

AC

cell 27611

09/30

CROWN JEWEL 2000 EXPEDITION



The Witches Hats, Little Switzerland



++++

Crown Jewel Expedition 2000

PERSONNEL

Brian Davison
Lindsay Griffin
Brian Griffiths

SUMMARY

From the 1st-31st May British climbers, Brian Davison, Lindsay Griffin and Brian Griffiths, visited the previously unnamed glacier (now proposed as the East Fork of the Crown) to the south east of The Crown Jewel (2,362m). The latter lies at the southern head of the Pika Glacier in an area approximately 25 kilometres south of McKinley commonly referred to as Little Switzerland. The team made a total of 14 probable first ascents, including 12 of previously unclimbed peaks.

From a base camp on the East Fork the team climbed the following: the South Couloir of Gendarme 7,300 followed by a traverse to, then ascent of, the East Ridge of The Crown Jewel; the South Couloir to the West Ridge of The Crown Jewel; the three Witches' Hats; the South Couloir and East Ridge to the base of the final three-metre monolith of The Tiara's East Summit; the South Couloir to South West Ridge of Your Highness; the North Summit of The Coronet via the South South East Flank and a descent by the East Couloir below Pt Pico, which was also ascended via its East Couloir. From a temporary camp on the southerly Dix Glacier various easier peaks closer to the Kahiltna Glacier were climbed together with the fine trio of Deception, Arrowhead and Misty Peaks above the Brume Glacier (south east of the Dix).

The climbers originally hoped that at this time of year they might find ephemeral ice lines in south-facing couloirs but very heavy snowfall a few weeks prior to their arrival had left the spiky granite peaks, that characterise the area, very well-plastered. Deep and worrying unconsolidated snow leading to narrow, Peruvian-type ridges was the norm, though there were sections of enjoyable 'Scottish mixed' ground on some of the routes. Due to remarkably settled and sunny weather for a good portion of the time, the best conditions occurred on south-facing slopes around dawn. However, all three climbers felt that, overall, the conditions were consistently the worst they had experienced anywhere. The weather in Little Switzerland during May was much less cold and harsh than on the bigger mountains to the north. Temperatures fell as low as -20°C early in the month but towards the end were considerably higher. During several periods of poor weather in the latter half of May they barely dropped below freezing.

There is still capacity for further pioneering in this region and, in the summer, potential for good new rock routes up to 400-450m in height. The best scope for the latter would appear to lie above the West Fork of the Crown Glacier and would provide climbing similar to that already established in the Pika Glacier to the north.

THE ASCENTS

The Expedition made 14 probable first ascents. Apart from the Crown Jewel and Your Highness, the summits were previously virgin. All names are provisional and all altitudes (in feet) very approximate:

South Couloir of Gendarme 7,300 followed by East Ridge of The Crown Jewel (7,750).

South Couloir to West Ridge of Crown Jewel, then descend South East Couloir.

First Witch's Hat (6,500) via West Face.

Second Witch's Hat (6,500+) via West Face and South Ridge.

Third Witch's Hat (6,600) via West Face, East Flank and South Face.

The Tiara (7,300m) to within three metres of East Summit via South Couloir and East Ridge. Descent via South Couloir and South West Ramp.

The Coronet North Summit (6,800) via South South East Flank. Descent by the East Couloir below Pt Pico (6,400), which was also ascended via East Couloir.

Your Highness (7,950) via the South Couloir towards the broad col between this peak and Lady in Waiting (7,300), then the South West Ridge.

Lookout Peak (5,000) via the West Couloir and South Ridge.

Merry Peak (4,550) via the South Ridge and South South East Couloir. Descent by the couloir.

