smoother and even the Balti villagers robbed us with smiles on their faces. As on the previous expedition, an Advanced Base Camp was established under a huge boulder at the foot of the SW face where the difficulties begin. We hoped for a rapid ascent to our old high point, but unusable and frozen-in fixed ropes denied us this and a similar time was taken.

Boysen was determined to avenge his epic of 1975 and with Anthoine in close attendance rapidly reached the scene of his undoing. Unfortunately, despite widespread scrounging, the expedition only possessed 2 5-inch bongs and after inserting one, Boysen was once again forced to resort to knee jamming. He spent a couple of minutes doing a mental 'wind-up' before powering up 40 feet of vertical crack to a large roof—in went another bong. What had appeared to be a ledge from below turned out to be illusory and 30 feet of very difficult traversing was needed before a stance was reached. The next pitch, although slightly easier, involved some extremely complex climbing including an airy tension traverse and some marvellous hand jamming. It led to the first possible place for a bivouac since leaving the snow-patch 550m below. The pair were soon joined by Brown and Howells who had been following with a haul bag, and Tony Riley, the camera man.

The bivouac ledge was situated at the foot of the final chimneys and the following morning Boysen and Anthoine watched Howells performing in a vertical groove from the warmth of their sleeping bags. It was the first time

71 Trango bivouac (Photo: J. V. Anthoine)



Howelis had climbed technically difficult rock at near 6000m, and he was most impressed. The pitch took over 3 hours and he arrived at the stance exhausted. The next section overhung impressively and 4 hours of Brown's undivided attention was required to lead it. His stock of pegs and chocks was somewhat depleted and he had to resort to repeatedly descending and de-pegging sections before progress could be made. We reckoned he climbed the whole thing at least twice. Howells then struggled up a vicious flared overhanging crack for 30 feet and hammered in a bolt, after which they descended the fixed ropes to the bivouac ledge.

The prospects were decidedly grim. The next pitch offered a choice of lines, both of which according to Howells were desperate. On the left was a 9-inch wide slot up a vertical wall with the back lined with ice and not a peg crack in sight. The right hand alternative was a very thin overhanging corner crack filled with ice that could only be reached by using tension.

By daybreak on the 8th Anthoine and Boysen were jumaring up the ropes fixed the previous day. Anthoine chose the right hand crack and, after a few skittery and inelegant moves, managed to reach it. To his relief the crack was not as nasty as it had appeared and, while Boysen shivered away on the stance, he pegged and chocked about 100 feet to where the angle eased. He was faced by a snowy slot that ended under an overhang split by a V-crack. He started up this snow, but after a couple of steps it disintegrated and left him on ice, wedged between the 2 walls with no cracks to grasp and very frightened. A bolt was quickly placed; a few slithery moves above it enabled an ice-peg to be inserted below the overhang. The next 20 feet were certainly no place for a coward and so Boysen was brought into action. His solution was masterful and completely free. Legs stuck out at impossible angles, grunts, a full 360° turn and he was over it, wedged in the crack above and convulsed in a noisy coughing fit. Seventy feet of easier jamming and in went the second bolt he had ever placed; Anthoine joined him and spent the next 15 minutes making the stance safe! As the ground ahead looked mainly free, Boysen again went into the lead. An uneventful 50 feet, 3 pegs and he suddenly became airborne—so down to the stance for more pegs and back up. His problem was to move from an overhanging wall on to a high angled snowy ramp to his left. He swung on to the snow and grabbed for a crack; the snow gave way and once again he was off in a flurry of curses. Composure regained, a little craftiness and upward progress was resumed. Two hours later came an excited yell—'We've cracked it!' He had arrived on the shoulder at the top of the summit chimneys after more than 4 hours on what was certainly the hardest pitch on the whole climb. Anthoine and Riley arrived at the shoulder in turn, about 350 feet below the summit, but as they were reduced to one rope and only $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours of daylight remained, Riley decided to descend.

Three rapid, easy pitches and Boysen and Anthoine were on the small pointed snowy summit. Big grins and a quick look at the sunset on the Muztagh Tower, the Gasherbrums and Masherbrums were followed by a careful descent to the others at the bivouac ledge.

The following day Brown and Howells also reached the summit and descended again in rapidly deteriorating conditions. The descent was continued to the accompaniment of avalanches and rock falls and in consequence all the fixed ropes were left in position. Base Camp was reached safely that evening.