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THE BRITISH MT RUSSELL EXPEDITION 2000

MEF Reference 00/34

EXPEDITION REPORT

A mountaineering expedition to the Central Alaska Range of Alaska

10th May to 10th June 2000

**Supported by : The Mount Everest Foundation
The British Mountaineering Council**

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Introduction

The Central Alaska range is situated in a National Park in Alaska. It is the home of Denali, the highest peak in North America and two other giant peaks - Mounts Foraker and Hunter. In addition to these three peaks, the range consists of another 60 recognised summits, many of which provide challenges similar to the biggest routes in the Western Alps. With its location being at such a northerly latitude (63 degrees) compared to Everest's (27 degrees), this mountain range experiences a much lower barometric pressure than the Himalayas resulting in the summit of Denali having a pressure similar to that of a Himalayan 24,000 foot peak. Similarly, the weather can be extremely severe. In the summer season it is quite common for the summit temperatures on Denali and Foraker to be as low as minus 40°C. The summer ascents of the smaller peaks in the range are very similar in undertaking to climbing in the Western Alps in winter.

This expedition was planned to make an ascent of a route on Mount Russell. The unclimbed West face of Mount Russell lies at the extreme Western edge of the range and overlooks the tundra. Extremely remote and with access problems that lay completely in the hands of the glacial pilots, this face remains to this date unclimbed.

This report describes the expedition that made two first ascents of peaks in the range.

Acknowledgements

Our sincere thanks go to all the individuals, companies and organisations that helped us.

Our thanks to the following Companies and Organisations that supported us :

The Mount Everest Foundation
The British Mountaineering Council
Talkeetna Air Taxi
First Ascent

Objectives and summary achievements

Objectives

To make the first ascent of the West face of Mount Russell.

This objective was abandoned due to were continuously high winds in May 2000. The glacier pilots were unwilling to fly to this remote area as it is also the windiest part of the range. An alternative objective was found and completed and on our return the winds still blew preventing access at the second attempt.

Summary achievements in order :

The first ascent of Mount Sholes. Located on the divide between the Coffee Glaciers and the Ruth glacier system. The first ascent was made by the South East face.

The first ascent of Mount Tassles. Located on the divide between the Coffee Glaciers and the Ruth glacier system. Two attempts were required. The first failed on the South West ridge due to rock towers and cornice problems. The second attempt on the central couloir on the West face was successful.

Note : On the slopes of Mt Tassles - Geoff Hornby found a wooden box dating back to the Fake Peak story and the disputed first ascent of Denali.

Team

The membership of this expedition consists of two very experienced cold climate alpinists. The original cast of Geoff Hornby and Andrew Brash was changed at the very last minute. Andrew Brash deciding that his finances could not support a leave from work. He was replaced by Mike Smith - recruited in Talkeetna, Alaska.

Geoff Hornby

The expedition leader and planner. Geoff will be making his 10th expedition to either Alaska or the Yukon. His last 5 expeditions have received the generous support of the MEF and the BMC. During this time his teams have achieved the

following successes :

- a. The 1st ascent of Point 9070 on the Kahiltna Glacier
- b. The 1st ascent of Thunder Mountain (the last major unclimbed peak in the Central Alaska range) on the Kahiltna Glacier.
- c. The 1st ascent of the East face of Benign Peak in the Chugach range (& in winter).
- d. The 1st British ascents of the SW ridge of Mt Hunter.
- e. The SE ridge of Mt Crosson.
- f. The 1st ascent of the Central Spur on the West face of Wood Peak in the Yukon.
- g. The 1st British ascent of the Lowe route - Keystone Greensteps in Valdez.
- h. A new route in winter on the West face of Sukakpak in the Brooks Range.

In addition to this, Geoff has led four Himalayan expeditions, the highlights of which have been the 1st ascents of Laspa Dhura, Nandakhani & Nandabhanar and repeat ascents of Tharkot and Tharpu Chuli.

His alpine record includes the first free ascent and in winter of the Direct start to the Supercouloir, the 1st British ascent of the Lalidererspitze North face direct, the Walker Spur and the Matterhorn North face.

Elsewhere in the world, Geoff has succeeded on the 2nd winter ascent of the Diamond couloir direct, the 1st winter solo of the Ice Window route and the 2nd ascent of Behemoth on the East face of Kishtwa Tembo, he has made over 45 first ascents in the Wadi Rum and climbed extensively in Oman, Norway, the Tatra in winter & Ecuador .

His big wall experience includes ascents of the Nose, Zodiac, Watkins South face and the NW face of Half Dome (in a day) in Yosemite and the Troll Wall in Romsdal.