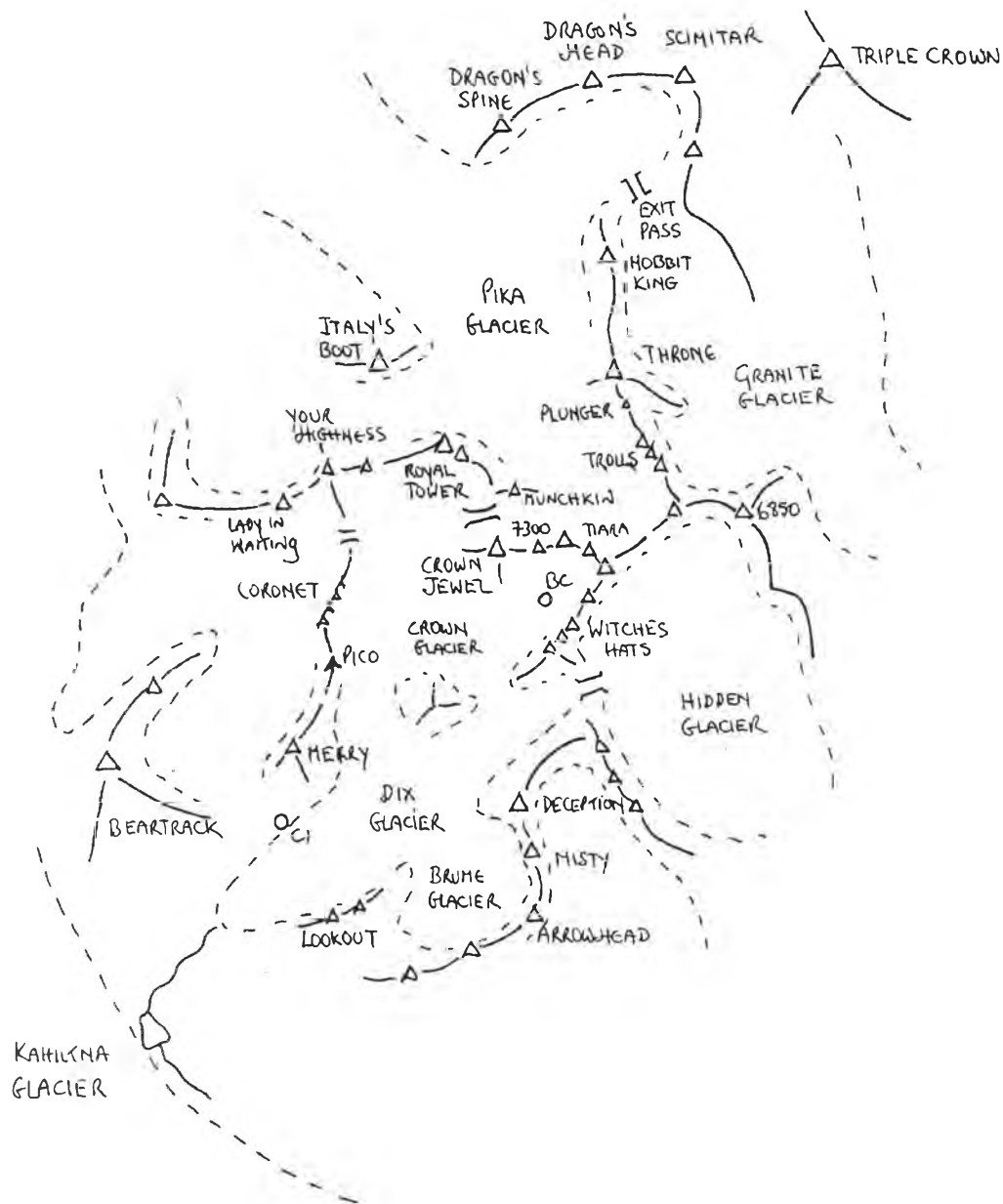
Beartrack Peak (5,995) via East Flank, Cwm and South Ridge.

Arrowhead Peak (5,910?) via the North West Flank and South Ridge.

Misty Peak (6,000) via the North Flank and Ridge.

Deception Peak (6,420) via the South West Couloir and East South East Ridge.

Climbs were made from the East and West Forks of the Crown Glacier, the Dix Glacier and Brume Glacier. Base Camp was at 5,900 on the East Fork of the Crown Glacier, while Camp 1 was sited at approximately 3,800 on the north bank of the Dix.



Map of Little Switzerland

LITTLE SWITZERLAND

Little Switzerland could rightly refer to the entire array of fine granite spires and bizarre fingers of rock that lie east of the big bend in the Southern Kahiltna Glacier. However, to those who know of the region, most would consider Little Swiss to be the peaks surrounding the Pika Glacier, a one kilometre-wide highway of ice that flows gently for eight kilometres from the Crown Jewel - Pt 2,088m watershed, to join the Kahiltna at c62° 44' N. Notable here are the vertical rock walls on the East Face of the Royal Tower (2,478m), the highest peak in the immediate area, and the smaller but equally

steep West Face of The Throne. In the last two decades there has been a slow but steady increase in the number of climbers visiting these easily accessed peaks, with the Pika Glacier providing a relatively reliable landing strip for most of the season.

Little climbing appears to have been attempted in the region south of the Crown Jewel. Roger Robinson and Brian Okenek certainly travelled the Dix Glacier and Okenek crossed the Crown Glacier to make the first ascent of the Crown Jewel. He also unsuccessfully attempted a peak south of Your Highness. Paul Roderick landed below the south east flank of the Crown Jewel and climbed the prominent south-facing couloir some distance to the right of the snow couloir descending from the notch at the base of the Crown Jewel's East Ridge. An attempt to continue up left to a virgin summit was stopped by dangerous snow conditions on the crest.

In the last decade Little Switzerland has become a useful venue for guided and instructional courses, particularly those concentrating on ski-touring, and nowadays can be visited as much as several times in one season. However, virtually all parties keep more or less to the confines of the Pika Glacier, enjoying the excellent granite for which the area is reputed and often terminating their rock route some distance away from the summit to avoid dangerous snow conditions. Documented ascents since the early '90s are not complete and it is very possible that several rock routes will have been omitted from the following history.

A Brief History of Climbing in Little Switzerland

The first recorded ascents in this granite land took place as long ago as May 1964 when James Richardson and Margaret Young landed their own Cessna 180 on the 'big bend' of the Kahiltna. They first climbed the lower summit of a split pinnacle close to camp but several days later moved east in to the range and made the first ascent of a 2,423m peak, later to be called Your Highness. One lead by Young, straight up a 40m section of snow plastered rock, was described as hair-raising, 'as she hung off icicles while standing on a thin covering of snow and ice without pitons'.

