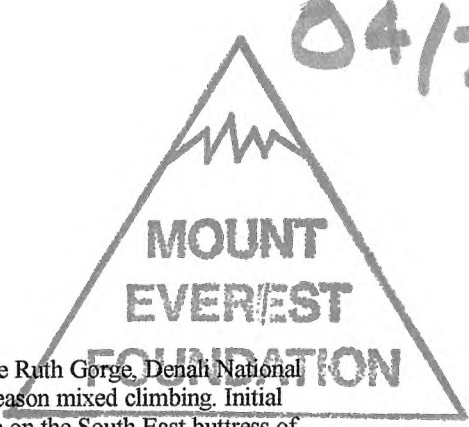


**EXPEDITION REPORT**

**BRITISH BRADLEY EXPEDITION 2004**



**SUMMARY**

In early march of 2004 Sam Chinnery and Andy Sharpe arrived in the Ruth Gorge, Denali National Park, Alaska, with the intention of exploring the potential for early season mixed climbing. Initial objectives were a new line on the South face of Bradley and new line on the South East buttress of Dickey. On arrival in the gorge Mt Dickey was found to be in very good condition with an unclimbed line of ice and neve running down the SE buttress. This was successfully climbed on the second attempt over a period of three days. Poor weather and lack of time prevented an attempt on Bradley.

**TEAM MEMBERS**

Sam Chinnery – 27 Cabinet Maker  
 143 Machon Bank Road, Sheffield, S7 1PH

Andy Sharpe – 27 Doctor  
 Top Left, 48 Thornwood Terr, Glasgow, G117QZ

**EXPEDITION DIARY**

- 25 March Depart Gatwick, arrive Anchorage 22.00.
- 26 Shopping Anchorage.
- 27 Shopping Anchorage.
- 28 Dep. for Talkeetna at 8am, arrive at 10.30am. Pack plane and fly into Ruth Gorge. Half hour flight. Arrive in gorge at 2pm.
- 29 Snowed all day, tent bound.
- 30 Snow showers throughout day. Skinned around glacier looking at objectives.
- 31 Packed gear for attempt on Dickey.
- 1 April Set off on SE buttress of Dickey at 7.30am. Clear all day. Approx 500m of climbing.
- 2 Clouded in throughout morning. Bad spindrift and snow started on 2<sup>nd</sup> pitch so retreated to basecamp.
- 3 Very warm, snow PM. Dug out tent, which was buried in the night.
- 4 Snow all night. Dig out tent. Decide to move camp out into middle of Ruth Glacier to get more sun. Pull one load to new campsite.
- 5 Snowed all night. Spent all day ferrying loads to new campsite.
- 6 Very cloudy and warm. Lots of fresh snow on the mountains.
- 7 Snow pm.
- 8 No snow. Decide to go back on route.
- 9 Leave at 4.30am. Pass old bivi site at 1pm. Snow and spindrift start at 3pm. Carry on climbing and reach a bivi site in evening after 18 pitches.
- 10 Up at 4am. 12 pitches including the crux snow mushroom and reach bivi at start of shale band. Snow and spindrift throughout day.
- 11 Climb through shale band and onto upper snow slopes. Summit at 5.30pm. Clear and sunny all day. Descend the 'normal' west flank route; back down over the 747 pass and onto the Ruth glacier. Back to camp at 1am.
- 12 Rest day.
- 13 Rest day.
- 14 Owen Samuels and Guy Willet (UK) arrive on the glacier.
- 15 Skied up to the west face of Moose's tooth for an attempt on Shaken Not Stirred.
- 16 After two pitches of climbing started snowing and had to retreat due to spindrift. Ski back to base.
- 17 Snow / Cloudy all day.
- 18 Snow / Cloudy all day.
- 19 Fly out of Ruth Gorge.

## **PLANNING**

Planning a trip to Alaska is very easy to do due to minimal red tape and ease of communication. We benefited from the advice of several British teams that have visited the area in recent years. Namely Richard Cross and Jon Bracy. One point that must be considered is that if you are going for an 'early' season trip, i.e. anything before the end of April, the usual climbing and tourist infrastructure is still closed for the winter. This means that transport from Anchorage to Talkeetna can be difficult to arrange.

