

## North America 2000

### ALASKA

Perhaps the epicentre of North American alpine climbing, Alaska continued to receive world-class ascents on big, difficult routes as well as repeats in blazing alpine style. On **Denali**, the 9000ft *Czech Direct* (initially climbed as a siege effort in 1986) received its second and third ascents, and quantum leaps in the definition of 'alpine style'. In May, Ben Gilmore and Kevin Mahoney repeated the massive route in alpine style in seven days, a fine feat of its own. Less than a month later, Steve House, Scott Backes and Mark Twight blitzed the route in 60 hours of climbing, sans bivvy gear. House claims 'It was my first world-class route' – a powerful statement from one of North America's top alpinists. They simul-climbed and soloed considerable amounts of the 5.9 WI6 route, belaying thirty-one 60-metre pitches in their remarkable ascent.

Also on **Denali**, *Reality Ridge* received its first solo from Robert Shonerd. Bart Paull and Fred Wilkinson, each a mere 20-years old, blazed the *Cassin* in 56 hours – a route requiring up to a week for many seasoned alpinists.

An adventurous Canadian couple, Sacha Friedlin and Marie-Diane Cyr, hiked into the Alaska Range, climbed **Foraker** and **Hunter**, and Friedlin soloed **Denali**, before the pair hiked back out after approximately two hearty months.

The profound *Infinite Spur* on **Mt Foraker** received its third and fourth ascents at more or less the same time over about one week in late May. The first team was veteran Alaska hardman Carl Tobin and the timeless alpine superhero Barry Blanchard, with 'the lads' close on their heels: Gren Hinton and Glen Deal, both in their early 20s.

On **Mt. Huntington** persistence paid off for Brad Grohusky and Rod Willard who, with Mike Gruber and Mark Thompson, finally succeeded on their new wall route. *Golden Granite West Face*, 1200ft of climbing between the *Colton-Leach* and *Polarchrome* routes, is the big gash gully starting on the left side of the face.

**Mt. Hunter's** North Buttress continued to receive attention, with its undeniable allure. Jeff Hollenbaugh and Bruce Miller, both from Colorado, arrived in hopes of the *Moonflower Buttress*. However, with the route practically becoming one to queue-up for, and the need to battle parties with haulbags and portaledges, their light and fast ideals would be problematic on the popular route. Instead, they climbed Twight and Backes' unrepeated *Deprivation* to the big zigzag where they logically finished on

the Moonflower's *Bibler Come Again* exit. The pair were forced to retreat in bad weather just shy of the buttress' top.

Brits Jules Cartwright and Ian Parnell climbed a stellar new route, *The Knowledge* (Alaska Grade 6), to the right of the *Moonflower* in late May and early June. The difficult mixed route shares some pitches with the *Moonflower* but is primarily an independent line and a very impressive one.

Jim Donini had better luck this year on the impressive **Thunder Mountain** than in the previous year (nail-biting epic with Malcolm Daly), climbing a new rock route on the prominent *Central Spur* with John Bragg. The two hadn't climbed together since their historic first ascent of **Torre Egger** nearly 25 years ago. Their initial attempt on the buttress ended in stormy retreat, but they left a gear cache. They returned to their high-point via a couloir entering from the right, gaining their point rapidly on moderate snow, before continuing on steep rock to the top of the buttress.

Exploration and climbing, primarily on excellent granite, continued in the Little Switzerland area, with many fine routes established.

In the Ruth Gorge, Scott DeCario and Kelly Cordes emerged from their base-camp laziness to try several routes, and surprisingly climbed some, including a difficult new route on **London Tower**. *The Trailer Park* climbs the left couloir for 3200ft, with many difficult mixed sections. The pair climbed the route in 12 hours, base to summit. Also in the Ruth, Tim Wagner and Seth Shaw climbed a 4000ft-plus new route, *The Escalator*, on **Mt. Johnson**. Their route, climbed in a 31-hour round-trip push through intermittently stormy weather, climbs what could be called the *SE Couloir*, left of the prominent unclimbed East Buttress. Tragically, the highly-respected Shaw was killed a week later by a massive sérac collapse while ice bouldering near Johnson.

Opposite the Ruth, the Buckskin Glacier saw action in the fall – a rare time for parties to visit Alaska. Gilmore, Mahoney, and House climbed a 5000ft new mixed route on the **Moose's Tooth**. The route begins in the deep gully between the Moose's and **Bear's Tooth** before finding a corner system giving passage to the upper slopes and the summit. Also on the trip, DeCario soloed the probable first ascent of **Peak 9160** via the 3160ft South Face. For its likeness to **Mt. Assiniboine**, DeCario informally named it 'Canadian Rockies Peak'.

