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Mount Everest Foundation

Expedition Report of:

New Zealand "Alaska Take-Two" 2003 Expedition

to the Alaskan Range, Alaska.

May-June 2003 (Expedition Reference 03/46)

Patricia Deavoll, September 2003.

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1. Overall Aim

The overall aim of the expedition was to attempt ascents of new routes on the North Face of Peak 11,520 (Tokositna Glacier) and the West Face of Mt Hunter (Kahiltna Glacier). The expedition also hoped to climb the North Buttress of Mt Hunter. Pat had already made one failed attempt on the North Face of Peak 11,520 in 2002.

2. Summary

During May –June 2003 two New Zealand climbers spent 5 weeks climbing in the Alaskan Range in central Alaska.

Pat Deavoll and Marty Beare flew into the head of the Tokositna Glacier on the 7th May. On the 14th/15th May the party made a successful ascent of a new route on the North Face of 11,520. This was not by the originally intended line, which was considered out of condition. The descent off the peak proved arduous when the weather deteriorated.

On the 19th May the party flew into the Kahiltna Glacier and spent two days ‘scoping’ their intended new line on the West Face of Mt Hunter. A decision was made not to attempt the route based on a combination of unsettled weather, poor snow conditions and objective hazards.

Over the 23rd -25th May the party made a successful ascent of “Deprivation” on the North Buttress of Mt Hunter. They finished up the final pitches of the “Moonflower” route with a high point the conclusion of the technical climbing. The climb took 53 hours.

From the 26th -28th May the party again scoped and considered the line on the west face of Mt Hunter and again discounted it because of the obvious dangers.

On the 29th May the party flew into the Ruth Amphitheater. An attempt of “Ham and Eggs” couloir on Moose’s Tooth was abandoned because of deteriorating weather. From the 3rd- 6th June the party made a successful ascent of the SW Ridge of Peak 11,300. On the 9th June the party summated Mt Dickey via the West Ridge. The party was flown from the mountains on the 9th June.

3. Introduction

3.1 Purpose

The expeditions aim was to attempt two new routes in the Alaskan Range of SW Alaska.

The initial objective was to complete a new route on the North Face of Peak 11,520 in the Tokositna Glacier. Pat had already made an attempt on this line in 2002 but turned back at half height because of poor snow conditions.

The primary objective was to make an ascent of a new line on the West Face of Mt Hunter. This line was scoped in 2001 by Pats original climbing partner, Rob Owen of Canada. When Rob had to withdraw because of injury he supplied enough information for it to remain a realistic objective

3.2 Location.

The Alaskan range lies within the SW quadrant of Alaska. Its 600 mile span encompasses Denali National Park. The Tokositna and the Kahiltna are two of the largest glaciers within the range. The Tokositna glacier runs from the eastern side of Mt Hunter. The Kahiltna glacier runs off the Southern flanks of Mt McKinley. These locations are shown on the accompanying map (see Appendix C).

3.3 Character and Access

The remote nature of the Alaskan Range and the availability of good glacier landings ensure that almost all access is by fixed wing aircraft. A forty minute flight from the small town of Talkeetna will access the Tokositna and Kahiltna glaciers. Basecamp for the ascent of Pk. 11,520 was in the east fork of the upper Tokositna Glacier at an elevation of 8500ft. Advanced base camp was some two hours ski away in the west fork at approximately the same elevation. Basecamp for the attempt on the west face of Mt Hunter was in the SE fork of the Kahiltna Glacier at an elevation of 7000ft. Both locations were in heavily glaciated terrain.

4. Personnel

The expedition members comprised of two New Zealand climbers. These were;

Patricia Deavoll

Marty Beare

Both members have over 25 years of mountaineering experience. Marty is a fully qualified UIAGM guide and has worked as such since 1983. Pat has worked as an outdoor instructor for fifteen years.

5. Research and Preparation

5.1 Introduction.

This section describes the expedition's preparation prior to leaving New Zealand.

5.2 Research

The objectives of research were to find unclimbed routes within the Alaskan Range that suited the skills of the climbers involved. North facing ice and mixed routes that could be climbed using a lightweight single push approach were sort.

5.3. Climbing Objectives

Because Pat has visited the Tokositna Glacier in 2002 and made an unsuccessful attempt on the North Face of Pk 11,520, another attempt seemed an appropriate objective. A new line on the west face of Mt Hunter was selected because Pats original climbing partner (Rob Owen) had scoped the route in 2001 and was happy to 'hand over' the information when injury precluded him from the expedition.