- **Travel.** Usually a flight to the US and then an internal flight to Anchorage. From Anchorage a three-hour private hire bus ride takes you to Talkeetna. From Talkeetna a 30minute flight takes you to the Ruth Gorge.
- **Accommodation.** Overnight stays will usually be required in Anchorage and Talkeetna, which can be booked on the internet.
- **Permits.** No permit is necessary for climbing in the Ruth Gorge. You must still register with the ranger station in Talkeetna and you will be issued with a wilderness toilet.
- **Grants.** These are available to suitable expeditions through the BMC and MEF. Other organizations that might offer support are: Nick Estcourt Award, Polertec award, Lyon award, and Alpinist Magazine B Team award.
- **Visa.** Not required for British citizens.
- **Other.** Food and gear is available in Anchorage and less so in Talkeetna.

## **TRAVEL**

We bought our flights through Expedia and flew with Delta. Cost was 465 pounds. Baggage allowance was 64kg per person but a maximum of two bags each is allowed. A ski bag counts as one of these bags. If you are going before the main climbing season starts in early May the minibus taxi services to Talkeetna are not running as normal and although I was told they would run, you can expect to pay around \$100 pp each way! Fortunately we managed to get a lift to Talkeetna with a friend who lives in Anchorage and we hitched back at the end of the trip. We easily got a lift but you take your chances. From Talkeetna we flew with Paul Roddick of Talkeetna Air Taxis. This cost \$350 pp. Baggage allowance is 125lb pp and costs \$1 per pound for every pound over. TAT will also hire you VHF radios so you can keep in contact with any pilots in the area. This costs about \$100 for three weeks and is highly recommended. TAT will also sell you white fuel and you can hire skis, sleds and wands from them.

TAT is not cheapest flight operator but Paul Roddick is undoubtedly the most experienced pilot in the area and one of the few pilots that will land you anywhere in the Ruth Gorge at this time of year. He also keeps a check on your progress regularly throughout your trip.

## **ACCOMMODATION**

In Anchorage we stayed with friends but accommodation can easily be booked over the internet. In Talkeetna we stayed at the bunkhouse owned by TAT. This is included in your flight cost and we used it both going in and coming out.

## **OTHER LOGISTICS**

Food for the trip can be purchased from one of the many massive supermarkets in Anchorage, such as Sear, Carrs or Wal-Mart. Gear can be bought at the REI superstore or the smaller AMH store. Although you can get most things in Anchorage it is unwise to rely on it. We had a hard time getting a bivi bag and ski masks! Butane can be bought at REI and Coleman white gas can be bought from flight operators in Talkeetna. 1 US Gallon of white fuel is reckoned to last 1 person 21 days on a glacier. We

found this to be right but always take spare. Books, maps and route info. Can be looked at in the ranger's station in Talkeetna.

## **COMMUNICATIONS AND SAFETY ISSUES**

You can hire VHF radios from most of the airline operators. These work on a line of sight basis so you cannot contact Talkeetna from the Ruth Gorge. They can be used to speak to any pilot within sight. As the Gorge is very popular with tourist flights, planes will be around on most clear days, even early season and they will relay messages back to civilization for you and give forecasts. If you are climbing early season in the Ruth you must be totally self reliant as you may well be the only climbers in there. This means taking more food and gas than you think you need and also a comprehensive medical kit. Planes struggle to land in the Ruth after heavy snow so you may find yourself being trapped for several days. They may also not be able to pick you up from your drop off point so you must be able to transport all your stuff by sled to a new landing zone.

## **WEATHER**

We had quite poor weather throughout the trip with the longest clear spell being 5 days. It snowed most days and we had several large dumps of a foot or more each. Temperatures were very low (our sunflower oil froze!) for the first four days of the trip but as soon as we got into April things warmed up considerably and even managed to reach zero during the day. Climbing in March and April can be extremely cold and windy and you must be prepared for this. We only had one bad storm but we found that the weather was on the whole very unpredictable and forecasts didn't seem to help much.