The lesser known, but impressive **Chugach** and **Wrangell** mountains received many new routes as well, primarily by Alaskans with local knowledge of the gems, establishing fine routes on scarcely-known peaks.

**Mt. St. Elias's Mira Face** received its second ascent, and the first ski descent (an often-attempted feat) by the Colorado team of Doug Byerly, Lorne Glick, Andy Ward and James Bracken. On St. Elias, another impressive ascent was a three-day blast (including one day pinned down by weather!) of the *Homberger Route* by Alaska climbing veterans Dave Nettle and Bean Bowers.

In the Coast Range, the spectacular South Ridge of **Mt. Oasis** was finally climbed, the first time the peak's summit had been reached. The route climbs granite with some snow, following a glacier climb to a col, about 4000ft base to summit. The project was planned by the venerable Fred Beckey, who remained at the col while Kelvin Vail and Jon Walsh completed the first ascent.

## CANADA

The big-wall hotspot Baffin Island saw many new routes. Kurt Albert and party redpointed *Odyssey 2000* (5.12b, 12 pitches) on the E Face of **Polar Bear Spire**. The route was comprehensively bolted. On **The Fin**, *Earth, Wind, and Choss* was established by Russel Mitrovich, Mike Libeck, and Josh Helling plus expedition camera crew Peter Mallamo and John Middendorf. The route, conservatively graded VI 5.10 A2+, was filmed by American Adventure Productions, and will be broadcast on the Outdoor Life Network Channel.

A handful of Norwegian climbers, Bjarte Bo, Halvor Hagen, Torkel Roisli and Odd-Roar Wiik visited the **Sam Ford Fjord** and couldn't keep still! On the North Face of **Polar Sun Spire**, *The Norwegian Route* was established (VII 5.10 A4). After the ascent, Bo quickly got bored and freesoloed the South Ridge of **The Beak**, perhaps a new route. Soon afterwards, Hagen and Wiik climbed a 10-pitch new route to the previously (probably) unclimbed S summit of **The Turret**. Then Bo and Roisli started a new pillar line on **Great Cross Pillar**, climbing 18 pitches, mostly free up to 5.11, in rock boots. They called the route *Helluland Revisited* (V 5.11 A1). The pair relaxed for a few hours during the night, but finished the round trip in about 36 hours.

Canadians Jason Methot and Jason Robinson climbed a steep new 3400ft line on the **Cat's Eye Wall**, calling it *Pillar of Fire* (VII A4 5.10 WI 3). At one point, a sound above made them fear rockfall, but it was a solo BASE jumper roaring past them! Also on Baffin Island, Canadians Ben Demencech, Matt Maddaloni, and John Millar climbed a 2800ft wall on the south bank of Gibbs Fjord, calling it *Midnight Watch*.

In the St Elias Range **Mt. Logan** was the main target, as always. Aside from the standard attention given to the *E Ridge* and *King Trench* routes, Swiss climbers Werner Stucki and Christian Zinsli repeated (second ascent) the *Hummingbird Ridge-Thunderbird Variation* in impeccable style. After warming up by making the first ascent of **Mt. Teddy**, 3960 metres, via the 1300-metre-high East Face, they blazed the route on Logan in a mind-boggling 26 hours. The route ascends about 3600 vertical metres, and they climbed it mostly unroped. Conditions dictated an unplanned descent of the East Ridge, almost a repeat of the FA party's epic, but fortunately pilot Paul Claus happened to fly overhead and pick them up!

**Mt. Kennedy's** proud 6000ft *N Buttress* saw its first alpine-style ascent, by Andy Cave and Mick Fowler. (See article 'Mount Kennedy – North Buttress' in this volume.)

Rock climbing near the **Cirque of the Unclimbables** continued, with Chris Van Leuven and Matt Childers climbing a new route on the **Minotaur** in a spectacular and rarely-visited cirque in the Ragged Range.

BC's impressive Waddington Range of the Coast Mountains saw action, with **Mt. Monarch's N Ridge** getting its first ascent by Bill Durtler, Bruce Fairley and Don Serl. On neighbouring **Mt. Combatant**, a new route *Perseverance* was made on the last major unclimbed buttress on Combatant, left of Child and Foweraker's 1995 route *Belligerence*, by Brendan Cusick and Alan Kearney. In the same group, Brits Simon Richardson and Dore Green made the first ascent of the impressive 800m rock pillar directly beneath the summit on the 1400m South Face of **Mount Tiedemann** (3848m). On the *Cataract Buttress* of **Mt Shand**, an impressive line was established by Mark Hartley and Lorne Hoover.