The range was really 'discovered' in 1976, when local climbers, Roger Robinson and Brian Okenek, set up camp on the Pika Glacier and in a series of forays during late July climbed Italy's Boot (2,289m) on the 22nd via the North East Couloir and North Ridge (70°), the small granite pinnacle of the Scimitar (2,164m) on the 25th via the South Face, Dragon's Spine (2,283m) on the 26th via the South East Couloir and North East Ridge, and on the same day Hobbit King (2,106m) on the east side of the Pika via the North West Couloir (three pitches of 5.7 on the summit ridge). Finally on the 31st they climbed The Throne (2,252m) via a fine 12-pitch rock route up slabs towards the far right side of the South Face. They didn't get on to the Crown Jewel at that time but returned the following year, only to fail on this 2,362m summit, the second highest in the Pika Glacier cirque. The Crown Jewel is possibly named because of a conspicuous hanging serac high on the North Face and it was below this formation, close to the glaciated col leading over to the West Fork of the Crown Glacier, that Robinson had a surprise encounter

with a black bear. However, with Ken Cook, Robinson and Okenek managed to make the first ascent of the highest peak in the group, the 2,478m Royal Tower, via a two-day ascent (19th-20th July) of the North East Ridge (15 pitches with snow, ice and mixed climbing plus several rock sections up to 5.10). The three also made the first ascent of South Troll (2,118m) on the 22nd via a snow couloir and rock slabs on the West Face (5.7). Finally, they made the second ascent of Your Highness on the 28th, following the side glacier to the north of the Royal Tower. They found this led easily round to the West Face of Your Highness leaving only four pitches of climbing up beautifully sound granite to reach the summit.

The next recorded visit occurred in 1980 when more local climbers, Ned Lewis and Stacy Taniguchi, made the second ascent of the Throne via the Central Gully on the South Face, left of the original route. Conditions were poor and the summit ridge a nightmare of hanging cornices. With Ron Baird this pair also climbed two short rock routes up to 5.9 on buttresses that lie on the south west flanks of Hobbit King. In the same season Dan Hanson and Holm Newman climbed the Dragon's Head (2,195m: north east of the Dragon's Spine) via the East Gully and corniced South Ridge, while Kent Benesch and Chris Haunold climbed the South East Ridge of Hobbit King and the Central Spur on the North Face of Italy's Boot.

The South Face of the Throne was climbed again over two days in August 1981 by Alaskans, Mark Moderow and Nick Parker, via a 15 pitch route reported to be 'somewhat broken but quite sound'. Okenek returned to the Pika in 1982 with a group of three Italian clients and amongst other things made the first ascent of the couloir on the East Face of Italy's Boot. 1983 saw a total of 33 climbers visit Little Switzerland and also the first ascent of The Crown Jewel by Brian Okenek. This time Okenek, together with David Johnstone, Jon Waterman and Scott Woolums, approached up Whitehorse Creek in July, then crossed the Granite and Hidden Glaciers to reach the East Fork of the Crown. Woolums first soloed an easy point on the ridge south of the Witches' Hats, then all four climbed the main South East Facing Couloir on the Crown Jewel to reach the upper section of the West Ridge. They traversed the 2,362m peak by descending the East Ridge and down a south-east-facing snow couloir to regain the glacier. During their explorations of the range in the same month the four also climbed a 2,624m peak near the top of the Granite Glacier's Right Fork. This high, pointed mountain lies three kilometres east of the Scimitar and was christened Triple Crown, the route of ascent taking a couloir on the south flank of the West Ridge, then the long rocky crest above to the highest point.

The most obvious feature on the Throne is the sheer West Face rising directly from the Pika Glacier. The right side of this face was climbed in June, when after fixing ropes Reese Martin, John Rich and Peter Pollard made a 23 hours round trip from base camp, completing the wall at V, 5.9, A2 and reaching a point on the heavily corniced summit ridge two pitches from the top before rappelling. They also made a 30 hours round trip of a rather dirty rock route on the South West Face of Dragon's Spine (5.10 and A1) and the first ascent of the small rock peak south east of the Royal Tower (and just east of the col

separating this peak from the Crown Jewel) via its North West Ridge. The c1,880m peaklet was christened The Munchkin and the route graded 5.10 and A1. The trio also reached the summit of Middle Troll via its sound South Ridge. This last route was repeated just a month later by Denklewaller and Obrien, who also climbed the North Couloir to the high notch east of the Crown Jewel and made the first ascent of the mountain's East Ridge. In the same year a climbing course run by the National Outdoor Leadership School managed to add another new route to Italy's Boot, when they climbed the South Face opposite Your Highness via the prominent rectilinear snow couloir splitting the face.

The Throne was climbed via its steep rocky North Ridge in July 1985 by Jorgensen, Lane, Musial and Stacheli, while in July 1987 Moore, Stone and Waitman reached the head of the Pika and climbed up left to gain, via its North Ridge, the West Top of the long crest leading to Pt 2,088m. A continuation along the sharp crest to the highest point will prove very taxing. The following May saw the obvious Central Couloir on the East Face of the Royal Tower fall to Alaskan's, Bill McKeena and James Sweeney. The six mixed pitches above the 540m, 60° snow couloir provided the crux. This pair also climbed a short rock route on the right side of the Throne's West Face (Maneater: 5.10b). The same year saw a remarkable climb achieved, when Perret and Spichiger traversed the long and complicated West Ridge of the Royal Tower all the way from Your Highness to the main summit.