Research was carried out to establish that these lines were unclimbed. This included contacting climbers well familiar with the area and consulting the American Alpine Club Journals. In 2002 Anna Keeling and Karen Mc Neil completed a route on the west side of North face of Pk 11520 which finished on the ridge 800 feet below the summit. They were consulted about using this route for the descent.

The following maps were obtained:

- Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research. Mount McKinley, Alaska. 1:50,000.
- National Geographic. Mount McKinley, AK '54. 1:63,000.
- National Geographic Mount McKinley, AK '78. 1:63,000.
- National Geographic Talkeetna, AK '73. 1:63,000.
- National Geographic Talkeetna AK '58. 1. 63,000.

5.4. Formalities.

Very little formality was required for an attempt on the chosen routes other than informing Denali National Park Headquarters of our location and intended period of stay. It was necessary to pre-book a flight from Talkeetna in to the Alaskan Range with Talkeetna Air Taxis (the company of choice) prior to leaving New Zealand. (See Appendix D)

5.5. Provisions and Fuel.

Freeze-dry food was brought from New Zealand, courtesy of Back Country Foods who offered a sponsorship arrangement. 'Clif' provided energy bars and gels free of charge. All other food items and butane gas canisters were purchased in Anchorage. Fuelite (white spirits) was purchased from Talkeetna Air Taxis. A VHF band handheld radio was also rented from TAT at a cost of US\$150.00. This was used to make line of sight contact with passing aircraft when air transport was required.

Mac Pac Wilderness Ltd provided both climbers with clothing and tents. Black Diamond, in association with Southern Approach Ltd., provided climbing hardware, helmets, harnesses and technical ice climbing tools.

5.6 Finance.

The total cost of the expedition per member including airfares to and from New Zealand was estimated at NZ\$7000.00. Actual costs per person were approximately NZ\$5700.00.

The Mount Everest Foundation made a generous grant (to Pat) of UK£350.00. The New Zealand Alpine Club granted each member NZ\$550.00, and the Canterbury Mountaineering Club granted the expedition NZ\$750.00. Expedition members financed the remainder of the costs personally.

5.7 Insurance

Insurance was arranged through the New Zealand Alpine Club, which offers a policy arranged by Torribles Insurance Brokers of Bristol, England. Cover for each member for the period of the expedition (42 days) was NZ \$410.00. The cover extended to medical, travel cancellations, search and rescue, personal liability and accident and personal effects.

5.8 Medical arrangements

Both climbers had extensive personal first aid and medication kits. These proved adequate for the minor ailments suffered (cold and flu, muscle strain etc.) and were sufficient to alleviate more serious injury if air evacuation was immediate.

5.9 Air Travel

Both climbers flew to Anchorage with Korean Airlines with a stop over in Seoul. Small aircraft access into the Alaskan Range was with Talkeetna Air Taxis. The cost of the initial flight from Talkeetna to the Tokositna Glacier was US\$350.00 per person. This price included the eventual return flight to Talkeetna. The 'bump' flights from the Tokositna to Kahiltna Base Camp and from KBC to the Ruth Amphitheatre were US\$75.00 per flight per person.

6. Activity/ Trip Log

4th May-6th May

By the 4th May both expedition members had arrived Anchorage. After a day of shopping we were transported by Denali Overland Shuttle Service to Talkeetna, some three hours drive north. We were due to fly into the mountains at 5 pm but on arriving in Talkeetna bad weather set in keeping us in Talkeetna until the 7th.

7th May

On the 7th the weather began to clear and at 1 pm we were able to lift off for the Upper Tokositna Glacier. After a 40 minute non-eventful flight we arrive at the head of the east fork of the Upper Tokositna glacier and set up our base camp. We then skied down valley to break a bit of trail towards where our Advanced Base Camp was to be established beneath 11,520ft in the west fork of the Tokositna Glacier.

8th-13th May

We awoke to heavy snow, but set off with loads to establish Advanced Base Camp anyway (ABC comprised our Mac Pac Integral single shell tent!). This was about 2.5 hours ski away. After spending one night the weather continued to be bad so we returned to our camp in the east fork. It continued to snow heavily until the 13th. Time was spent digging out Base camp and skiing over to ABC using the GPS to dig it out and keep our hard earned trail cleared. On the 13th the weather looked to be clearing so again we skied over to ABC with the intention of attempting our new route on the North Face of Pk. 11,520 the following day. On arrival at ABC we were able to get a good look at our intended line. We decided that after a week of heavy snow the upper section on the line presented significant avalanche hazard. We concluded that a large couloir to the left running the full length of the face would be a better option.