Impressive free routes were established at **Squamish**, with the Grand Wall on Squamish Chief freed by Scott Cosgrove; and on the Sherri's Badge formation of the Chief, Peter Croft and Hamish Fraser freed a new line, *The Fortress*. It was the last of the three main walls to be freed. Also on the Chief, Conny Amelunxen and Adam Diamond established a new wall route, *Bald Egos*.

In the Selkirks, new routes established on **Mt. Dag** were *Ankles as Far as the Eye Can See* and *Ankles Me Boy*, by Jason Magness, Sam Price, Mike Brown, George Ortiz, Craig Clarence, and Andy Magness, operating in two teams.

Tophier and Patience Donahue put up *Cameron's Pillar* (1500' 5.11+), a stellar line on the South Face of the **South Howser Tower** named after their friend Cameron Tague, whose spirit they felt 'during every perfect jam'. The duo established other shorter routes on the trip, and made the first free ascent of *Tower Arête* (1000' 5.12-) on **Snowpatch Spire**.

In the loose, massive, and impressive Canadian Rockies, Raphael Slawinski and Jim Sevigny established *Leftover Rib* on the stunning East Face of **Mt. Chephren**, the route ascending an obvious rib left of the *Gran Route*.

## CONTINENTAL UNITED STATES

While **Yosemite** didn't see lightning-fast speed records in 2000, free action, and free solos, were indeed impressive. Dean Potter became the second person, after Peter Croft, to free solo *Astroman*. While Potter used an easier variation on the crux of pitch three, the ascent was indeed awesome and admirable. El Cap was freed by two new routes, *Lurking Fear* and *Golden*

*Gate*. The former was freed by the young duo of Tommy Caldwell and Beth Rodden, with the latter by the inimitable Huber brothers.

On **Lower Cathedral Rock's** North Face, Steve Gerberding and Dave Griffith made a new wall route, *Children of the Corn*. Eric George soloed a new/variant line, *The Long Walk* on **Half Dome**.

New action in **Red Rocks** was had by Roxanna Brock and Gary Fike, as well as Brian McCray and Mike Lewis – not to mention the reticent local crew establishing routes nobody knows of!

Paul Ross kept busy in the desert of the Colorado Plateau and Utah, establishing a plethora of new routes, many of shaky towers that most people of sound mind would steer clear of. Busy in Zion and throughout Utah, firing scores of new routes, were Nate Brown, Troy Anderson, Jason Stevens, Jared Nielson, Douglas Heinrich, Boulos Ayad, Eric Draper, Bryan Bird, Dave Littman, Joe French, Fly'n Brian McCray, and Burt Arend.

The Black Canyon of the **Gunnison** in Colorado had a new solo variation to *Black Planet* by Brent Armstrong, and the fast and furious team of Mike Pennings and Jonny Copp fired a new line, *No Pig Left*, descending to the base of the new line carrying one rope and no pitons.

Rolando Garibotti, whose impressive ascents belie his refreshing reluctance to talk about his climbing, repeated the *Grand Traverse* in under seven hours. Many parties bivvy on the traverse, and to do it in a day is a worthy goal for most climbers. The late Alex Lowe's 8.5 hours on the traverse was thought to be inhuman and impossible to match!

The hardcore local Montana crew continued to get after it on the big remote ice and mixed lines of **Glacier National Park**, as well as other areas of the remote state. In Glacier, Chris Gibisch, Kevin McCracken, Patrick Knoll, Jeff Shapiro, Ryan Hokanson, Patrick Knoll, Gabe Boisseau, Chris Gibbish and Blase Reardon led the charge. In the **Bitterroot** mountains, pioneering activity on impressive rock faces continued, led recently by a crew including Brad Stevens, Jim Crossland, Jimmy Pinjuv, Chris Trimble, Rafael Graña, Kevin McCracken, Jeff Shapiro, Jim Earl, Stephen Porcella, Ben Osburn and Eric Roberts.

## MEXICO

In **Basaseachi Falls**, a new wall, which has been called 'Cascada', received two impressive new lines. Lucas Laeser, Dierk Sittner and Pete Daumeister established *Subiendo el Arcoiris* (IV 5.12c A0 or 5.13b?, ten pitches), which ascends a prow left of a huge waterfall for 900ft. Cecilia Buil also opened a new route, solo, on the wall and named the route *Lluvia de Plata*.