## **GEAR**

We climbed as an alpine style pair throughout the trip so tried to keep as lightweight as possible. For sleeping we used 700g bags from RAB and PHD. The PHD bag was water resistant inside and out and retained loft far better than the normal RAB bag although both bags still got very wet due to spindrift. We used bivi bags on the route although, again due to spindrift, I would recommend having one with a good cowl. We used PHD ones which were excellent. Andy was using a new RAB one-piece shell that proved excellent and very lightweight. We also carried down belay jackets from RAB and PHD. Both Scarpa Alpha boots and standard Vegas proved warm enough. For cooking on the hill we used a Markill hanging stove that had been fitted with a heat exchanger. This worked well. Climbing gear: 2 x 8.5mm dry ropes, standard rock rack plus pegs and 8 ice screws. I would recommend taking a spare thick sleeping bag for use in basecamp.

## **THE ROUTE**

We initially intended to look at a line on the south face of Bradley but on arriving in the Ruth an obvious, unclimbed, snow/ice couloir snaking down the SE buttress of Dickey demanded attention. The couloir line lies just to the right of the South East Pillar Original Route (Roberts/Ward/Rowell, 1974).

For our first attempt we packed 5 days gas and four days food and managed to climb about 10 pitches before having a comfortable bivi in the second snowpatch. The climbing had been primarily on neve with three pitches of steep ice. All very nice. The following morning we managed two more pitches before the clouds came down and it started to snow. Almost immediately a lot of spindrift started pouring down the gully line. It was too dangerous to climb so we abseiled back down using threads, wires, and abalokovs. The force of the spindrift was such that even abseiling proved quite dangerous and a retreat from higher up in those conditions would be very difficult.

After a week of waiting for good weather we set off again in the first clear day. We were very conscious of the need to climb fast and limit our exposure to spindrift in the lower reaches of the route so we decided to take only 4 days gas and 3 days food and we started at first light. We managed to regain our high point by midday but by 3pm snow had started falling and with it spindrift. We had reached a large snowfield below the upper chimneys so we decided to start digging a snowhole in case it got worse. After a couple of hours though the clouds lifted a little and we managed a few more pitches before digging a bivi ledge just to the left of the upper chimneys. The climbing had all been very good, on mainly neve and snow with a few pitches of steep ice up to 90°. The following day remained cloudy but with minimal spindrift. Again the climbing was excellent and sustained at an

interesting level. The hardest pitch and the crux of the route was climbing round a huge snow mushroom guarding the upper gullies. This proved to be steep and bold climbing. The last five pitches before reaching the amphitheatre were good steep water ice.

We dug a bivi ledge/cave in the base of the amphitheatre although we had a hard time finding a spot out of spindrift. Above the bivi the rock changed abruptly from granite to black shale. The following day three tricky pitches and some interesting route finding took us out on to the upper slopes of the south face and easy mixed climb led to the summit which we reached at 5pm. After a brew stop we set off down the normal west face route and we arrived back into basecamp at 1am in the morning. The decent involved a huge amount of deep soft snow and we encountered a lot of crevassed terrain.

Overall the route was excellent, with sustained climbing on ice, neve and snow. All three up to about 90° and the odd overhanging bulge. Protection was generally fine with a good mix of rock and ice gear. Bivi sites were plentiful. The only problem was the continual spindrift with any snowfall.

The crux of the route was about Scottish VII/7 with several VI/6 pitches, all on ice.

We called the route 'SnowPatrol' (1600m VI, WI5+)

### **MOOSES TOOTH ATTEMPT**

After a few rest days we decided to try and climb 'Shaken not Stirred', an established route on the west face of moose's tooth. After spending a day skinning up to the base of the route we set off the next morning and managed two pitches before snow and spindrift started! Having had enough of spindrift we bailed down and were picked up two days later and returned to Talkeetna.

### **OTHER ACTIVITY IN THE RUTH**

As we arrived in the Ruth Freddy Wilkinson and partner were flying out after an abortive attempt on a line on the south face of Bradley. He returned with Ben Gilmore midway through our trip and ended up repeating SnowPatrol after we had left the gorge accompanied by Owen Samuels who was part of a British team with Guy Willet. This British pair arrived a few days before we flew out with their sights also set on new routes on Dickey. Unfortunately due to a recent back injury Guy was unable to climb and had to return home early. There was one other pair arriving on the glacier as we left but as yet early season activity in the Ruth is still a fairly peaceful activity.