14th-15th May

First ascent of the North Face of Pk. 11,520, Tokositna Glacier.

After a 4 am wake up, we cross the bergschrund at the bottom of our chosen couloir at 7am. We then climbed 20pp (3000ft) of very hard green ice. The majority of the climbing was at about 50 degrees, with several steeper sections of 80-90 deg. By 2 pm (about pitch 10) it was snowing lightly but we weren't really that concerned and continue on to reach the high point at 11 pm. This was just beneath the summit cornice. By this time it was snowing heavily. Immediately we started to rappel the route the spindrift avalanches began. It was very frightening. Spindrift made building v-threads impossible for much of the descent, so we had to leave behind much of our gear (screws, cams, wires etc) as anchors. After 20 rappels we finally arrived at the bottom at 8am on the 15th, extremely cold, tired and relieved.

16th-18th May

Attempted second ascent of the South Face of Kahiltna Queen, Tokositna Glacier.

After 36 hours rest, we left camp at 9pm on the 17th for an attempt of a route on the south face of Kahiltna Queen (which had had its f/a about 2 weeks previously). We climbed steadily up a huge couloir surrounded by massive granite walls until about 2am on the 18th, when it became evident that the snow was too unconsolidated to continue safely. We abseiled off, arriving back at our camp at 6 am. After a few hours sleep we packed up camp and skied back to Base Camp in a whiteout. We manage to contact a passing plane by radio and send a message out to TAT for a bump into the Kahiltna glacier for the following morning.

19th-22nd May

Our plane arrived around lunchtime on the 19th and deposited us at Kahiltna Base Camp, where we spent the next 3 days deliberating over our intended route on the West Face of Mt Hunter. The weather was unsettled and it was impossible to view the whole route because of low cloud cover. We decided that the route posed too threatening to consider at that time. The team decided to attempt "Deprivation" on the North Buttress of Mt Hunter, and then re-evaluate the West Face route.

23rd-24-25th May

Ascent of "Deprivation", North Buttress of Mt Hunter, Kahiltna Glacier.

We left the base of Deprivation at about 2am on the 23rd and 'simul-climbed' the first 900 feet of 60degree ice band and WI 4 ice runnels, with Pat leading and Marty carrying the heavier pack. This got us to the base of the first crux. Marty then lead two 60m pitches up a very steep chimney of poor ice and unconsolidated snow, while Pat seconded with the smaller pack and guided the larger pack as Marty hauled. The team reached the top of the first ice band at about 2 pm. Then Pat lead five good pitches of WI 4 plus and mixed, while Marty seconded with the bigger pack. By 1 am on the 24th we were bivouing on a small ledge chopped from ice at the top of the second ice band. By 7 am the team was away again, up the ramp system between the second and third ice band. Much of the climbing was on bulletproof ice covered in 6 inches of snow, and very tenuous and unpleasant. By 2 pm we had reached the third ice band. Abandoning the larger of the packs we headed off up the 'Bibler Come Again Exit' with Marty in the lead and Pat carrying the smaller pack. Several more pitches of hard tenuous mixed climbing, and we reached the end of the technical difficulties, and our high point at 7 pm. We immediately began to rappel the Moonflower route. The 35 rappels, primarily on v-threads, were straightforward and by 3 am on the 25th we were back on the glacier and on our skis back to Kahiltna Base Camp. The ascent from Base camp to Base camp took 53 hours.

26th-27th-28th May

Heavy snow through the 26th and 27th gave us some much need rest days. The 29th dawned partially fine and the team again scoped the intended route on the West Face of Mt Hunter. Again the route was discounted because of avalanche threat.

29th-30th-31st May

Attempt on 'Ham and Eggs' Couloir, Moose's Tooth, Ruth Glacier.

On the 29th the party flew into the Ruth Glacier and set up camp beside the Don Sheldon Mountain House. At 6 am on the 30th we left for an attempt at the 'Ham and Eggs' Couloir on Moose's Tooth. By 1 pm we had climbed up to the 'Root Canal' high above the Ruth Gorge but by 4 pm the weather had deteriorated. We left for the route at 9 pm but turned back at the base of the couloir because of warm temperatures and heavy snow. With only 2 days supplies we could not wait for the weather to improve, so returned to base camp, arriving at 5 am on the 31st.