In August 1989 two parties arrived independently on the Pika. Americans, Rob Heineman and Jim Litch, warmed up with a possible new route on the South Face of the Throne, then joined British climbers, Andy Garland and Bill Whitfield, for an ascent of the finger of rock in the col just south of that mountain. Two pitches, with the second rated 5.9 and A2. led to the c1,890m top, dubbed The Plunger. The following day the American pair made the first ascent of the Crown Jewel's West Ridge finding superb scrambling, four steep pitches up to 5.8 and a knife-edge summit ridge. All four then made a three-day slog over Exit Pass and Whitehorse to reach the Petersville Forestry Road, where they fortunately met a group of hunters with a 4WD and were able to beg a lift out to Talkeetna.

Pt c1,970m (6,500') to the south east of Hobbit King had a first ascent in May 1990 from Jerry Handren and Micheal Kahn. The short south-east-facing rock wall (5.7) led to an exposed summit ridge and the pair descended the snowslopes on the South West Face. Later, the pair made the first ascent of North Troll by climbing a 60° snow couloir to a gap in the summit ridge, then following the crest north (5.7 and mixed) to the top. There are also reports of a direct route up the West Face of Middle Troll a month previously by Paul Turecki.

In June 1991, after their impressive ascent of the South Face of Dickey in the Ruth Gorge, Italians, Bruno de Dona and Mario Manica, completed a hard new route on the Throne, which they called Harmonica Crack (VI and A3).

July 1994 appears to be the first time an ascent of the lower South Summit of the Royal Tower was recorded. Alaskans, Peter Haeussler and Lloyd Miller, spent two days on the South East Flank of the mountain climbing 18 pitches that linked small snowfields with generally easy rock climbing, though several pitches were 5.7 or possibly 5.8. Two months earlier Willi Peabody and Mike Wood had made an ascent of Your Highness, probably by a new line but details are not known.

A number of new rock routes were completed in July 1996 by the four-man Australian team of Campbell Mercer, Rob Pease, Matt Walsh and Mike Woolridge. Pease and Woolridge climbed the North East Ridge of North Troll, while Mercer and Walsh appear to have repeated the Plunger at 5.6 and A1 or 5.10a (though see later) and added a short new route to the lower South Face of the Throne, which they christened Half Way Hotel (200m: 5.8). This last named pair also climbed the 12-pitch Lost Marsupial (5.8) up the slabby walls just left of the Central Couloir on the South Face but did not go to the summit. The far left buttresses on the Royal Tower's East Face provided two new routes: Di's Surprise (Pease/Woolridge: 12 pitches: 5.9 and A2) and on the slender buttress to the right, Boomerang Buttress (Mercer/Walsh: 12 pitches: 5.8+). Both routes terminated at the base of the upper snow slopes. Several half-pitch rock routes were added to the south flank of The Munchkin ridge, which the Australians referred to as Little Arapiles.

The following year Doug Munoz and Kristian Seilling first climbed a route on the South/South East Face of the Throne, noting that there are endless route combinations here and plenty of evidence of previous traffic. Mark Price and Craigh Short also climbed a route there before all four headed for the Royal Tower and a new route first attempted by Sieling in '94. They completed the line up the left flank of the buttress immediately south of the Central Couloir on the East Face, both parties rappelling from the dangerous upper snow fields. The Chase was graded 5.10 and A2.

John Burcham, John Mattson and Josh Zimmerman spent the middle of June 1999 on the Pika and climbed a number of new rock routes, many quite short. One of the best was The Jester, a seven-pitch 5.10b towards the left side of the Royal Tower's East Face. They later added a variation start called The Blade, following a superb slanting crackline at 5.10d. The three also climbed the 300m West Face of Middle Troll, finding moderate climbing with a few pitches of 5.7-5.9 and an interesting finish up the thin summit fin. They also ascended a route on the South Face of the Throne and made a free ascent of The Plunger at 5.12a/b, a route repeated later in the month by Dave Anderson.

ITINERARY

Flight Manchester - Amsterdam - Minneapolis - Anchorage with KLM

Dates:

28 April. Fly from Manchester.

29 April. Arrive Anchorage. Get expedition food at Carrs Supermarket (8 hours of shopping - HELP). White gas (Coleman fuel) 6 gallons (US) and 8

gas cylinders from REI climbing store in Anchorage. Get bus to Talkeetna and stay at bunk house of Talkeetna Air Taxi (TAT).

30 April. Pack food and equipment and check weight for flight to glacier. Look over information from the Ranger Station in Talkeetna and talk with local climbers about developments in the Little Switzerland area. Copy info from Colby Coombs, a local climbing guide.

1 May. All personnel fly into glacier in evening (8pm) when weather finally clears. Erect tents. Snowed later in the evening.

2 May. Build igloo as a toilet and walls around the tents, then sort out base camp. Paul Roderick of TAT arrives on evening with second flight containing the bulk of our food and fuel. Found the radio didn't work.