Contact : The Coach House, Wingfield Hall, Manor Road, South Wingfield,
Derbyshire, DE55 7NH. Tel 01773 831915

Mike Smith

A 39 year old American who has spent much of his climbing time ticking off the harder routes in the Sierra's of California in summer and in winter.

His major alpine ascents include :

Mount Dickey - North East ridge

Denali - West Rib with 1st ascent of the Sharma variations.

Diary

- 8.5.00 Flew to Anchorage, slept at Airport.
- 10.5.00 Realised Andrew Brash was not coming, recruited Mike Smith
- 11.5.00 Bought food and gear and travelled to Talkeetna.
- 12.5.00 Turned down by glacier pilot on flight to Russell
Flew in to Glacier point on the Ruth glacier
- 13.5.00 1st ascent of Mount Sholes
- 14.5.00 Snowing
- 15.5.00 Snowing
- 16.5.00 Attempt on SW ridge of Mt Tassles
- 17.5.00 1st ascent of Mount Tassles by West face couloir.
500 metres WI3+
- 18.5.00 Snowing
- 19.5.00 Snowing
- 20.5.00 Return to Talkeetna. Discussion with pilot, still no attempt on flight to Russell. High winds are preventing anyone from summitting the West Buttress on Denali.
- 22.5.00 Flight into Kahiltna glacier to attempt a new route on Kahiltna peak.
- 23.5.00 Snowing
- 24.5.00 Advanced up glacier to 8,500 feet. Tied down by high winds for 4 days. Attempt abandoned.
- 26.5.00 Flew out to Talkeetna
- 28.5.00 Recruited Paul Roderick for attempt on new route in the Talkeetna range.
- 29.5.00 to 3.6.00 Unable to fly in to Talkeetna's because of bad weather

Accidents and injuries

The members of the team were involved in no accidents during this expedition.

ACCESS AND TRAVEL

Access is very easy to this mountain range.

Fly to Anchorage, easiest via Seattle - 20 hours.

Get a taxi service from Talkeetna to collect you from the airport.

Register with a Glacier Pilot Operator - we used TAT aviation.

Whilst the quality of service is constantly changing, it is not realistic to make recommendations in a report that may be read in 10 years time. For further detailed advice please contact the expedition leader by telephone.

EQUIPMENT

The following set of equipment was the basic set used by each of the four climbers :

CLOTHING

Polartec thermals

Polartec fleece jacket

Helly Hansen fleece salopettes

A lightweight down duvet

Heavyweight full weather protected down jacket

A single or two piece Gore Tex shell

Vapour barrier socks

Wild Country toaster socks

Scarpa Vega boots with normal inner and alveolite inner

Supergaitors

Fleece balaclava

Down booties

Inner gloves
Wool gloves for technical climbing
Pile lined overmitts

SLEEPING

Serious Goretex covered 5 season sleeping bag.
3 sleeping mats, either Foam or Thermorests.
Antartica dome tent.

COOKING

White gas MSR's with kettle and stainless steel pan sets.
I have a home made kitchen platform that is excellent in the snow.
A thermos is essential for keeping liquid overnight and simplifies
brews on the glacier or on routes.

CLIMBING

Clip on crampons. Normal technical ice tools.
Troll Expedition Whillans harnesses.
6 ice screws and 3 snow stakes per person.
100 metre 8.2 millimetre ropes.
Slings and tape.
Scottish mixed rack for harder climbing.
Snow saws and snow shovels, one shovel should be lightweight.

FOOD

Standard food, nothing fancy or clever, all bought or buyable at a
Safeways in Anchorage.

EXPENSES

| | | |
|---------------|---|-----------------|
| TRAVEL | to Anchorage : £675 x 1 | = £ 675 |
| | Anchorage to Talkeetna return : £80 x 1 | = £ 80 |
| | Glacier flights : £240 x 2 | = £ 480 |
| | Glacier radio hire : £200 | = £ 200 |
| | SUB TOTAL | = £ 1435 |
| FOOD AND FUEL | 25 litres of Blazo | = £ 40 |
| | Base camp and hill food | = £ 300 |
| EQUIPMENT | 1 new tent, 1 new set of Gore tex, abseil tape, snow stakes, 1 new pair of snow shoes, 1 new thermorest, extra warm weather clothing. | = £ 900 |

| | | | |
|-------------------------------|--|--------------------|----------|
| | | SUB TOTAL | = £ 1240 |
| INSURANCE | 1 x £150 | | = £ 150 |
| MISCELLANEOUS AND CONTINGENCY | To cover bunkhouse accommodation in Talkeetna, food in Talkeetna, lighters, film, maps, photocopies, research costs. | | = £ 200 |
| | | SUB TOTAL | = £ 350 |
| | | GRAND TOTAL | = £ 3025 |

This trip was financially supported by significant contributions from :

The Mount Everest Foundation
The British Mountaineering Council

to whom we are eternally grateful.