1st – 2nd June

Bad weather and heavy snow kept the team tent bound for three days.

3rd-4th-5th-6th June

Ascent of the SW Ridge of 11,300, Ruth Glacier.

On the 3rd we skied six hours up the west fork of the Ruth Glacier for an attempt on the SW ridge of Pk. 11,300. We left our camp at 6 am the next morning. By 10 pm the following evening we had climbed 4000ft of mixed ridgeline, mostly simul climbing. The rock was generally excellent but the snow conditions were bad – bottomless and unconsolidated. We bivouacked at 10,000 ft. After a 7 am start we

climbed the final 1500 feet of ice, reaching the summit at midday on the 5th in deteriorating weather. After descending a ridge to the east, we arrived back at camp at 7 pm in snow showers and squalls. The next day we moved back down glacier to our base camp in a very thick white out.

7th –8th June

Two days of bad weather precluded any activity.

9th June

Ascent of the West Ridge of Mt Dickey, Ruth Glacier.

On the evening of the 8th the weather cleared. The team left at 2 am on the 9th for an ascent of the West Ridge of Mt Dickey, arriving at the summit at 11 am. A straightforward descent allowed us time to pack up camp and fly out to Talkeetna that afternoon.

7. Conclusion

To conclude:

- It is not always possible to land aircraft on the Tokositna Glacier underneath Pk. 11520. Talkeetna Air Taxis determined that this glacier was too wind-ridged for safe landing during our expedition. TAT landed us at the standard landing-strip used to access the West Face of Huntington. We established our base camp here and erected an advanced base camp mid-glacier under Pk. 11520. Our two camps were approximately 5 kilometers apart and were at similar elevation (8,300 ft). Travel between the camps involved a 150-metre descent and ascent through moderately crevassed terrain. It took approximately 3½ hours for a one-way journey hauling sleds from one camp to the other.
- The route that we used to ascend Pk. 11520 acts as a major avalanche path following even small deposits of new snow. The fan-like couloirs in the upper-most slope feed into a single gully that narrows to a steep neck near the foot of the route. Our descent during a storm was enabled by keeping as close to climbers' right in the gully as possible, thereby avoiding the brunt of the avalanches.
- It was evident that most slopes of northerly aspect on Pk. 11520 were active avalanche paths during storms. This includes the neighboring line attempted by Deavoll and Simper in 2002. The north face slopes of the adjacent Pk. 11530 were also very active, with one path releasing a large amount of debris mid-way into the Tokositna Glacier.
- It would be possible to descend Pk. 11520 from the summit by climbing down to the high point of the Keeling/McNeil route (2002) on the NW flank of the mountain and descending this to the Tokositna Glacier. Our descent-line from just under the summit cornice of Pk. 11520 was down the gully that we had climbed. We abseiled the entire route, using anchors made with V-threads and ice-screw and rock protection when spindrift avalanches made this impossible.
- There are two more potentially excellent lines to be climbed on the North Face of Pk. 11520.
 - 1) The line tried by Scott Simper and Pat Deavoll in 2002
 - 2) A direct and harder line to the left of the centre of the face.
- The West Face of Mt Hunter was not viewed clearly by us during our time at Kahiltna Base Camp. What we could see led us to believe that it is subject to avalanche hazard during the approach and on the lower section of the route. We conclude that a spell of good weather would be advisable preceding any attempt on this route.

8. Acknowledgments

The expedition gratefully acknowledges assistance from the following organizations:

- The Mount Everest Foundation for financial assistance.
- The New Zealand Alpine Club for financial assistance.
- The Canterbury Mountaineering Club for financial assistance.
- Mac Pac Wilderness Ltd. for providing equipment.
- Black Diamond and Southern Approach for providing equipment.
- Back Country Foods for providing subsidized freeze-dry meals.
- Clif for providing energy bars free of charge.
- Heinz Watties Ltd. for providing their product free of charge

9. Copyright

The compiler of this report and the members of this expedition agree that all or part of it may be copied for the purpose of private research.