3 May. A late start to climbing. The team opted for a narrow curving snow gully immediately right of the prominent snow gully descending from the notch at the base of the Crown Jewel's East Ridge. Poorly consolidated snow over rock slabs guarded entry to the gully. After passing Gendarme 7,300' and making a traverse of about 200m of ridge to below the notch at the base of Crown Jewel's East Ridge, BG decides to descend gully and wait at the rimaye as progress is slow. This leaves LG and BD to gain the notch and continue up the East Ridge to the summit of the Crown Jewel.

4 May. Rest and further organising of BC.

5 May. Up at 2 am but snow prevented any start. Rest day and further radio test, no response from any passing planes.

6 May. 5 am start on snow gully on South Face of Crown Jewel. The direct start was rock so a diagonal line slanting up from the left was used. The gully was followed by BG, LG and BD to join the existing West Ridge route. An easier gully, the line of the 1st ascent, was then descended.

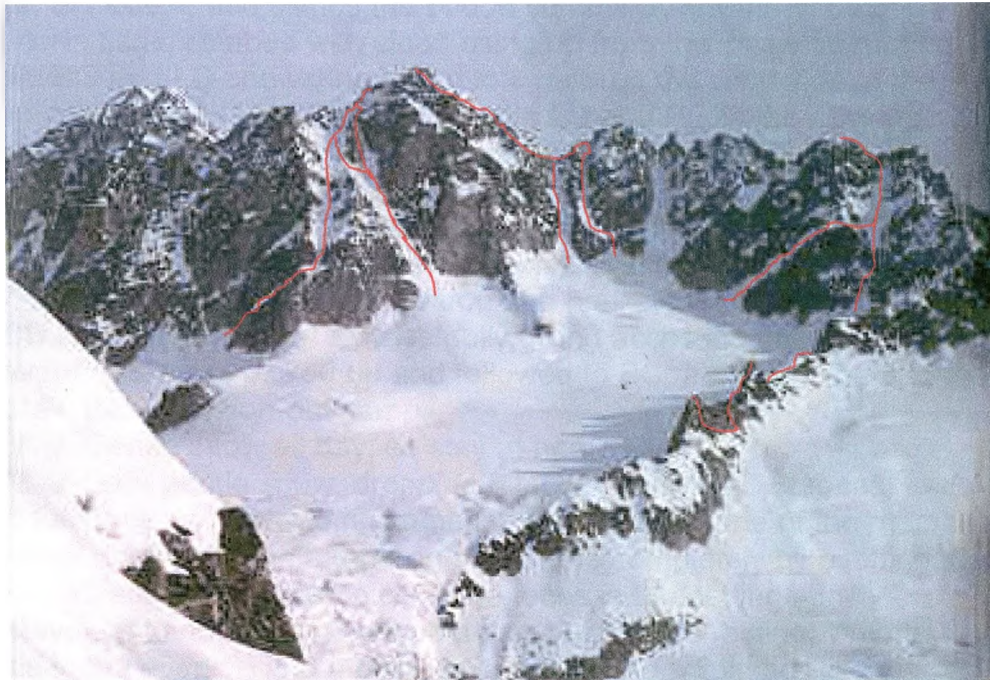
After a tea stop at BC the peaks on the other side of the glacier basin were attacked. From the ridge LG and BG attempted a snow line on the north side of one summit but backed off due to unconsolidated snow. BD soloed the next peak due south along the ridge via a short knife-edge, west-facing ridge. The snow on north-facing slopes had not consolidated so a descent around the rock buttresses of the next summit to the south was undertaken. A gully was climbed on to the south ridge and the crest followed to the top. BD reached the summit as LG and BG started on the first summit BD then descended along the ridge to the top of the gully, descended 200m on the east side to reach a groove that gave access to unconsolidated snow slopes, which were followed to the summit of the third and highest peak (6600ft), just as LG was summiting on the first peak. The route was reversed. All returned to BC. The three peaks were provisionally christened the Witches' Hats.

7 May. Rested all day, eventually leaving about 5pm for peak about 2 miles due west of BC. LG and BG on snow shoes BD on short skis. Gained height up a south facing snow basin on the mountain. Poor snow conditions led to LG and BG gaining the ridge from a gully and BD dodging between rock outcrops. The gully led to a minor point christened Pt Pico. The main peak itself, christened Coronet Peak had four separate rocky summits running roughly north to south, the second from north being the highest and one of the easier to reach. In failing light and threatening skies BD climbed the most northerly summit, a more difficult rock tower (by mistake, I miscounted) after a long traverse across snow slopes in poor condition. BD rejoined BG and LG

outcrops. The gully led to a minor point christened Pt Pico. The main peak itself, christened Coronet Peak had four separate rocky summits running roughly north to south, the second from north being the highest and one of the easier to reach. In failing light and threatening skies BD climbed the most northerly summit, a more difficult rock tower (by mistake, I miscounted) after a long traverse across snow slopes in poor condition. BD rejoined BG and LG on ridge, also climbed Pt Pico, then descended their gully. LG and BG continued but soon retreated when it started to snow.

8 May. Rest day and sorted out food for an eight-day side trip to the Dix glacier.

9 May. Cloud and light snow during day. Cleared in the evening. LG, BG and BD set off for a peak on ridge at back of glacier basin (NW of BC). Three pitches through mixed ground led to an easy snow gully, which was followed to the ridge. Three pitches (westward) along a narrow and corniced ridge led to a knife-edge rock ridge and a 3m granite tower, The East Summit of the Tiara, which in -20 C at night was not climbed. BD reached the bottom of this monolith while LG and BG shivered c10m below. This was the east most of three summits. After reversing the upper section of the gully a diagonal left to right gully/ramp was used for descent.