CONCLUSION

Late partner changes and unseasonably windy weather caused objective changes at the last minute. However, two beautiful peaks received their first ascents continuing the pattern of British exploratory involvement in this mountain range.

Anyone requiring further information on this expedition, or on how to mount an expedition such as this, or would like to discuss some objectives in this range are very welcome to contact Geoff Hornby as follows :

THE COACH HOUSE, WINGFIELD HALL, MANOR ROAD, SOUTH
WINGFIELD, DERBYSHIRE DE55 7NH.
PHONE 01773 831915, FAX 01773 833151.

Accompanying photographs and maps :

1. Mt Sholes with the first ascent line marked.
2. Mt Tassles with the unfinished SW ridge marked.
3. Mt Tassles with the West face couloir marked.
4. Map of Glacier Point area.

Dot ascent of Mt Sholes

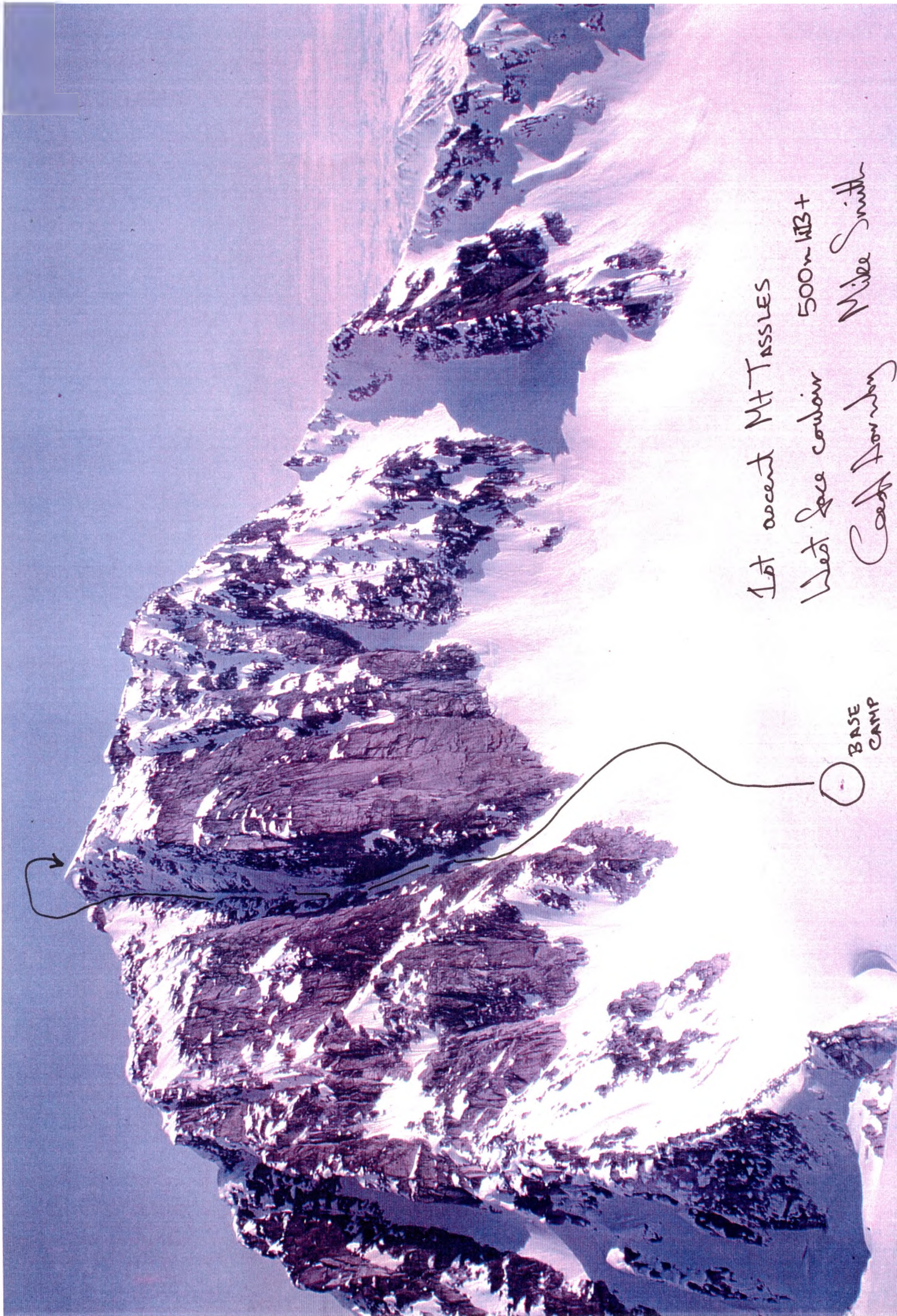
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ATTEMPT ON MT TASSLES SW RIDGE