Appendix A Bibliography

Books

1. Jonathon Waterman and Bradford Washburn – “High Alaska”, 1995
2. Michael Woods – “Alaska: A Climbing Guide”, 2002

Appendix B Photographs

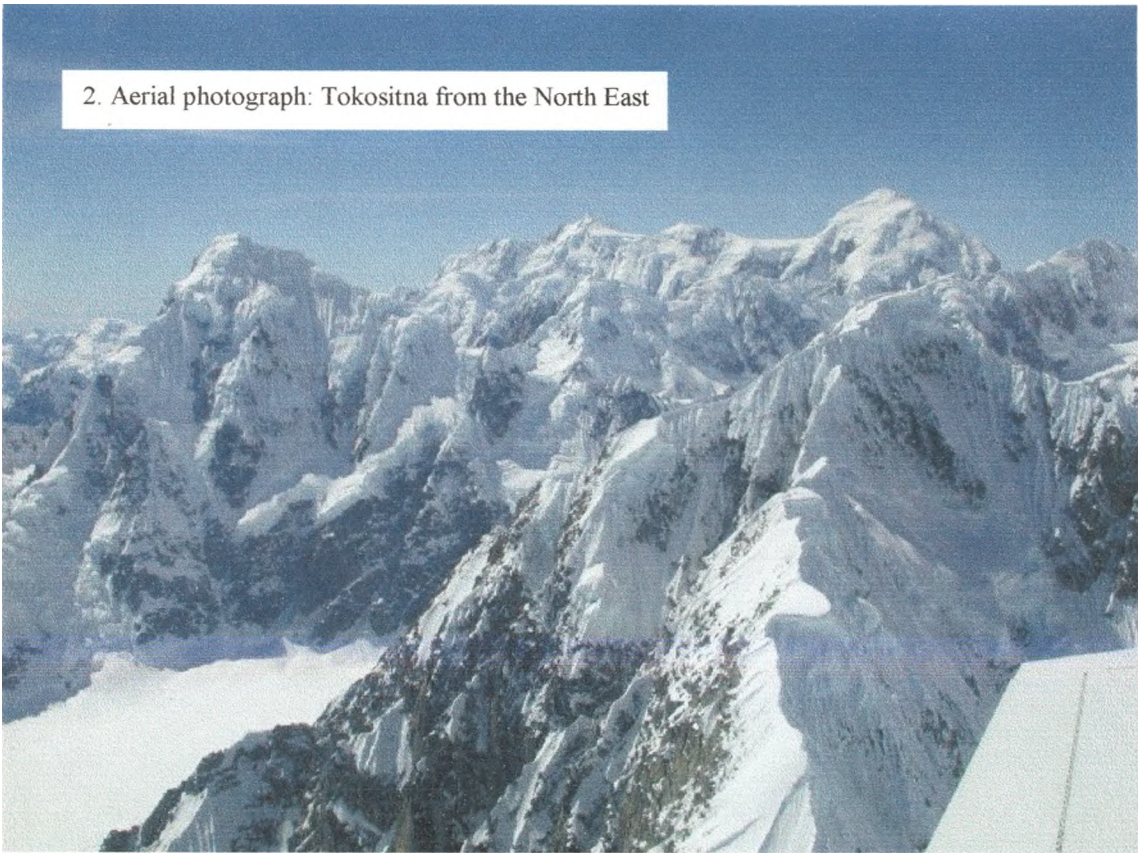
Key

1. **North Face of Pk 11,520**
 - Red: Beare/Deavoll route 2003
 - Blue: Deavoll/Simper attempt 2002
2. **Aerial photograph: Tokositna from the North East**
 - Centre: North Face of Pk 11,520
 - Right back: Mt Hunter
 - Right front: Kahiltna Queen
 - Left: 11,530
3. **Aerial photograph: Tokositna from the East**
 - Left centre: North Face of Pk 11,520
 - Right centre: South Face of Kahiltna Queen
4. **North Face of Pk 11,520**
 - Red: Beare/Deavoll route 2003
5. **Pat in the middle stage of the ascent of Pk 11,520**
6. **Marty after descending Pk 11, 520**