The East Fork of the Crown Glacier from Deception Peak.

10 May. Rest day.

11 May. Packed sledges and moved in late afternoon to position C1 on map about 3 miles SW down the glacier.

12 May. During the day BD climbed 5000ft summit, Lookout Peak, on the opposite (east) side of the glacier via a west facing gully and south ridge. LG and BG explored the top of the moraine on the west side. That evening BD and BG headed west for point 5995 but encountered unconsolidated snow on the east slope. LG reached the middle of the glacier opposite this slope via a

to col to meet BG and LG. Ascend gully on south side between Your Highness and point 7300 to gain SW ridge of Your Highness. BD continues up ridge on poor snow keeping to rock outcrops for maximum slope stability. Slope settles as summit is gained but doesn't avalanche. LG and BG wimp-out on the lower section of the ridge. Everyone descends and returns to BC.

28 May. A second message is stamped out in the snow.

29 May. Still no planes. Frantic eating of provisions, undertaken to lighten outward loads.

30 May. Low cloud with some snow so no flights. Force feeding of BG to finish food and lighten loads for the outward journey.

31 May. Weather improves in the morning. LG writes another message on clean sheet of snow. BD bakes cake. Paul Roderick of TAT flies over on journey back from Denali BC and circles above glacier, smoke bomb fired up is admired by Paul. Everything packed and plane returns in a couple of hours to collect us. Heavy loads and deteriorating weather necessitates the leaving of some gear. Fly out in mist. Meet up with Geoff Hornby at TAT offices.

1 June. Sort out equipment at Talkeetna. Visit ranger station and get more info on first ascents in Little Switzerland. Remaining equipment collected from glacier by TAT.

2 June. Visit local radio station and Brian Okenek, who has climbed extensively in the area and did first ascent of The Crown Jewel. Met up with Julian Cartwright and Ian Parnell fresh from Mt Hunter.

3 June. Leave for Anchorage. Visit the lake and Portage Glacier to the south of Anchorage with GH while waiting for our 5am departure.

4 June. 5 am flight Anchorage to Manchester.

5 June. Arrive at Manchester airport in the morning. The baggage arrives in the evening after a delay in Amsterdam.

6 June. Baggage delivered to home addresses.

TRANSPORT

Long Haul Flight

We flew with KLM/North West Airlines via Amsterdam and Minneapolis. No real complaints at all until KLM lost our baggage in Amsterdam on the return journey - a common occurrence amongst many KLM travellers at the time of writing. The trans-atlantic flight offers a two-piece baggage allowance, with each bag a maximum of 66lbs, making it possible to live comfortably on the glacier and take out from the UK any extra delicacies required.

Talkeetna Shuttle

The easiest and most efficient means of transporting oneself and hundreds of kilos of food and equipment from Anchorage airport to Talkeetna is to take a shuttle service. We were recommended Talkeetna Shuttle who provided an excellent service, meeting planes by arrangement. It is run by Julia Stephens and bookings can be made in advance by phone, fax or email. Cost was \$85 each for a return journey.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Talkeetna Shuttle Service

PO Box 468

Talkeetna, AK 99676

TOLL FREE IN THE US: 1-888-288-6008
DIRECT PHONE: 907-733-1725
FAX: 907-733-222
Email: tshuttle@alaska.net
Web site: <http://www.alaska.net/~tshuttle>

Glacier Flight

Paul Roderick's TAT (Talkeetna Air Taxi) is now the company chosen by nearly all climbers. In fact, it may be the only choice if you wish to visit a non-standard area.

Paul, who is also a climber and skier, is widely thought to be one of the best glacier pilots in the region and will get you into places where many other pilots can't or won't land. Weather permitting, he will also make regular detours from the normal Denali run, flying past your base camp to check for emergencies. TAT also have bunkhouse accommodation for climbers waiting for a flight in to the glacier or shuttle out of Talkeetna.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Talkeetna Air Taxi - TAT
PO Box 73
Talkeetna, Alaska 99676
TEL: 907-733-2218
Toll free US only 800-533-2219
FAX: 907-733-1434
flytat@alaska.net
<http://www.gorp.com/flytat>

MAPS

For an overview of the southern part of the Central Alaska Range from Foraker in the north to well south of the Kichatna Mountains and Willow region the United States Department of the Interior Geological Survey produces 'Talkeetna' in the Alaska Topographic Series at a scale of 1:250,000. Little Switzerland lies on the Talkeetna C-3 Quadrangle Map in the USGS series at a scale of 1:63,360 (or an inch to a mile for those who have not lost touch with imperial measurements).

EQUIPMENT

Anchorage is the best spot to buy any necessary equipment. REI on Northern Lights (almost next door to Carrs) has a huge selection, while only 100 yards away, at 2633 Spenard Road, Alaska Mountaineering is smaller but still quite comprehensive. Talkeetna has a small climbing shop towards the far (riverside) end of the main street.