x
BASE
CAMP

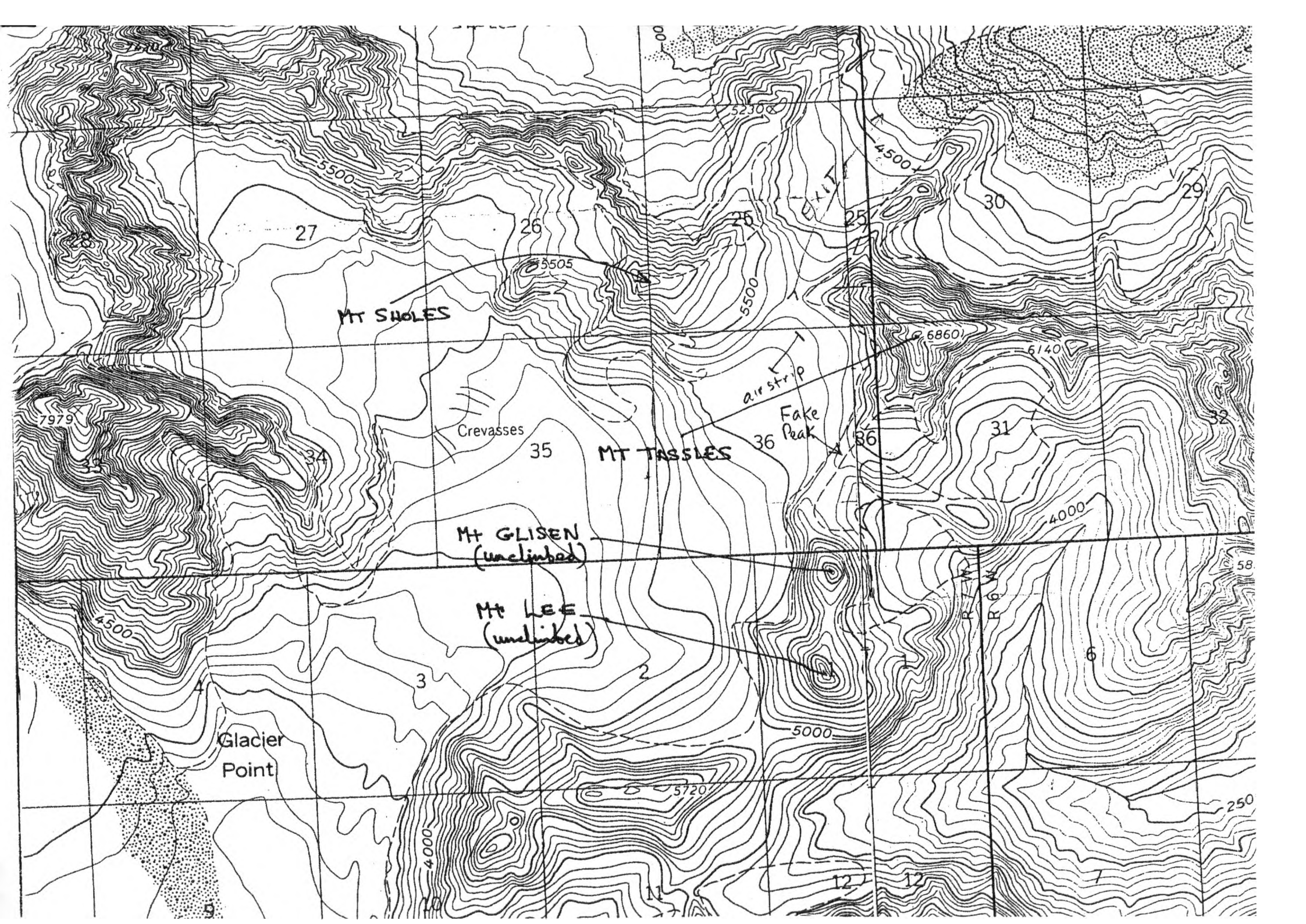


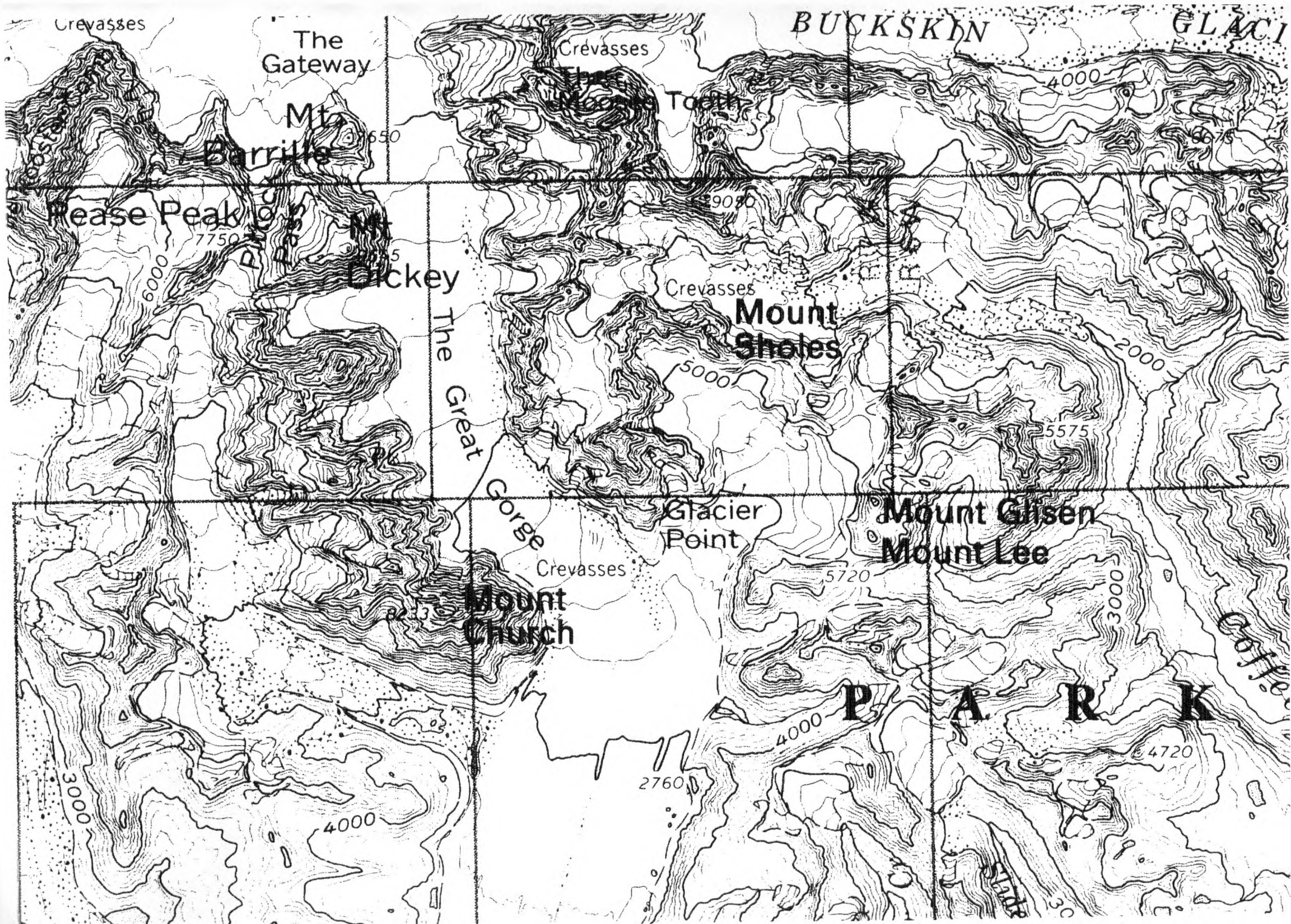
1st ascent Mt Tassles

West face couloir 500m NB+

Cash Downby Mike Smith

BASE CAMP





Crevasses

The Gateway

Crevasses

BUCKSKIN

GLACI

Mt. Barrille

The Tooth

4000

Pease Peak

650

5900

Pease Peak

7750

Mt. Dickey

Crevasses

Mount Sholes

5000

2000

The Great Gorge

5575

Glacier Point

Mount Glisen
Mount Lee

Crevasses

5720

Mount Church

3000

P A R K

Glacier

2760

4000

4720

4000

3000