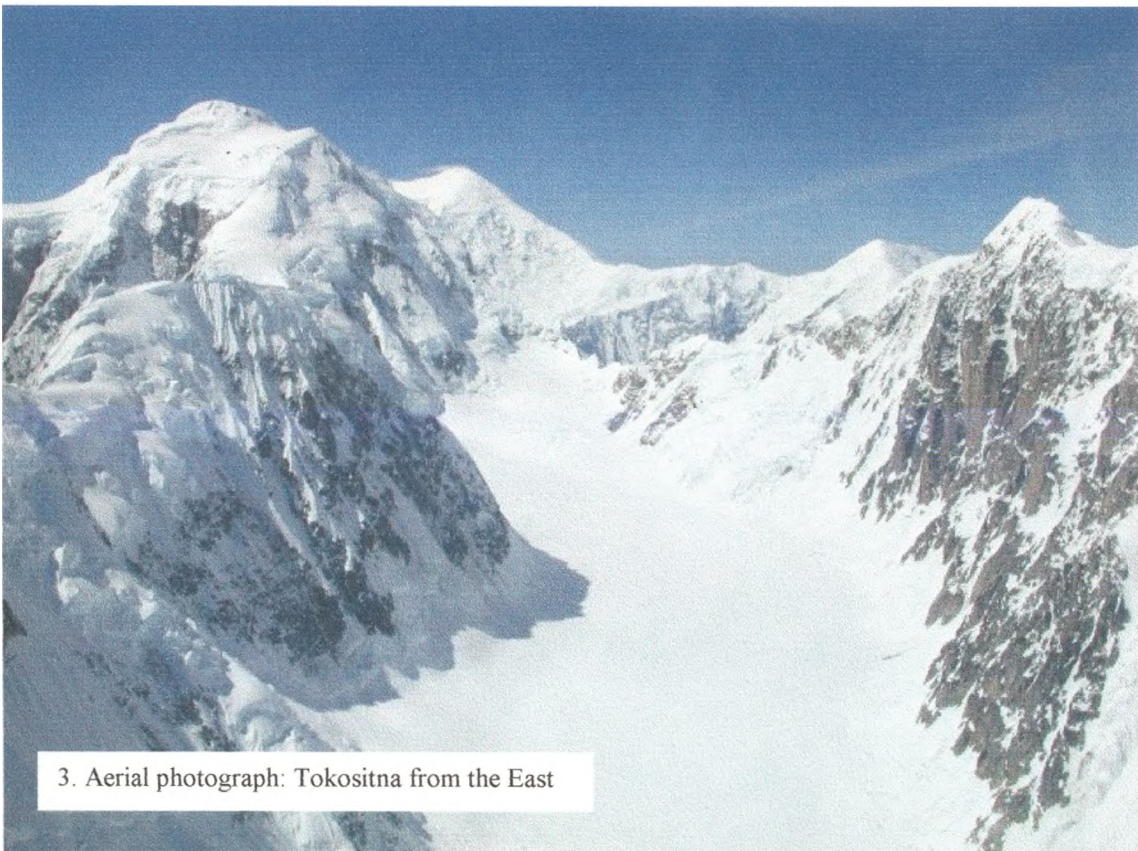


I. North Face of Pk 11,520

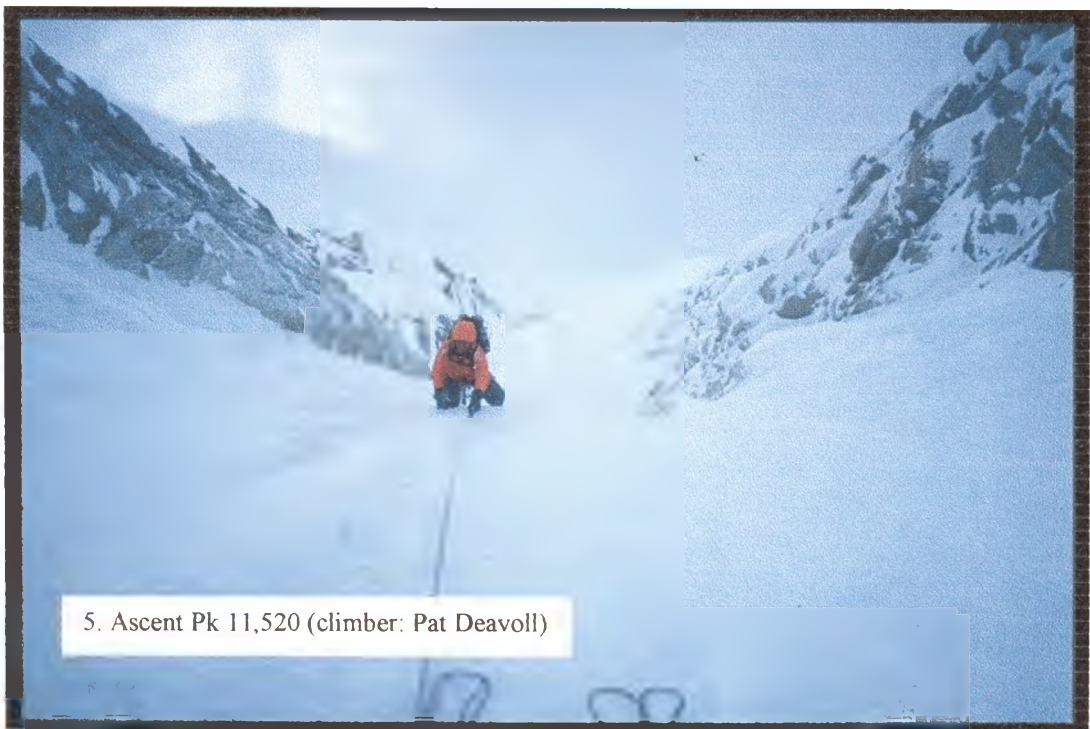