TAT provides plastic sledges and wands and can hire snow shoes, snow saws, shovels etc. The plastic sledges are very useful for seats around base camp and as receptacles for melting snow in the sun (don't forget the black plastic bin-liners) but for towing gear across anything other than a clean flat glacier, forget it. Plastic barrels are very useful for gear storage outside the tent and for protecting food if neurotic about possible bear attack.

FUEL

We took six US gallons of Coleman Fuel purchased from REI in Anchorage. After the first week there was a slight panic but with careful use this lasted the trip. However, another gallon or two would have been preferable. We capitalised on all the fine weather by using black bin liners to melt snow during the day, thus reducing our fuel bill. After a few teething problems all petrol stoves functioned perfectly on this clean fuel - a far cry from the Himalaya. We used two simple petrol stoves from Optimus and an MSR. The latter is excellent for boiling in the fastest possible time but not very useful for simmering. A plywood board approximately one foot square is needed to stop the stove sinking in to the snow.

Anticipating spending much longer than we did on our routes, we ordered eight gaz cylinders in advance (recommended) from REI, specifying the 70/30 Butane/Propane mix. In fact we never really needed them and were able to sell most of them back at around half price to the climbing shop in Talkeetna.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

The area was pristine. All our rubbish came out with us on the flight from base camp and was doomed to the land-fill in Talkeetna. Unfortunately, there does not appear to be any special facility in place for used batteries. We built an igloo at base camp for human waste, as there was not an accessible open crevasse to be seen for miles. The Ig - loo at least confined it to one spot and provided much needed shelter when the occasion arose.

WEATHER AND CONDITIONS

At our lowly altitude and distance from the biggest peaks in the Central Alaska Range the weather seemed remarkable. Throughout our stay there were only two real periods of snowfall and these occurred late in the month. The air was generally dry, there was little in the way of wind and a burning sun during the day could make it feel quite warm. However, at night the temperatures plummeted, dropping to -20°C on at least one occasion during the first half of May. On a clear night during mid-May darkness was only apparent for approximately two and a half hours and by the beginning of June a head torch was hardly necessary. It was a different story on McKinley, where during the same period success rate was poor due to very low temperatures (reported to be -53°C on one day high on the mountain) and very strong winds.

In contrast and perhaps understandably, snow conditions were consistently more or less the worst that all three members of the expedition had experienced. The best conditions, which were sadly very short-lived, were found on south facing slopes around dawn, whereas north facing slopes never consolidated. Ridges were very narrow and generally plastered in snow to rival the best that Peru can muster, so that rather than the climbing being technically difficult, it often felt desperately precarious and in this sense ungradeable.

RADIO

Radios are not compulsory and parties may wish to chose complete autonomy and total commitment by not taking one. However, Alaska is not Tibet. The infrastructure is in place and widely used by everyone, or they try to. TAT will hire CB Radios for \$60. Despite our CB working to perfection when on the runway in Talkeetna, 30-40 metres from a large base set, would it perform once we were dropped on the glacier? No!

A considerable amount of time, energy and ingenuity were spent attempting to get any reception. All failed and at the end of the trip the team resorted to stamping out messages in the snow. These became rather more urgent as our deadline approached. The lack of radio made the situation feel rather more serious than would normally be the case but fortunately we did have a small FM radio and most of the time were able to receive Talkeetna 98.5FM and other local Alaskan radio stations. Not only did these provide great entertainment but also regular weather forecasts, which were generally very helpful. The National Park Service, Kahiltna Base Camp and all bush pilots in the area use Band 19 (27.185MHz) and the radios work on line of sight (up to around three to four miles for the smaller sets). They need to be kept warm and condensation free. A CB takes 10 AA batteries and at least one spare set should be brought.

Apparently, radio failure is not uncommon and in hindsight we should have spent considerably more time checking the working operation while in Talkeetna. For instance, it is possible to carry it around the town listening to bush pilots as they make their approach to the airstrip. It might be possible to bring one from the UK that could be tuned accordingly once in Talkeetna. It is apparently possible to buy them at electronic stores in Anchorage and Wassila. Mobile phones also work in certain circumstances and in various parts of the National Park. While we were there a party low down on Foraker successfully telephoned Anchorage to initiate an aerial search for two other climbers who they thought had been hit by an avalanche towards the base of the route. A mobile phone brought from the UK and fitted with a local card might be the answer for emergency procedures.

Also potentially useful in an emergency was powdered colour dye (for highlighting messages in the snow) and 'smoke bombs' (originally designed to test laboratory fume cabinets) brought from the UK.

MEDICAL

Although these mountains of circa 2500m may present a number of dangers, altitude sickness is not one of them. With approach by aircraft through the hygienically sterile USA the familiar Himalayan gut problems associated with dirty water and contaminated food were not encountered. Base camp on the glacier at about 2000m was sufficiently high to prevent problems from mosquitoes, though some insect repellent was worth carrying for the return journey, when these large slow airships were present in greater numbers. Bear tracks were our only other sign of wild life while camping and for this a medical kit may have been of limited use.

None of the team were medically qualified but all had medical first aid training or personnel experience in medical emergencies.

The main first aid supply was left at base camp with members carry a small supply of pain killers, bandages, padding and elastoplasts for use on the hill.