### **BUDGET**

<b>Expenses</b>		<b>Income</b>	
Flights	933	BMC	1200
Glacier Flights	478	MEF	500
Other Travel	82	Personal	863
Food	374		
Film	71		
Misc.	200		
Insurance	300		
Anchorage Costs	125		
<b>Total</b>	<b>2563</b>		<b>2563</b>

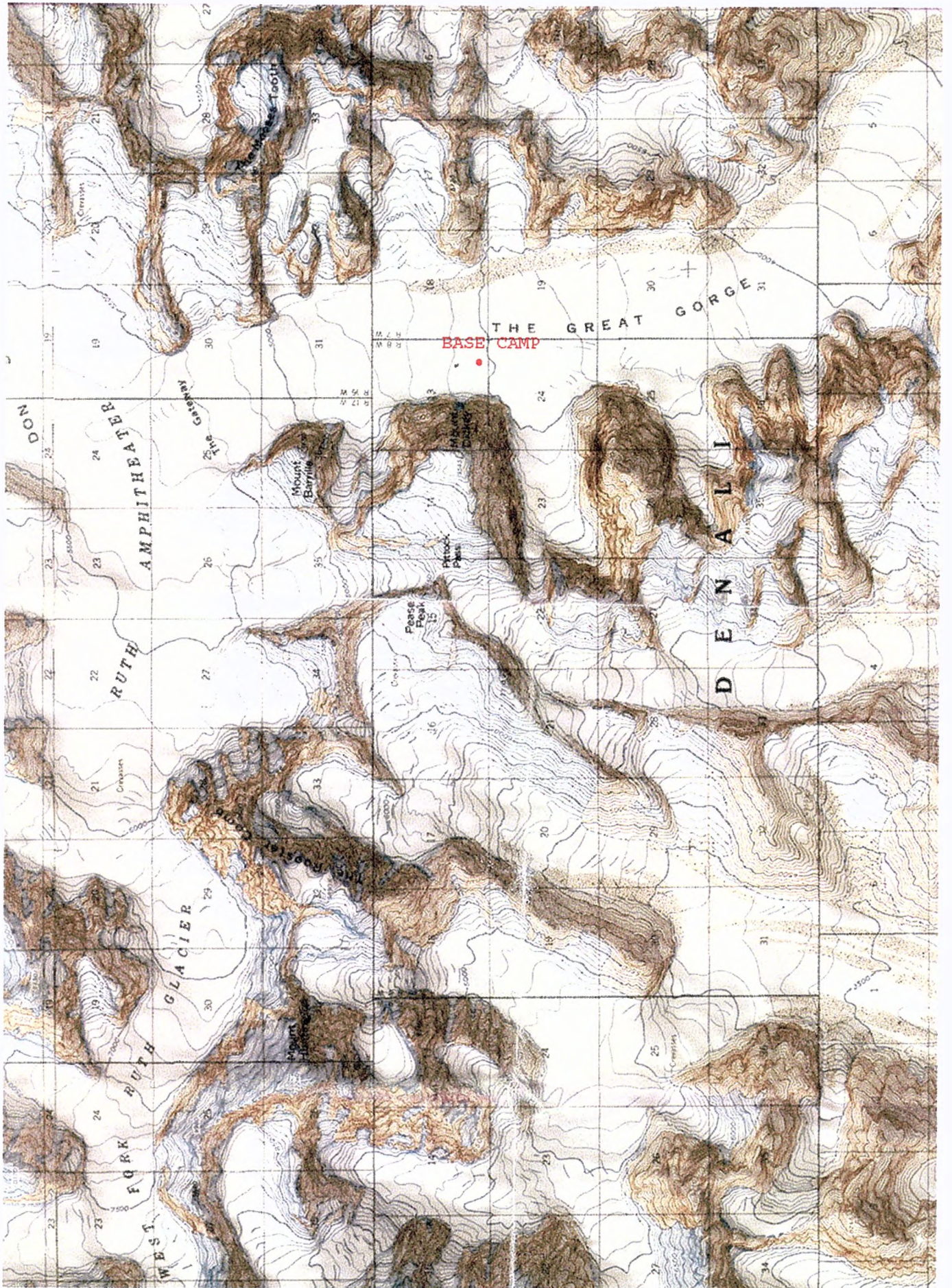
## **THANKS**

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