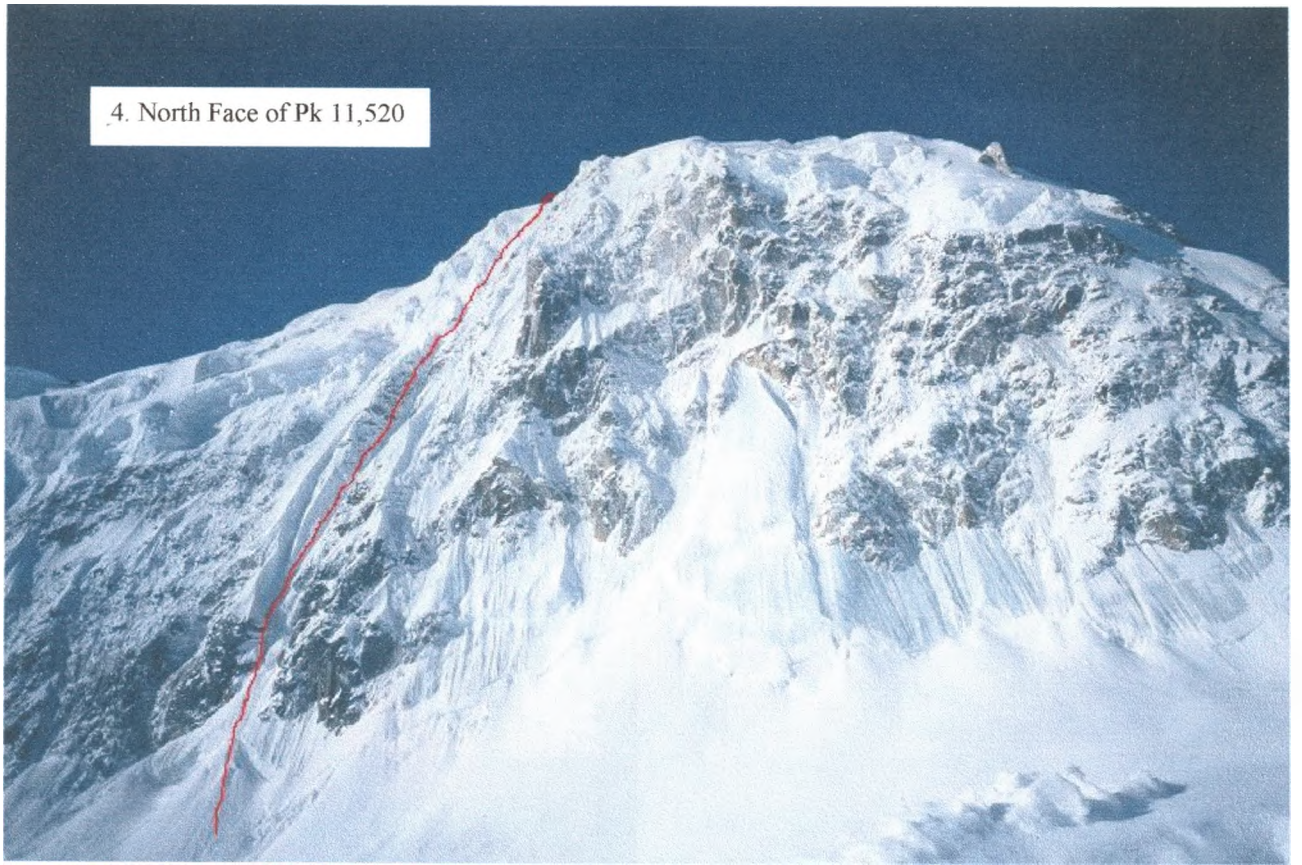
2. Aerial photograph: Tokositna from the North East