Aspirin and paracetamol were taken as a moderate pain killer with a small supply of Temgesic as a major painkiller. Ibuprofen was available as an anti-inflammatory. A couple of courses of anti-biotics ciprofloxacin, amoxycillin and erythromycin an alternative to penicillin were present in the main medical kit left at base camp. Eye patches and amethocaine and chloramphenicol were provided for snow blindness. Stilnoct was included to combat insomnia in the 24 hours of day light. Lomotil was provided for diarrhoea with senna tablets available for constipation. Wet wipes and kitchen roll were useful in aiding basic hygiene and preventing infection.

Fortunately, apart from the occasional headache none of the medical supplies were brought in to play and the team were far too old to resort to any experimental use had they been tent-bound for weeks on end due to periods of bad weather.

FOOD

Always the subject of much debate, this time we pretty much got the food right, given the need to take an extra five or six days in case we were unable to fly out on our allotted date. The place to shop is Carrs, a huge supermarket chain. There are outlets in Anchorage (#1805 1605 W Northern Lights Blvd) and also in Wassila, which lies on the road north from Anchorage to Talkeetna. Shuttle drivers will stop at Wassila but only for 15-20 minutes, so for a big order it is best to visit the main store on Northern Lights (very close to REI) before meeting the shuttle bus. There is a price reduction at Carrs for those with Club Cards and for the sort of quantities required by most teams, it is well worth joining. The assistants will also pack all your food in to reasonably strong cardboard boxes. As an idea of what is on offer we took the following:

All Bran, Bran Flakes, Shredded Wheat, Muesli, Porridge, Crackers, Pilot Bread, Cookies, Shortbread, Large Crisps, Honey, Peanut Butter, Jam, Marmite, Gatorade, Ribena Juice, Kool Aid, Coffee, Tinned Pink Salmon, Tinned Vegetable Chili, Tinned Tuna, Tinned Sardines, Tinned Turkey, Tinned Chicken, Turkey Jerky, Cheese, Lentils, Margarine (Gold), Dried Apricot, Dried Apple, Dried Figs, Dried Raisins, Chopped Dates, Gorp/Trail Mix, Hearshey Bars, Twix, Milky Way, Snickers, Granola Bars, Kellogs Twists, Boiled Sweets, Chewing Gum, Packet Soups, Pesto, Jelly, Custard, Pancake Mix, Maple Syrup, Pasta, Rice, Instant Mash Potato, Herbs and Spices, Sugar, Dried Milk, Cooking Oil, Ketchup, Kitchen Tissue, Washing Liquid and Duracell Batteries (AA).

(Bread, a few fresh vegetables, tomatoes and pure orange juice were taken for the first week, apples and onions lasting several weeks).

From the UK it is advisable to bring:

Tea bags (regular and Earl Grey)
Instant Custard
Cadburys Milk Chocolate and regular Mars Bars
Dried Vegetables.

Bread and Cakes were also successfully made at base camp. Virtually all of the food bought was good quality. We probably wouldn't bother again with the American jelly or custard, or indeed the Kool Aid, which was better suited to marking out an airstrip in the snow. The Gatorade was excellent and very much cheaper than in the UK. We also appreciated lots of biscuits on which it is possible to use an assortment of spreads. In this respect we would probably take more Pilot Bread, an enormous circular cracker that could only be found in the US of A. We ate well for around five weeks on roughly £35 per person, per week.

For quantities we used the established total of 1kg/person/day. Within this we loosely set amounts for each item in accordance with a list produced by that master of expedition organisation, Dave Wilkinson, marking individual products up or down (usually up) to taste.

ACCOUNTS

Income	
MEF grant	1300.00
BMC grant	1500.00
Personnel	2310.72
Total	5110.72
Outgoings	
Travel	
Manchester to Anchorage KLM flight, three people	1411.50
Talkteetna Air Taxi, flights, accom. equip. hire etc	838.43
Anchorage to Talkeetna shuttle	167.16
Taxis and airport travel	126.18
Fuel and sustenance	
Hill food from Carrs and UK	531.61
Meals and sundry expenses	337.50
8 gas cylinders	23.46
6 gallons fuel	15.64
Equipment purchased for trip	641.39
1 st aid supplies	87.30
Insurance, three people	801.00
Postage, phone laser copies etc	129.55
Total	5110.72

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For their financial support without which the expedition would not have been possible, the climbers would like to thank the following:

The Mount Everest Foundation
The British Mountaineering Council

For generous support with equipment:

Neil McAdie and North Cape for windproof tops and pants, underwear, thermal tops, socks and gloves.

Mike Kerry and Terra Nova for mountain tents.

Andy Denton and Lisa Fair and Mountain Equipment for clothing.

Hugh Banner and Shane Ohly and HB Climbing Equipment for axes and hardware.

For help with medical supplies:

Dr Terry Kenny

For help in gleaning what little information we could on the area and tips for Alaskan novices:

Fred Beckey, Christian Beckwith, Colby Coombs, Andy Garland, Geoff Hornby, Nick Lewis, Mario Manica, Paul Roderick, Stacy Taniguchi and Dave Wills.

COPYING

The expedition members agree that any or all of this report may be copied for the purpose of private research. Really interested parties can obtain more information by contacting any one of the members:

Brian Davison: 01524 34226

Lindsay Griffin: 01248 602589

Brian Griffiths: 01433 650560