3. Aerial photograph: Tokositna from the East



4. North Face of Pk 11,520



5. Ascent Pk 11,520 (climber: Pat Deavoll)

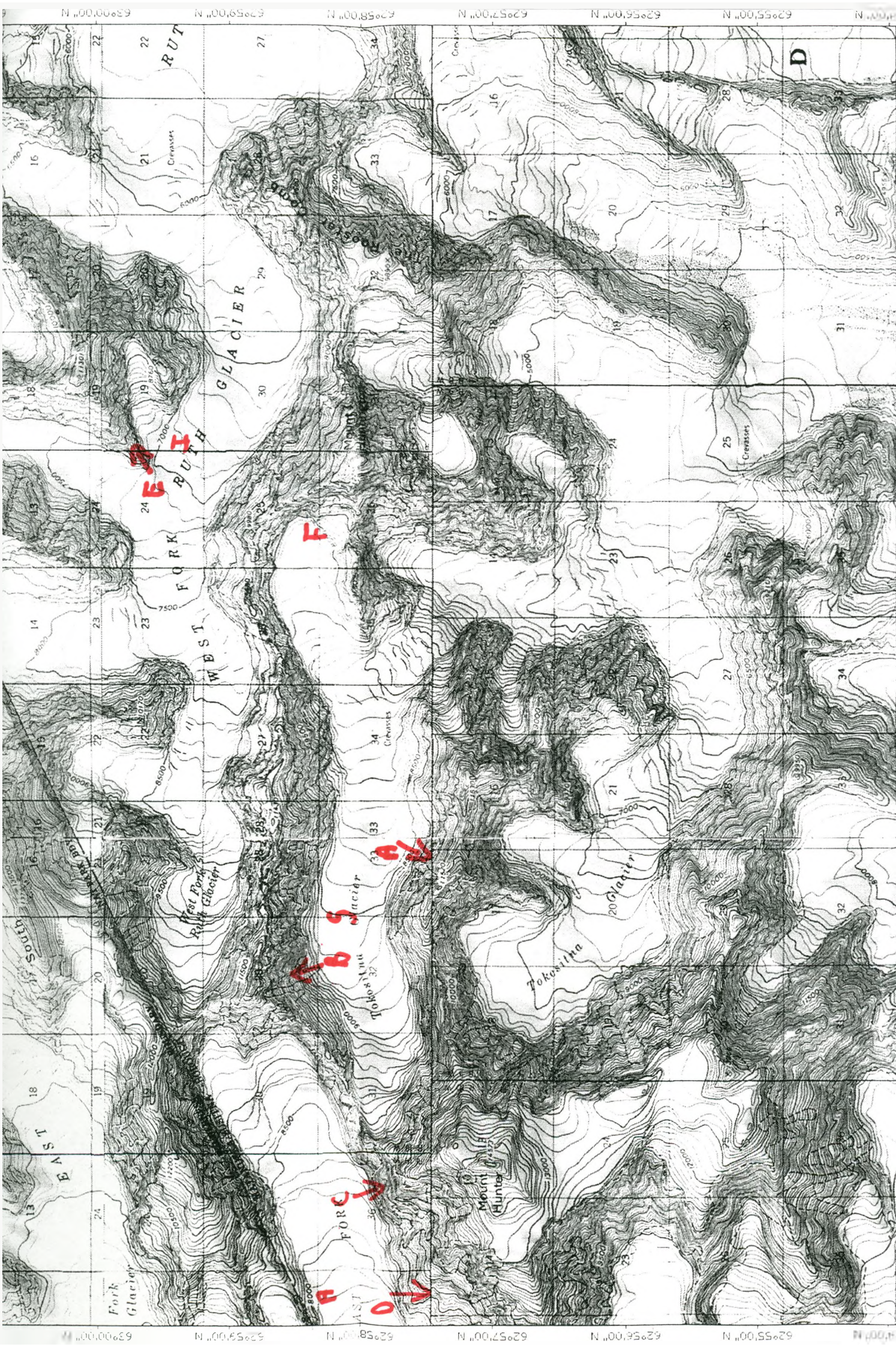
6. Marty Beare



Appendix C Map

Key

- A Pk 11,520.
- B Kahiltna Queen
- C North Buttress Mt Hunter
- D West Face, Mt Hunter
- E Southwest Ridge, Pk 11,300
- F BC 1
- G ABC 1
- H BC 2
- I ABC 2



Appendix D Further Information

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